This study documents three cases of protracted conflict in an institution of higher education. Work groups in conflict were studied for one year in order to create cases and to describe factors influencing conflict escalation. From these cases, autistic conflict as a descriptive construct was developed to illustrate one phase of protracted conflict escalation. The following research questions guided this study.

1. How and why does protracted conflict develop and escalate in higher education work groups?
2. What is the nature of chronic autistic conflict?
3. How do higher education cultures and system affect the development of protracted autistic conflict?

The population studied included the administration and three distinct work groups from one university where conflicts had continued for an extended period of time. The stories of group conflict are fully reported in this study, and process maps illustrate incidents and influences related to conflict escalation.
To study conflict and human behavior in this context and to describe the effect of the institutional culture on conflict escalation, ethnographic methodology was used. Cases were developed from interviews, participant observation, and document review. The researcher worked with the university in a number of settings for over a year, which provided opportunities to observe daily life in these disputant groups and to develop a broader understanding of the organizational culture.

From findings in this study, it was possible to form a number of hypotheses regarding protracted conflict escalation. These hypotheses include the following:

1. Protracted conflict in institutions of higher education develops in five phases.

2. When conflicts escalate among groups in higher education without successful resolution, disputants develop dysfunctional behaviors which contribute to conflict escalation.

3. A number of contextual factors evident within institutions of higher education contribute to autistic conflict development.

Additional research questions with broader implications for conflict in organizations and recommendations regarding the improvement of practice regarding conflict within institutions of higher education were also generated by this study.
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Autistic Conflict in Higher Education

by

Susan K. Murray-Ritchie

A THESIS

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APPROVED:

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Major Professor, representing Education

Redacted for privacy
Director of School of Education

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Dean of Graduate School

I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my thesis to any reader upon request.

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Susan K. Murray-Ritchie, Author
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AUTISTIC CONFLICT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Chapter 1
The Problem

Introduction

"To work, to manage, and live in an organization
is to be in conflict."
(Tjosvold, 1990)

This study tells the story of three different conflicts occurring
within work groups at a university located in the United States. Each
conflict evolved through escalating stages of development until
participants became stuck in a repetitive cycle of hostility and
dysfunctional behaviors. The values, patterns and culture of the
educational institution, the conflict approach of individuals and the
evolution of the conflict itself created an environment where conflict
escalated unchecked.

In all cases, work relationships deteriorated into a series of moves
and countermoves, where group members endeavored to save face and
defend against perceived threats. Because of the intense focus on the
conflict itself, people struggled to complete their work. Finally, a series of
crises threatened each work group's credibility within the educational
institution and brought administrative attention to the problems. By this point, the conflict behaviors of participants intensified into serious dysfunction which will, in this study, be likened to the mental illness of autism.

*Conflict in Organizations*

Organizations have moved toward participatory work structures as a way of improving problem solving and decision making. As organizations, both private and public, attempt to engage people in making and implementing decisions, interdependence increases and so, too, does the potential for conflict (Hocker & Wilmot, 1985).

Conflict in organizations is defined in many different ways. Fink defines social conflict as "any social situation or process in which two or more social entities are linked by at least one form of antagonistic psychological relation or at least one form of antagonistic interaction" (Fink, 1968, p. 456). Conflict concerns any incompatibility, especially those where valued goals of disputants could interfere with the completion of one party's goals (Deutsch, 1973; Hocker & Wilmot, 1985). Heitler states that conflict occurs when seemingly incompatible elements exert force in divergent directions producing tension. "Conflict exists when people think it exists, even if it does not, in fact, have contradictory factors" (Heitler, 1990 p. 86). Common elements of these definitions
include perceived differences and interaction. Implicit is the belief that someone may lose something important; thus, threat exists.

Conflict in organizations is not necessarily a problem. If work groups understand and use conflict constructively, it increases group capabilities (Heitler, 1990; Rahim, 1990; Tjosvold, 1992). It can help people to better understand different sides of important issues; it can challenge inflexible positions and encourage consideration of different views; it can prevent "group think" and provide new strategies to address problems (Janis, 1972; Manz & Sims, 1980a).

At its best, conflict creates a healthy dialectic between opposite tensions which improves the ability of an organization to adapt to a changing environment (Pondy, 1992; Rahim, 1990; Weick, 1979). Most often, however, conflict is not constructive. It can and does disrupt productivity and effectiveness in work groups.

Conflict Development

Studies indicate that cycles of conflict development occur in phases (Newell & Stutman, 1991; Nicotera, 1995; Pondy, 1967). At first, conflict is latent where players are aware of an aggravating underlying difference. Concerns of disputants create perceived or real challenges. Next, participants observe and test the power of the opposing side and look to build their own power base. This may include influence from
within or outside of the work group. Behaviors to counteract perceived or real threats or to save face or build power are likely to occur in a series of moves and countermoves.

Once initially recognized, conflict can follow a number of paths. People can problem solve, compromise, become apathetic, or leave the group. Power groups, including management or colleagues with status, can facilitate or force conflicts to end. Groups can go through a difficult process called differentiation in which issues, needs, and concerns are identified with the intent to work toward possible resolution. On the other hand, individuals within groups can also participate in threat-counterthreat behavior, resulting in a focus on the conflict rather than on solution building. Conflict, if allowed to escalate without constructive resolutions, becomes very personal and continues interminably. It detracts from work, and people become obsessed with conflict.

If a conflict escalates to high levels of intensity, it manifests itself in a series of symptomatic crises that emerge with unexpected ferocity (Hermann, 1963). In this study, these crises will be referred to as triggers. According to Hermann, these incidents involve surprise, high threat, and short decision time. Other researchers note that these triggers create "an intolerable situation, unstable condition, or sudden change that disrupts the normal operation of an individual, a group, an
organization, or a community and demands immediate attention and resolution" (Holmes & Fletcher-Bergland, 1997, p. 305; Weick, 1979).

Conflict triggers cannot be ignored and tend to focus the attention of administration on group problems. However, looking only at trigger events frequently leads to misdiagnosis of the real problem. Commonly, administration will focus conflict intervention attempts on trigger events rather than on root causes of conflict. Unfortunately this misguided effort results in the belief that the conflict cannot be solved. This often continues group dysfunction and contributes to increased escalation.

**Autistic Conflict**

Severe, protracted conflict is like an infection. It develops into debilitating crises which severely obstruct a group from doing its work. It can require intensive institutional energy in constructing interventions that often treat the symptom, rather than the cause of the actual conflict (Holmes & Miller, 1976).

Conflict that is mismanaged over time erodes relationships, undermines trust, and threatens the group's credibility or even its existence within a larger organization (Handy, 1993). Often the behavior or the disruption of the organizational system is evident in extremes of behavior and crises that emerge. This manifestation of conflict can be likened in some ways to mental illness.
Autism is considered a pervasive developmental disorder. The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* published by the American Psychological Association (Reid, 1995) states that autism is characterized by impairment of social interaction, impairment of communication and activities, behaviors and interests that are repetitive, restricted and stereotyped (Reid, 1995).

Theodore Newcomb (1950) in *Social Psychology* referred to the nature of protracted conflict as "autistic hostility," in that it manifested such behaviors. Holmes and Miller (1976) in a description of severe interpersonal conflict also identified it as "autistic." Susan Long (1992) in *A Structural Analysis of Small Groups* uses Mahler's (1968) description of a developmental state of autism to describe rejection of external environment as a protective strategy in groups. The metaphor of autism is applicable to the behaviors found in groups operating under the stress of severe and chronic conflict.

Conflict behavior is described by organizational development specialists in terms that could be likened to a general conception of autistic behavior. It includes the disregard of external reality, an extreme preoccupation with self, retreat into a private world of a delusion, and attribution and paranoia. It is encouraged by the inability of individuals to process incoming stimuli and information correctly in order to respond constructively to their environment (Holmes & Miller, 1976). Groups in chronic conflict isolate in cabals, are self-absorbed and obsessively focus
on the conflict at hand (Holmes & Miller, 1976). They harden into the conflict, and all actions are seen through the lens of ill feeling (Handy, 1993). Obsession with the conflict and motives of others dominates thinking. Group and individual energy is misapplied (Handy, 1993).

This study will attempt to use autism as a descriptive construct to better understand the intensity and limited behavioral repertoires occurring within work groups engaged in serious unresolved conflict.

*Research on Conflict*

Researchers in conflict have been influenced by a number of theoretic approaches. This study will refer to many of these approaches and focus primarily on institutional theories, conflict predispositions and phase models of conflict development.

Institutional theory represents a macrolevel of analysis which reveals how conflict is embedded in and influenced by organizational culture. In institutional theory, it is important to take a broad look at how organizational patterns and expectations impact interaction. In this study, a number of contextual factors affected the development of conflict in the three cases presented. Cultural elements within an organization include history, norms, and patterns of approved behavior which serve to support the status quo (Lawler, 1985). Additional institutional factors in educational organizations such as administrative, leadership, and
systemic elements, faculty standing and position, and institutional response to conflict and problem solving are considered as they alter the nature and development of each conflict.

Conflict predisposition is the second theoretical framework referenced in this study. It is concerned with individual conflict approach preferences and links to organizational predispositions and patterns of conflict. Individual conflict styles run the gamut from aggressive to avoidance (Putnam & Wilson, 1982). As people interact, conflict styles produce counter reactions from opponents. As well, organizational norms and expectations influence and are influenced by patterns of interaction. Each move and counter move, as in a game of chess, creates an environment which reinforces behavior and expectations.

There is reciprocal influence of individual and organizational conflict approach preferences on the development of group conflict. Sanctioned conflict behavior predetermines rules for how conflicts are played out in work groups. The approbation or avoidance of certain behaviors contribute to the entrenchment of rules for dealing with conflict in the organizational context (Nicotera, 1995). Pondy (1992) refers to reinforced organizational or group behaviors as "behavioral repertoires" which tend to perpetuate and reinforce themselves in a conflict context.
If groups successfully sort out conflicts, the ability of that group to solve conflict increases. If, however, groups repeatedly fail to resolve problems, even at a low level of conflict, the group builds a "failure expectation" that is reinforcing, causing employees to believe that conflict cannot be constructively negotiated in their organization (Papa & Canary, 1995; Tolbert & Arthur, 1990).

Phase theory is a theoretical framework applied in the following studies. It involves viewing conflict as a series of actions and reactions which occur in repetitive cycles (Newell & Stutman, 1991). As conflict behaviors fall in larger, predictable units, they are considered episodes or phases. Although conflicts can take different turns along each path, certain stages of conflict development can be predicted. These phases, over time, provide the basis for interpreting the next step in the conflicts observed (Folger, Poole, & Stutman, 1997).

As each conflict in this study was scrutinized, certain patterns of behavior were evident. Names were assigned to stages of conflict development observed in all three studies. Each phase was influenced by the institutional culture and systems, perpetuated by the conflict predispositions of individuals and the institution, and evolved in patterns similar to those outlined in phase theory.

The cases in this study are particularly interesting because of the degree to which the conflicts within one institution were allowed to escalate. By the time intervention was agreed upon, conflicts had
reached a particular stage of development characterized by repetitive destructive behaviors. Individuals involved were not able to see beyond their own perception of what was wrong or to acknowledge their part in the problems. Instead, they developed strong power groups, tested their power by threatening their opponents, escalated threats, and reacted with counter threats in a destructive cycle of behaviors ending in the inability to accomplish work.

People got sick; they quit; they went into counseling because of the mental and physical strain of these conflicts. Despite the obvious danger of these conflicts, the institution did not take steps to mediate the problems or force an end to conflict until it had escalated beyond all control.

Summary

Because conflict is so common, and the ability to solve conflict in groups is complex, the likelihood of work groups experiencing protracted conflict is high. As a consultant in the field, I have observed similar behaviors in many organizations, private or public, education or business. Conflict can get so extreme in work groups that participants spend all of their time reacting to threats and enacting counter threats; ultimately, this prevents people from working productively together to complete tasks. This study will focus on the development and description
of protracted, escalating conflict in order to further understand it and its ramifications.

The term *autistic conflict* will be used as a descriptive metaphor in this study to elaborate on this particular episodic sequence of behavior. Autism has been used specifically in describing serious conflict behaviors by a number of psychologists and social scientists (Holmes & Miller, 1976; Long, 1992). However, it had not been fully explored as a part of phase theory. Because there are striking similarities between the behavior of coworkers engaged in protracted conflict with some symptoms of the mental illness of autism, this study will attempt to elaborate on these similarities and to link autistic conflict to the last stages of conflict development.

These three case studies, emerging from a single institutional context in a university, may serve as a microcosm for other conflicts in higher education. Hopefully, these stories will assist educators in better understanding the nature and development of serious protracted conflict in institutions of higher learning. And, by understanding conflict, administrators and faculty may help their colleagues avoid it.

**Purpose of the Study**

This study recounts three separate protracted internal conflicts faced by a university. The purpose is to provide descriptions of protracted
conflict using autistic conflict as a descriptive metaphor and to suggest contextual factors contributing to the development of autistic conflict. Interventions used in the conflicts described will not be included in this study.

This researcher is not a determinist, suggesting that there is one pattern of protracted conflict; however, according to phase theorists, there are common elements in the development of conflict. Understanding the possible characteristics of autistic conflict as an aspect of phase theory in institutional contexts may assist leaders in better understanding protracted conflict in its emergent state.

It is important to pay attention to protracted conflict in institutions of higher education, so that leaders can understand the development, nature and effect of this condition on work groups. Commenting on the mission of organizational development, Schein (1985, p. 2) suggests that, because organizations are networks of people ideally engaged in achieving common goals, "the more we understand about how to diagnose and improve their interactions, the greater our chances of finding solutions to problems and of ensuring that such solutions will be accepted and used by members of the organizations."
The Research Questions

Bullock and Tubbs (1986) recommend that high quality research questions come from active involvement in real organizations and from investigator interest, effort, and intuition. Significantly, they focus on exploring real problems with practical utility. The research questions for this study were generated with these recommendations in mind.

The following questions grew out of my experience as a consultant working with over 12 groups struggling with severe and protracted conflict. As I assessed work group conflict over time, questions surfaced regarding the development and sustaining factors involved in conflict escalation in work relationships. I observed that within groups experiencing severe conflict, there were characteristics and patterns which seemed to mirror each other. I began to develop a predictive ability with new groups in severe conflict based on previous experience. This created speculation as to the characteristics, behaviors, and influences in the development of protracted conflict in work groups and encouraged inquiry into conflict theory. Although the focus of this study is limited to three particular conflict contexts, all of my experience and research in conflict over the last three years has influenced and informed the research process.
The research questions in this study serve more as organizers for this investigation than hypotheses to be tested. The intent of these questions was to guide my inquiry as the data and information unfolded.

1. How and why does protracted conflict develop and escalate in work groups? Can patterns be observed within and across groups in conflict development?

2. What is the nature of chronic autistic conflict?

3. How do organizational cultures and systems affect the development of protracted autistic conflict?

Use of Metaphor in Conflict Contexts

Metaphor will be used in two ways in this study. First, metaphors generated by participants will express the feelings, concerns, and perspectives of those involved in protracted conflict. Second, the metaphor of autism will be applied to the phase of conflict where the opportunity for constructive resolution has passed and participant behavior has deteriorated into behavior similar to those found in this mental disorder.

Metaphors from Participants

Metaphorical language communicates meaning (Schon, 1963). Morgan (1986) suggests that metaphors are powerful communicative
elements that assist people in expressing emotions and perspectives.

Conflict situations generate metaphors portraying complex feelings and indicate whether participants feel hope or hopelessness regarding possible resolution of conflict (Hocker, 1991, p. 6).

In the following protracted conflicts, participants generated very negative and very potent personalized images which delineated good and evil—villains and heroes—within their work groups. In the following stories, metaphors of war, illness, toxicity, physical wounding and scarring, molestation, and other seriously distressing images are used to express people's feelings. These verbal indicators suggest that people felt helpless and victimized and that the conflicts they faced were larger than life. As people framed their situation in terms of destruction and hopelessness, metaphoric images reinforce people's beliefs. These images become heuristic in conflict contexts, in that they reaffirm beliefs each time they are restated (Schon, 1990). Metaphors reinforce the perceived reality.

Obviously, this is a circular problem. People see reality through a lens of their own making—one that is difficult to objectify. Each act is interpreted in a certain way which perpetuates the person's belief. Whether participants view conflict as a hopeless situation or as a creative opportunity, the images generated from conflict situations shape participant belief about possible conflict resolution (Hocker & Wilmot, 1996).
Metaphor of Autism Applied to a Phase of Protracted Conflict

In this study the metaphor of autism, an image powerful in most educator's minds, is used as a descriptive construct to further understand one phase in protracted unresolvable conflict. Autism involves certain characteristics: impaired social interaction, impaired communication and activities, behaviors and interest that are repetitive, restricted, and stereotyped (Reid, 1995).

A number of social theorists and psychologists have used this metaphor as passing reference to describe protracted conflict. However, it has not been fully developed as an extended metaphor to describe many of the common characteristics of a dysfunctional phase of protracted unresolvable conflict in organizations (Holmes & Miller, 1976; Long, 1991; Newcomb, 1947, 1950; Schmuck, 1987). This study will attempt to elaborate on and apply this construct.

Significance of the Study

Conflict in work groups is an issue of importance to organizations. The ability to deal constructively with differences within work groups is critical for managers who spend a great deal of their time dealing with negative conflict or the effect of negative conflict in their work environment (Argyris, 1970; Nicotera, 1995; Rackham, Honey, & Colbert, 1971).
This study offers a front room view of chronic dysfunction in groups. Few organizations are willing to acknowledge the existence of such conflict and, certainly, are not willing to open it to public scrutiny. This study will add to the body of knowledge available in understanding protracted conflict in educational settings.

Directly observed data from conflict will also expand Holmes and Miller’s (1976) notion of autistic conflict. As mentioned, autistic conflict as a metaphor, although used in the work of several researchers in psychology and social science, has not been thoroughly developed or applied in an organizational development (OD) study in education (Holmes & Miller, 1976; Long, 1992; Newcomb, 1950). Observed behavior in three conflict contexts within a university suggests connections between protracted conflict and mental illness.

This study describes the behavior of group members in their own environment. Much of the available literature on conflict describes broader sociological phenomena, or relates conclusions drawn from controlled experiments where conflict is studied "under glass."

This study is significant in that it tracks conflict in one institutional setting manifested in three different work groups over time. Policy manuals, program descriptions, and long-range plans were examined; meetings were observed; interviews were conducted. Information was triangulated with informant information within the organization in which it occurred. Although there are always distortions
possible when an outsider enters a group to observe behavior, because the researcher became almost an extension of the group in their own environment over time, the degree of behavior change may be less than in other, more intrusive studies.

Finally, this study provides insight on the topic of conflict with peer work groups in education. Conflict between students or between students and staff (Johnson & Johnson, 1979; Schmuck, 1987) is a more common topic in educational research. It is difficult to find studies documenting the effect of chronic conflict between educators in small groups established to accomplish tasks together within a larger institutional context. For whatever reason, research on severe and protracted conflict in educational work groups is not currently available to the extent needed. Interpersonal conflict with peers in educational work groups is bound to become an issue as groups continue to make more decisions in a socially stable, but resource poor environment.

Assumptions of the Study

The researcher in this study made basic assumptions that may or may not bias the data collected and conclusions drawn.

1. Conflict is an emergent state and not an isolated set of incidents or behaviors.

2. Groups and individuals experience conflict.
3. Group conflict is a product of individual, group, and organizational beliefs and behaviors with each action and interaction influencing the development of the conflict context.

4. Patterns of conflict can be uncovered but do not necessarily apply to all contexts.

5. Groups selected for the study are in the state of chronic, protracted conflict.

6. The metaphor of autism is appropriately descriptive to serve as a construct for examining conflict experiences.

**Limitations of the Study**

The study is limited to an analysis of three separate conflict contexts existing within a university; thus, the sample is small. Given the nature of qualitative research methodology, conclusions of this study may provide guidance in understanding autistic conflict but cannot provide definitive conclusions applicable to a broader context.

Despite attempts to understand the roots of the conflict interactions, the researcher does not have a complete knowledge of the social contexts which she has observed. It is impossible for any outsider to completely understand the socially constructed norms and culture of the groups involved in the study (Blumer, 1969).
An additional limitation involves the researcher as the instrument of data collection and analysis. The study is based on self reported data that reflects the researcher's bias and limitations. Even the selection of organizational development assessment frameworks is shaped by the values, experience and limits of the researcher. The research scholar may have unwittingly formed a biased picture of the group interaction she proposes to study as she brought her own interpretation to observations made (as described in Blumer, 1969).

Intrusion of the researcher into the group could also change group member behavior, even when the outsider is accepted over time as "one of us." Any additional factors involved in the social interaction of a group will influence and change the meaning and shape the decisions for action within that group.

Due to the nature of the client-consultant contract and the primacy of safeguarding the intervention, prior consent for use of interviews and observation was not obtained from participants and was granted by the organization after assessment was completed. Therefore, data analysis is restricted to field notes, process maps and reports, verbal and written, submitted to the organization.
**Definition of Terms**

This study employs various terms whose definitions vary in the related literature. It is important to the purpose of this study that key word are defined in accordance with their use by the researcher.

**Attribution Theory:** A theory that suggests people attempt to interpret and understand behavior of others by projecting intent (Baron, 1984, 1985; Sillars & Parry, 1982).

**Autism:** A pervasive developmental disorder characterized by impaired social interaction and impaired communication, with activities, behaviors, and interests that are repetitive, restricted and stereotyped (Reid, 1995).

**Autistic Conflict Behavior:** Behavior that includes the disregard of external reality, an extreme preoccupation with self, retreat into a private world of a delusion, and the inability to process incoming stimuli and information correctly in order to respond constructively to the environment and limited behavioral repertoires creating escalating conflict (Holmes & Miller, 1976).

**Behavioral Repertoires:** Patterns of organizational, group, or individual behaviors (Pondy, 1992).

**Bundling:** A term used to describe a behavior typical of conflict contexts, in which participants attempt to obscure problems and prevent
problem solving by bundling issues together, so that conflict issues are obscured (Walton, 1956).

**Conflict:** Any social situation or process in which two or more social entities are linked by at least one form of antagonistic psychological relation or at least one form of antagonistic interaction (Fink, 1968, p. 456).

**Conflict Escalation:** An activity characterized by the inability of conflict participants to constructively explore and solve conflicts. It involves behavior marked by hostility, avoidance, increased negative conflict interaction, and the development of power constituencies to combat threat (Folger et al., 1997).

**Culture:** A patterned system of symbols and meaning (Hofstede, 1991).

**Critical Incident:** A triggering event bringing notice of the full organization to the conflict that becomes part of the individual or group memory and shapes actions and reactions (Bormann, 1986; Hermann, 1963).

**Ego Conflict:** Conflict that has moved from the issues level to the interpersonal level where the desire of disputants is to win, save face, and discredit opponents rather than seek solutions (Folger, et al., 1997).

**Elite Bias:** Overweighing data from articulate, well-informed, unusually high status informants and underrepresenting data from intractable, less articulate, lower status ones (Miles & Huberman, 1984).
**Employee Involvement**: The extension of power to make or inform decisions and act on those decisions (Lawler, 1986).

**Differentiation**: A phase in conflict development where differences are surfaced and explored by participants (Folger et al., 1997).

**Face Saving**: Behavior with the goal of protecting the positive social value a person claims within a social setting (Folger et al., 1997).

**Group Differentiation**: A result of social categorization, people create results in polarization and attendant stereotyping. We-they polarization occurs when groups see themselves in competition. Communication between groups breaks down and differences are heightened, while common interests are minimized in social categorization (Robbins, 1983; Folger et al., 1997).

**Integration**: A phase which occurs when further escalation of conflict is perceived as fruitless, and parties explore possible options that move toward solution (Folger et al., 1997).

**Interpersonal Conflict**: Perceived incongruity over personal styles or needs (Beebe & Masterson, 1993).

**Institutional Theory**: A macrolevel of analysis revealing how conflict is necessarily embedded in organizational parameters, both explicit and implicit, which serve to support the status quo (Lawler, Mohrman, & Ledford, 1992).

**Mechanistic Model**: An organizational model developed to ensure control of an unruly and self-interested work force through hierarchical
control, maximized specialization through division of labor, and a proliferation of bureaucratic levels enforcing social control and conformity (Morgan, 1986).

**Metaphor:** Expressions of imagery and analogy which occurs when people have strong feelings to express (Morgan, 1986).

**Nonrealistic Conflicts:** Expressions of aggression based on the need to save face, discredit, or punish the opposing parties. The sole end of nonrealistic conflict is to do damage (Beebe & Masterson, 1993).

**Organizational Behavior (OB):** The systematic study of the actions and attitudes that people exhibit within organizations (Argyris, 1957).

**Organizational Culture:** The collective programming which distinguishes the members of one organization from another. Organizational culture is similar to societal culture and is made up of intangibles such as values, beliefs, perceptions, behaviors norms, artifacts, and patterns. Culture is determined by things seen and unseen, explicit and implied. It is a social energy that moves people to act (Kilmann, 1984). "Culture is to the organization what personality is to the individual—a hidden, yet unifying theme that provides meaning, direction and mobilization." (Hofstede, 1991, p. 180).

**Organizational Development (OD):** Concern for the vitalizing, energizing and actualizing, activating and reviewing organizations through technical and human resources (Argyris, 1970). This means dealing with organizational problems, such as chronic conflict, that
prevent efficiency and productivity and inhibit people from working
together within an organization. It is the role of OD consultants to assist
in changing to destructive systems, cultures, and behaviors within
organizations. (Argyris, 1957)

**Phase Theory:** A theoretical model which views conflict as a series
of actions and reactions occurring in repetitive cycles. As conflict
behaviors fall in larger, predictable units, they are considered episodes or
phases which, over time, can provide the basis for understanding past
interactions and can be used as a map in charting the next step in
conflict contexts (Folger et al., 1997; Newell & Stutman, 1991).

**Primary Group:** A group which persists long enough to develop
strong emotional attachments between members and develops a set of
rudimentary, functionally differentiated roles and a subculture of its own
which includes an image of the group as an entity and an informal
system which controls group relevant action of members (Johnson &
Johnson, 1979).

**Procedural Conflict:** This type of conflict is characterized by
disagreements over a course of action. Conceptual conflict involves
disagreement over ideas, information, theories, or opinions. In goal
disagreement parties differ in values or end states. Schmuck (1987) and
Schmuck & Runkel (1985) refer to these as structural conflicts.

**Protracted Conflict:** Long-term conflict which seems to have no
resolution and has escalated (Handy, 1993).
**Pseudoconflicts:** The interaction of interdependent people who perceive incompatible goals and interferences from each other in achieving these goals (Beebe & Masterson, 1993).

**Realistic Conflicts:** Conflicts that are based in disagreements where participants believe there is a possibility of resolution (Beebe & Masterson, 1993).

**Social Categorization:** In social identification, people identify with their own groups and distrust other groups with which they cannot identify (Folger et al., 1997; Robbins, 1983).

**Social Interdependence Theory:** This theory suggests that interests of an individual or group can be promoted by the actions of others, obstructed, or they can have no effect on desired outcomes (Johnson & Johnson, 1979).

**Tit-for-Tat Behaviors:** Threat and counterthreat behaviors in an attempt to leverage power, save face, or disenfranchise opponents (Folger et al., 1997).

**Triggers:** Crisis incidents that occur in prolonged conflicts involving surprise, high threat, and short decision time (Hermann, 1963). These crises disrupt the normal operation of a individual, group, organization, or community and demand immediate attention and resolution (Holmes, 1997; Weick, 1979).
Chapter 2
Literature Review

Introduction

Chapter 2 presents a comprehensive review of several bodies of research to provide a foundation for the present study. This review establishes the complexity of protracted conflict in organizational work groups and develops a framework for understanding the characteristics of and influences on the development of conflict escalation in work groups and organizations. It also provides a scaffolding from previous organizational development research on conflict to support the observations and conclusions presented in this study, particularly the use of autism as a descriptive construct for this phase of conflict.

This review will focus on four areas:

1. Participatory work groups in organizations and higher education.

2. Conflict definitions and development in work groups.

3. Organizational culture and organizational response to conflict.

4. Autism as a metaphor for protracted conflict in groups.
Participatory Work Groups in Organizations and Higher Education

Shift from a Mechanistic to Participatory Model of Work

Employee involvement and team based structures have increased in the United States. In The Coming of the New Organization, Peter Drucker (1988) foretold of corporations with fewer levels of management and more reliance on teams for decision making and project implementation. In 1984, Nasbitt predicted that employee participation in decision making and self governance in the workplace would be a major trend affecting the American workforce. Since those predictions, eighty percent of Fortune 1000 companies have reported using employee involvement practices (Lawler, Mohrman, & Ledford, 1992). These changes are part of a long evolution from early mechanistic management systems of the 1800's to experiments in participation in the 1960's to the present.

Mechanistic organizational structure was evident when thinkers such as Adam Smith and Fredrick Taylor made organizations into economic systems with a clear lines of authority and division of labor (Shafritz & Ott, 1991). From the 1800s to the 1930s a structural theory of organizations emerged with the goal of creating machine-like systems (Morgan, 1986). This mechanistic model sought to ensure control and conformity of an unruly and self interested work force through hierarchy and maximized specialization (Morgan, 1986; Weber, 1946).
This model of efficiency was also applied to social institutions including schools and institutions of higher learning. In the late 19th and early 20th century, America's educational systems reflected organizational structures of an emerging industrialized society. Educators like William Harris sought to centralize schools into efficiently managed hierarchies which would prepare individuals to function effectively in a complex and specialized industrialized society (Guteck, 1991).

Using business as a model, administrators created bureaucratic structures for control and efficiency. Schools promoted values of self discipline, obedience to established law and order, and respect for private property. Teachers enforced rules that reinforced silence, regularity industriousness, discipline and conformity (Guteck, 1991). Administrators enacted systems to ensure consistent curriculum, specialization of study based on ability groups, and standardized procedures to support uniformity.

The mechanistic model was effective in environments where predetermined goals and procedures addressed problems. However, organizations and social institutions are seldom stable and predictable (Bolman & Deal, 1984). A number of factors influenced a rethinking of organizational models. During societal changes of the 1930's through the 1950's, a need arose to accommodate the rapid flow of materials, energy and information between the internal and external environment
(Burns & Stalker, 1961; Trist, 1977). Competition and a decrease in production as compared to international competitors such as Japan and Germany encouraged streamlining bureaucracy in American institutions (Lawler, 1986).

The control and command structure did not meet the needs of a comparatively better educated workforce and frequently fueled conflict between labor and management (Selznick, 1949). Again, organizational models changed and new, more participatory systems emerged to deal with changing and uncertain external environments.

These systems encouraged decision making at different parts of the organization, shifted influence from a vertical to a horizontal level, increased speed of communication, and blurred the distinction between managers and those managed. External relationships were a source of internal power and influence. Team work and entrepreneurial action became a focus (Argyris, 1990; Lawler et al., 1992; Senge, 1991a).

Job enrichment, combined with a more participative, democratic and employee centered style of leadership arose as an alternative to the excessively narrow, authoritarian and dehumanizing work orientation generated by scientific management and classical management theory. Employees were to be seen as valuable resources that could contribute in rich and varied ways to an organizations activities if given an appropriate chance (Morgan, 1986,44).
Participatory Models

Participatory involvement is described as the extension of power to make or inform decisions and act on those decisions (Blake, 1974). One key way in which a participatory organizational model is implemented is through the development of work groups. Fisher (1993) suggests there are a smorgasbord of definitions and configurations for work groups. They can be self-directed, semi-autonomous work groups, autonomous work teams or self-managed teams.

Charles Handy (1993), in his comprehensive study of organizations, also describes different models and authority for work groups and teams in organizations. Their purpose, role, structure, authority, decision making responsibility and the degree to which they are empowered within an organization differ (Handy, 1993).

Despite differences, work groups share certain attributes (Hackman 1990; Handy, 1993). A group is a real, intact social system with boundaries that distinguish it from others groups. There is necessary interdependence among members and differentiated member roles. Members are dependent on each other to accomplish shared purpose. A group has tasks to perform. A group operates in an organizational context and manages relations with other individuals or groups in a larger social system.
Other researchers corroborate this general description. Cohen and Ledford (1991) suggest that work groups are "groups of interdependent individuals that can self-regulate their behavior on accomplishing tasks" (Brillhart & Galanes, 1998; Cohen & Ledford, 1991; Fisher, 1996; Mink & McKay, 1989; Scott, 1979).

There are common reasons why groups are formed within organizations. Flexibility of teams allows work distribution according to employee skills, time and knowledge. Management and control of the work is accomplished by those directly involved with implementation of projects and assessment of work quality. Problem solving can be made at the direct services level encouraging local intervention. Team structure also satisfies an individual's need to belong. Team members can support colleagues, assist in working through problems, and create shared purpose (Handy, 1993). In teams, it is probable that people do more work, care more about the quality of their work and stay in jobs longer (Senge, 1990b).

Concerns with Participatory Models

Although there is potential for increased employee and organizational efficiency and satisfaction in this participatory model, there are also problems associated with work groups. Group experiences
that are not productive can deeply affect accomplishment of work
(Lawler, 1986; Sims & Manz, 1983).

Groups can turn inward and focus on self-interest; they can lose
contact with the interests of other groups or the organization; they can
forget what they are working to accomplish (Long, 1991). This
phenomena called social categorization, involves group identification and
insularity (Long, 1991; Folger et al., 1997).

In social identification, people identify with their own groups and
distrust other groups with which they cannot identify. Group
differentiation results in polarization and attendant stereotyping.
We-they polarization occurs when groups see themselves in competition.
Communication between groups often breaks down and differences are
heightened, while common interests are minimized in social
categorization (Robbins, 1983; Folger et al., 1997).

This insularity and self-identification in groups can be serious.
Members of groups develop internal messages which "slant" group
perception against their opponent (Folger et al., 1997; Baron, 1984).
We-they cultures create strong group coherence and refocus on
differences. "In effect, the in-group creates a self-fulfilling prophecy
whereby its worst fears about the hostility of the other group is
confirmed and polarization is intensified (Folger et al., 1997)."
Problems with Leadership in a Participatory Model

In addition, there are also problems facing leadership in this model. Obviously leaders strive to be effective in any management system. This effectiveness is defined as the degree to which the unit's productive output meets standards of quality and timeliness; the degree to which carrying out the work enhances the capability of employees to work together interdependently in the future; and the degree to which work experiences contribute to the growth and personal well-being of the participants (Hackman, 1986, p. 98). So, how can leadership be effective in a participatory model?

Research on successful self-managing team models indicates an important role for leadership. Leadership in participatory organizations requires different skills than in traditional organizations, however. There are, of course, differing views about the role of leadership in self-managing team models. Some organizational specialists believe the leader's role is to emphasize advising, organizing, exploring, clarifying and linking (Kanter, 1989). Manz and Simms (1987) promote a consultative style where the leader is an "unleader," who facilitates and informs group interaction. Hackman (1986) argues that should leaders establish and maintain favorable performance conditions which include clear direction, a constructive structure, a supportive organizational context, expert coaching and adequate material resources the goal of
which is to operationalize effectiveness of team performance (Hackman, 1986).

There are difficulties with any leadership philosophy in a participatory setting. One problem occurs when leaders are unsure about their roles and responsibilities as differentiated from those of their teams. For example, teams may believe themselves to be empowered to make decisions while an administrator may see him/herself as responsible for decision making (Tjosvold & Chia, 1989). In a participatory model it is not always clear when groups have the right to make and implement decisions. Unfortunately, few organizations define role, responsibility and authority clearly. They prefer a flexible model.

This ambiguity of authority and hesitancy to use administrative power, typical of the command and control model, compounds communication problems within the organization. Confusion fuels resentment about the intrusive role of leadership when groups feel they should be able to act autonomously. Group action, out of the leader's control, produces anxiety for leaders who believe they are ultimately responsible for organizational results (Manz & Sims, 1984). This confusion creates tension between groups and individuals.

An additional problem regarding the shift in responsibility of leadership concerns problem solving in teams. Recent studies suggest that the ability to solve problems is more important in effecting group efficiency and productivity than autonomy as a group (Ayres, 1992).
Groups seldom are trained and supported in their efforts to self-manage, problem solve or resolve conflict. In traditional models, managers assumed responsibility for problems. Personnel issues could be dealt with unilaterally; input could be used or dismissed; options could be limited. The leader could force compliance by coercing agreements, suppressing conflict or using threats to change behavior.

With participatory models there is the potential for local problem solving. Individuals could have more control over outcomes and decision making. However, in smaller groups where social categorization is possible and ambiguity regarding power and decision making is evident, it is also possible for groups to develop dysfunctional problem solving behaviors (Hackman, 1978).

This is particularly the case when groups perceive threat from the outside. In this case, power becomes important. Potential threats from other powerful groups or individuals encourages advocacy and position taking within groups (Blake, 1974, 1985). The potential for group conflict is high particularly if individuals within groups are unable to problem solve or if strong administrative controls are lacking which could force needed interventions or conformities to institutional expectations.
Work Groups in Higher Education

At first glance, it may seem that university systems reflect more traditional models for decision making and governance (Schmuck, 1968). A vertical chain of command is evident in most organizational charts of universities and colleges with boards, presidents, provosts, deans and division and department chairs having highest degree of power and responsibility. Many decisions come from the top in mandate form. Key committees are chaired by senior faculty. Decisions and processes follow laborious protocol, as in the case with personnel committee decisions or in the process of granting tenure.

However, this structure is actually dominated by the influence of multiple interest groups, many of which represent the units where work and local decisions are made. These semi-autonomous work groups, in the form of departments, divisions, schools, committees or work classification make up the significant decision making system by which resources are allocated and used. As well, administration's role is one of hands-off management. Expectations for provosts, deans and directors to support autonomous groups is traditionally high (Cohen & March, 1974). These models are described by Cohen and March as a loosely coupled semi-autonomous group structure, the goals of which on a larger organizational level are often unclear and ill defined.
Higher education work groups have considerable independence in decision making and use of resources. Each individual unit, as it acts independently, acts in a degree of isolation from other units and the organization as a whole (Benjamin, 1993). With the emphasis on participatory work teams as a model in business, universities and educational institutions have moved further into independent decision making.

Benefits and Liabilities of Group Work in Higher Education

Group work affects everyone in an educational institution, including students. Research suggests that the climate of participation and collegiality among teachers, administration and staff also promotes a climate of academic success for students (Bigelow, 1971; Schmuck, 1968; Seeman & Seeman, 1976). Evidence indicates that instructors who show high degrees of collaboration in their work groups, and who are involved in the dialogue, decision, action process with colleagues have students with more favorable attitudes toward school (Seeman & Seeman, 1976).

Problems with work group autonomy in higher education. There are problems with group work autonomy in higher education. One in particular involves weak linkages between interest groups and the full organization. This disconnectedness of smaller work groups fuels
segmentation between groups when each try to satisfy conflicting needs. As competition for resources is heightened, groups furiously pursue multiple and local goals (Benjamin, 1993). Strong internal stakeholders use power, voice and leverage within the system to get what they need. Conflict and negotiation of differences is often avoided or suppressed by organizational leadership. This suggests to work groups that conflicts must be avoided and that conflicts cannot be resolved through dialogue and constructive processes.

To smooth over conflict between groups and to get tasks done, the University administration trades off interests between competing groups (Benjamin, 1993). As with any pluralistic "society" representing diverse interests, groups and administrators within higher education support this bargaining process itself and learn to build power, establish coalitions and leverage their power so the strongest survive and flourish (Benjamin, 1993; Foote & Mayer, 1968; Cohen & March, 1974). The brokering role of management allows groups to develop significant organizational influence. Groups hesitate to compromise their interests for the good of the larger institution which means compromising institutional goals.

Administrative control is lessened in this negotiator role. Frequently cut off from groups and reliant on mid-managers for accurate information or to enact policy, upper administration often finds itself outside of the loop (Benjamin, 1993). Too often, the role of mid-
management is to hide problems from the upper administration so that there will be little interference in how the small group functions (Tjosvold, 1992). Autonomy is highly valued. In addition, in higher education there is a strong cultural expectation that upper administration maintain a supportive but "hands-off" role. Again, the autonomy of work groups is reinforced.

*Faculty leadership roles.* In addition to the difficulties caused by weak organizational linkages, faculty leadership roles can also be problematic (Foote & Mayer, 1968). Faculty assume leadership roles and have significant power within all of the groups in which they work; however, the system does not provide training, staff support, or clearly defined areas of control in many of these roles. "The power of the faculty is considerable, but it is exercised in a milieu of confusion and uncertainly as to its autonomy, role or area of responsibility" (Foote & Mayer, 1968, p. 68). This limits midmanagement effectiveness in the system or, at least, creates ambiguity in role and responsibility.

*Responsibility without power.* Faculty leadership roles within a school or division are especially problematic because these roles involve supervision and direction of colleagues. Faculty do not always acknowledge that their director, who is also their colleague, has the power to enact administrative roles such as faculty appraisal, program planning, or budget allocation without their approval. Each administrative decision by a faculty leader means negotiation and
compromise with individual faculty members (Benjamin, Carroll, Jocobi, Krop, & Shires, 1993). This circuitous process takes time and effort.

In an environment which requires responsive, immediate action it is difficult to move groups forward in this role. Frequently, expectations for performance from this role results in backroom negotiations or the building of power constituencies so that the faculty leader can move decisions forward. In response, faculty have been known to develop their own constituencies to block administrative decisions.

Faculty members who hold administrative positions in higher education frequently learn their new leadership role on the job. There is little training available in the university setting. Apparently, University administrations believe anyone can take on administrative duties (Foote & Mayer, 1968). Faculty, used to autonomy in teaching or research, are not necessarily prepared to be administrators, who need to work to build consensus in a group. The training necessary to work with peers in groups on developing shared purpose, in evaluating colleagues or in disciplining them for errant behavior is often absent.

In addition, the faculty director role may be rotational. When a program chair or division chair's cycle is over, another faculty member is nominated for the job. This cycle of responsibility may have benefits, but it also creates gaps in effective and trained leadership.

*Tenure.* The tenure system is valuable in many regards. It supports academic freedom, safeguards senior faculty from cost cutting
measures and can clarify university expectations and standards to assure understanding of performance expectations for new faculty. However, as it has evolved, tenure creates significant problems for group works and power distribution among faculty.

The tenure system gives senior faculty control over newer faculty. It creates administrative limits in that it makes it difficult to fire dysfunctional tenured faculty. It allows tenured faculty to control the behavior of new faculty members at the local level through threat and enforced conformity. Tenure weakens the authority of upper administration with new faculty, who look for protectors among the experienced senior faculty. This extends the power base of traditional faculty groups.

Tenure can limit the university's ability to cultivate new models and values. The values of senior faculty are perpetuated as younger faculty are groomed into traditional ways of thinking through their alliances with tenured faculty members. Faculty, outside of this power structure, often find themselves disenfranchised. Upper administration, in essence, relinquishes control of tenure systems. There are few checks and balances to the power of senior faculty in the university tenure process.
Summary

In the university system, work groups are loosely coupled, but connected through a central administration which, over time, has taken on a bargaining role in trading interest for interest across groups. Groups have tentative horizontal interconnections, and thus, no effective forum for prioritization of institution need over parochial concerns.

The strong local voices tend to control resources often at the expense of institutional interests (Darlin & Brownless, 1984; Foote, 1968). Power can be dissipated from the full organization. Polarization is encouraged as strong groups compete for reduced resources. Competition for resources results in perceived threat. Threat creates conflict generating behaviors. Behavior is not regulated through powerful administrators, unlike many private business. Conflict behavior can go unchecked. Isolation and competition is strengthened, and the opportunity for groups to promote discussion about collective needs and values is limited.

Some contextual factors common in higher education contribute to the potential for group isolation and power building. First, upper administration traditionally takes on a laissez faire attitude, leaving governance largely to mid managers. Ambiguity of role and responsibility is the norm in this system. Second, local managers are often faculty who take on additional administrative roles without training or real authority.
Again, lines of authority are not clear. In addition, strong constituencies supported by tenure and other systems in higher education, build strong, local groups often in competition for resources. Because administration must negotiate between strong individuals or groups to accomplish tasks, power becomes important.

Work groups, in education or business, operate with varying degrees of authority and efficacy. The contribution of work groups or teams to an organization can be great. However, the potential for failure is also great (Hackman, 1986). There is no guarantee that participatory work groups will produce desired results in any particular situation. There are many aspects of this structure that lead to problems between groups and organizations. Conflict in participatory models is inevitable. A significant factor influencing group effectiveness is the ability of individuals and the group as a whole to constructively deal with their differences. (Blake, Shepard, & Mouton, 1964)

**Conflict and Conflict Development in Work Groups**

According to many researchers, conflict is "a window to the drama of organizational life." (Deustch, 1973). Looking at conflict tells much about organization and its future. Conflict is caused by many different factors; it is rooted in personalities and relationships; it is acted out in
specific incidents; it is strongly felt. Conflicts emerge in interpersonal contexts.

Work in groups inevitably means that individual interests are affected by the actions of others. Deutsch (1973) and others emphasize that conflict originates in the interaction of interdependent people who perceive incompatible goals, and possible interference by others in accomplishing those goals. Johnson and Johnson (1989) have studied this potential of conflict in groups. They state that this social interdependence can lead to a number of outcomes. Interests can be promoted by the actions of others, obstructed or have no effect on desired outcomes. As people interact in groups, if their action is perceived as obstructing the success of others, conflict occurs.

Sheif (1953) was able to demonstrate, in controlled situations, that whenever people work together in a group, there is the potential for conflict even if the tasks performed have a low threshold of importance to participants. Tjosvold (1992) in his studies of groups also concluded that conflict in social settings is inevitable. Where there are people; there is conflict (Brickman, 1974; Folger et al., 1997).

Definitions of Conflict

There are many definitions of conflict. Due to its idiosyncratic nature, social conflict is difficult to define (Fink, 1968; Nicotera, 1993). There is disagreement among scholars as to what social interactions
should be considered as conflict, and how they should be classified. To
deal with differing perspectives, Fink (1968) argues the case for a
"working definition" of social conflict which can be generalized to apply to
the analysis of each individual case.

Fink (1968) defines conflict as "any social situation or process in
which two or more social entities are linked by at least one form of
antagonistic psychological relation or at least one form of antagonistic
must be perceived, and it must represent a potential opposition, blockage
or threat to resources or position and power. It is seen as having the
potential to inhibit participants in the achievement of goals or furthering
their interests (Robbins, 1983). Folger and Marshall (1984, p. 4) define
conflict as "the interaction of interdependent people who perceive
incompatible goals and interferences from each other in achieving these
goals." Heitler (1994) suggests that even conflicts that are only perceived
must be considered real.

In social exchange theory, Johnson and Johnson (1979) suggest
these conflicts are driven by self-interest. Hocker and Wilmot (1985)
concur and suggest there are always perceived rewards and costs
involved when individuals have conflict. Conflict is best understood when
considered in terms of behavioral patterns of interaction. This series of
initiation-response and counterresponse can create a spiral of
exaggerated reactions (Folger et al., 1997).
Categories of Conflict

One type of conflict occurs because people have differing understandings or interpretations of the problem. Beebe and Masterson (1993) refer to these conflicts as pseudo-conflicts. Pseudo-conflicts result from poor communication, differing information about the issue to be addressed due to a lack of skill or emphasis on clarification.

Conflicts also arise because of differences over procedures, concepts or goals. Procedural conflict is characterized by disagreements over a course of action. Conceptual conflict involves disagreement over ideas, information, theories or opinions. In goal disagreement parties differ in values or end states (Schmuck, 1968). Schmuck and Runkel (1973) refer to these as structural conflicts. Beebe calls this category of conflict simple conflicts. Pondy (1992) refers to them as substantive conflicts. No matter what they are called, they involve conflicts over interpretation, process or outcomes. Conflict on this level, if dealt with well, can lead participants to new perspectives and appreciation of other ideas.

Conflict can also be interpersonal. Differences that are interpersonal usually come from a perceived incongruity over interpersonal styles or needs. This is the most difficult type of conflict to handle. Beebe and Masterson (1993) refer to this as personal conflict. It involves relationships and interpersonal interactions. It is often hard to
identify the source of interpersonal conflict. Interpersonal conflict becomes most threatening when an individual or group feels attacked, blocked or disenfranchised. This feeling can trigger a personalized reaction that may or may not be directly related to the issue or problem under consideration.

Frequently when interpersonal conflict becomes more extreme, it is referred to as ego conflict. Ego conflict is manifested through face saving and face losing behaviors within a group. "Face" can be defined as the positive social value a person claims within a social setting (Folger et al., 1997). When people's identity in a group is threatened, face saving behaviors attempt to re-establish value and identity after threat. Face saving characteristically results in redirecting conflict from the issue to personal response and results in personal reactions and defensiveness.

Face saving behaviors produce changes in the quality of group interaction (Folger et al., 1997). During certain phases of conflict exploration, ego conflict can result in blame followed by displaced aggression. Interpersonal conflict can be managed, although it is more difficult to constructively deal with than pseudo or structural conflict (Folger et al., 1997). Despite its importance, conflict which results in interpersonal dissonance is often ignored and allowed to escalate.

Folger et al. (1997) also suggest that conflict can be realistic or nonrealistic. In realistic conflict there is a possibility that resolution of conflict can occur. Unrealistic conflict suggests that conflicts are
expressions of aggression based on the need to save face, discredit or punish the opposing parties. The sole end of non-realistic conflict is to do damage (Folger et al., 1997).

As conflicts become arenas for people to establish and defend images of themselves, the focus of constructive problem solving is deflected. The degree to which conflicts are realistic or non realistic often depend on the degree to which groups have experienced conflict as a positive or negative encounter.

The complexity and idiosyncratic nature of conflict also contributes to how difficult the conflict will be to manage (Watzlawick, Weakland, & Fisch, 1974). The degree to which there are differences over what to do and how to do it, as well as the quality of the relationship of those engaged in conflict, influence conflict escalation. The period of time over which a conflict is allowed to escalate and the previous experience of a group in conflict resolution also determine the development of conflict (Schmuck, 1968).

*Constructive conflict.* Conflict in itself is not necessarily good or bad. Pondy (1992) and Weick (1979) describe conflict as encompassing oppositional states: competition and cooperation; differentiation and integration; trust and distrust; attraction and avoidance; structure and anarchy; static and dynamic activity.

Organizational systems are energized through such polar opposites. If there were no active conflicts, Pondy (1992) states, one force
would dominate another. This could result in the diminishing of certain behavioral repertoires available within an organization. An organization could lose its capacity for adapting to new environmental stressors.

Adaptation and conflict are inevitably linked (Ruben, 1978).

"Conflict is not only essential to the growth, change and evolution of living systems, but is also the system's primary defense against stagnation, detachment, entropy, and eventual extinction." (Ruben, 1978, 206). Ruben (1978, p. 202) states that "determinations as to whether conflict is good or bad, functional or dysfunctional, useful or not, should be based upon... the extent to which conflict serves a system (individual or social) over-time in adapting constructively to its environment." Thus, productive conflict encourages interaction that is competitive, but also creates opportunities for sharing views and needs. Productive conflict resolution builds behavioral repertoires for treating conflict situations productively (Folger et al., 1997; Hackman, 1990; Weick, 1988).

So conflict is not necessarily a problem. Even when it is an uncomfortable experience, conflict can have positive result. This result depends on how differences and antagonisms evolve, and the ability of the group to use a conflict experience productively. Research suggests that if groups understand conflict and use it constructively, it increases group effectiveness. The work of Tjosvold (1992), Weick (1988), and Deutsch (1973), among others, indicates that when all parties believe
disputes can be resolved and goals attained, conflict is constructive. It adds to the group's belief that future conflicts can be resolved.

Success in conflict resolution affects groups in positive ways by building group cohesiveness; galvanizing the group against perceived threats; challenging restrictive rules; and encouraging high level and full consideration thinking. Success also gives group members incentive for challenging outmoded procedures (Tjosvold, 1990; Hocker & Wilmot, 1985, Coser, 1956; Wehr, 1970).

Additional outcomes of positive conflict include the improvement of morale as employees release tension and feel heard, improved self-awareness, and changed awareness of others as mental models are reconsidered (Senge, 1990a). Participants can gain psychological maturity as they learn to listen thoughtfully to the views of others, putting aside personal ego-centric interests (Tjosvold, 1992; Hocker, 1996; Wehr, 1970). Schmuck (1968) argues that the most important function of conflict is to raise the possibility of being able to work through differences in the future.

Constructive conflict behaviors are learned and practiced; they must be supported within the group and organization to have full effect. Having these skills and the confidence that conflict can be resolved favorably helps groups to avoid chronic, negative conflicts. However, knowing conflict can be positive does not necessarily make it so. Most
often, conflict is a negative experience which deters productivity and effectiveness (Tjosvold, 1992; Wehr, 1970; Weick, 1988).

*Dysfunctional conflict.* Dysfunctional conflict approaches are also learned. In contrast to constructive conflict, destructive conflict does not encourage dialogue and problem solving. Instead competition and hostility set in motion moves and countermoves that intensify dysfunctional behavior. Destructive conflict is likely to have "protracted, uncontrolled escalation cycles and prolonged attempts to avoid issues." (Folger et al., 1997, p. 9). This state works against reasonable resolution of problems (Hocker, 1996). Worst of all, it gives the message that conflict is to be avoided or suppressed because it is not useful.

It is easy to create conditions of negative conflict in team situations. Sheif (1953) in early experiments in group conflict found that intergroup hostility is inevitable where well developed groups operate in a competitive or reciprocally frustrating situation. With little effort, hostile behaviors in groups can be induced. Sheif's (1953) studies also indicated that interaction between members of a group could produce unstable conditions leading to hostility even in cooperative tasks.

In a series of training exercises conducted by a number of notable organizational development practitioners, including Trist and Kaplan, conditions were created that gave rise to conflict in groups. Dysfunctional conflict behaviors included suspicion of group members, personal antagonism between competitive groups, questioning of the
motives of other group members, intentional distortion of the communication, and attributing of hostile motives to ambiguous behavior such as seeing silence as malevolence. If these behaviors occurred even when individuals in the group had very little at stake in group decisions or outcomes, imagine what happens when stakes are high.

Conflict Escalation Within an Institutional Culture

No conflict exists in a vacuum. Conflict escalation is encouraged by a number of factors. It is influenced significantly by organizational culture and the conflict approach of individuals, groups and institutions (Folger et al., 1997). It is sustained by learned behavioral repertoires shaped within the environment of threat and counterthreat. It is influenced by patterns of conflict escalation known as phases that are predictable in any escalating conflict context.

Organizational Culture and Organizational Response to Conflict

Conflict is embedded in larger interaction sequences and influences. Researchers have argued for years that organizational response to conflict, greatly influences conflict escalation (Lewin, 1951). To understand a conflict, it is important to see how it is created and changed by institutional forces or patterns found in organizational
culture, group culture and individual style. The influence of organizational and group norms on conflict cannot be overstated. Organizational values evolve out of beliefs, values, rituals and protocol which is a product of people's interaction and history in organizations (Hofstede, 1991).

A soft concept, organizational culture includes the shared mental models and expectations that influence action and interaction (Hofstede, 1991). Hofstede (1991, p. 180), an expert on national cultures, describes organizational culture as "the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one organization from another." (p. 180). Schein (1990) adds to this definition, suggesting organizational culture is similar to societal culture, made up of intangibles such as values, beliefs, perceptions, behaviors norms, artifacts, patterns. Culture is determined by things seen and unseen; explicit and implied. It is a social energy that moves people to act (Killman, 1985, p. 230). "Culture is to the organization what personality is to the individual—a hidden, yet unifying theme that provides meaning, direction and mobilization."

There is no standard definition of organizational culture, but scholars observe that culture seems to be

1. Holistic, a whole which is more than the sum of its parts;
2. Historically shaped, a composite history transmitted through stories and or procedures from one generation of employees to another;
3. Related to things anthropologists, sociologists and psychologists study such as rituals and symbols;

4. Socially constructed, created and preserved by the group of people who together form the organization; and

5. Emergent, in a state of flux and growth, influenced by actions within and influences from outside (Hofstede, 1991, p. 180).

The development of culture in organizations is based on four central conceptions of symbolic interactionism:

1. People, individually and collectively, act based on the meaning assigned to objects, communication and actions that comprise their world;

2. People make indications to one another and interpret each other's indications;

3. Meaning of social acts is constructed by interpretation of the acts and the conclusions drawn by participants; and

4. The complex web of acts that comprise organizations, institutions, division of labor, and networks constantly change and adapt to newly constructed knowledge (Blumer, 1969, p. 50).

Although there are common elements that create a larger sense of how things are done in an organization, the interpretation of cultural elements may not be congruent within all members or groups. Louis (1993) suggests that organizations are a culture-bearing milieu where multiple nested cultures develop.
Several factors contribute to the development of local cultures such as: stability of membership; the extent to which key members agree to a set of ideas, norms or frameworks; the size of the organization; human qualities of key people; the permeability of organizational boundaries; membership restrictions, innate attributes and status of members; and the degree to which local groups operate autonomously and have entrepreneurial ambition (Louis, 1993).

Thus, to understand conflict, both a micro and macro analysis of conflict in an organization are necessary. Conflict in organizations is expressed as a form of symbolic interactions regulated by larger and smaller normative movements and parameters, both explicit and implicit, which serve to support the status quo and also influence each institutional act through the entrenchment of rules and expectations. Conflicts are affected by the shared meanings existing within various parts of an organization, thereby creating the systemic nature of conflict.

Each individual, group and the organizational culture have conflict styles that are acted out in conflict situations and that influence the culture of the group and institution (Hocker & Wilmot, 1991; Jones & White, 1985). Conflict style includes specific types of behavioral repertoires designed to defeat or defend against other conflict behaviors.

Individual and group patterns in conflict style can be used to predict the predominant way in which a person or a group will respond to conflict. Styles run the gamut between cooperative, accommodating,
competitive, and assertive or withdrawing (Jones & White, 1985; Putnam, 1988). Not all styles are equally advantageous in a conflict situation. Some styles exacerbate conflicts; some bury them. Style is also a product of past interactions and institutional response to those interactions. Issues of conflict avoidance or suppression from leadership becomes a contributing factor in reinforcing certain behaviors regarding conflict (Katz & Kahn, 1978).

Institutional culture is also significantly shaped by systemic forces such as leadership roles, power, policy and procedures. The dominance or lack of dominance in authority relationships, the degree of supportiveness in the group and institution, the sense of group identity and degree of interdependence between individuals or groups contributes to organizational culture.

Certain protocols in various organizational structures greatly influence conflict. In higher education, tenure, committee structure, faculty midmanagement are all aspects of organizational culture impacting conflict development. The role of upper administration in higher education is shaped and limited significantly by the power of different faculty groups in universities and colleges.

Organizational response to conflict greatly influences whether a conflict will be handled in a constructive or dysfunctional way. There are a number of responses which could encourage positive conflict development. These include building a culture where conflict is
embraced and worked through constructively; where leadership roles and responsibilities are clear and consistent; where a balance of power exists between individuals; and where people have and are encouraged to use skills in dealing with conflict situations (Kolb & Bartunek, 1992; Tjosvold, 1990).

Researchers have also identified a number of influential preconditions for this destructive conflict development within organizations. Conflict is likely to fester when the following conditions are present.

1. During periods of rapidly expanding achievement followed by limitation or reversal;

2. When there is ambiguity about relative power and confusion regarding the real power base in groups;

3. When one person or group believes that their opponent is afforded more power than is warranted by position or status or invidious comparison;

4. When there is status inconsistency and rank disequilibrium exists, and groups throw off conventional distribution of power;

5. When weak groups with weak group norms are threatened by changes in status quo;

6. Where zero sum thinking leads groups to believe there must be a winner and loser in conflicts;
7. When communication among allied group members is strong, but communication with those outside of the group is weak;

8. When leaders, natural or assigned, believe there is a need to organize a group struggle. (Hocker & Wilmot, 1985)

Traditionally, conflict is not dealt with openly in organizations. Instead conflict is viewed as undesirable and an indication of weakness on the part of managers or participants engaged in the conflict (Schmuck, 1968; Putnam & Poole, 1987). Putnam and Poole (1987) states clearly that managers fear taking disagreements to supervisors and suppress conflict because it suggests incompetence on their part to control the conflict. The dread of conflict is due in part to the emotional tension and chaos inevitable when disputes are surfaced (Putnam & Poole, 1987). Inherent in conflict avoidance is a fear of emotional displays that cannot be controlled and could escalate out of hand.

Conflict Moves and Countermoves to Gain Power

As well as organizational influences, research indicates that behavior of individuals in a conflict influences the potential for conflict escalation. In conflicts, individuals perceive threat. In situations where threat is evident, people attempt to use power to gain advantage. Of course, individuals or groups first have to have power, in order to use it against opponents (Berger, 1994).
Power is defined by Folger et al. (1997) as the capacity to act effectively and the ability to influence or control events. Whoever has influence in a system can muster more resources to increase influence within that system. This gives that group or individual power (Mintzberg, 1983).

Competition for resources and influence encourages power struggles and power acquisition (Mintzberg, 1983). Competition stimulates feelings of threat because of its potential threat to a group's needs, goals or status.

When people in organizations have to attend to issues of safety and perceived self preservation due to competition, needed cooperation, trust and openness are often sacrificed. The degree of threat to individual members in the group and the degree of competition for resources impacts development in an organization over time. (Blake & Mouton, 1984, p. 103)

What disputants believe about who has power impacts conflict escalation in two ways. First, it can create moves and countermoves between those who threaten interests and those who are threatened. It can also spur attempts of one group or individual to develop connections with those in power in order to shore up their own power base to contend with threat.

Perceptions of who has power and who can "win" in competitive situations effects conflict escalation. As disputants attempt to counteract enemies or develop constituencies, moves and countermoves
occur. According to Folger et al. (1997, p. 106), the impact of power in conflict is constantly negotiated as interaction unfolds.

A balance of power in a conflict situation is more likely to encourage collaborative problem solving and exploration of common interests than an imbalance of power. Clear lines of authority also makes resolution easier. If, however, power is uncertain, there are usually attempts by potential disputants to gain power through various means.

Power in a group, particularly in a group of colleagues, is often unbalanced or ambiguous. Perception of and use of power to threaten and counteract threats leads to conflict (Berger, 1994; Folger et al., 1997).

One way in which power can be negotiated is in developing small constituent groups. According to researchers interested in coalition formation, these groups are formed in order to give additional influence to those within a group with less power. They are usually formed on the basis of common interests or attitudes (Axelrod, 1984; Caplow, 1956; Deal, 1982). Stronger members usually move to lead groups. Strong individuals in lead roles within a group can mobilize their "constituency" to pressure for advantage. In a like way, groups can do this between themselves in organizations causing factionalizing.

The momentum of conflict behavior increases through this cycle of threat and counterthreat. This occurs if groups are not able to constructively deal with their differences. Moves and countermoves of
participants to "win" is called "tit for tat" behavior (Baxter, 1982). We all have heard the phrase "an eye for an eye." This behavior is typical in any threatening situation. Disputants complain, "You did this to me, so I will do this to you." Even in games like chess or monopoly, people are compelled to attack and defend. These patterns of behavior support and perpetuate themselves.

Attribution, in particular, is an important element fueling the cycle of dysfunction (Baron, 1985; Sillars & Parry, 1982). In attribution theory, people attempt to understand behavior by projecting intent (Canary & Cupach, 1988). To maintain self-esteem in conflict situations, individuals often defensively attribute negative motives and to vilify opponents, seeking to justify their own dysfunctional behaviors.

Research suggests that when parties attribute conflict responsibility to their opponents, they are likely to react negatively and fuel the cycle of conflict (Canary, 1990). A number of studies suggest that people see themselves as victims rather than instigators of conflict (Baron, 1985; Nicotera, 1995). If, however, participants in conflict are able to see their own part in the conflict escalation, they are more likely to desire resolution through integrative strategies (Folger et al., 1997).

Also, dysfunctional conflict involves this type of self-perpetuating response and counterresponse called "behavioral repertoires" which reinforce each other (Pondy, 1992). These responses occur with increased
frequency as conflict cycles continue (Pruitt & Carnevale, 1993; Putnam & Jones, 1982).

Disputant experience with conflict, either positive or negative, creates patterns of behavior and expectations that influence future conflicts. As groups move through various phases of conflict, they behave in predictable and self-perpetuating patterns that assist in resolution of conflict or fuel escalation. Successful conflict resolution begets new successes; problematic conflict generates difficulty in solving future conflict.

As people negatively react to each other, the nature of their relationships become more antagonistic. Face saving and defensive routines get in the way of successful differentiation. Negative attribution, vilification, assumptions have become part of the group's belief system during conflict episodes.

If leadership is constructive, the capacity and skill of the group to overcome these behaviors, their ability to focus on issues, a group may overcome these negative conflict behaviors. More often, the lack of positive interaction with opponents over time increases isolation and cuts communication, creating more negative attribution and face saving. Thus, preconceived notions of opponents cannot be justified; threat and counterthreat behavior continues. Isolation is reinforced (Walton, 1956).

At this point in a conflict, the focus for action shifts from resolution to discrediting and, perhaps, even destroying the opponent. In
addition, the moves and countermoves in escalating conflict become layered with so many complaints that no problem can be easily solved. Groups are unable to sift through all of their hostile behaviors to focus on problems that could be solved. Walton (1956) refers to this as a "bundling board."

In this situation, key issues are murky. Problem solving becomes larger than life. Each attempt to problem solve is complicated by so many issues that the entire effort seems impossible. As issues are added, or as focus becomes obscured, more emphasis is placed on the conflict rather than the resolution of conflict. As noted by several researchers, few individuals have learned to move into constructive problem solving with perceived opponents when they have strongly identified that group as an enemy (Janis & Mann, 1977; Zillman, 1990).

Instead people used different methods to undermine their opponent's position. Some of these methods, such as voting or majority rule, appear to be constructive; some, including sarcasm or threats, are not. In any case, methods are used to win advantage in situations. Winning and defense become the basis of the interactions of conflict participants.

At this phase, conflict is "unrealistic" ego conflict and is unresolvable at an issues level. These conflicts become worse because of failures in relationships (Folger et al., 1997). Participants lose sight of
substantive differences and degenerate into interpersonal war. Conflicts continue to escalate over trivial or inconsequential matters.

At this point, escalation of conflict has occurred often because people within the group and organization have failed to develop the interactive skills needed to succeed in a conflict situation. Research suggests that this lack of ability, particularly verbal skill, in addressing conflict results in aggressiveness that is overtly hostile and injurious or in covert activity that avoids direct conflict confrontation. In turn, these behaviors support conflict dysfunction (Infante & Gordan, 1985).

As people in groups demonstrate they are unable to solve problems, there is a loss of faith in the ability of anyone to resolve conflicts. Successive failure becomes a pattern. The belief that conflict will inevitably have negative effect pervades institutional culture and re-reinforces a pernicious "trained incapacity" to deal constructively with conflict (Newcomb, 1947; Walton, 1956).

Trained incapacity develops in a number of ways. Trained incapacity occurs where groups are unskilled in managing conflict and do not make conflict a tool for good decision making. Most managers and team members are untrained in problem solving, conflict identification, prevention or resolution techniques. As noted by Blake (1974) managers and team members don't learn how to do safe problem solving. "Other than in the school of hard knocks, there may be little opportunity to learn to become effective in problem solving interactions involving two or
more individuals" (p. 103). In addition, attention to process and relationships are sacrificed to completing tasks (Tjosvold, 1990).

In families, people often deal with extremes of unresolved conflict with divorce. In dysfunctional work groups, individuals can't simply elect to disband. Groups often respond to poorly managed conflict in a variety of ways which seldom lead to meeting group goals (Johnson & Johnson, 1976). Thus, conflict that is poorly managed costs a great deal and in the long run no one wins when conflict escalates. Frequently dysfunctional cycles of conflict make individuals and groups more insular, chauvinistic and inefficient.

**Phases of Conflict Escalation**

Although conflict appears random and chaotic, some theorists believe conflict responses occur in predictable episodes or phases. By understanding conflict episodes, past interactions can be used as a map in charting the next step in conflict contexts (Baxter, 1982; Newell & Stutman, 1991). This theoretical framework is referred to as phase theory. It is thought by some conflict theorists that if one can understand the cyclical nature of conflict and determine leverage points in the stages of development, it is possible to intervene successfully in conflicts.

One model of phase theory describes conflict in two significant phases: (a) differentiation and (b) integration or escalation (Walton,
In differentiation, differences are surfaced and actions considered. Escalation or integration can follow in the second phase. Escalation occurs because of the inability of conflict participants to constructively explore and solve conflicts. It is characterized by hostility, avoidance, increased conflict interaction and development of power constituencies to combat threat. Integration occurs when further escalation of conflict is perceived as fruitless and parties acknowledge common ground and explore possible options that move toward solution.

Other theorists describe these phases in more detail (Pondy, 1990; Rummel, 1976). For example, Rummel suggests that there is a "latent phase" where the potential for differences exists, but the differences are not yet discovered. This may be due to differences in style, values, desired outcomes, or needs. This phase is often followed by a stasis phase where players determine power, consequences and build constituencies in preparation of moves and countermoves. This phase can go on while additional trigger events or crises occur. Frequently, at this point a group attempts to move to differentiation.

Phase models make dealing with conflict sound so easy. Groups talk about differences, and explore collaboratively devised outcomes where key interests are protected. Obviously, it is not that simple. In fact, differentiation is extremely difficult. Most parties retreat from the differentiation process for good reason. At first differentiation includes volatility, potential escalation, and a feeling of powerlessness in
attempting to balance power. Previously unsuccessful attempts at differentiation often makes participants believe that closure is impossible. They believe, quite rightly, that opposing parties are out to harm, rather than to problem solve (Deutsch, 1973). As combatants face these and other concerns in the differentiation process, people have to be courageous. Frequently, it is more than they can handle.

Folger et al. (1997) suggest that, in differentiation, participants most frequently personalize conflict because in this phase individuals clarify their needs, concerns and positions. Advocacy and defensiveness can result in intense emotional responses. It is not until these positions are articulated, however, that conflict can be addressed in a less personal way. Simmel (1955) refers to this as "resolving tension between contrasts."

Although differentiation is critical to problem solving, it can also result in serious escalation. Stakes are high; people are aware of differences and threat. Few people have skills to move from a feeling of threat to rational problem solving. Many unsuccessful differentiation behaviors have been documented in conflict research.

Leary (1957) and Gibb (1961) suggest that people naturally act in hostile and defensive ways when they feel needs, position, or interests are threatened. Swenson (1973) suggests that relationships are strained when group members disagree over important issues. The longer conflict
participants maintain their differences without constructive dialogue, the more difficult constructive discussion of differences (Swenson, 1973).

Janis and Mann (1977) suggest that individuals, when articulating a position in public and restating it several times, also tend to increase their commitment to that position or behavior. In differentiation there is the potential of making people more intractible.

Face saving is another concern in differentiation. Individuals in this process often identify strongly with their position. Admitting they might be "wrong" or agreeing to a "compromise" may suggest weakness. This suggestion of weakness could result in a feeling that one's status in the group is demeaned, particularly for group leaders. Loss of position causes destructive defensive behaviors in an attempt to save face. Considered together, the experience of differentiation which often includes the threat of loss of face, increased potential for attack and defensiveness, and public affirmation of a position is a potentially painful experience.

For these reasons the differentiation phase of conflict is often avoided. Parties try to side step divisive issues and may undermine their ability to resolve differences to the satisfaction of the group over time. When differentiation is not successfully completed as a phase, escalation rather than integration occurs. Phase theories describe how individuals involved in unresolved conflict over time perpetuate the conflict cycles
leading to potentially destructive results (Folger et al., 1997; Newcomb, 1950).

Ironically, the impact of not surfacing and constructively dealing with conflict in a group can be equally difficult over time. Inability of a group to manage their dilemmas interferes with the group's decision making and productivity. It erodes relationships, undermines trust and it can threaten the group's credibility, or even their existence in a larger organization. Conflict that is not constructively addressed can obstruct decision making. Each time a conflict is poorly managed, it inhibits the ability of the group or organization to address the next problem.

**Autism as a Metaphor for Protracted Conflict in Groups**

*Protracted Conflict*

Behavior prevalent in protracted group conflict has been described by many organizational development specialists. Charles Handy (1993), for example, describes groups in conflict as a "hardening around" conflict as individuals or constituencies within the group anticipate each new acting out of the conflict. Their behavior is characterized by distortion and control of information to support the held beliefs.

People move from more flexible to more self-interested action (Folger et al., 1997) which encourages development of power
constituencies, vilification of opponents, defensive routines and face saving. A climate of action and reaction cultivates hostility and suspicion of "others." Collaboration degenerates into bargaining. There is misapplication of individual and group energies. Aggression, punishment, winning become a focus.

Long-term patterns of poorly managed conflict can lead to a sort of mental illness in groups. Theodore Newcomb (1950) in Social Psychology refers to a state of extreme social conflict as autistic hostility. Holmes and Miller (1976) referred to severe conflict as "autistic." To expand on this metaphor, the state of autistic conflict is somewhat analogous to autism. Autism as a mental condition is marked by the disregard of external reality and is characterized by an extreme preoccupation with the self. When autism becomes pathological, a person loses contact and retreats into a private world of delusion—one of his/her own making.

Autism is generally described as a pervasive developmental disorder which is characterized by impaired social interaction, impaired communications and activities, and behaviors and interests that are repetitive, restricted, and stereotyped (Reid, 1995). As a mental condition it is marked by the disregard of external reality and is characterized by an extreme preoccupation with the self.

Autistic patients are sometimes unable to comprehend, organize and process incoming stimuli and information. They struggle to form social bonds. They may not adapt well to a changing environment. This
condition focuses their thinking in an absorption with satisfying their own needs, which may become rather obsessive and narrow (Reid, 1995). When autism becomes pathological, a person loses contact and retreats into a private world of delusion of their own making (Dawson, 1989).

Certain characteristics of autism can be found in work group behaviors and beliefs when enmeshed in protracted conflict. Protracted conflict has aspects of being cut off from others, self-absorption and an obsessive focus on the conflict (Newcomb, 1950). As with autism, it involves self-absorption and interest in meeting individual needs regardless of group purpose. Protracted conflict becomes an internal motivation that is fueled by self-justifying beliefs. Group members isolate themselves from those with which they have the conflict. They cluster with other members who have like views. They share this perspective and are unable to see beyond it to depersonalize the issues. All behavior is interpreted through the lens of one perspective. Motives and evil intent are attributed to others (Newcomb, 1950).

This world view produces reactive behavior. Productive work stops. Increasingly exaggerated behaviors and reactions occur in autistic conflict. Everything within the system, especially mistakes, fuel beliefs and result in extreme reactions. Symptoms occur with increased regularity. It becomes a sort of group character disorder. The symptoms themselves are a signal that all is not well, but generally they are ignored
or treated on the "events" level in an organization until there is a major problem (Handy, 1993; Tjosvold, 1992).

The internal dissonance begins to build a memory bank within individuals and the group. This is often reinforced through informal discussions substantiating group beliefs. If the conflict is not resolved and if something triggers a similar feeling of dissonance, it is probable that the feelings of conflict can build to a significant degree (Newcomb, 1950). As more incidents are seen through the conflict lens, more internal support for these feelings continues. This conflict perspective grows until there is no exit. It grows quickly when there are other people in the environment or parts of a system that feed and maintain it.

Social psychologist Ted Newcomb (1947) referred to autistic hostility as a cyclical negativity feeding on itself. This cycle can begin in a number of ways. It can even begin with simple conflicts when a problem is not acknowledged or managed constructively and grows. People may begin to be aware of interpersonal conflicts over style that increase the degree of negative feeling.

Over time the hostility and emotional intensity become larger than the issues at stake. As conflict grows, less interaction occurs, and less and less objective information about the problem or person is considered. When people are unable to interact in some positive and open way, parties conjure up in their own minds evil intent in others. Soon
participants are unable to look objectively at an issue. The hostility colors all interactions. It is a no-win, no-exit situation.

Summary

In the United States, more people are working in groups with increased autonomy and decision making adaptability. Administrative hierarchies do not hold as much control as in the past. In education, universities, schools and colleges have long operated in semiautonomous work groups were decision making and problem solving occurred through bargaining at different levels.

Conflict is inevitable any time people interact with each other where needs or concerns are at stake. Groups within education are not immune to conflict; in fact, the contrary is true. Educational institutions experience a great deal of conflict. Conflict can be positive or negative depending on how successfully individuals are able to move through phases of conflict. If co-workers are able to identify differences and construct mutually acceptable solutions, conflict can vitalize institutions and help them adapt to a changing environment. However, more frequently conflict is negative and has deleterious effect on individuals and their work.

Certain factors have been found to influence the outcome of conflicts within organizations. These may include organizational culture
and approach to conflict negotiation, leadership and power, group skills, communicated messages and interpretation of each conflict negotiation as it is added to the collective norms.

Conflict develops in phases over time. As time elapses without successful resolution of group problems, conflict escalates. The possibility of resolving differences disintegrates over time as groups increase hostilities through moves and countermoves. Conflict can cripple interaction between disputants. Ultimately it affects all systems that come in contact with the infected group.

Protracted conflict is similar to a mental illness of autism. This autism isolates individuals, breaks down communication, fuels obsessiveness and paranoia, encourages attribution and stunts the possibility of problem solving. In order to understand the nature of protracted conflict in educational institutions, it is important to study interactions and the contexts in which autistic conflict is generated and nourished.

Educational leaders are bound to face more, rather than less, conflict within groups due to the increased role and power of groups in educational institutions, the ambiguity of power within this changing system, and the competitiveness from decreased resources.

Administrators, faculty and staff at institutions of higher education need to know how to prevent or ameliorate dysfunctional conflict within groups before it negatively impacts group effectiveness. To do this, it is
important to understand why it happens, how it is supported by individual, group and organizational behavior, and what intervention strategies might be used to prevent it.

At the heart of organizational development is the concern for the vitalizing, energizing and actualizing, activating and reviewing organizations through technical and human resources (Argyris, 1970). Organizational development means dealing with organizational problems, such as chronic conflict, that prevent efficiency, productivity and the well being of people working together within that institution. It is the role of leaders and OD consultants to assist in changing destructive systems, cultures, and behaviors within organizations.

This study describes three instances of autistic conflict in a university setting and to lend insight about conflict development. Although conclusions drawn from case studies are not generalizable, common patterns and behaviors observed can offer insight to educational leaders as to the nature of autistic conflict development.
Chapter 3
Research Design and Methodology

Whenever people encounter one another in social interaction, most of the things social psychologists talk and write about are happening all at once....No theory can possibly encompass it all. No mind can apprehend or comprehend it all at once. Thus, the aim of any theoretical perspective is to separate out a few attributes to be examined in purely analytic isolation in the hope of gaining intellectual orderliness within the narrow slice of reality we have chosen to study. (Emerson, 1989)

Introduction

Humans in groups engage in action. Action consists of activities that individuals perform as they encounter one another in a succession of situations. These social interactions create "meaning building" and influence future interactions. Fundamentally, people are constantly influenced by interactions and interpretations in which action is constructed (Blumer, 1969).

This flow of interaction and meaning making is based on what people know, their assessment and interpretation of what they know, and action taken based on knowledge and interpretation (Blumer, 1969). It reaches back into the past and projects into the future. It is not simply a linear construction, however. The flow is influenced equally by feelings, fears, and interpretations that occur simultaneous to construction of conclusions.
According to Blumer, an individual, to adapt to each new context, must observe and interpret the actions of others in order to act (Blumer, 1969). People interact in accordance with what they believe to be the motives, intent and anticipated actions of others. They direct their own conduct in terms of what they believe about the conduct of others. This means group life is a formative process, not simply the expression of behavior, where meaning and action is constructed (Blumer, 1969).

Because of this emergent quality of human interaction in group work, positivist research methodology has not always been the most appropriate method for studying organizational behavior. Dissatisfaction with scientific research methods as applied to organizational development (OD) questions has been documented in the literature for twenty years. Eminent researchers in organizational development such as Lawler et al. (1985) and Argyris (1982) argue, "People in organizations cannot become subjects in the same way animal, neutrons and chemical substances become subjects. Instead they are an active part of the research process and influence it very directly." (Lawler et al., 1985, p. 58)

Scientific research methodology intrudes on the organizational environment to be studied and changes organizational behavior. It imposes artificial social systems such as random groups, controls and tests, as well as imposing questions accommodating research methodology rather than addressing organizational significance (Argyris
Schon, 1974). Most importantly, traditional approaches have a negative effect on participants in the research. The unintended consequences include physical and psychological withdrawal and overt or covert hostility. This happens when the subjects feel manipulated, controlled and deceived to fit the research needs. According to Argyris and Schon (1974) and others, the results of such effect is unnatural data.

Instead, Argyris (1970) and Lawler (1985) argue for organic rather than mechanistic research. Naturalistic evaluation is a methodology better fitting the context of organizational development work. Organizational behavior is messy and complex. The context is constantly changing. For this reason it is important for the research method also to be emergent (Lofland & Lofland, 1984) and directly rooted in the practice (Lawler, 1985).

**Grounded Theory and Researcher as Tool**

Naturalistic research methods, grounded theory in particular, emphasize understanding the human experience within the context studied (Yin, 1989). This approach seeks to identify patterns and link processes in a more systemic collaboration of event, interpretation and interaction in real life settings (Argyris, 1957; Charmaz, 1983; Kanter, 1989; Lewin, 1951; Yin, 1989).
In grounded theory, abstractions are built on particulars that have been gathered and grouped together. Theory emerges from specifics (Bogdan & Bilken, 1992). This type of naturalistic research allows focus on the setting as a direct source of data, and the researcher is the key instrument. It is descriptive and requires that data are analyzed inductively. Surfacing meaning is its essential concern (Bogdan & Bilken, 1992).

Lawler (1985) suggests that one way to bring research into the context of an organization and to link it with questions of concern to practitioners is to extend the researcher’s role in the organizational development process. He is concerned that organizations are studied by researchers who never see them. The result of their research can be antiseptic. Lawler argues for training researchers who can engage in consulting relationships with organizations (Lawler, 1985, p. 14). This process of direct observation of the environment studied is critical to understanding group conflict. Blumer concurs. He writes that people who perceive nothing of the social world can know nothing of it, but those who participate in it will have a greater knowledge of it, despite their naive understanding of context particulars. Observation and involvement are keys to understanding (Blumer, 1969).

According to Bergson, there are two profoundly different ways of knowing a thing. We can move around the object or we can enter into it (Mitchell, 1993, p. 55). Therein lies the reason for consultants and
researchers to join functions. A consultant has access to organizations where the research question emerges and the organizational behavior occurs. The researcher uses systematic methodology and careful documentation of what is observed to contribute frameworks to improve practice (Yin, 1989).

**Organizational Development and Grounded Theory**

Work for consultants in organizational development is a natural fit with grounded theory. Organizational development work involves immersion in organizational culture, participation in specific contexts and analysis of particulars. To do organizational development, one has to be present and experience that organization.

When conflict becomes debilitating, the organization, group or leader may elect to seek outside intervention. Outside consultants, invited to assist groups in managing their conflict dilemmas, have a special opportunity to observe and understand how conflict happens, and how it can be addressed.

As the executive director of a consulting group and the owner of a private consulting practice, I have worked as a consultant with many different organizations, businesses, agencies and educational institutions in group development, planning and facilitation. I have conducted hundreds of sessions involving conflict.
The relationship between a client and consultant begins with gathering information and an understanding of what has happened in the past from many perspectives. It also unearths how people perceive the present situation. My experience with groups includes extensive interviews within the group and from internal informants within the organization, observation of formal and informal interaction, and research on critical incidents in both the institution and the group in order to develop a picture of the conflict.

The consultant working in conflict situations, I find myself engaged with a group over a long period of time, and I have observed their behavior in a wide variety of structured and unstructured settings. In this role, one has access to levels of the organization and to key people who hold another view of what has happened. It is a long-term relationship that is centered in trust and honesty. This relationship surfaces the secrets and the stories of the organization and group. This experience benefits the role of researcher.

The relationship between a consultant and a group is an intimate one. It is fragile. People experiencing deep and hurtful conflict expose their vulnerability in a way different from most organizational development work. So, a consultant brings to the data gathering process the ability to gather information and solicit response from clients in non-threatening, unobtrusive ways, so as not to disrupt the group's natural activity or threaten participants (Bennis, et al., 1985).
The experience of being an outside consultant develops in a person the ability to extricate one's self from specific biases of clients while viewing the conflict context. As Buddhist philosophy suggests, it is best to enter the situation with a beginner's mind, one cleared of expectation. The first part of any good conflict assessment involves transparent listening and detailed data collection. Few conclusions are drawn; information is collected as it evolves; many sources are solicited. This represents naturalistic research methodology (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984).

**Ethnographic Voice**

The voice of the researcher is often one in which the word I is banished. Instead, we refer to ourselves as "the researcher," and speak in the third person and in non-gender-specific language of he/she, implying that a human being has not contaminated the scientific inquiry being described. This rarified voice is an illusion. As Charmaz and Mitchell (1996) suggest, researchers in ethnography are present and have a human voice. In acknowledging the storyteller's voice, ethnographers challenge the authority of the researcher. "We have not pretensions that our stories are autonomous truths..."

In ethnography, the author's voice is consciously involved, as it attempts to convey in our human and imperfect way, our own "capacities to experience and communicate something of others' lives" (Charmaz &
Mitchell, 1996). As researchers in this genre, "...we go and see and sometimes join, we ask and listen, wonder, write and tell stories, not necessarily in that order." As well as the selected detail, the layering, the richness, and the personal observations propel the reader into the experience itself. The writer's observations, confusion, and downright befuddlement in the context which they report also weaves together disparate information. The untidiness of our reality is acceptable and reportable in this way (Charmaz & Mitchell, 1996).

In the stories generated from this research, I include my own voice. It reflects my perceptions, my limits, and my feelings. To do less would be dishonest. I acknowledge that my presence and involvement is part of each group's story. Readers from the academic community have suggested it is disquieting to have the author use the word I, so undisguised. This is understandable. However, to convey the "compelling complexity" of what is experienced and observed in social settings, I cannot suggest I am omniscient, objective, or absent. I am engaged and I report, in my personal and limited ways, what I observed within a changing context. What I notice I describe; what I connect with I emphasize; what I feel shapes the language I use. My voice conveys meaning. There is nothing objective about it.
Selection of Site

The purpose of this study was to observe and document the experience of protracted conflict in groups working within an educational setting. As a consultant working with groups in conflict, I had many opportunities to collect data on the subject.

A number of organizations in which I conducted conflict interventions as a consultant, were considered for the study. All self identified as experiencing severe conflict where an outside intervention was necessary. Each organization hired me to conduct three phases of work: assessment, intervention and evaluation.

Twelve organizations were selected for consideration in this study from my data base. The following criteria were used.

1. The group self-identified as having severe conflict.

2. The conflict existed for an extended period of time (over one year) and was described as having escalated.

3. The conflict may have started with two or more individuals, but grew to infect the full group to some degree.

4. Efforts had been made to deal with symptomatic crises, but generally internal intervention strategies failed and may have increased the conflict state.
5. Leaders in the organization viewed the group as problematic and treated the group differently than they had previously been treated within the organization.

6. The conflict was perceived by participants and key stakeholders as extreme, and behaviors of participants were enmeshed in the conflict state.

7. Energy of the participants was directed at the conflict in nonproductive ways, thereby limiting the amount of actual work within the group that could be accomplished.

8. Interviews with disputants and informants indicated a high degree of paranoia, conspiracy belief, defensiveness and self-protective behavior, the development of cabals, isolation from other groups and elevated incidence of attribution and projection which influenced actions of individuals and smaller groups within the work group.

All groups identified in this protracted conflict category could have served as subjects for this study. However, receiving permission from individuals to use interview information was problematic. Too often, organizations are hesitant to air their difficulties in public. Usually, ethnographic research is limited to studying the disenfranchised in our society rather than those with standing and reputation. Receiving permission to describe institutional weakness is not often given.

One of the 12 consultations considered involved a university which had used my services for three separate cases. When approached for
permission, administration was willing to participate in the study. In my view, this was a courageous act. A number of other universities and colleges had refused use of their consultation information because they were afraid of acknowledging their weaknesses in a broader context. Educators at the university studied felt it important to explore the complexity of conflict development, thereby helping others understand and perhaps prevent problems in their own institutions. Because of the richness of using three cases within one educational institution, this setting was selected. The research process for each of the three cases involved a seven step data collection cycle.

**Data Collection Overview**

Data collection was conducted in the following three stages (Figure 1). Stage 1 involved collecting and categorizing data. Three steps occurred in this stage: (a) briefing meetings, interviews, and participant observation; (b) developing codes from affinity group process and checking codes against Tichy's organizational analysis assessment (1983b); and (c) continued observation, informant interviews, and document review.

Stage 2 involved repackaging and aggregating data. Steps involved in this stage included (a) final coding, delineating deep structure, data
analysis, and identification of themes; and (b) report development and process map development.

Stage 3 involved synthesis and triangulation. Two steps included (a) development of the group story with participant feedback and (b) checking information against participant feedback and revision of report data with recommendations for intervention. As mentioned previously, no intervention information will be included in this study.

Data Collection Stages

The stages in data collection were typical for a multi-group project. The profile of each case and the numbers of participants differed. Descriptions of each group are located in Chapters 5 through 7. Each data collection process had different timelines, but followed a similar process outlined in Figure 3.1. Some adaptations were made because of the particular needs of each setting. Data collection for all three groups was documented in detailed field notes where consultant questions, observations and commentary, as well, were noted (Merriam, 1988).

These data represented a rich *hodge podge* of many different perspectives from multiple sources and were used to create as comprehensive and accurate picture of the group/situation and setting to be studied as possible.
Figure 3.1 Data Collection Stages

Stage 1: Collecting and categorizing data

1a • briefing meetings
• interviews & participant observation

1b • developing codes from affinity clusters
• checking against Tichy's organizational assessments

1c • continued observation, informant interviews, document review

Stage 2: Repackaging and aggregating data

2a • final coding, delineating deep structure
• data analysis; identification of themes

2b • institutional report development
• process map development

Stage 3: Synthesizing and checking data

3a • storytelling
• participant feedback

3b • triangulation
• revision of institutional report

Process begins
Stage 1: Collecting and Categorizing Data

Three steps occurred in this stage.

1a - Briefing meetings; interviews and participant observation. In all three cases the process began with an interview between the consultant researcher and the University administration. The intent of this initial meeting was to outline costs, timelines and to determine if the consultant had the skills and style to match organizational needs. In addition, facts, names, locations and key organizational connections were shared so that the next level of fact finding could begin.

This meeting was the first step in conflict assessment and provided information on the role, position, concerns and conclusions of people in power. I was able to learn about the administration's biases, any previous attempts at intervention, and the degree of success in those attempts. Descriptions of the key players in the conflict context from the administrators indicated what conclusions they had already drawn. As well, this interview gave me a glimpse of the organizational culture and conflict approach.

The data collection activity consisted of interviews with group members. In two cases, Tag Team Wrestlers and Splinters, I interviewed all individual faculty and staff named in the group conflicts. In a third case, Toxic Waste, both faculty and a large number of students were involved. In this case, selected students were interviewed and others had
the opportunity to be interviewed by signing up for a limited number of appointment times. The majority of the students involved in the program elected to be interviewed, so there was a large sample.

Interviews conducted in all three cases generally lasted from 30 to 75 minutes, with 10 minutes for recording between interviews. The interviews were scheduled back to back when ever possible so I could be immersed in the information over an 8-hour period on consecutive days. All interviews were completed within a 2-week period. In some cases a few interviews were conducted over the phone.

Live interviews occurred in a neutral location where anonymity was assured. Each interview began with a brief explanation of the purpose, process and researcher background, assurances of anonymity, and questions about purpose, interviewer background, and the interview process. The first questions always began with what was working well in the school, department or group. The second question then explored the conflict in a nondirected interview process.

Follow up questions assisted in verifying information, clarifying discrepancies, eliciting additional information and unearthing feelings and responses of individuals. Interviewees were given the opportunity to add any additional information not covered by questions and to have questions answered before the end of the session.

All interviews concluded with an outline of the next steps and how feedback to participants would proceed. The responses to questions were
recorded in researcher field notes. My own observations, descriptions, feelings, concerns, reflections and questions in the researcher role were also noted during the recording process.

Faculty, students, staff and external informants gave their perspective on the nature of the conflict context. The degree to which selected respondents were involved in the conflict context varied. However, each person interviewed was familiar with the culture and had been either a witness or participant in significant events important in understanding the context. Interview questions explored organizational culture and group history, identified critical incidents or triggers from many perspectives and helped the researcher understand how people were feeling.

Although interviewing is a strong methodology for collecting information, there are some difficulties. In this process, some people were not entirely comfortable with intense, face to face exposure. Many times, people in these interviews broke down into tears. I know from experience with interviewing subjects that comfort and trust are important. It is important that a researcher provide these things in both manner and setting.

According to an exit survey in one of the more difficult conflict contexts, interviewees felt confident about the integrity and openness of the process. This was particularly true in two settings, where there was a heightened degree of trepidation regarding interviews. Students signed
up, regardless of their fears, because of messages about the comfort of
the sessions were conveyed by those previously interviewed. This was
reported to the consultant in the course of interviews.

Another concern for this study involved the potential danger of
information being associated with specific individuals. Because of the
consultant's previous experience with interviews, a coding process was
developed and used by the consultant. The process documented age,
gender, role and other demographic information without identifying
names.

In addition, a written agreement between the client (the University)
and the consultant prior to the assessment phase of the project verified
consultant ownership of notes and raw data. Again, given the ticklish
issue of confidentiality, those interviewed could rest assured that no one
in the organization would have direct access to interview responses.

Other limitations of the interviewing process included the amount
of time involved and the volume of information generated. Because over
eighty interviews were conducted in the course of these three studies, a
large number of field notes were produced. To identify the pertinent
information for inclusion in this study from such voluminous notes
proved difficult.

Despite the problems involved with in-depth interviews, interviews
are necessary for assessing protracted conflict. From this consultant's
perspective, interviews are the only way to provide rich and textured
descriptions necessary for understanding complex situations.

1b. Developing codes from affinity group process; checking codes
against Tichy’s (1983a, 1983b) organizational analysis assessment. After
each step in the data collection, the researcher sorted and categorized
data in order to identify patterns, critical incidents and influences.
Initially, data were transferred to self-stick notes as separate units.
Repeated units from one source were noted with a color designation so
that no one person could create larger categories by virtue of the fact
that they talked a lot about an issue of concern to them.

These units were then clustered in an affinity structure to create
broader categories. Each category was named and reviewed. This
process helped me to make sense of the information collected. The
primary use of the affinity structure was to use information from the
context. Focusing on discrete units of information with value in their own
right and then grouping them allowed me to resist my own or participant
preconceived notions about the nature of the problem.

Often administration, faculty or students advocate for their own
conclusions which can influence an outside, paid consultant. Regardless,
systematic procedures provide a counterbalance to this type of pressure.

For the purpose of maintaining a systems perspective, I also
adapted categories of inquiry from Tichy’s (1983a, 1983b) organizational
diagnosis. This process helped me to be sure my views were not myopic.
Tichy (1983a, 1983b) suggests that it is easy to get mired in particulars of a group’s needs when doing an assessment of an organization. The process of gathering specific information should also be guided by larger organizational constructs. Tichy’s organizational diagnosis assured consideration of institutional influences in the search for meaning and forced me beyond categories of information into a systems perspective. Tichy’s categories provided a touchstone in addressing blind spots. Using a rigorous and systematic process that involves particulars and larger institutional issues, I was able to explore key areas and to draw independent conclusions.

1c - Continued observation, informant interviews, document review.

The data collection process also involved investigation of contradictory evidence. I had to look for the answers to questions and explore leads. This process included corroborating evidence through interviews with outside informants, analysis of related documents, processes and procedures, as well as observing groups at work.

Regarding outside informants, in all three cases, key administrators were interviewed throughout the process. One case also involved legal advisors to the university. In another, volunteer students stepped forward and added information to interviews. Also, as I developed additional contacts across campus, frequently information about groups would come up in conversation. I did not instigate these discussions. However, because the campus was like a small town,
everyone knew what was going on. People were anxious to tell me what they thought. I documented information from these informal conversations.

For all three groups, I observed staff meetings and meetings with other stakeholders, such as administration and students as well as outside faculty members. Although these meetings frequently included me in some purposeful way, the opportunity to observe interactions gave insight and were noted in field notes. In all but one group I facilitated clarification sessions where information was presented and discussed. In all of the groups, small mediation sessions between individual participants were conducted. I acted in a participant observer role in these cases.

Obviously, extensive documentation of interaction could not always occur at the time; however, I immediately recorded notes after meetings had ended. In those cases where I need only be an observer, I documented interactions in greater detail.

In all cases, I had access to files, documents, process and procedures that assisted in understanding the protocol of the organization and of each work unit. Particularly in one group, documents proved an interesting source of information and pointed out the disparity between process and procedure that were at the heart of the conflict.
Stage 2: Repackaging and Aggregating Data

2a - Final coding; delineating deep structure; data analysis and identification of themes. After this information was collected, I again used the coding and categorizing process to sort and ponder informant interview data, organizational scans, document analysis and observations of formal and informal interaction. Units and categories from both coding processes were revisited. After adding new data and categories, initial categories were changed in some cases, and in others categories remained the same.

2b - Report development; process map development. In Step 2b, I developed a comprehensive story of the case and process maps to be shared later with participants. In each case, the story represented a synthesis of all of the voices heard and the behaviors observed. The story described common points of references, particularly critical incidents or triggers that participants had experienced or heard about in a conflict context. In all but one case the story was told to the full group of disputants. In that case, not all of the disputants participated.

In all cases, reports were generated. Reports were verbal or written and included an assessment of the conflict context affinity groupings, descriptions of critical incidents and an intervention plan. Usually verbal updates were made between various steps in the data collection process. A written report or process maps were used as reports in each case.
Reports were generally delivered to the provost, although the president of the University was directly involved in one report session.

**Stage 3: Synthesis and Checking Data Against Participant Feedback**

3a - *Sharing the group story and soliciting participant feedback.* In this phase reports were shared with administration and then participants. Participant reaction to process maps and the consultant's interpretation were discussed.

In the story telling session, people involved were able to elaborate on my interpretation of their experiences, feelings and fears. They responded to descriptions of trigger events and outside influences. Each story was told from a number of personas and allowed presentation of different interpretations of common experiences. Participants actually ended up constructing the final graphic of each story.

Telling of the story had two purposes. First, to get reactions from participants and check the accuracy of data collected and consultant interpretations; Second, to begin the intervention process where concerns were made public and perceptions were aired in a structured, depersonalized way.

3b - *Checking information against feedback and revision of report data with recommendations for intervention.* Revision to the process maps based on participant feedback was noted, as intervention strategies were
discussed and agreements were made by participants and administration. The action planning for conflict intervention occurred at this time. In all cases, the intervention process involved me as a consultant researcher over a 6- to 8-month period. As mentioned previously, no intervention information will be included in this study.

This three-stage model was used in each of the three conflict contexts studied by the researcher in this project. I conducted this data collection process without knowledge it would serve as the basis for this study. However, the consistent method of data collection across these three groups, based on my prior work as a consultant in group conflict interventions, makes the comparison of group data viable. Information from stages 1-3 will be used for the purpose of this study. Intervention will not be a topic of discussion in this thesis.

*Chronology of Data Collection*

After each case assessment, intervention started and ended at a different time, but each followed the data collection process overviewed above. The chronology is noted in Table 3.1. Some of the phases were concurrent; for example, interviews with internal informants may extend into the construction of the story.
Table 3.1
Chronology of Data Collection.

**Start: 7/1995**

**Tag Team Wrestlers**

Stage 1
- step 1a
- step 1b
- step 1c

Stage 2
- step 2a
- step 2b

Stage 3
- step 3a
- step 3b

**Start: 4/1996**

**Splinters**

Stage 1
- step 1a
- step 1b
- step 1c

Stage 2
- step 2a
- step 2b

Stage 3
- step 3a
- step 3b

**Start: 5/1996**

**Toxic Waste**

Stage 1
- step 1a
- step 1b
- step 1c

Stage 2
- step 2a
- step 2b

Stage 3
- step 3a
- step 3b

End: 6/96

End: 9/96

End: 12/96
Case Analysis

In Chapters 5 through 7, case studies have been developed. These are abbreviated versions of stories developed during conflict assessment activities.

Each is a synthesis of data collected in the assessment phase of each conflict and borrows heavily from the reports and process maps constructed for administration and conflict participants. Process maps are represented in Chapter 8, Figures 8.1 through 8.4. Conclusions, further questions for research and recommendations from these findings will be presented in Chapters 8 and 9.

Although conclusions from this study are not generalizable due to the qualitative nature of the investigation and the different types of group settings studied, the case analysis may surface key elements of interest to educational leaders in understanding serious group conflict and should better inform than a single case study.

Validity

In naturalistic research, validity hinges on a number of factors. First, the reported data should accurately represent the context studied. Second, the researcher must keep disturbance of the environment studied to a minimum. Third, outsiders accept the researcher's process. Fourth, participants in the study judge the information to be adequate
and representative. There must be ways within the process to assure these requirements are met.

Through previous experience in data collection within protracted conflict contexts I am familiar with threats to validity. The following attempts to reduce the control threats to validity were made. To get an accurate picture of the context, I attempted to interview all group members. This sometimes included students, staff, faculty and administration.

Frequently in the intake interview with administration, pressure is placed on a consultant to corroborate administrative conclusions or further certain agendas. In addition, administrators often unintentionally try to simplify the problems to be studied in order to reduce cost or save face. I noted any pressure from administration in these regards and brought my concerns to the table prior to accepting their consulting work.

In an effort to lessen the potential for elite bias, I used color coding for key respondents. In this way I could tell if the frequent or dominating messages of one individual was skewing affinity grouping results. In addition, I also noted repeated phrases during interviews. My experience tells me when certain responses have been rehearsed for my benefit or when membership in particular groups have taken on a group think mentality (Miles & Huberman, 1984). Informants, observation, document analysis assisted in checking out accuracy of information.
Interviews took place in neutral territory and were scheduled anonymously so no faculty member or administrator knew who would be interviewed. This was done so people could be truthful and forthcoming about how they felt and what they believed. Due to power differentials, this was particularly important when students, nontenured faculty or classified employees were involved.

In creating categories, I noted when responses from one individual were frequent, and the researcher attempted to disallow categories generated by only one participant. No single participant could control the development of a key category by mentioning it repeatedly in interviews without documentation to that effect reflected in other interview data. When data were repeated by a single participant or a small group, that information was also noted.

Feedback to confirm validity occurred throughout the process. Additional interviews were conducted after participants had worked with me for a number of group sessions and were more at ease with the consultant and the interview process.

I spent over 80 hours observing or working directly with each group prior to developing a finalized version of the affinity groups or a dynamics analysis. This allowed me to be almost part of the group. In all three settings the group acknowledged that they considered me a group member. As an example of this, I was invited to parties and even signed up to bring snacks for meetings as if I were a part of the group.
With research it is important to cross check information. Qualitative researchers in particular need to have some points on which they can compare information for validity. In this study I attempt to triangulate data through repeated interviews, conclusion checks with informants, summary checks (story and critical incidents) with participants, document analysis and informant interviews.
Chapter 4
Site and Group Descriptions

Introduction

Universities are places of learning where presumably enlightened people work together for the good of students and the advancement of knowledge. The staff, faculty and management of these institutions are well educated and skilled in communication, human interaction and systems dynamics. But conflicts, both serious and petty, occur in this environment regardless of the skill or education of those working together. University personnel are not immune from conflict and the consequences of being unable to extricate themselves from it.

This study took place at a university located in the southwestern United States and chronicles three conflicts occurring within work groups. Each story was named using metaphors from those interviewed which seemed especially descriptive.

The first conflict I called "Tag Team Wrestlers" because it described a public grappling between two female Titans and their team mates waiting in each corner, ready to join the fray. The second conflict is called "Splinters" because in a thoughtful moment, a faculty member said it reminded her of when glass shatters on a concrete floor sending out shards in all directions. The splinters "travel and lodge themselves in people and hide in places, later to snag the unsuspecting." The third
case is called "Toxic Waste." Over ten participants, including students, faculty and administration, used toxicity in their description of the situation. Obviously, toxic waste is a far reaching threat. Potentially there are many casualties from leaving waste untreated. It taints generations rather than just individuals.

The following stories are not sequential; they dip into the past and project the future. The people are complex characters and generally behave in ways they believe to be just and appropriate. However, as this study indicates, sometimes people act irrationally or even viciously in order to save face or to protect themselves or their group from perceived threat.

The following account is not meant to criticize or to judge. It is meant simply to document stories told from the many perspectives and colored by the emotions, positive and negative, of those involved. Each conflict and work group in this research study are different; however, conflict patterns emerge both in cause and effect. In each case, the drama begins at the department level, but later extends beyond to involve many parts of the institution.

The university setting, campus culture and structure, as well as key players within the institution itself, need to be discussed before presenting each case.
The Setting

The Town

Red Rock University is located in Hensenville, a town with a population less than 20,000, which can be described as typically "rural United States." Be careful driving into town. Speed traps catch unsuspecting motorists and provide money for city coffers at $100 a ticket. There are no reductions for showing up at court. I know from experience.

The street leading downtown is dotted with stoplights and intersections. A number of cheaper, California-style motels line the main drive. Passing a Kinko's, strip mall, and many fast food joints, it is easy to observe where the newer parts of town begin and old town ends. At city center, thriving small businesses in older storefronts occupy streets around a large town square.

The square itself, a large open space covered with spare and yellowing grass, creates the only open space in the immediate downtown area. A single elm tree provides a bit of shade. A large bronze statue of a World War I soldier stands starkly on a concrete slab, listing names of those fallen. Graffiti in Spanish and English marks the monument with signatures more contemporary.
Predictably, down a side street one finds a thrift store and laundromat. A delicatessen, an ethnic restaurant and pizza place are within walking distance. An old, 1930s movie theater billboard advertises past first-run movies. Discount night is Monday.

Many small galleries offer southwestern-style ceramics and silver jewelry from local artists at prices only tourists would pay. Another town nearby supports an eccentric artist colony, said to be a throwback to the sixties. Each year, many vacationers make a pilgrimage to this area for the sights and to soak in the relentless sunshine.

It's hard to get a gourmet coffee in Hensenville, but lots of coffee shops sell a "cup of Joe" to retired folks sitting at small tables with their donuts and newspapers most weekday mornings. The town has its own newspaper, which publishes the police log and advertises for local merchants. There is a distinctly conservative tone to many of the editorials. Many vacationers retire here.

This area, near two large cities, offers access to cultural and social events, but the University is the main source of entertainment for residents. Unless detained by construction or rush hour, a drive of 30 minutes takes you downtown. Two of Red Rock University's satellite campuses exist in metropolitan areas. Its urban campuses are modern and in the center of city life. Although parking is difficult, students find the atmosphere a welcome change from the sleepy rural village which is their home base.
The area is primarily agricultural, but the town is feeling growing pains as it becomes a suburb for workers in growing nearby cities. Grazing ranges are being turned into housing tracts. The place is transforming into a bedroom community for the two major metropolitan areas with commuting distance because of the safety and high quality of life.

The Campus

At the outskirts of town, the University sits on a high bluff. There, one can look down and see the distant mountains whose geometric forms edge the skyline. The high desert air smells of sage and dust. The countryside beyond is barren. Cattle ranges are spaced infrequently along a ribbon of highway going further east.

In the evenings, the campus of Red Rock University looks out over a panorama of mountain, desert, and city. The sky fills with southwestern colors. Dark blue, cream, gold, and salmon fill what locals call their "big sky." In this place, stars seem as plentiful and as vibrant as the city lights below.

The campus is a mish-mash of architectural styles. Older buildings of brick and adobe point to the multicultural roots of this institution. New construction marks a recent affluence, suggesting
change and investment. Tall, modern buildings of glass and metal reflect the constant sunlight.

In the spring, students sit outside on benches chatting. The atmosphere is unhurried and friendly. The tennis courts are often full. Most of these students, presumably undergrads, look very young. With the excessive heat and humidity of summer, activity moves inside, where air conditioning is found in almost every building on campus.

The student center features bulletin boards with posted activities. A strong emphasis on outdoor sports suggests that students here are active. There are raft trips, horseback riding expeditions, backpacking, and geology expeditions every weekend. The place exudes a frontier past, even down to offering a student club in gunsmithing. Also evident are long-time rituals linking traditions of past and present students; some are singular to Red Rock U; others, such as homecoming, mimic institutions everywhere.

Students

Students are served in a broad curriculum which includes the liberal arts, sciences and a number of prestigious graduate and professional programs. The student population for nearly one hundred years was primarily undergraduate, but professional and graduate programs have been gaining momentum in the last decade. They bring
many older students with families and a new sense of professional and financial urgency to each program.

These older students are absent from the casual conversation groups evident on campus. In fact, interviews indicated that most grad students live and work outside of town and spend as little time on campus as they can because of its inconvenient location and their own busy workloads. These students tell of feeling isolated both by being in a small rural town and by being on a campus that does not always encourage collegial gatherings in graduate programs.

In many ways the University is struggling with a changing identity. Since it was founded, Red Rock has offered a personalized service philosophy of a traditional small town college. The academic rigor expected from its of graduate programs and the commuter lifestyle of older students with families and jobs present new challenges. The university struggles to integrate these different aspects of itself.

Over half of the graduate students interviewed indicated that they were attracted to Red Rock University precisely because of the personal, human "feel." However, their expectations for community, humanity and relationships on campus had not been realized. Grad programs operate differently than undergraduate programs.
**Student Services**

A strong student services component, admissions and recruitment infrastructure is evident at the University. Because tuition is a bit higher than many schools in the state, students take on significant financial obligations to complete their education. Red Rock acknowledges this fact in its catalogue and attempts to ease this burden through grants, student work, loans and payment programs.

Many undergraduate students live on campus; in fact, freshmen and sophomores who do not live at home are required to do so. Residence halls have "themes." Diversity, wellness, arts, outdoor activities or special interest areas offer students a chance to connect with others who share similar interests. Meals are served in the commons area, and students are encouraged to eat together. Unless employed as resident assistants, graduate students seldom participate in residential life or activities.

The University also offers an active counseling service to support students. Resident assistants, who live in student housing, are trained to identify and refer students who appear to need support. Counselors, under the supervision of a professional psychologist with many years of experience, provide expert service. The dean of students as well as the provost, both of whom have backgrounds in counseling and psychology,
have an open door policy and spend a great deal of time listening thoughtfully to the concerns of students.

Faculty

Full-time faculty teach in various programs. Adjunct faculty are also employed, particularly in professional programs which engage professionals in the field to teach students. Despite the presence of graduate programs, the faculty's primary responsibility is teaching rather than research. Student evaluations of faculty teaching are taken very seriously.

Many faculty have active roles in professional organizations, and many also function in a quasi administrative roles such as program chairs, division chairs, or directors. Publishing, conference organization, speaking and chairing significant statewide or national organizations are given public praise. Achievements of faculty are highlighted in Alumni publications, campus newspapers and in staff meetings. Subtle pressures to be recognized encourage work outside of the classroom.

Because of the need to be active in public ways and to be an excellent teacher accessible to students, faculty feel "very driven." The expectation to work hard and "burn oneself out" is evident in all groups and manifests itself in a desire for faculty to produce evidence of one's
work such as developing standards, participating on committees, that seldom, in conversation, seem directly to benefit students.

**Organizational Structure and Key Individuals**

The organizational structure of the University is fairly typical for a school of its type. There exists an active board of trustees and boards of advisors for each professional school and program. The administrative level of the university is fairly lean, with a president and provost overseeing the majority of the operations.

*The President*

The President of many years recently left the University and was been replaced by a woman with significant experience at an institution similar to Red Rock. The previous administration, well known as a good ol' boy network, generally ignored concerns of importance to many female faculty. Issues such as faculty dating students, parity in salaries between men and women, tenure and hiring qualified women applicants, women's studies programs, and sexual harassment were left on the back burner and allowed to simmer for years. Only when women became more militant and threatened law suits did change come, albeit slowly.

The new President offered a glimmer of hope to many of the newer faculty members interviewed. They saw her as sympathetic to their
causes and powerful enough to confront the male network still holding
the power. A petite, conservatively dressed woman with an aristocratic
profile and demeanor, the new President's style was reserved and intense
in the meetings in which she was observed.

Offices tell a lot about the image, style and values involved in this
study. The new president's office said much about her. The glass and
high ceilings of the new administration building lent its own modern
elegance to this uncluttered room. The most prominent feature of
President P's office was the massive bookshelves wall to ceiling filled with
many titles including Wheatley's Management and The New Science and
Peter Senge's (1990a) work. Psychology and human behavior were heavily
represented with Tavistock authors in evidence.

Her desk was cleared; no sign of frantic work over files in this
place. Three comfortable but straightback chairs were situated in front
of the bookshelves and formed a semi-circle for conversation. When
observed in two meetings, the President sat very straight in her chair,
legs crossed, hands loosely folded in her lap; she gave a sense of polished
presence mixed with intense scrutiny as she listened, eyes squinting
slightly and lips pursed. She wore a silk suit, which suggested an
understated formality distinguishing her style from those who dressed
with comfort in mind at the University. Despite the extreme heat, when
we walked outside into the midday sun, President P. always appeared
cool and collected.
President P's manner was aloof and direct with those administrators she supervised. Once in a while she flashed a quick smile. Her comments privately were pointed in their analysis of people's behavior and motivation such as, "Administrators are part of the problem by not providing 'R' with appropriate supervision." In interviews, managers suggested that the new president was a shrewd politician with the ability to "cut bait" and make harsh decisions regarding the future of those who cause serious problems.

But faculty and student described her differently. According to these groups she was warm, interested, open, and sympathetic. The President was perceived as preferring to get information directly from the source rather than through administration. Because faculty is suspicious of the "filtering of information" by management, this made them hopeful.

The President was directly involved with only one group conflict; however, the shifting of power away from a traditionally male dominated system and the hope of her advocacy in the future, influenced all of the groups in the three cases to be studied.

The Provost

During this study, the provost was the dominant figure in operations at the University. In his role, he was responsible for solving problems, implementing policies and procedures as well as negotiating
settlements. Jim (everyone at the university except the president and a few senior faculty are called by their first names) attempted to sort out the wicked conflicts dropped in his lap by managers, students and faculty.

A tan, balding gentleman, his charming manner gave an air of casual easiness with people. His rolled up shirt sleeves suggested that despite his position, he was "just folks." A good listener, he often showed a quick grasp of situations, motives and consequences. This also may have been partially due to the fact that he knew the University better than anyone. He had been a faculty member, adjunct faculty, a dean, a vice president, and interim president and provost for many years. Jim could call every faculty member and many students by name. Everyone interacted with him and had opinions about his worth.

His office, also housed in the administration building, reflected open elegance, but was adorned with art from the Central America, where he had made many trips to secure the University connection with countries in that region. A single gold trophy sat in an unobtrusive shelf near Jim's desk. Faculty mentioned that he had been an avid golfer, but a back injury sidelined his time on the links. Jim had spent many hours networking with power brokers in this informal way. It was part of how he did business.

Jim's books were less obvious in the room, with some titles on management, but primarily focused on business and counseling, his area
of academic pursuit. A huge table dominated the room with a built in easel used for planning hanging on the wall, to be hidden away if the office needed straightening for some official meeting. In these meetings Jim often sat to one side of the table, trying not to be the center of discussions.

Unlike that of the President, Jim's desk was covered in files. His computer e-mail constantly signaled new messages; his secretary had to alert him when the next meeting was waiting and this one must end. Working late into the evening he would return calls from his car phone in route to or from meetings. Jim had a more frenetic pace than anyone else observed at the University, but seldom mentioned it, unlike many of the faculty who often referred to their intense workload.

Described by faculty in a number of ways, Jim was a figure with mixed reputation. His sincerity and charisma one on one appealed to faculty. After a private chat with Jim, people interviewed said they felt acknowledged and heard. They were hopeful of his support and felt satisfied. However, this glow of tentative confidence changed to skepticism when promised support did not materialize.

There were rumors about "questionable behaviors," such as dating students, reported from the past which also colored the faculty and staff's view of his trustworthiness and effectiveness. One female faculty member observed, "He is one of those guys. It's no wonder policy at the University has not changed."
Much of this behavior had to do with rumors about past behaviors in his personal life, but some were the result of having not been decisive or having been part of the good ole' boy group. Given the organizational culture's resistance to change, a number of faculty remain dubious about the intentions of anyone in administration, except for the new President, who is yet untested.

Distrust was also evident with graduate students interviewed during "Toxic Waste." They had heard the stories about the provost's alleged personal involvement with a student. In attempting to verify these rumors, no actual documentation could be found. Despite their dubious authenticity, students had heard and many believed powerful rumors which undermined his credibility.

Repeated comments by faculty suggested that Jim was also vague and wishy washy. He had a reputation for giving mixed messages to faculty. This was evident in both "Tag team" and "Splinters" where faculty and administration got different stories at different times. Faculty overwhelmingly described this as indicative of his "inability to make a decision" and unreliability with follow up. "A nice guy but ineffective."

I observed this behavior in a number of meetings. His style was more constructive than faculty comments suggested. It seemed that Jim was flexible and could see the various sides of an issue. He also hesitated to solve a problem for faculty. He clearly saw his role as facilitative rather than authoritarian. Jim described his behaviors as part
of a style which "hopes people can work it out," and "not wanting to intrude too much"; "working in the situation rather than controlling it," as opposed to any sort of "malevolent desire to ignore problems or keep people out of the loop." Whatever the reason, there were instances where action promised by the provost did not materialize.

The Provost supervised all of the key administrators involved in this study. Usually this was done through informal meetings focused on program information and tasks. If troubleshooting was necessary, his style was one of attempted mentoring. Most often, however, Jim was not brought up to date with problems until they were significantly out of hand. When problems blew up in his face, Jim's "counseling" ended up as criticism of management action or judgment. This frustration was seldom expressed directly. In observed interactions, the Provost always softened his critical comments to directors, chairs, or deans.

The Provost was most involved with a manager when there was a problem. In fact, one of the universal descriptions of management process at the University was one of "putting out fires." The provost's job in years past had been one of problem solver. This was sometimes done through coaching, cajoling or threats. His relationship with faculty, although tenuous, had been better than anyone else in the administration; he had traded on those relationships to help people through difficult times. Unfortunately, the culture of the University
which kept conflicts hidden or avoided them all together made the provost's job of problem solver more difficult.

**Upper Level Administrators**

Other administrators operated in less visible and involved ways. Vice presidents for financial affairs, and university relations carry responsibility for specific administrative functions. They were never mentioned by faculty or students in any interviews conducted. In fact, their offices were difficult to find and often their role difficult to determine. Suffice it to say, they played a negligible role in any conflict studied.

**The Dean**

Overseeing the undergraduate courses and curriculum was a dean of HEE&X whose role was primarily administrative, and who had a broad range of authority. John had been a dean in many institutions both public and private. A soft spoken man, John took care to slowly and deliberately articulate his views unless he was moved with an unexpected burst of emotion. Usually, his emotions were spare until his exasperation brought out an aggressive belligerence.

More often subtle comments suggesting displeasure or agreement were made in a patronizing way. "Yes, I think you have that correct" or
"You should be acting more adult" indicated his fatherly tone with faculty and staff. Often he took on a protectiveness toward those he perceived to need his patronage both campus wide and in the department. This was evident in his advocacy for Rose and censorship of Zelda in "Splinters."

In appearance, John seemed the stereotype of dean or professor. Tall, slim, his graying hair askew, he was usually dressed in gray pants and a slightly rumbled white shirt with stripes. An amusing tie, decorated with something like Mickey Mouse cartoons, often hung free in a disheveled manner. The southwestern sun had not been kind to the wrinkled and sagging skin of his face. Oddly enough, he was considered rather dashing earlier in his career, at least according to one female staff member.

Located in an old house out of the mainstream of campus, John's office was unremarkable. He had a desk covered with paper and a round table for meetings. Books were not in evidence. His space was the epitome of utility, not style. While at the planning table, John liked to lean way back in his chair giving an air of casualness as he looked down at one through thick, horn-rimmed glasses. This was not a power office, but interestingly a number of his faculty mentioned how intimidated they felt at that intimate little table. It was a place of deals and agreements.

My initial interviews with faculty from that department were scheduled in a room next to John's office. He was out of town at the
time, and everyone on faculty knew it. Despite that fact, three of those interviewed told me they were uncomfortable with that location because they might be heard. "Someone could listen in" and "Why does it have to be here?" were indicative comments suggesting paranoia about the space. Evidently the location held some power despite its very downscale appearance.

John's leadership style was particularly manipulative. He admitted that himself, but used different language. He saw himself as a negotiator. John thought a good manager was able to trade benefit for support amongst faculty members. His significant skill in knowing how to use this style to "get his own way" both enhanced his ability as a productive administrator and undermined the trust that others have in him personally. In one instance he was able to get a key faculty committee to discipline a faculty member for him. The result backfired for him, however, as will be seen in the cases to follow.

As a long time administrator and a key player in the "Splinters" drama, John had fears about the new values brought to campus by a female president. He said he had championed changes on campus, but behavior suggested otherwise. Dealings with female employees and management of unacceptable male behaviors in his department had not been his strong suit. Two law suits from his area regarding sexual discrimination had been settled; a third was threatened. Serious conflict between male faculty and female faculty over a women's studies program
and the use of sexually explicit metaphors in the classroom were the focus of developing conflict. Faculty indicated he was part of the old system, in their view. "He uses the males with power to keep us divided. It is an evil thing."

John's style involved working privately with people and brokering deals in order to accomplish what he perceived to be critical tasks. This he acknowledged with pride. As dean of HEE&X, John supervised and led a group of faculty chairs, whose administrative role included working with the dean to make and to implement decisions, monitor budgets, and deal with personnel issues important to HEE&X. In these decision making groups a great deal of "backroom" deal-making went on. John admittedly enjoyed this negotiating process because he could work one on one with people to help them come to conclusions he supported.

To do this, he often prepared key leaders to back him up. Sometimes faculty believed there were trade-off's in these deals for resources, powerful committee positions, etc. In other private meetings, subtle intimidation and threats were also described. One faculty said that threats or prizes were given depending on how much leverage or power a person had. Senior faculty with tenure and connections to the traditional power networks often fared well in these sessions with John.

Because decisions were often made privately, faculty participating in meetings often felt that decisions and even voting was useless because important issues were "done deals." In order to ensure correct decisions,
meetings were managed to close down opposition. Information was not shared. Discussions were limited. Votes were called too quickly. John and others used belittling statements to discredit errant faculty members. Certain faculty used seniority and sarcasm to silence others. John presided over all of this as a sideline participant. This style was described as an effective way to "keep us excluded." More vociferous faculty lashed out in these meetings, creating a flurry of disapproval over perceived immature rebellion.

Personalities and traditional management vs. participatory management values clashed in this department. The infusion of new, female faculty into a male-dominated faculty created dissatisfaction. Strong personalities, shifting leadership dynamics and differing views on quality instruction, feminism, faculty conduct, communication and power became influential elements in the conflict that emerged in this work group. The conflict between men and women in this department made John lose sleep over the last six months as values and power groups shifted with the coming of the new administration.

Directors and Chairs

The majority of the professional schools were administered by a director or chair. Directors and division chairs were administrators who also taught. S/he could be elected, appointed, rotational or the
individual may be hired for that specific job. The majority of directors teach a large load, with some reduction for administrative duties. Directors and chairs were seen as colleagues by faculty but also had a supervisory responsibility which meant they conducted evaluations. They led planning, dealt with staff and program issues and were liaisons with the University.

Unlike the undergraduate administrative structure with a dean, directors of the professional schools were supposed to work as a equal members of the collegial team and had fewer opportunities to operate unilaterally. Participation in decision making was shared among faculty to varying degrees within each professional school. However, a director's power and involvement with the faculty varied greatly.

Faculty in administrative roles had challenges unlike any others at Red Rock. These faculty taught and had insufficient release time and support staff assistance for administrative jobs. Most were not trained in personnel management or planning to act in management capacity. They were asked to supervise colleagues who saw them as equals and were given little authority to deal with personnel problems that existed.

In spite of their often tenuous position, directors also wielded significant influence over programs and departments. Directors and chairs also had knowledge of each person and program as well as information critical to departments from the University administration. This information was power. Midmanagers acted as the critical
information link between people, programs and the power structure within the University. Information could be communicated to upper administration or held 'close to their chests.' Because programs at the University operated quite autonomously, decisions made at that level set direction for each graduate school.

The leadership role of the faculty-administrators reflected a paradox common in other institutions of higher education. Faculty had significant power, but also had an unclear and shifting span of control. Their decisions impacted the governance and organizational structure of the University in their work in departments, divisions and on key committees. However, they lacked administrative experience and staff support to move action and decisions forward.

The University's management structure supported autonomy within departments, divisions and schools at Red Rock. Furthering interests of their department or school became a major concern for midmanagers and faculty. Often this resulted in competition between groups. It also encouraged the use of information to affect power and decision making.

Programs were expected to perform and make it work. Resources usually followed high performers and good politicians. One faculty member from a graduate program likened this to Social Darwinism, where survival of the fittest was a motivator in institutional action. Frequently this meant putting the best foot forward and not creating
problems. Faculty were encouraged to be high profile in their professions; problems were not publicized and sometimes not acknowledged until it was too late to stop a public debacle.

*Faculty Governance: Roles and Power Dynamics*

Professors also participated actively on committees that made decisions at the University. Of particular import were the faculty senates, the accreditation review committee and the faculty personnel committees. Faculty committees influenced many important decisions, particularly regarding tenure and behavioral expectations.

Representation from across campus was important in these committees. Committee work was one of the few opportunities faculty at Red Rock had to communicate and make recommendations from a campus wide perspective. Graduate and professional programs were represented on similar but separate committees.

The provost was the primary administrator working with these groups. However, the dean of HEE&X served in an advisory capacity. The dean and provost influenced these groups through direct and indirect participation in committee work. Influence meant anything from attending meetings to lobbying faculty members on committees.

Faculty were elected to these posts. Colleagues usually selected the most experienced representation possible. Faculty served two years. To
be voted onto the Personnel Committee, in particular, was considered a
great compliment, and many faculty vied for that honor. To hold this
position meant one was recognized as a leader. Committee work was
considered by some faculty as a way to garner power and was used to
disenfranchise opponent faculty with different views.

Over the last five years, it was noted by one administrator that the
faculty committees had become a political forum to confront or reinforce
University policy or behavioral expectations. Differing values were in
conflict within these committees as one group attempted to change the
University and another tried to keep things as they were. Senior faculty
in particular were influential; however, new members, representing
younger faculty views, vied for recognition in these prestigious groups.
Because the faculty was fairly small, some individuals played many key
roles.

Committee members sometimes aired their differences publicly,
even though meetings and information was supposed to be confidential.
These differences became the topic of gossip and rumor on campus,
particularly when controversial tenure decisions were involved. The
leaks from key committees, the discounting of faculty positions, the
rumor mill, all became a part of the University culture that influenced
power dynamics in the conflict cases described.
Changes at the University

Just prior to the time this study was conducted, significant changes occurred at Red Rock that influenced the conflicts being studied. Six changes in particular contributed to each conflict context to a certain degree, often catalyzing the symptomatic outbursts that brought attention to each group in conflict.

First, as mentioned, the president of the university who had been in power for a significant period of time retired and a new president was hired. The style, expressed values and gender of the new president engendered a new hope among a particular groups of faculty members, most notably newly tenured women, who expressed a renewed desire to challenge the male dominated old guard.

Second, a number of real and potential lawsuits were threatening. Some involved sexual harassment and perceived gender issues; others came from students concerned over alleged unfair practices in one of the professional schools. Some faculty and students saw the success of litigation as an effective way to leverage advantage. In the course of interviews, over twenty references to potential lawsuits and thirteen references to the past litigation were made. Lawsuits and their cost were ever on the minds of upper administration. In fact, in one briefing session between the consultant and provost, lawyers attended to outline a prior litigation where faculty to be interviewed had taken an active role.
Third, personnel committees were grappling with faculty issues that were problematic. They included tenure agreements, termination of contracts and punitive action by the committee regarding a division chair's behavior. Faculty members had been nominated for positions on this committee who had serious conflicts with faculty currently being reviewed for tenure by the committee. Committee membership became an ethical issue vs. a political issue.

Fourth, a new professional school was established and moved from a department under the School of A and S to graduate program status. Temporary leadership in the form of a teaching director was filled by an untenured faculty member in the department. An unsuccessful search to fill this position resulted in reappointment of the temporary director.

Fifth, the university was beginning a self-study process which would lead to accreditation evaluation within a year and, sixth, significant changes in admissions, populations group served, tuition and curriculum within one professional school were being implemented. At the same time, tensions regarding limited resources and potential declining enrollment were evident in budget discussions at the program and departmental level.

In each of the three cases to be described, attention will be paid to the key people, events, triggers and escalators in the conflict as well as driving and restraining forces from other parts of the organization. The history of the department or people will be included as it is relevant.
Summary

This study focuses on three groups within a university setting. Key individuals within the administration and faculty influenced conflict development, as did established University norms, power struggles over differing values and educational systems such as tenure that supported traditional values over change. However, because change is inevitable, the university grappled with key changes that were influencing the organizational climate. Conflict erupted due to a number of factors, which over time, created serious trigger events which disrupted work within departments or schools.

Three case studies are presented in this dissertation. Names and details which could identify people or the university involved were changed. The nature and development of each conflict will be examined and described. Different phases of conflict development will be explored. Common patterns in conflict development will be identified in order to provide a better understanding of protracted conflict development.
Chapter 5
Tag Team Wrestlers

The State of Affairs

The School of D had only been in existence for six months when serious problems within the work group occurred. At first conflicts simmered below the surface, but were not intense enough to be acknowledged. The faculty in this group described themselves as extremely conflict avoidant and went to great lengths to ignore or bury differences. Having been ignored so long, when the conflict finally surfaced, it did so with great intensity. By that time, work was completely disrupted by unresolvable differences.

When conflicts were finally brought to the attention of the University administration and outside assistance was brought in, two antagonistic groups had squared off, meetings had deteriorated, and people were literally afraid of each other. Face saving behavior and threat counterthreat behavior between disputants occurred with intensity and frequency. Paranoia was rampant. Decisions were not made, and work was not being accomplished. In fact, the credibility and, perhaps, existence of the School of D within the University was threatened. To understand how this situation developed, it is important to know the opponents, their styles and the trigger events that led up to deterioration of the work group.
There were eight faculty, two exempt employees, and one classified staff in the department. Katherine was the interim director of the school; Penny was the only tenured faculty member and placement supervisor; Jane held an exempt position, dealing with enrollment and working with advisory boards and marketing; Laura was another exempt staff who dealt with marketing; Terry and Sandy were non-tenured-track faculty who had only taught at Red Rock for 3 years. Jeff, Monica, and Kim were newly hired tenure-track faculty.

Katherine, the interim director, was the one who initially contacted me. During our first telephone conversation she explained that the faculty wanted to interview consultants to do a planning facilitation for a few hours at a retreat when most of them would be together. "There may be other work on conflict resolution," she mumbled on the phone.

After talking with Katherine it was easy to conclude that there was very little facilitation work involved in this contract. And, for this work, I would have to travel a considerable distance. Although I don't like to give up a job to competitors, I am also not interested in wasting many hours in a plane. Katherine and I both knew there were consultants with
offices closer to her location who could conduct a simple planning session. I felt something was odd in her insistence that I come to be interviewed. I probed further.

"Don't you know consultants located a little closer?"

"Yes; we completed a strategic planning session last summer to establish the mission and goals of the new school of D."

"Why not call them?"

"Because there is more to it. Our meetings have been very difficult lately. Some of the faculty have been acting up. It was uncomfortable. There will be some key people absent and this will cause problems."

"Why not wait until they could attend?"

"Because it is not a matter of attendance, but rather a matter of them not being invited to this particular gathering."

"Excluded?"

"Well, yes and no."

"Could decisions be made without them?"

"Yes, but some of the faculty will think it is not appropriate."

This first telephone conversation continued laboriously until a number of issues were established. First, the occasion for the session was a University meeting where only faculty in each school met to deal with issues. An exempt staff member would not be present. Katherine, the interim director of a newly formed School of D was anxious to move key decisions forward. Time was precious.
Second, Jane and Laura, the exempt staff members uninvited to this meeting, were considered of critical importance to decision making by a certain group of faculty within the School of D. The fact that decisions might be made without them was a bone of contention.

Third, the faculty requested a neutral facilitator because of the divisiveness of this and many issues. My name had been suggested by "one camp," and another name had been suggested by "the other camp."

Katherine said the group was divided along "typical lines." I asked what this meant and the director intimated that there were two distinct groups in the department. At the moment the differences between these groups were combative. The two consultants were to be interviewed for the session and the faculty would vote. Katherine's tone on the phone suggested she did not feel that the process of selecting a consultant in this way would be any more successful than any of the decisions the group had tried to make in the last few weeks. On most everything there was stalemate.

The process used for selecting a consultant typified how even simple tasks could not proceed without wasted time, great effort and little result. All of the staff and faculty were supposed to interview and select the consultant. Setting up times when this could happen took weeks and many phone calls and faxes. Katherine attended to the details. When the day arrived, half of the faculty (most from the "other camp") did not show up. The interview proceeded but was strained
because the faculty and staff in attendance had no idea what questions to ask.

Oddly enough, the entire process was resolved simply because the other consultant withdrew. He told Katherine there was too much to be done with this group. Penny, who had missed the interview, still insisted that I submit to a phone interview before she agreed to participate in the planning session. The great irony, I found out later, was that she had given Katherine my name in the first place. I was called initially due to her recommendation, yet when Katherine and her group agreed to hire me, Penny decided to resist.

Finally the planning time was scheduled and every faculty member agreed to participate. At first the room was filled with palpable anxiety; however, the session went smoothly. I had negotiated with Katherine a topic relevant to faculty only so Jane and Laura's exclusion was not an issue. The group was on their "best behavior" according to Katherine. Other than being nervous and guarded, there was little to indicate the source or degree of conflicts.

After the planning session, everyone said they were relieved it went so smoothly. One faculty member told me it was like the strategic planning session that had gone on so well when the school was formed before all of the "damage had been done." However, Katherine said, "[Penny] was on good behavior. You won't see that again." Over the next three months, I observed and worked with the group in many meetings.
Conflict occurred in all of them, but Penny was not the only one to behave badly.

**Katherine: In One Corner**

After our preliminary planning session, I conducted private interviews with group members. It seemed the only way people would open up. When we met in Katherine's office on the Red Rock campus, her manner was reserved, carefully friendly, and a little nervous. Short, wide, and lumbering, she was very deliberate in her movements. Her thick white hair hung straight around her face in a bowl cut. Stiff and unmoving, it looked like a hat which could be removed later after work hours. Katherine's complexion was tan and her arms and hands were dark, suggesting she spent time outside. She was muscular and, although very short, she seemed much larger, due to the brawny nature of her body.

Katherine's eyes seemed to bother her. She often squinted, leaving the feeling to those whom she addressed that she was angry or upset. In fact, she seemed bothered by her eyesight and often stopped our conversation to adjust her contact lenses. Later, I learned she was allergic to the dust which seemed to be everywhere. I sneezed frequently each time I visited the campus. I could not imagine how difficult the situation must be for someone with severe allergies. I asked Katherine
why she stayed there, since she seemed to be so bothered by her environment. She indicated that it was really not so bad. Only certain times of the year it bothered her to distraction. She had been born near here and, although she left for college and work, her desire was to return. She loved the desert. It was her home.

Katherine, as with most people at Red Rock, dressed casually and with that southwestern sense of color. She and I both were wearing long-sleeved cotton shorts, in anticipation of the artificially cool environment created by the air conditioning on campus. Unfortunately, the day of our first conversation, the air conditioning malfunctioned. We talked distractedly as we sweated in her sweltering office. It made a difficult conversation even more laborious.

Katherine's office was big, but seemed cramped because it was filled with her desk, bookshelves and a huge conference table with eight chairs. She beckoned me to sit at the conference table while she concluded a telephone conversation. It was difficult to pull a chair out to sit down. They were wedged tightly against the wall. I looked around the office until her phone conversation ended.

I saw nothing unusual in her office, except a large, painted gourd shaped lantern that sat near a window. It seemed out of place, but was probably an attempt to give deference to the Central American influence evident around the University. Other than that, all was utility.
Katherine's degrees and certificates of acknowledgment were framed and hung on the walls. Her desk was filled with files and papers. An extensive computer system was set up to the side, indicating she knew what to do with technology. The phone rang three times during our conversation. Each time Katherine stopped and took the call. I felt rather like a shopper waiting in line at a department store when a store clerk took a call rather than attending to people waiting to pay. After each call, it took Katherine awhile to re-enter our conversation.

Katherine was the interim director of the newly formed School of D at Red Rock University. She had been a teacher in a number of positions, in both secondary and higher education. As an administrator, her experience was limited, but she had overseen a number of grants which she had brought to the university through her efforts.

The provost and faculty encouraged her to be interim director until a nationwide search was completed. She had intended to be in this position for less than a year. Unfortunately, the search was "handled badly" and the "pool was shallow." Katherine decided to submit her application for the permanent position. This raised concerns with other faculty. As a stop gap, Katherine was re-appointed interim director for another year.

Katherine's dark brown eyes looked directly at me as we talked. She was thoughtful and careful. Her thinking process was considered and quiet. This was reflected in the way she approached briefing me on
the group. At first she related all of the "facts" including numbers of staff, development and hierarchy of the program, numbers of students, etc. All was logical and orderly. After this litany of demographics, she hinted that things were not going smoothly but was hesitant to elaborate on what was wrong.

Her responses to my interview questions corroborated what I had learned about her in our initial telephone conversation. She did not feel comfortable with conflict and did not want to acknowledge that what was happening within her team was anything more than one staff member's dysfunctional behavior. Katherine's resistance to acknowledging conflict had kept her from informing the provost that things were out of hand. Katherine later expressed, "by virtue of the fact I am the administrator of the group, I must take responsibility for the problems that have evolved." Her statement suggested that the responsibility she took was not personal.

I had also learned that Katherine was determined to get tasks done regardless of damage done to the group. The work team was divided into two camps and conflict had occurred that was divisive enough to make people afraid to confront each other without a professional referee. Jane's absence from a decision making session was obviously a new battle field, yet, despite warnings from colleagues, Katherine insisted on dealing with an issue where Jane's ideas would be important to the disputant group. Had there been a deadline or some compelling reason to move forward,
Katherine's decision would have been less puzzling. Stubbornly, the director persisted in trying to move her agenda forward notwithstanding the fact that faculty would obstruct the work to be done. Her attempts seemed futile.

Regardless of an apparent no win situation, Katherine was rigid about doing the work. This need to complete tasks was part of her character. Katherine described herself as "focused on tasks and efficiency at the expense of communicating effectively on a personal level." Because she was compelled to get things done, she acted unilaterally. Her desire to improve the errors of past leadership in her role as director made her desire the position full time. However, there were many aspects of leadership Katherine did not completely grasp; the importance of politics being one.

By hiring a consultant in the way she did, Katherine showed she was willing to bow to demands of her opponents who had power to confront her authority. Katherine believed "they would act up" no matter who led the group. She was not willing, however, to assuage their concerns and simply let them select the facilitator. Instead, she gave them equal opportunity to influence the selection. This reaction on Katherine's part to the demands of faculty was played out many times.

In our interview, Katherine revealed very little personal information. She focused information on facts, organizational structure and history that could be documented. With Katherine, there was little
small talk. I had worked with her over 4 months before I learned she had a grown son and daughter, lived with her husband outside of town and made quilts. She was also an exceptional cook. Often she would bring in home-baked goodies for staff meetings. She seemed to take pleasure in sharing from her kitchen.

One staff member, passed along a rumor that Katherine was an alcoholic. In fact, this staff person said her parents had also been alcoholics and she saw much of that behavior in Katherine. This perception greatly affected their relationship. However, there was no indication in Katherine's behavior over the 6 months in which this study was conducted that this rumor had any basis in fact. Projection and attribution was rampant by the time I arrived on the scene.

Katherine had an obvious passion for her subject area, geology, and spent a great deal of time and effort in her work. Frequently, she went out on rock hunting trips and was well-known in the field. Due to her efforts, the University had received federal grants to fund research projects in which she was the administrator. In addition to her teaching, director's duties and grant administration Katherine was a workaholic. The time spent in the conflict frustrated Katherine. To make up for wasted time, she tended to act unilaterally simply to get something done.

Katherine liked being director. At first, the administration felt Katherine might be a good choice for the permanent position. She made some "minor errors of judgment" that were common in a new
administrator, but nothing irrevocable, or so they thought. However, as
time went on and certain patterns of behavior continued to fuel conflict,
upper administration changed their mind. The provost grew increasingly
frustrated with her stubbornness and lack of political savvy. "She just
didn't get it," he mentioned more than once.

The administration tried to dissuade her from applying for the
position, but Katherine continued her efforts. This included encouraging
faculty members to advocate for her in that role which cemented
divisions in the work group. One faculty member, Terry, was a strong
supporter of Katherine. "Katherine is stable, humane and organized.
She must be director. There is no one else who can save us from Penny."
Jane, on the other hand, was frantic to "get a real director." Penny
concurred.

In her role as interim director, Katherine used her influence with
the search committee and faculty to discount all possible contenders who
surfaced in national searches. This further divided staff on each
selection process. Her stubborn insistence to continue this effort was
typical of how intractable she could be. Tunnel vision made her unable
to assess the political ramifications of her conduct.

When asked why she pursued this course of action Katherine
explained by discounting the provost's understanding and competence.
She was frequently one step behind the politics of the situation and
unaware of the limitations of her own power and influence. As one
faculty member said, "there is a titanic battle of egos going on here. We are held hostage. People have lost all perspective."

**Meetings**

My primary opportunity to observe Katherine and all other faculty was in meetings. I attended over twenty. Although meetings changed significantly during my intervention, the initial observations told a great deal about participants and conflict development.

Katherine ran meetings. She developed the agenda, prioritized issues through the agenda and frequently gave so much information there was no time for discussion. This was perceived by some faculty and staff as a subtle way to control everything and silence everyone. When meetings were primarily information sessions, less conflict could arise because discussion did not occur. However, Penny and her camp often disrupted Katherine's linear agenda with unwanted questions, procedural concerns and "whammies" which will be described later.

Katherine also wrote and distributed minutes of the meetings which became a major area of contention. Penny, a fanatic word crafter, "quibbled over every reported detail." Both women understood that these minutes would be used later to support different views. Penny felt that Katherine's bias was reported unfairly in these documents. The
reporting of minutes influenced conflict development during the latent phase.

In the meetings disputes were certain to arise. Sometimes people anticipated the problems and came prepared; frequently they did not know "where it would hit you." Overt hostility bothered everyone except two faculty members in the group, Penny and Terry. They seemed to relish a good dog fight. But Katherine was extremely shy of conflict. Her behavior in those circumstances was predictable. She would put her head down and turn her body away. She did not give eye contact. Her speech slowed, and she indicated frustration by sighing, rolling her eyes, smiling sarcastically and making gestures with her hands.

Katherine described her own reaction as "closing down." She couldn't think or respond because she was so angry. At these times, "her own mental meltdown" prevailed. Her lack of eye contact, turning away and body language suggesting rejection seemed to fuel Penny's reactivity. Ironically, Penny's need to be acknowledged was powerful; Katherine's ability to discount and avoid was equally powerful. The natural reaction of disputants to each other escalated conflict. Both women were filled with anger after these encounters.

Issues that were not on the agenda, but which had emotional resonance, were often brought up by Penny toward the end of a meeting. Katherine referred to this as a "whammy." When whammies occurred Katherine felt blindsided and ill prepared. Katherine needed to prepare
mentally and emotionally for most things, certainly those that were confrontational; whammies were a tactic considered "below the belt" by other staff.

As both women would tangle over these unexpected problems, meetings would end with a bad feeling for everyone. Soon very little was resolved constructively by any of the conflict tactics used. The group stopped meeting regularly because things were so "uncomfortable and ugly." The disputants' behavior suggested that solving problems was not the intent; rather, discrediting the opponent and winning a skirmish was the desired outcome.

Katherine was seen by many to be the victim in these attacks. Katherine's manner, after an incident, was wounded; her visceral reaction, childlike. Because of this apparent victimization, Penny's aggressive behavior was deemed "criminal." The group nearly always responded to the tenor of the fight rather than the substantive concerns raised. Frequently Penny's concerns had merit, but because of Katherine's reaction and the way in which she brought up the concern, her point was discounted. Group members focused on the emotional toll Penny's style took on Katherine.

Certain behaviors from the group were immediately evident as soon as Penny's voice became shrill. They sat quietly and "looked at their shoes," trying to avoid all eye contact. Sometimes they would doodle or
have side conversations about other topics, trying desperately to get a little business done.

As time went on, Katherine developed a new way of dealing with Penny. She assumed an attack was inevitable. To defend herself Katherine would bring "evidence" to dispute any arguments challenging her. Soon she was carrying a veritable file cabinet to meetings. "Defensive" was a description used by friends and foes alike to describe her new approach. Attacks, defensive response, became the norm for every meeting. No one listened to key issues being raised.

In one particular meeting Penny raised issues causing student unrest. A small group of second year students had voiced their concern over substantive issues in the program. Penny was asked to air these issues in the staff meeting. Before Penny had finished talking, Katherine began her defensive discounting of criticism. Katherine interpreted Penny's report as a personal attack, even though Katherine's classes were not the major concern. Katherine dismissed student concerns as reported and suggested punitive measures against "instigators." Other faculty stepped in to smooth over a potential disaster. But Katherine's characteristic defensive stance toward criticism was firmly established.

In order to strengthen her position in meetings, Katherine lobbied staff for support and prepared them in advance with evidence. Faculty, who were "intimidated by everyone with any power at all would never
step up." Faculty meetings always deteriorated. "Everyone could not wait to get out the door."

After the meetings participants scurried into each other's office to talk about the terrible behavior of the other group. Faculty indicated they were getting more and more isolated from each other. There was little communication in staff meetings. This continued to isolate people and to perpetuate hostility. Attribution and assigning intentions was rampant from both groups.

People got increasingly more mistrustful and paranoid. One new faculty member was so afraid, she called Katherine to be sure she was supposed to talk to a consultant. She went so far as to think that Penny had set up a trap to find out which side she was on. "People were lining up on either side . . . Private conversations reinforced the image of the others as enemies . . . I hear things even though I try not to get involved ...I am always uncertain about people's motives."

**Behind Katherine**

Katherine privately cultivated friendships and alliance with new faculty. She was not warm or overtly social, but instilled trust with her stable manner behind the scenes. Because of the risk factor with tenure, new faculty were unwilling to publicly show their colors and choose a camp, even though many looked favorably on Katherine and resented
Penny's outbursts. Their support for Katherine took many forms. Most of the time they gave her private moral support, while sometimes they reported things that had been said by the other camp. Two of the new faculty had private discussions with administration about Penny's behavior.

Only one faculty member actively took Katherine's side in meetings. Terry was a faculty member on a nontenured track who was very afraid of Penny. She figured she had little to lose by being outspoken. It was also a style she could not control. "She (Penny) is out to get Katherine and I."

Terry had many arguments with Penny over the years and was as outspoken, distrustful and aggressive as Penny. When Katherine had taken a beating in a meeting, it was Terry who jumped in with similar hostility. "Some people in this department need to be controlled. They are way out of hand." "There is only one problem; everything else is OK. It is [Penny]." "You can't reason with her."

Terry was a source of information for new faculty about Penny's inappropriate behavior surrounding tenure in the past. Unfortunately, it had a different effect than she had hoped. Terry believed new faculty should see that Penny was pulling the same thing with Katherine and should be stopped. Faculty should use their influence to censure that behavior. However, telling the story only served to quiet them and make them afraid.
In an interview, Terry also made comments about Katherine's relationship with Jane. "Jane makes too many decisions on her own. She isn't even faculty. That's a bad idea." Terry also commented on how Jane always backed Penny, and she always had too much to say. This confused new faculty. "With Terry behind Katherine, Jane behind Penny, and all others on the surface "up for grabs," the balance of power in this group was always tenuous.

Although Katherine had alliances with new faculty there were times when she voiced sharp criticism about them. This happened privately and was not articulated to them. One faculty member in particular had been supportive of Katherine during the worst conflicts. After mediocre student evaluations Katherine indicated the faculty member may need to go. So quick and harsh a judgment of a new teacher was startling, particularly when there had been no mentoring and where teaching had become secondary to interpersonal conflicts fueled by Katherine herself. Loyalty may have been one sided in these relationships with Katherine.

_Tenure, Rumors, and Fear_

To understand why new faculty were so frightened to take a stand in the conflict between Katherine and Penny, it is important to explain the tenure process and cultural stories around this process at Red Rock.
As far as could be ascertained from interviews, tenure, more than any other process at the University, influenced the behavior of old and new faculty.

Tenure is a process which is typical within most institutions of higher education. It involves contracting with a faculty member and giving them seniority, thereby assuring employment. Tenure affirms the value of a person and their work, and it guards faculty against capricious firing, intrusion on academic freedom or dismissal because senior faculty salaries are larger than those of newer faculty. The notion of tenure affirms the value of experience and age within the university setting. Once tenure is granted, faculty are pretty much guaranteed a position until they retire. With tenure, faculty gain status, security, power and influence in institutional decision making.

The tenure process at Red Rock is not atypical of that in most other universities. A personnel committee gathers information including academic credentials, letters from colleagues and supervisors, student evaluations, publications and professional associations. The committee discusses findings and makes recommendations to administration. The process is, on paper, one of careful consideration. Obviously, faculty and management have to be cautious when committing themselves to an individual professor for the duration of his or her career because to give tenure is, in essence, to ensconce a person in a position for life. Care is warranted.
Frequently, however, care was not the main concern in this process at Red Rock. The notion of guarding academic freedom was also not at the heart of the tenure process at this institution. Instead, politics dominated decision making. At least, this was a story within the institutional culture. Rumors from within the personal committee and around campus suggested that influential faculty and administration used tenure to "cleanse" the University of perceived disagreeable elements. This sometimes meant they got rid of people who disagreed with the powerful, questioned the status quo or did not conform to traditional practices.

The stories of purging "enemies" by powerful faculty or administration were supported by the secretive process used to gather information. Letters from faculty concerning colleagues were reviewed by the committee, but were not publicly disclosed. This provided a private forum to discredit or attack colleagues. Faculty up for tenure could not refute claims made against them.

This private process caused discomfort and dissension within the committees and was talked about outside of the personnel committee. The fact that private business from the committee was reported outside was substantiated by personnel committee members who indicated in interviews that information known only to committee members had become public knowledge. These "stories" became powerful elements influencing new faculty.
The leaks describing the political power of certain faculty became part of the university culture. Interviews with new faculty indicated that "tenure frightens new faculty into submission to agree with any and all who could influence the tenure decision." Once granted tenure "the real person emerges" to vent years of hostility about mistreatment and denigration of themselves as faculty, only to turn around and expect the same type of conformity to their espoused views from other new faculty. "I acted perky for years in order to get tenure. Now it's over I can be myself and fight the system." It seems extreme, but evidence from interviews suggests it is not far off the mark.

Adding to this problem, the evaluation process for faculty at Red Rock was weak. As all of the studies in this research suggest, very little constructive feedback regarding work expectations came to faculty prior to the tenure evaluation process. Student evaluations were weighted heavily, but there was seldom follow up from administration to set up constructive or consistent interventions for faculty with difficulties.

In addition, evaluations from division chairs or directors were either absent, watered down, disputed or based on personal perspective rather than commonly agreed upon criteria. Faculty struggled to understand what was expected of them. They labored for recognition, sometimes burning themselves out, or they allied themselves with powerful faculty, thereby conforming to established behaviors and thinking of that group.
In any case, the ambiguity of expectations and standards coupled with the lack of constructive, consistent feedback added to the confusion and paranoia of new faculty. As power brokering forced new faculty to align with tenured faculty who held positions of influence within the University, splinter groups developed. This alliance system was admittedly confusing because new faculty were never sure who had more power.

This was certainly true in the School of D. Both Katherine and Penny were formidable women with connections campus-wide. New faculty did not know which alliance would best serve them in their attempt to weather their first few years at Red Rock University. In any case, attempts at protecting themselves with judicious alliances or neutrality occurred.

**Penny: In the Other Corner**

Penny was very different from Katherine. A tall, thin woman in her early fifties, Penny served on various important committees and was well known on campus. She had been in the department longer than anyone, over ten years. One person observed that "she was a social butterfly and had powerful contacts." Penny could get in to see the provost or dean quickly and did so when she wanted to "report" on the behavior of others.
She had significant pull with some of the older male faculty members who, according to one source, thought she was "energetic and charming."

Penny had previously held an administrative role as program chair under the Dean of HEE&X. She decided, with the help of colleagues and the provost, not to take on the job of director of the newly established school of D. Why this occurred was never entirely clear, but rumors suggested that the previous department head had serious conflicts with Penny. Penny's incessant "harping" had literally forced Alice to another university in search of less harassment. Terry told me "She [Penny] drove [Alice] nuts. She had to leave because they couldn't stand her. She [Penny] just pushes and pushes. She is a bull dog and some of us are dog meat."

Penny vehemently denied wanting the position of director. She was content with the area she supervised and felt relieved not to be burdened with an administrative role. Privately, colleagues and the administration believed she resented being passed over. But Penny insisted that "it is more a matter of autonomy than control." She simply wanted a leader "who would not be grossly incompetent and threatening to faculty and staff." She wanted someone who would do what she thought was right.

Penny was meticulous about many things. Her appearance and her office were indicators that she valued style and order. One could identify Penny walking across campus. Her long, blonde hair, worn like
Cindi Crawford's, bounced as if she stepped out of a shampoo commercial. Penny looked much younger than her real age. She took a long stride and moved quickly, despite the fact that she wore high-heeled sandals. With beautifully tailored skirts and crisp, pastel blouses, Penny always looked as if she had stepped out of a Nieman and Marcus catalogue.

Penny's well-kept office was carefully decorated in spring pastels and white wicker furniture. Coral, white, and lime green pillows lay on chairs casually. It was the largest faculty office in the building. A desk, located in the center of the room, looked out a window with a view to one of the landscaped areas on campus. The windows sported white sheer draperies.

There were certain social amenities that set the scene for each conversation with Penny. It was not polite to begin the work too abruptly. Penny would be sure to offer a beverage. Once I opened a conversation by asking a personal question about a picture of a high school athlete on her desk. She indicated that was her son, but he was older now and expecting his first child. She chuckled about being unsure about "this grandmother business." She was much too young.

In every meeting, we chatted about trivial things. This opened the door for more serious discussions. One day she gave me instructions on how to make a latte where the coffee and milk stayed in layers in a clear mug. She learned this in Hawaii. Sometimes Penny made a comment
about my clothes or hair style. "I like your hair cut. It suits your face."
"That is a good color on you." "Did you buy that set together?" She asked me one day. "It is clever how you matched the colors in jacket and pants." Sometimes the remarks seemed on the edge of motherly disapprobation.

Penny made many judgments that placed her in a parental role. I found it interesting that she needed to put me in the role of a child or novice to be taught. It was an adjustment for me. I am roughly her age. Although this chatting had very little substance, it set a certain tone and was valued by Penny. It also suggested much about her needed role in relationships. This role was not something Katherine could passively accept.

Penny had an air of almost southern hospitality, but her manner was not really of the south. In fact, there was an insistence to her communication that suggested a more urban background. The gentility was learned and a bit artificial in that it was rushed. I would not even have believed it was natural to her character. At times of stress, she dropped the pretense of refinement all together.

Penny talked quickly and filled any silence with chatter. The content of our conversations vacillated between superficial small talk and intense statements describing her concerns and misgivings about co-workers or departmental problems. Her fierce blue eyes called for attention. She felt a sincere need to be heard. To that end, her tone was
driving and her voice insistent. Often, she would lean forward in the chair and even strain her neck forward so as not to be ignored. In many stormy conversations, both in staff meetings and in private mediations with Katherine, Penny, and me, she would seem to catch herself in an exaggerated lean and sit straight and still, seemingly trying to compose herself.

She was married to a successful stockbroker and lived in a posh part of town. Her office and clothes gave the message of affluence. Her new Lexus was a testament to her family's financial success. Ironically, Katherine believed "money issues were a major focus for [Penny] for some reason; she's particular about collecting the maximum in mileage reimbursements, compensation for every cent spent on students."

In an interview, Penny mentioned how miserly the department was about money. She had to fight with Katherine to be reimbursed "what was due her." Faculty and staff in Penny's camp believed that resources were given out to "favorites." They were not likely to get the "goodies" from Katherine. Whether this focus on money was an extension of her detail-oriented style, concerns over Katherine's leadership, an issue in itself or a way to aggravate the director was never determined.

Penny was also meticulous about details in work. It was one reason she was excellent at her job of placing students in internship sites. She kept copious notes of discussions with colleagues so she could document any conversation. She valued every detail. She read every word
of meeting notes, insisting on corrections when her perception of a
meeting differed from those taking notes. She was described as "mired in
detail" by an unsympathetic colleague. "She can't see the big picture"
was a common complaint. Memos from Penny were full of specifics
reminding colleagues or administration of promises made or history that
only she would remember.

Her careful chronicling of particulars and awareness of specifics
made her extremely knowledgeable about policy and procedures at the
University. As a senior member of the faculty "she knew every shred of
history and every piece of gossip." This made her an "elder" whose
experience should be considered, so said the provost. Faculty
corroborated the fact that she was extremely knowledgeable and good
with detail. Unfortunately, these skills were not always seen as helpful
by members of the "opposite camp." "[Penny] is the department
historian." Some wondered how much of what she said was a fabrication,
though. History always seemed to agree with her.

Frequently, her colleagues were confused by her obsession with
particular details in meetings that seemed irrelevant to the rest of the
group. "Why we have to go over and over something is beyond me. No
body cares." "She just won't let things go." Others could see the value of
confronting the director about her inconsistencies. "We need to be sure
the record is accurate." In any case, a great deal of time was spent in
meetings arguing about specifics that were seemingly irrelevant to the
mission of the group. This frustrated faculty, but they didn't challenge this practice. "No one steps up to stop this. " We should change things, but we're afraid to alienate anyone. None of us have tenure, you know."

Penny did not have tenure at the beginning of this conflict; however, she was soon to be the only tenured faculty member in the school. During the tenure process, Penny lobbied Katherine and the new faculty members in the School of D for letters of support. They had all complied willingly even though there were questions about her skills. "She is an academic light weight." "I didn't have confidence in her academic abilities." "She does not set a scholarly tone for the program."

No one felt Penny was particularly gifted as a teacher; however, she did well with her job supervising students in a business internship program. One staff member mentioned how "she was very civil and nice to work with at first." This changed once tenure was granted. The faculty member wished she could take back her letter of support, but by then it was "too late."

According to all members of the work group, tenure gave Penny more power than anyone. "She was the only one who was safe." "When she became tenured, things started to go wrong. She disagreed with [Katherine] publicly. "To people in the department this safety meant two different things; Penny was safe to speak out against the director and she was also safe from attack by new faculty because they could be hurt by her influence. One new faculty member admitted, "I'm looking to buy
a house here, so I need to be careful." Because her position was ensured, Penny felt she must take on the role of advocate for vulnerable staff and important issues. She also felt she could be aggressive in advocacy for what she considered to be "right."

_Penny's Tactics: Open and Secret_

Penny's approach to advocacy took two different forms. One involved fighting openly. The other involved lobbying behind the scenes. Fighting openly usually occurred in faculty meetings. She would attack Katherine on issues of dispute. Sometimes other faculty would also feel her wrath. Her voice would be raised. She would strain forward; she talked over people constantly.

Her style included intense questioning, aggressive body language, interrupting and being insistent about her points until people were worn down and gave in or no decision was made. "[Penny] would continue until she made sparks fly." "She'll fight until she gets what she wants." "She is a bull dog." "[Penny] is not in control of her behavior. She operates in extremes. She is very aggressive in meetings." One faculty member likened it to "a joust" where Penny would fit her lance, get up in a public arena, mount her steed and "keep on trying to knock Katherine down."
When a problematic issue was on the agenda, both Penny and Katherine made preparations in advance when they knew they would lock horns. Katherine would bring files to respond to Penny's morass of detail and documentation. Katherine would also begin to refute Penny's position before it had been clearly explained. Penny, on the other hand, would move quickly to a level of exaggerated expression and aggressively question Katherine, suggesting her decision or position was poorly considered or uninformed. Penny often implied there were ulterior motives for Katherine's proposals. In a defensiveness that seemed intractable, Katherine reacted with few words, but refused to compromise. "Penny pushes. Katherine won't give way." Katherine's conflict behavior will be discussed in more detail later. But Penny's was clearly insistent, assertive, unlistening and reactive.

Penny's lobbying was a very different strategy, but was approached with similar tenacity. She worked both in and outside of the School of D, garnering support where she could with tales of mistreatment and lack of "protocol." She tried to get the Provost's support, but he soon tired of her laborious documentation and repetitive message. She also complained to colleagues. The conflict in the School of D was a topic of conversation on campus. This was more than paranoia; faculty from other departments related details of this conflict during unrelated interviews. One faculty member likened this to poisoning the water. "Everyone on campus knows about our trouble. I feel pretty childish."
Penny tried hard to make alliances with new faculty in her work group. Penny liked to be everyone's "buddy and mentor." "She was nice at first. She wanted to get people on her side. I was new and naive; not suspicious. I enjoyed the attention." Her helpful motherly advice was interpreted by some as an attempt to control and by others as friendliness and mentoring. Through private conversations, one person explained, Penny lobbies to undermined Katherine's credibility. "She lobbies me compulsively with words and actions. She comes and gossips to me. I go to Katherine. I feel like a mole. It is terrible."

Katherine also lobbied faculty in the work group. "I have been pulled aside before an issue was to be discussed. This one will come to a head and people will be uncomfortable I was told." "It felt like a constant tug of war. I don't know if there would be repercussions if I got on the wrong side."

These statements convey the fear felt by faculty about both women. But, Penny was especially worrisome because she had tenure. Rumors suggested she had pushed people out in the past and her style was more blatantly aggressive. Because of Penny's status as the only tenured faculty member in the School of D, she would be asked for input regarding the character and ability of her colleagues. Her reaction to opposition, demonstrated by her "vindictive behavior toward Katherine in the form of personal attacks in memos even sent to the Provost," made new faculty unwilling "to cross her."
Stories were told to new faculty about Penny's ability to get rid of faculty she did not like. Four faculty members repeated one particular incident in interviews. A letter from Penny to the personnel committee had influenced their decision to not grant a new faculty member tenure. The proceedings from this committee were private; however, frequent leaks from the personnel committee regarding tenure were liberally shared on campus. Faculty were convinced of the story's validity.

During this conflict, attribution of malevolent intent was rampant on all sides. "She is out to get Katherine and me." "I am getting paranoid." "I try to steer a neutral course." "Penny was known as highly political; there had been a letter where she convinced other professors outside of the department to support her. She has poisoned the university against the school. She has done some of that with students." Because there were so many new faculty members in the department, Penny's ability to intimidate remained a key factor in the escalation of conflict.

On the other hand, some of the faculty and staff of the department saw Penny as their savior. Some weak group members were not in sync with Katherine. Staff did not always understand the antagonism they intuited in Katherine's voice. They felt "like two cents" when their views were "discounted." They felt like they had done something wrong, but didn't know what. "Christ, what am I doing wrong?" She was "unpredictable, a despot, and did not inform people but acted
unilaterally." '[Katherine] always believes she is right even when she is wrong." Jane believed she had good reason to fear. Katherine was "trying to get her fired." Even Katherine's own constituency agreed that Katherine threatened certain weaker members of the department. Penny was tenaciously loyal and a true defender of those group members.

In Penny's Corner

Jane and Laura were the only exempt members of the department. Jane had the second longest employment history in the department. Her role as secretary to the advisory committee as well as her administrative duties in enrollment, placement and marketing, made her knowledgeable on many topics. Her style was reserved, but in staff meetings she talked a great deal. In fact, she commented on every topic.

Often, her input dominated discussions. Even in areas that affected instruction, rather than enrollment, Jane made long exegesis. Frequently, Jane's and Penny's ideas supported each other. New faculty listened intently to their expert advice. This openly aggravated Katherine who would turn aside, try to get a word in edgewise, and finally drum her fingers and sigh when she could not put an end to what seemed endless commentary.

Other faculty also had misgivings about Katherine's administrative style. Sandy was a part-time instructor and was not on tenure track.
She had worked with Penny and Jane under the Dean in Hee&X and felt uncomfortable with how Katherine ran the department. Faculty and staff could not swallow the "lack of consultation from a colleague with little experience." In response to concerns voiced, Katherine responded "better to ask forgiveness than permission." This raised the hackles of those who were concerned she was making mistakes.

Penny's cabal feared Katherine. They saw Penny as the only voice questioning Katherine's draconian style. Although they had little power, Jane and Sandy stood squarely behind Penny's efforts. In this conflict, there were clear heroes and villains; but who was who depended on the person talking.

**Overview of the Alliances**

When asked to outline who was allied with whom, descriptions from all faculty and staff were very consistent (Figure 5.1). Oddly enough, everyone knew where everyone else stood despite the care for secrecy. Primary disputants, or at least the most vociferous ones, were Katherine and Terry vs. Penny and Jane. The support staff stayed far away from any alliances but indicated they thought Penny should "get some manners and figure out who is in charge." Sandy saw herself tacitly allied with Penny. "I may be seen as taking sides because I can't always
separate personalities and professional issues." "I work closely with [Jane and Penny] and respect their knowledge."

Monica, a new faculty member, was torn and had initial closeness with Penny. That changed after she experienced negative lobbying and felt used in Penny's tenure process. Katherine shared stories and memos from Penny with Monica who felt outraged by this behavior. Her private alliance was with Katherine; publicly, she stayed neutral. Later, she took a leadership role in the next national search for director. Her involvement in this strained relations with Katherine. She ultimately was disgusted with Katherine's insistent discounting of other candidates and finally by her divisive and futile application for the job. Initially describing herself as naive, Monica learned that all participants in this conflict had responsibility for perpetuating it.

Jeff and Kim were firmly in the middle. They described their behavior as "milk toast." They were afraid of ramifications of alliance in a shifting power structure. "New faculty don't know who will hurt them more." During the course of the conflict, Jeff became more assertive in his own behalf arguing issues with both Katherine and Penny. This allowed him autonomy to pursue areas of interest without emotional entrapment. Kim, on the other hand withdrew. Much of it was legitimate. She went on a traveling teaching-research project, then she had an operation where convalescence was extended.
Key Trigger Incidents

The conflict went on a long time before it gained the notice of University administration. Key triggers and escalated frequency of dysfunctional episodes forced administration to bring in outside help. The first trigger has been mentioned. Katherine applied for the full-time director position. Although, at the time this occurred there were comparatively minor reactions, the continued efforts of Katherine to throw her hat into the ring established the first threat.

Katherine had been appointed interim director by the provost for a number of reasons. She had a level head, she was familiar with budgets and she volunteered. No one dreamed she would be more than a one-year replacement while a national search moved forward. This search was an utter disaster because the application pool was poor, and because many hidden agendas regarding Katherine’s and Penny’s conflicts were keeping the search committee from focusing on the job at hand. Members were lobbying for their own interests.

At this point, Katherine made her move. It occurred approximately four months into her appointment. She pressured the committee and provost, ultimately submitting her application for consideration. Many of the faculty were pleased with this idea. The new faculty felt Katherine had successfully led them through their strategic plan and the implementation stage of program development. However, Penny, Nancy
and, to a certain extent, Sandy and Laura were unhappy. The opposition to Katherine's candidacy created the first strong opposition effort on Penny's part and became a public controversy since faculty and administration outside of the School of D were involved.

Katherine and other faculty were surprised. They knew there had been tension but the degree of concern and the effect it had on the provost, who rejected Katherine's application, worried everyone. Katherine accepted the provost's compromise which was to appoint her for another year. At this point, Penny had laid her hand on the table. Katherine had upped the stakes by assuring her own powerful role as director.

During this phase of conflict development, Katherine ran a tight, information-focused agenda. It was one way she could keep control of what Penny and her group might do. "She kept everything close to her chest and had to control it all." Penny, however, was not anxious to support Katherine's need for control and disrupted with "whammies" which threw Katherine off her game. Katherine commented that Penny was "explosive and difficult to work with at anytime, but especially in meetings." The rest of the faculty and staff sat in any full faculty get together in complete discomfort. Meetings proceeded, but their effectiveness was marred by this parrying.

After a few weeks, Penny brought up serious concerns about the meeting minutes. She felt railroaded by Katherine's control of agendas,
content, discussion and, finally, outcomes. After confronting Katherine directly a number of times and demanding revisions of meeting minutes, Penny wrote a scathing memo and sent a copy to the Provost. The language was conflagrant.

When I made a request to establish a procedure to make corrections to the minutes you seemed to "snap." Your uncooperative approach of what you want rather than what we want is autocratic....Your defensiveness and inability to deal with or deliberate decision not to deal with my request is not conducive to cooperation, consensus or the democratic process used at [Red Rock]. Isn't it the antithesis of the university spirit?...The school of D has deteriorated to a distressing point, once again.

Katherine reacted strongly. "I just received another memo. It is one of a dozen or so over the last six months that represent an increasing degree of antagonism and paranoia in my view....The provost knows about them and finds these memos silly. Of course he won't tell Penny that." Memos back and forth continued with threatening language but little result in changing behavior.

With hostilities, serious confrontations were bound to occur and they did with dramatic flare. Katherine, as I mentioned, seemed to have a problem with Jane's role in the group. Part of this could have been because of her alliance with Penny, her comments which could be interpreted as a bit arrogant, or the fact that she talked too much in meetings. Regardless of the reasons, which are not clear, Katherine
"seemed to have it in for Jane." Katherine had previously discussed with Jane some concerns about her work. This did not prepare Jane or her constituency for a "threat" which was to follow.

In a staff meeting, Katherine suggested to the faculty that Jane not be allowed to vote because of her status as an exempt employee. Katherine's rationale for this was based on a review of the policy manual. Although the language in this area of the manual was very ambiguous, Katherine had checked her decision with the provost who was not aware of the political climate and agreed.

Everyone in the meeting was aghast. "What she did to Jane was unbelievable." Even Katherine's staunchest ally, Terry, could not believe what had happened. Katherine went on to assure Jane that this was not personal, but rather a matter of following policy. An extremely heated discussion followed.

Jane described the meeting as humiliating. "I was treated like a nonperson. I was so surprised. At first I tried not to personalize it but finally I got up and left. I could not watch them talk about me as if I were invisible."

Other faculty members also described the incident with dramatic language. "K referred to Jane as 'her.'" Even the language depersonalized Jane. It bothered everyone." "It was very political. She [Katherine] brought it up in a public meeting without warning Jane. " "The concern over power and role in the department manifested itself when we talked
about Jane voting. Everything came to a head. The staff divided into clusters." "It was an ugly scene. [Katherine] brought up this issue and [Jane] was deeply hurt and offended. [Penny] took up her case and attacked [Katherine]. Everyone wanted to go away. No one understood the issue. People talked about it as if it were impersonal but there really was no issue discussed." "I felt sorry for [Jane]. It was so uncomfortable for us all." It finally came to a vote and a number of people abstained so no decision was made. Obviously, both faculty members had strong views and the policy manual was unclear. In this instance, as in most, no decisions were made and conflict escalated.

Penny was furious. Katherine, she believed, had openly threatened a weaker staff member. As the only tenured faculty, Penny decided to use more of her formidable power. Another memo to the Provost and dean was the result. She also met with the provost and left believing the provost agreed that Jane could vote if everyone agreed.

In addition, meeting minutes had been distributed. Penny felt they inaccurately represented the discussion and demanded a revision. Another 'poisonous' memo was sent to Katherine and copied to the Provost. Privately, Katherine shared the memo with new faculty in order to show the degree of hostility she faced from Penny. She also threatened to copy the poison memo to the faculty. Penny said "fine."

At every subsequent meeting, conflicts occurred. Faculty sat with their aligned groups. New faculty gingerly tried to be nonpolitical about
their seating arrangements. When discussion items were brought up, 
combatants looked for the smallest error or perceived misrepresentation. 
The issue usually didn't matter. Both groups understood that what was 
important was to defend themselves against threat and to discredit the 
other group. All of the hurt and negative energy generated by 
dysfunctional problem solving in the past were unfurled in each meeting, 
even over the smallest of matters.

After meetings, cabal members joined to vilify the other group. 
One serious action involved the creation of a governance document. 
Penny started to draft a document "so we can be safe from [Katherine's] 
capriciousness." Penny felt her knowledge of the system made her the 
right person to set down rules for governance. She was aware that new 
faculty had no understanding of why a document of this type would be 
important to safeguard their rights, but she proceeded anyway without 
their support. A very legalistic document was created.

Katherine reacted strongly. "Who is she to do that? She wants to 
find some way to control everyone and get her own way" was a sentiment 
voiced by Penny's opponents. She believed Penny was "too simple to 
figure out she didn't have the power to make decisions." Everyone, 
except Jane and Penny, was deathly afraid of the introduction of the 
document for discussion. First, it would cause more hostility and, 
second, the discussions would proceed word by interminable word with
much debate in between. The faculty was desperate to get some work done.

While this was going on, Katherine had started to evaluate faculty for their yearly review. She took the job very seriously and knew there would be problems with Penny. One morning she arranged a private meeting with Penny to clear the air. Penny was willing and an apt time was set.

As mentioned earlier, Katherine suffered from terrible allergies during certain times of the year. Even though medication gave her some relief, she could not entirely escape the itchy eyes, running nose, and headache. Her illness brought out some of the less attractive aspects of her personality: surliness, unresponsiveness, insensitivity to the cues and needs of other, closed and negative body language, and an overwhelming need to get things done. The morning of the meeting, Katherine was suffering terribly and thought to cancel the meeting, but given the situation she worried Penny might take offense. She came into her office late. Penny, who was always punctual, had already been there waiting, but left. Later, Penny indicated that waiting made her feel like a child or a servant. Katherine was almost always late to everything. This was obviously a poor start to a meeting meant to mend fences.

Penny had made a special effort to bring coffee and was her typical cheery, social self that morning. This was a direct contrast to the slow moving, ill Katherine who admittedly was not a morning person. These
women were opposites in every regard. When both women touched bases, Penny came into Katherine's office, coffee in hand, trying to put on a cheery smile. Katherine, sitting at her desk, was on the phone and gestured to Penny to sit at the conference table. I can imagine Penny struggling to pull out one of the chairs, heavy and wedged close to the wall.

This incident was related to me by both women. However, the effect it had on Penny was much stronger than on Katherine. In fact, in her brief description, very little of the emotional significance was related by Katherine. Penny on the other hand went into great detail, although the substance of the discussion was unclear in the telling, the feelings and results were clear.

Katherine put down the phone. Penny waited for Katherine to join her at the table, but Katherine began talking about issues from her desk. Penny's peace offering of coffee was getting colder and colder, sitting on the long conference table by an empty chair. Penny's mind was on it. She got up and brought it to Katherine. There was little acknowledgment. Penny was always irked at Katherine's "unwillingness to have a pleasant conversation." She indicated that "I always have to initiate conversation; I would never stoop to her level of rudeness."

Katherine was trying to stay focused and get down to business. She was nervous about this meeting and was feeling miserable. It was all she could do "to keep her head up," least of all respond to Penny's
hospitality and intense need for personal contact before starting the meeting. Penny sat back down at the table, at least five feet away from Katherine who stayed squarely behind her desk, talking about roles and concerns.

By this time Penny's feelings of being treated like a child had overwhelmed her. In our conversation, she said it was "like being in the principal's office." Penny's responses must have become more caustic or aggravating in some way because the conversation took on a more threatening tone, according to both women. Finally, Katherine said "Why should you stay coordinator of...?"

The threat to Penny was obvious. She was angry and feeling aggressive. The discussion deteriorated when there were intimations that Penny's evaluation would reflect her behavior and that the director could take away her practicum placement role. At least, that is what Penny heard.

Katherine did not make the substance or intent of this conversation clear in our interview. She said she was ill and did not remember much of it. The result, no matter what the real content of the meeting, was verification by Penny of Katherine's evil intent and a gathering of the forces for a full assault. The question of Penny's evaluation and final submission of this document did not take place in the six months I worked with this group.
The next immediate issue involved Jane's role on a School advisory committee. It was reminiscent of the issue of her voting in faculty meetings and deeply threatened Jane and Penny. However, Penny was ready to fight Katherine when this issue came up. Jane had been a member of the School of D's advisory board longer than anyone. She took minutes and clarified information for the group. Katherine also attended meetings as the director. Katherine mentioned to Monica and Terry that she had concerns over Jane's influence over the thinking of the group. She wanted to change her role and make it advisory. Jane's voting in that group seemed inappropriate.

Following the previous discussion about Jane's role in faculty meetings, you can imagine Penny and Jane's reaction to this new proposal. The idea that Katherine was once again "trying to slight and censor" Jane was too much. Again, the groups prepared for combat. Memos to the provost, meetings, briefing cabal members occurred. Obviously this issue would not be decided in a logical, issue oriented way. In fact, as with most issues at this point in the conflict, nothing would ever be decided. Stalemate was always the result.

During this time, Katherine was trying to convince faculty and upper administration to appoint her as full-time director. Her arguments seemed logical. The conflicts were part of the power ambiguity which an interim director was powerless to solve. If she had real authority she would have leverage to deal with the problems. However, in private
conversations with the provost, Penny made it clear she would continue the conflict if Katherine were director. In truth Katherine would have no"power" as director; She certainly did not have the administrative skill to deal with problems. No resolution could be had with her appointment.

A new national search was instituted. Both women confided that "Jim was a great guy, but he tries to please everyone." Obviously, he was not willing to support Katherine or Penny in the battle over a directorship at this point. They both believed, and the culture of the University suggested, that the strongest would survive and get the prize. Both women continued the fight.

Summary

Faculty members established the new school at Red Rock University in the spirit of cooperation and hope. They worked constructively together on goals and objectives. They held a collective vision and hired new staff. When the issues of leadership could not be resolved, one faculty member volunteered to be interim director and was supported. However, differences in leadership style, power ambiguities, perceived mistreatment of staff, and perceived incompetence spiraled into a deep and twisted conflict that could not easily be untangled. Powerful alliances complicated faculty interrelations. University policies of tenure silenced new faculty. Conflicts were not identified until they had become
intractable. The inability of the group to identify and solve problems internally exacerbated the problems.

Even though each individual in this conflict was an amiable, competent individual and each acted on what they believed to be justified based on the threat they encountered, behavior from each camp became exaggerated out of proportion. No one could stop. "They all seem crazy," the provost finally remarked to me during my report.
Chapter 6
Splinters

Introduction

I live in a small town in the foothills surrounded by forests and farmland. There is much to recommend living in a community with people you know; especially when relationships are strong and values similar. But sometimes there are constricting expectations or traditions that make life in a close knit community difficult. Change comes slowly; advocates for change gravitate to each other to challenge and overthrow outdated practices. This can set one group against another.

Universities are like small towns. At Red Rock, university traditions are strong. This is part of the charm in an institution with deep roots and a historical past. However, some traditions have a dark side. Lines of power are well established; one group can hold significant control and can resist needed change. Too often power groups are hesitant to include diverse perspectives when making the rules. Their control is self-interested. Their views are narrow.

Women are often one of the groups left out of established university decision making groups. However, women at Red Rock were developing a more significant voice, and as they became stronger, they confronted traditional power groups. Clashes were often the result. Such was the case with the School of HEE&X at Red Rock where set traditions
and established power were confronted by new groups anxious for change.

Although this case study chronicles a struggle of change vs. tradition, newly established power groups against established power, and one gender against another, the development of this conflict goes beyond. Instead, it reflects how deeply power threatens people. As power and threat progressed, people develop patterns that are deeply destructive and mean spirited. This conflict illustrates how action for the good of a reasonable cause can become subverted through group dysfunction.

Like many extreme conflicts, this conflict developed over a long time. As problems simmered, participants personalized differences and took advantage of situations to further their self-interests at the expense of others. There was little modeling or encouragement from the university to deal openly with conflict. In fact, conflict was suppressed until it could no longer hide behind office doors. It broke out in many different directions and manifestations.

The complexity and depth of this particular conflict is reflected in the title of this case, "Splinters." This description came from a faculty member who said the conflict reminded her of when glass shatters on a concrete floor sending out shards in all directions. The splinters "traveled and lodged themselves in people and hid in places, later to snag the unsuspecting."
In comparison to Tag Team Wrestlers, this conflict is not as localized. It started in one school and was nurtured there, but spread and took on permutations so that the manifestations of conflict were difficult to trace to its source. In this story a wide circle of people are affected and brought low by unexpected involvement in group problems.

**Background**

After a laborious intervention with the School of D, I was asked to help with another conflict at Red Rock. A meeting was set up to overview the problem from an administrative point of view. When I arrived for the briefing, an anxious looking personnel committee chair, the provost and the University's lawyer were waiting. They filled me in on the problem and the background from their perspective.

A conflict between a male faculty member and a group of female faculty surfaced within a department. The incident smacked of a recently settled law suit. This previous suit had been costly and time consuming. It also involved many of the same female faculty members identified in this new incident.

The recent litigation brought by a former female faculty member against the University concerned gender discrimination. The particulars of the case were not terribly important except for the fact that many currently employed female faculty members had testified in her behalf. The provost insisted that the University was innocent of discriminatory
practices against women; however, he acknowledged that policies and procedures of concern to women had been slow to change under the previous president. The "women certainly had reason to complain in the past," but things had been corrected and Red Rock was on the right track.

The University lawyer, a distinguished looking woman in her fifties, had interviewed these faculty members for the case and suggested their concerns were vague and rather emotional. The women felt discounted; they did not feel powerful. To various degrees, "the women did not consider themselves supported by the male dominated administration" because their issues such as sexual harassment, policies on dating students, and woman's studies programs were never part of institutional dialogue. Although there were more women on campus, and a growing number with tenure, this particular group of women seemed to believe they were powerless and "second class."

When the provost left the meeting for a minute, the lawyer furtively added more details. In the past, the University had been on the edge of discriminatory practices. Equal pay, sexual harassment, tenure and hiring practices had been modernized. However, the University culture was indeed slow to change. Men dominated the decision making groups. The male structure was even given a name, "the barons." The president, provost, dean and senior male faculty were part of this powerful select group.
University policy on dating students was a particularly galling issue for women which had not yet been entirely resolved. In the past, many of "the barons" had dated students. In fact, some had married them. The provost was one. To women faculty it appeared that those who ran the University were some of the worst perpetrators of sexual misconduct and misuse of power. However, they knew that as female faculty members they did not have the influence to push for policy changes on key issues. They found this frustrating.

The female chair of the personnel committee corroborated the lawyer's information, but was quick to suggest not all women instructors felt this way. She indicated that "these women" were all members of one school and seemed to feed off of each other. They had become particularly shrill. No one relished the idea of dealing with them on this recent issue. Reactions were intense but issues seemed ambiguous; in fact, no one seemed to know what the "gender issue" really was.

During the meeting, both the provost and the lawyer lumped all of the women together as if they were a single entity. Visions of the "Borg collective" from Star Trek came to my mind as female faculty members were described as if a nameless horde or swarm. Only two were given identities with any distinguishing detail. Very little of what was said about these women was flattering. I could see that the single female faculty member present was grimacing with the language used.
It was also evident that the administration saw this group of woman as volatile and threatening. Someone called them "harpies" in the conversation. Female faculty in this particular group had become outspoken since a progressive female president had been hired. Many of them recently received tenure and were taking on roles of responsibility in their departments, and they had successfully negotiated the litigation on the part of their female colleague. They were, according to both the lawyer and provost, filled with a sense of their own self-righteousness. Aggressiveness gave this group more success in furthering their agenda; the aggressiveness was escalating, according to the provost. A striking picture of Amazons came to mind from statements made in the meeting. The women were considered armed and dangerous.

Administration's Understanding of the Incident

An incident precipitating University attention occurred one month previous to the briefing meeting. It seemed to come out of the blue. One of the more vocal women in the group, Zelda, who served as division chair for about a year, had a serious encounter with one of the younger male faculty in her department. Later, other members of the women's group were brought into the conflict.

Zelda was described as a dynamic women with a considerable flair for the dramatic. Her powerful personality and her direct, rather
abrasive communication style created challenges for her and colleagues in her role as division chair. However, she took this job very seriously and was determined to "right " some of the perceived wrongs promulgated by the male predecessors in this role.

One of those wrongs had to do with faculty evaluations. Zelda felt it had been too superficial a process in the past. The division chair usually wrote something innocuous, based on little to no evaluation information. Zelda decided to spend time with the process; she made an effort to visit classes and to give extensive written feedback to everyone. One male faculty member, David, who had previous conflicts with Zelda, received a particularly negative evaluation. He reacted strongly and went to her office to discuss it. Unfortunately, both people blew up.

In this confrontation Zelda told David many of his female colleagues did not respect him and felt uncomfortable with him. He demanded names and immediately set up meetings to find out what had been said and to dispute allegations obviously confided to Zelda. These meetings were disastrous. Untenured female faculty felt threatened and intimidated. Tenured faculty felt David was inappropriately aggressive, especially with the untenured women. In some meetings people yelled. More often people were angrily defensive. A lot of past baggage about David, his standards and male power structure came out in private and public conversations. Zelda was shunned by colleagues for naming
names and disclosing what had been discussed in many private soirees of this group of women.

The disputants brought concerns to the personnel committee chair who saw things would get out of hand. Emotions were running high. Female faculty felt intimidated, harassed and singled out. Many of the women told the personnel committee they had been bullied. David considered a harassment suit. He wrote a letter of protest to the provost and personnel committee. Some of the faculty involved made public their concerns over David's teaching and behavior toward female students, a key issue at the heart of their disparagement of David. The University administration, gun shy at this point, decided to determine root causes to avoid potential litigation. Interviews with disputants added information unknown to administration.

**Interviews With "the Women"**

Needless to say, the dispute between David, Zelda and other female faculty in the school of HEE&X had been brewing for some time. It did not "come out of the blue." The administration knew some of specific incident details but understood few of the sore points bothering people for over five years.

To conduct the conflict assessment, I interviewed fifteen women, the Dean of the School of HEE&X, and David. Follow up interviews
occurred as well with individuals, both males and females in the division, but not directly involved with the incident. Also, during my continuing work with the School of D, a number of faculty commented on what was going on across campus. The gossip pipeline was as efficient as usual.

Most of the interviews took place one sunny afternoon in a small house on campus which was home to the offices of the Dean and many faculty members. Prior to the interviews, I walked through a few faculty offices in the building and peeked in. Campus offices for faculty were small, cramped corners decorated with personal items such as pictures, books, quotes, and subject matter clutter. Some were neat; others chaotic. Interviews were conducted in a dark storeroom on the first floor near the dean's office because it was private and had a bathroom close by. Zelda was the first interviewed.

Zelda was about 15 minutes late. I was feeling concerned because she had not made an appearance. My interview schedule was very tight, and I needed time with her to sort out many details. Suddenly the door burst open and a woman who looked like a lion came rushing in. Her face was framed with curly, red hair. Her eyes were wide and frantic; she was powerfully tall and muscular. I was struck immediately by the physical presence of this woman who slammed her books down on the desk and offered her hand for a greeting. She filled the room. "Sorry I'm late. You know students. We can reschedule if you'd like." Anxious to get
some preliminary information for the following interviews I elected to start, but suggested we may need more time at a later date.

Zelda could not understand how things had gotten out of hand with the department and David. After all "she was only trying to do her job." But she knew after a long time at the university "it was a bad idea for a woman to criticize a man at this place." She had been selected division chair in the School of HEE&X and represented her colleagues with other division chairs under the supervision of the Dean in a key decision making group called HEX (an acronym for various departments represented.) The Dean chaired meetings of HEX and supervised division chairs; chairs were responsible for evaluating their colleagues and assisting in representing division needs. She had been chair for three years.

Zelda was dressed very casually, with a pastel scarf tied around her neck, a light sweater and "Bugle Boy" pants. She wore boots that increased her already significant height. Throughout our conversation she ran her hands through her hair and looked around anxiously and asked if the Dean was in next door. "People can hear, you know. We are not safe meeting in this room. It's just like him to put us where he can spy on what we say. They say everything is confidential but then they listen in. No one is trustworthy in that group." Zelda continued in this vane until I reminded her the Dean was out of town. My assurances fell on deaf ears. With a hollow sounding bravado, she indicated that
anything she said to me she would say to "his face" anyway. She had
tenure and a good reputation. The years of having to be silent were over.
Apparently they still bothered her, however.

She described important background information and her
emotional reactions very intently. Her relationship with the Dean of the
School of HEE&X dominated most of our conversation. The Dean, John,
described in Chapter 4, was a dominant figure in the school of HEE&X.
A career middle manager, he had started teaching a foreign language at a
University in the Southwest, but moved into management quickly and
stayed there. He was a natural at backroom politics and felt very
comfortable cutting deals and negotiating compromise.

As dean of HEE&X, John supervised and led division chairs.
Faculty leaders took on these rotating administrative positions and were
responsible to implement decisions, monitor budgets and deal with
personnel issues. In these decision making groups a great deal of
"backroom" bargaining occurred, where John "bribed, cajoled, or bullied
people to support him" in order to accomplish what he perceived to be
critical tasks.

According to Zelda and a number of female faculty members, these
private meetings included perks or subtle intimidation depending on how
much leverage or power one had. Senior faculty with tenure and
connections to the traditional power networks often fared well with
John; others, like Zelda, did not.
Because decisions were made in private, there was tremendous cynicism on the part of more disenfranchised faculty about purported participatory decision making. One woman said "everyone knows decision making is window dressing. Things are decided in the Dean's favor long before a vote." Besides the obvious distrust and the hostility about backroom decisions, Zelda and others felt betrayed by the Dean's disrespectful behavior. If a faculty member did not cooperate with John, they quickly lost his good favor.

Zelda seemed to want John's approval very much, but often fell short of it. It bothered her. "When I don't do what he wants, I feel the sting of his disapproval." Often the Dean's disapproval was reflected in comments of colleagues who supported the Dean. "Barons, older, distinguished male faculty furthered the Dean's agenda in HEX meetings." Collusion was obvious.

Zelda described ways in which the Dean would zing a faculty member without saying a word. In one particular HEX meeting, Zelda was surprised by a decision. She indicated that a decision had not been made and referenced her minutes. Everyone's attention turned to her. They all agreed a decision had been made and she was mistaken. Again, she attempted to correct the group and bring back debate.

The dean was angry with this effort, but said nothing. It reflected in his body language, however. Shortly after this incident, one of the HEX members, a baron, lashed out at Zelda with personal, sarcastic
comments. He was not censored by any of his colleagues nor stopped by the Dean, as would normally be the case. Clearly the dean allowed the barons to punish Zelda for her overt action to foil his agenda.

I asked John about this incident in my interview, and he acknowledged he could have and probably should have stopped this tongue lashing, but "she had it coming. She was way out of line. Sometimes [Zelda] embarrasses me and herself in those meetings. If she has a problem, she knows she can talk to me privately to hammer it out." Zelda thought hammering it out meant agreeing to do what the dean wanted. The process was flawed.

This particular incident in HEX, combined with some private conflicts and negative comments on the part of the dean, troubled Zelda. She was angry, but also felt loss at the damage in her relationship with this significant figure. Zelda was obsessed with this relationship. Nothing physical or even vaguely romantic had passed between them, but some interpersonal tensions were obvious. She described feeling elation when the relationship and communication was good and like a bad child when it was bad. A father and daughter relationship was suggested throughout the conversation. Often she felt parental disapproval in her relationship with the dean.

Zelda also described a strange incident that haunted her and suggested a semi-sexual attraction between them. At a play, the dean's wife intimated, in a kidding manner, that Zelda was having an affair with
John. Zelda was both flattered and taken aback by this statement. She referenced this incident over four times in different interviews over the course of this assessment. It was on her mind.

Her love/hate relationship with John had started early in her career at Red Rock. Early in her employment at the college she had received a poor evaluation from the Dean. He suggested her outspokenness, disorganization and interpersonal skills would need improvement if she was to stay at the University. This devastated Zelda. Usually a poor early evaluation of a faculty member was a death knell for tenure. Zelda said she was not alone in receiving such an evaluation and, in fact, she had worked hard to change. She told me proudly that she was the only one of that faculty with poor evaluations to "make it through and get tenure." Zelda was a survivor.

However, this ability to survive meant conforming to cultural expectations that bothered her. She said she decided she had to be "perky" to stay and set forth to use all of her "considerable acting skills to present a character acceptable to these old men--happy, accommodating and cute." She taped a "Cathy" cartoon about being "perky" in the workplace above her desk and for years kept up this persona. The day she received tenure, she ripped it down. "Perky" was a thing of the past.

In this transition back to the person she really was, Zelda struggled with losing the Dean's acceptance. Her meetings with him were tense. She felt conflicted and often acted out in meetings. More than any
single thing, Zelda expressed in the interview the desire to be accepted for who she was rather than having to "chose between acceptance and integrity." This was a theme in many of the women's comments.

Zelda's manner of speaking was random and associative. It was difficult to keep her on an orderly track and not even desirable to do so because her stories were rich with emotion. Her frankness and earnestness dominated the tone of our conversation. Often at difficult junctures, she would purse her lips and tighten her throat as if trying to keep back the emotion. Sometimes the tears flowed regardless of this effort.

As the time elapsed, I was anxious to get inside information on the issue with David to prepare for my following interviews. I tried to steer Zelda back to the incident at hand. Many of the facts as related by the administration were accurate. David had received a poor evaluation. He over reacted and was aggressive in meeting with female colleagues to verify Zelda's statements.

But Zelda was not too interested in talking about substantive issues, facts or specifics. She told me "David gave [her] the creeps." "He makes the hair stand up on the back of my neck." She used the book, *The People of the Lie* by Scott Peck (1983) to draw an analogy. "He is one of those truly evil people. One just knows it." A Scott Peck fan, I had read that book years ago. It was not on the best seller list so I was startled by Zelda's reference. In essence, Peck's book suggested that some people are
possessed by the devil and are downright evil. I understood how extreme her sense of revulsion was toward David with that statement. She admitted it as more intuitive than factual. After this description, I was pretty curious about meeting this male faculty member.

To refocus, I asked Zelda about the specific problems documented in her evaluation letter. The letter began with positive comments about David's teaching and listed concerns about an over abundance of sexual analogies and the use of the word seminal or semen with regularity. He also brought in speakers who represented extreme positions, particularly on feminist issues. In addition, there was concern over a seminar-like teaching style which differed from that of his female colleagues.

Zelda's evaluation reflected three major concerns voiced by the women repeatedly in the interviews. Their expression of these concerns occurred with amazing similarity of theme and language, suggesting rehearsal or many hours of casual discussion about the weaknesses of David and others.

First, women were disgusted that early in his career at Red Rock, David dated students and finally married one. This behavior was so abhorrent to female faculty in the department that they could not forgive him. He was "tainted." In fact, new female faculty were warned by this group about David's lack of integrity and cautioned not to get close to him. This was related by a female faculty member within the division,
but outside of "the female group." She had been caught in the women's rest room and advised to stop fraternizing with David.

Second, David had been lobbying to get on a committee that was planning a woman's studies program. He felt he was a bit of an expert on the matter because the issue had been explored in his courses. One course in particular he had invited militant lesbian feminists as well as representatives from conservative women's groups to speak. The female faculty in the school of HEE&X felt these extreme positions publicly discounted feminism. The women had worked for years to be taken seriously and to establish a woman's studies group on campus only to have it undermined, they thought, by David's extremism. That David wanted to assist in planning a course on feminism was too much for them. Outraged, they said his total insensitivity was reflected in his constant references to semen, and sexual imagery in class snagged the attention of the women until they were raw.

Third, the women were outraged with David's "verbal attack on women faculty without tenure." This behavior was another example of his need to intimidate and control women, they suggested. Remembering the power of tenured faculty over new faculty in the previous story, David's actions could be construed as insensitive at the least and, from many women's point of view, an attempt to intimidate was more likely.

Fourth, the women thought David did not work as hard as the women in the department. As mentioned earlier, part of the university
culture supported the notion of being a hard worker. Publish, represent the University on important committees, be a professional with a public reputation and teach well were the expectations. The women took this seriously and worked themselves into a frenzy.

David was considered "a mediocre teacher." He did "slovenly work on committees; his presentations to faculty were unprofessional" and yet, he had received tenure and the same recognition as the "most talented among them." This irked one woman in particular who was the most articulate person I spoke to at the university. Her name was Dana.

Dana was the second faculty member to be interviewed. She seemed unlike Zelda in every way. She was short, and her hair was cut in a boyish style. Dana wore a rumpled shirt, tucked into a pastel skirt what accentuated her roundness. Her practical shoes suggested she was not a slave to fashion in any sense.

From her rather mousy appearance, I drew inaccurate stereotypes. I had not expected the degree of brilliant, articulate language that flowed from Dana each time she opened her mouth. This woman had a vocabulary you wouldn't believe. I wrote a few words in the margin of my notebook to look up later. She was imposing.

Dana had been described in the only positive terms used in the initial briefing meeting. Her articulate, measured comments suggested a different style than Zelda's; however, as we touched on critical issues for Dana she often showed her emotions. I learned that Dana was, in fact,
the informal leader of the women's group and had significant talent in organization of a small group and assessing political expediency. She did not like it when the actions of others reflected badly on her proposed agenda.

Dana was outraged at David's behavior toward new female faculty in his recent confrontations. She was particularly concerned and protective about the untenured faculty who felt they were being threatened. As indicated earlier in the last case study, untenured faculty were very vulnerable to attack from the established power structure. Any tenured faculty could significantly influence their chances for staying on at the University. Obviously, according to Dana, David's display in private office conversations was meant to remind women of their vulnerability.

I asked Dana if perhaps his actions might have been to determine the veracity of Zelda's assertion that females did not respect him and feared him. After all, he had been told that these women did not want to work with him. Dana was adamant that David understood the power dynamic and the leverage he had over untenured faculty. Meeting with them privately was tantamount to a threat. "He knows full well that to confront . . . that he is threatening them."

This behavior was indicative of his intimidation and sexual exploitation of female students in the past, according to Dana. He had dated students when the University did not have a policy dealing with
faculty-student relationships. Dana tried to warn him against this practice, advice he obviously ignored. Later he married one of the students. "The power differential between tenured faculty, untenured female faculty and female students should be a consideration in people's behavior at the University. There is a blatant disregard of those power differences with [David] and other men at the University." Dana felt she was responsible to confront behavior of this type and to champion change in this area.

Dana also referenced the use of sexual language as part of his agenda with students. "David exposes his students to a degree of sexuality in courses that is inappropriate." Dana thought Zelda acted courageously in acknowledging the inappropriateness of David's teaching methods and ethics; however, she had been injudicious in exposing her female colleagues up to criticism and public scrutiny by dragging them into the conflict with David.

Furthermore, Dana was incensed by David's desire to be on the woman's studies committee despite all of his sexist and exploitive behavior toward women. He had a notion that he was a feminist himself; Dana sneered as she said this. In one of his courses he had invited "militant feminist extremist lesbians" to speak on feminism. Dana felt representing feminism in this way on a conservative campus like Red Rock's was disastrous for feminists and for the development of a woman's studies course. In fact, exposing students to extremes in the
feminist perspective had led to a backlash on campus regarding establishment of this course. It set them back a year or so, Dana thought. For this and other reasons, Dana and her colleagues were deeply opposed to David's participation on this committee.

Dana spoke about the baron's power structure and how little representation women had in decision making at the University. She felt optimistic because the new president had positive conversations and President P. seemed to understand the cultural dilemmas facing women. Dana especially resented an apparent double standard in work expectations for men and for women on campus.

According to Dana, women were expected to work hard and yet were not respected or acknowledged for their work. She believed the University's expectation that people burn themselves out was an issue for women only. Despite being acknowledged for exemplary teaching and professional activities, Dana felt she was not given any more respect than even the worst male teacher.

Rather out of the blue, Dana asked if David had been interviewed yet and I told her he was the final interview of the day. Dana also mentioned a few details that shed light on her relationship with David beyond her other complaints. When he first came to the University, she had made an effort to befriend him. They played tennis and went out a bit. When this came up, I noted in my field journal that this information
seemed out of place and oddly intentional. Obviously, Dana wanted me to hear about this incident from her perspective first.

My conclusion was verified later in David's interview when he also brought this information to my attention. His interpretation was different, however. He suggested the relationship was more than platonic on her side, but David let Dana know he was only interested in being friends. Dana knew this would come up and could seem discrediting.

Dana also indicated that "the group of women had been getting together as a support group after work hours." It was a social sharing time. Sometimes concerns about the University came up. This corroborated the fact that many of the women viewed issues at the university through a similar lens and articulated it with similar language.

It was at one of these soirees that Dana warned another female faculty in the rest room that David was bad news. The woman had taken it as controlling, rather than simple, well meaning advice. Dana wanted me to know specifically that she had not meant it to be threatening. The female faculty member, June, was untenured. June later expressed to me in an interview that she took Dana's comments as a threat. June and David were friends, and Dana had made attempts to discredit June in various political ways because, June felt, she had not heeded Dana's advice. David suggested in his interview that if Dana were so concerned about threatening untenured female faculty, Dana ought to stop doing it herself.
Dana spoke disparagingly of Zelda. This disapproval and the resultant alienation from her group hurt Zelda. The women were a close knit group of friends. They got together for dinner. They saw each other socially. Certainly at those times they voiced concerns about their treatment at the University. Dana's comments indicated that just as the women had censored David for his public actions on feminism that made them look bad, they were, in turn, censoring Zelda for her foolish handling of the evaluation and involving them in a public conflict with David. "It was stupidity to tell David our names." Dana and the women wanted distance from the event and key players. They resented being singled out. They wanted to bury the incident entirely. No forum; no interviews; no mediation.

Dana was politically astute. Although she held considerable influence with women faculty in the group; no one in the administration acknowledged her role in the group. Dana had kept a low profile and started to work to gain alliances with the new president, in the hopes of getting her support for women's issues.

Dana read the system well and avoided public displays of overt conflict; however, she clearly assisted the group in targeting potential scapegoats and solidifying the female faculty's sense of themselves as misunderstood victims. She was one of the most politically astute women I interviewed at Red Rock. My assessment of her political abilities was affirmed later as this conflict spread.
Many interviews followed. Each women's testimony seemed a clone of Dana's. There were only three women who added new insights: Sara, Jennifer and Janet. David was the last to be interviewed and of course he offered an entirely different slant on what had been going on.

Sara seemed to see things a little differently than Dana, although many of her frustrations about the University culture and the weakness of females within the institution were similar. She was not so harsh in her judgment of Zelda's actions, partially because she knew Zelda was acting on what she believed to be the women's agenda and also because she and Zelda had a close relationship. Sara had been Zelda's mentor over the years.

Sara had been at the University when there were almost no women with tenure. She was quite a bit older than any of the other women interviewed. Her skill at adapting and being conciliatory was at once applauded and criticized by the younger group of more militant women. She was gentle with Zelda about what had happened and understood the frustration the younger women were feeling in their situation. "Sometimes they are not patient, and they expect things to change too quickly." However, she acknowledged that Zelda often acted without thinking. This often hurt her credibility.

Sara corroborated all of the concerns voiced by others regarding David's behavior, but with less militancy. She had not worked with David a great deal and he had not been intimidating in his conversation
with her; however, his work was not considered of high quality. He was lazy. To illustrate her point Sara explained that in a presentation panel she had been on with him, it was clear David had not prepared. He shot from the hip and thoughtlessly went on about nothing, taking up other people's time. Insensitivity was a typical behavior.

Sara was serving on the personnel committee. She understood how faculty evaluations needed to be documented with evidence and based on standards. She also understood that sometimes power plays were used in this venue to discredit faculty or to make issues part of an institutional conversation. During the interview I asked if the personnel committee was careful about keeping confidentiality regarding information shared about colleagues in meetings. Sara said she hoped so but knew of instances where leaks had occurred. I also asked about how Zelda's evaluation of David had been handled. Sara indicated that there was little documentation in Zelda's letter about David's behavior and it was filled with criticism based on Zelda's and other women's personal bias about behavior and expectations rather than on real ethical problems. Such rantings were not taken seriously by the committee. David would have recourse.

Sara did not always agree with the women's group because she felt issues of academic freedom were at stake. David should be able to teach as he wished. This was a freedom some women would remove if they could. Sara did, however, indicate that everyone in her group was
frustrated with a culture that belittled or ignored women's issues. That was not academic freedom, but rather sexual discrimination of a subtle variety.

Sara was concerned that Zelda, in her role as division chair, had acted imprudently in her attempt to articulate more of the women's agenda on campus. Ultimately that overt behavior hurt all of the women's credibility. Later, Sara's position on the personnel committee and her concern about Zelda's rash behaviors would involve both women in a significant conflict that changed their friendship forever.

Following Sara, a new faculty member named Janet skulked into the storage room and told me that she didn't want to be seen talking to me. She was angry and resentful, being brought into this conflict. "I am not involved. I have no problem with David. He and I settled it, and I clarified any comments I may have made to [Zelda] about him. I am not in full agreement with the others." I asked her about the woman's group and learned that it was sort of a "gripping club," but pretty harmless. David, among other men, had been the topic of conversation from time to time. New faculty women were warned about some of these men. It was meant to be helpful. Janet strongly indicated that she was new to the University and did not want to be considered a trouble maker. She did not have tenure and did not feel comfortable being involved.

Janet's concern about taking sides or being seen as a trouble maker by the establishment was reminiscent of the new faculty concerns
in the School of D. When I asked if she was worried about repercussions in the tenure process from either David or the women's group, she said she was afraid of both. She did not want male colleagues to see her differently because her name was linked with this incident. During our conversation she was angry, guarded and anxious for the ordeal to be over.

A colleague of Janet's was the next to be interviewed. Jennifer added some details and many strong opinions. Jennifer seemed the embodiment of anger. Her abrasive manner was well known on campus; few people liked to interact with her. When Jennifer's name was mentioned, people rolled their eyes. Jennifer leaned forward towards me and gestured sharply with her arms or folded them tightly across her chest. She talked nonstop for thirty minutes.

Jennifer was distrustful of me immediately. She said so openly. Jennifer's suspicion was that regardless of the public sentiments of the Dean and provost, nothing would really change. She felt that litigation and threat was the best way to deal with those people. Threat was a tactic used against female faculty, after all; so why not play that game. Jennifer mentioned the litigation that had just been settled as a victory for women and a way of getting their way. It was as if the successful lawsuit gave her a taste of success and she was ready to taste victory again.

In our interview, Jennifer faithfully went through the common list of complaints articulated by all of the other female faculty. Each item,
however, was punctuated with descriptions of lawsuits, getting even, castration and other rather aggressive adjectives. Jennifer felt strongly that the University needed to articulate standards of behavior and work quality so "that slackers like David could get what they deserve."

She said he thought he was so important because he had attended a prestigious English University, but she added that anyone who had the money could go to those schools. She had come from a blue collar family and worked her way up. Venom and resentment was evident in Jennifer's comments. From her perspective, all of the "men in the administration were idiots and had mental disorders." She made no attempt to hide those feelings.

Once Jennifer's interview was over, I felt exhausted. Her intensity and vitriolic outpouring of hostility toward just about everyone was draining to hear. I still had more faculty interviews to complete and felt unsure if I would have the energy to listen intently. However, the next faculty were all new at the University, except of course for David. He was the last to be scheduled. Interestingly enough, all of the following interviews were without new content. The women to be interviewed had very little to say or simply reiterated, almost verbatim, what Dana and Jennifer had already told me. Each female faculty member went through this same litany of concerns and used similar order, language and phrasing to describe the issues and their feelings. In talking to them, the feeling of rehearsal was evident.
**Ethnographer's Comment**

In preparation for writing, I became very aware of how my field notes reflected this rehearsal in the women's comments. The language, phrasing and content was so similar it felt as if I were reading a script. For example, all of the women described the metaphor used by David that included semen and birth, yet, only Zelda said she had heard the image used directly. All of the women said he used the word "seminal" too often, and all but one suggested it was to "upset them." All of the women told me he dated students and had married one. All talked about the "power differential." All but two mentioned he "got too close and invaded one's space." They thought of his "physical size as a weapon." Physical intimidation was part of their theme. A number of them repeated the word "creepy" to describe David.

The ordering of incidents and details used in each interview was almost identical. Had I not dated and coded these comments separately in my field notes, I would have thought they were a repetition of one interview. During my analysis of these interviews I became aware of the fact I was lumping these "women" together as a group with inextricable identity, just as the provost, lawyer and personnel committee chair had done in our briefing session.
As an ethnographer my favorite part of any description is the physical one. The details of a person's face or their body language as they talk to me are fascinating, and I note them in my field journal in more detail than I can use. Yet in my field notes, I did not describe many of these women with distinguishing details. This is not characteristic of my research style. Perhaps I was tired, or perhaps the interviews were too short, or the women simply did not want to show anything of themselves to me so I felt disinterested. Any of these reasons may explain this untypical behavior. However, I have to admit to the feeling that "the women" seemed like they were faceless representations of a single person rather than separate, multidimensional people. That representation, I intuitively felt and noted in my journal, seemed a less developed, less articulate and far less politically astute copy of Dana. I had a sense that a puppet show had been orchestrated for my benefit, but that the roots of this show went back far into the past and had influenced many female faculty members.

**Interviewing David**

David scheduled an interview late in the day. The interview before him had been short. I felt more at ease knowing two of the disputants would not meet face to face outside of my door. David came in the storage room after much anticipation on my part. Given the descriptions,
I thought he might be part Beelzebub and part sex maniac. In fact, a tall, man with a round face framed with plentiful curls of black hair firmly shook my hand and looked about the room sheepishly before sitting down to talk. He was quiet and a person of few words. David had gone to University in England but was an American. When he sat down, he crossed his legs and hunched down; for a person well over 6 foot 4 inches tall, he looked rather vulnerable.

David was caught off guard by all of this conflict. He did not know why the women were so irate about his behavior. He knew one, Dana, was hostile about dating students, but he hadn’t done that for years. He felt the use of "seminal" in his lectures was contextually appropriate, and his use of sexual metaphors was not excessive, although he admitted to using one such metaphor when Zelda was observing his class.

He knew the women in the department did not like the idea of his participating on the committee to develop a woman’s studies course. He considered himself a champion of women’s studies groups and felt he could contribute. However, when asked about his use of controversial speakers he agreed that his choices were excessive; however, he believed it was through the dialectic of extremes that students could begin to evaluate positions. David maintained his right to do whatever he had done in the past. He had broken no rules except displeasing the prima donnas in his department.
David also indicated that many of the "older male faculty had tacitly supported him against these "shrill women." Ironically, David was getting support from the old guard. The Dean told me that David was getting more status from male colleagues as he was attacked and victimized by Zelda and the other women. Before this incident he was sneered at by the barons. The barons were happy to rally around David, who had solicited their support.

Even in the personnel committee, the old guard championed David's cause and denigrated Zelda's action. As a result, Zelda was given a letter of reprimand for her behavior; David's behavior was only addressed in a private conversation with the Dean, who suggested he should back off, not confront women alone in their offices and give up the idea of serving on the woman's studies committee. This corroborated the "female faculty's" view that nothing would happen to David, and they would be vilified. David, in a fit of hubris, immediately protested being excluded from the women's studies, and the dean recanted on this point. By the end, no one understood who had gained or lost, except for Zelda who had been tried and found guilty of acting too overtly.

After the interviews, furor around the incident began to subside. Administration thought the problem was defused by allowing faculty to reflect on their feelings and talk to me about their concerns. I suggested a different reason. The female faculty were tired of the effort and publicity the incident had caused. No one seemed to be winning the
skirmish so the conflict went underground. In this state, the women still
talked about David, were cynical about the dean and provost, and
strengthened their cabal. The barons and David had set parameters and
were successful at self-protection. Zelda had been discredited and, thus,
put in her place. The other women saw once again it was not politic to
confront the male power structure openly.

The university bought a little breathing time with this issue, but
their peace was short lived. Other triggers came to the surface involving
key players in the School of HEE&X. The first had to do with Zelda and
Rose, a long time department secretary. This conflict spread to include
the Dean, a 'baron," two members of the personnel committee, Dana and
the women's group and finally the provost.

**Another Eruption: Zelda and Rose**

A week after the interviews and my report to the provost, the dean
of HEE&X called me to say there was another serious problem in the
department. Zelda had requested my involvement. It seems that Zelda
and Rose, a long time and well respected secretary in the School of
HEE&X had a major blow up. The dean was threatening disciplinary
actions against Zelda. He was utterly fed up.

In the initial briefing with the dean of HEE&X told me it was a
matter of Zelda losing control one more time. She had inappropriately
confronted Rose about an expense reimbursement that Rose felt hesitant to process because she thought the request was questionable. Zelda had lost her temper. Rose came to him for advice and cried while she told him about what had happened.

Other faculty had heard about the confrontation and rallied to Rose's defense. Dana told other faculty about the second incident with Zelda. "They," the group of women previously interviewed, were incensed. Zelda was once again vilified by this group. Although the dean recognized the inherent threat for Zelda in having these woman against her, the Dean suggested he would not lift a finger to prevent Dana's actions against Zelda. Discipline, like decisions in this School, was often orchestrated outside of formal lines of authority or protocol. The Dean was quite good at getting others to do the discipline for him.

The Dean had already had a meeting with Zelda and expressed his displeasure. His anger was still evident in his comments. "How could she be so stupid? Zelda is out of control. She needs to resign as division chair immediately." His protectiveness with Rose was clear. I asked if Zelda and Rose had talked directly about the problems. The dean indicated that Rose should not be made to do that. It was, after all, not her problem, but rather Zelda's.

The dean knew Rose would not be comfortable talking about what went on. He doubted that she would even speak to me about it. He explained that Rose was a very private person. Rose, unlike Zelda who
basked in the opportunity to talk about feelings, did not think feeling or emotion had a place at work. Rose tried to hide her emotional reaction to conflict, but her behavior was evident to all. Rose had the reputation in the department for withdrawing if she felt the slightest bit threatened. In fact because she was perceived as fragile, people protected her. The dean, Dana and the dean's secretary, Ann, had all come to Rose's aid in the past. Because her manner was so passive, faculty were careful in how they treated her. She also had her share of personal tragedy. Faculty and staff felt compassionate about her experiences. Her first husband had been killed in the war. She had lost a child in infancy. She had been in an abusive marriage and was divorced. All of those factors contributed to her image of vulnerability.

Despite the Dean's comments I insisted that interviews take place. In my field notes I commented that John seemed to have already drawn his conclusions about fault and retribution in this incident. Later this conclusion was corroborated when, regardless of the information and intervention options I presented, he took action against Zelda with the personnel committee on campus. His method was indirect and political, typical for his style, and it led to serious consequences for many people at Red Rock.


**Interview with Rose**

When I set up an appointment with Rose, I found she was indeed "hesitant to get into all of this again." Her preference was "just to let it go." However, I insisted, and we finally agreed to meet in her small office on the second floor of an old white house that also held faculty offices on campus.

She had a corner office that resembled a storage room rather than an office. It was dingy, crowded and impersonal. Her small desk was in the center of the room right in front of the door. Faculty in-boxes and office equipment surrounded her. Papers were orderly; equipment was placed conveniently; the office felt efficient in a low tech sort of way. There was nothing of a personal nature about Rose's surroundings. No obvious pictures or decorations adorned the walls. That lack of personal artifacts seemed odd because Rose had been working for the University for over fifteen years.

When I entered and introduced myself, Rose was obviously nervous. Her hand was cold when it grasped my extended hand for an introductory shake. She crossed her arms in front of her chest and pulled her chair back a bit as I sat down near her desk to begin our conversation. Her voice cracked and she told me she was doing this under protest. "I don't want to dig this up again." Talking to me about
her feelings was one of the hardest things she had been asked to do at the University.

Rose was older, probably in her late fifties. Her hair was pure white, a lovely shade but less than natural in its perfect consistency. A stylish pageboy hairdo framed her face, which was made up slightly and tastefully so that her age was disguised with her wrinkles. Rose's arms were thin, and her muscle tone was beginning to surrender to the laws of physics, but her petite frame suggested she was still in pretty good shape for a woman her age. Rose wore trifocal glasses and sometimes took them off to rub her eyes. Rose was dressed in a prim, ironed summer blouse and skirt of classic style, so her clothes could have been old and well cared for or new. Her body language gave me the message she was trying to hide behind the furniture in her office; she wanted to be invisible.

Rose had a serious expression on her face at all times. I only saw her smile a few times during our initial interview. She turned her head slightly when she was listening. Sometimes she took a little more time to answer my questions than was usual in a conversation. Reflection seemed important for Rose. At first her answers were short and curt. Later she softened a little and acknowledged that it might be good to get some of this out in the open.

It was easy to conclude that Rose and Zelda had very different personalities. Zelda's dynamic, theatrical and very openly emotional
personality was in stark contrast to Rose's quiet, measured personality. She never raised her voice. She was very orderly and organized. Rose never volunteered information unless I asked her a direct question. She especially avoided talking about her feelings.

Rose was the secretary for the department in which Zelda was division chair. Her role was to assist faculty, deal with paper work and assist the chair in keeping records for the budget. She worked closely with Zelda and in many ways admired her energy. However, there were aspects of Zelda's character that drove her crazy. In particular, her disorganization, crisis mentality and fits of hostility directed at anyone who would not jump to meet her needs. Rose indicated that the relationship between Zelda and her had been rocky, but in previous incidents Rose buried her feelings and acted as Zelda expected. In this incident, Rose had decided to draw the line.

The incident, according to Rose, occurred over how Zelda used department money. Zelda was always running in and out of Rose's office with scraps of paper documenting her expenses. Some were for books, others for meals with students or for a party with faculty and students. Sometimes the expenses were conventional, but as was typical for Zelda, a few were very unconventional. Rose looked over these expenses and felt like screaming.

As a long time secretary for the department, Rose felt she knew what was appropriate or not. She was also concerned that Zelda spent
too much of the department's very sparse resources while other faculty were left with nothing. As Rose pondered this, Zelda called and asked her to expedite payment of these expenses. Zelda, as usual, was rather short of cash. Rose agreed, but later could not bring herself to process the expenses. She held off and left early for the weekend.

Over the weekend Rose felt stressed by the situation. "How am I going to handle this? " went through her mind constantly. Sitting alone in her house, she wondered why she caved in rather than simply telling Zelda the expenses were out of line. One reason was because of Zelda's had an explosive temper. "If it doesn't go her way she gets defensive and verbally abusive... I'm not that type of person. Some people like chaos and confrontation. Zelda is so dramatic she just goes wild. That is unsettling. " "When Zelda is angry she yells . . . One has to be careful of Zelda." "I'm surprised she doesn't have a stroke she gets so angry. She sets things up to go hay wire because of her total lack of organization." Rose referred to this behavior as "being out of the zone."

Rose went on to explain that she admired a great deal about Zelda. "She is powerful and she works hard for the department, but her life is utter chaos. She brings it with her into my office or other offices when she comes flying in." Even I had experienced that with Zelda in our first encounter. Rose explained that "everything with Zelda is a crisis. She does not meet deadlines; she does not plan." For example, everyone else on the staff, according to Rose, tried to give her and the work study
students at least 24 hr turn around for typing and copying. Not Zelda, "she wanted everything right now!" According to Rose, Zelda's reaction, when demands are not met, was fairly extreme.

At this point in the conversation Rose started get tears in her eyes. I went to get Kleenex from the next room and when I returned she asked if I would put a note the door indicating she was out. Rose went on with her story. When Rose came back on Monday, she had pretty well decided not to process the expenses. An anticipated call from Zelda was a worry all morning. It came about 11:45 am. The conversation was related like this:

Zelda: Rose, have you processed those expenses, I need to be reimbursed.

Rose: I'm not going to get them submitted today.

Zelda: [voice raised] What do you mean? I thought you did it Friday?

Rose: I need to check if these are OK. I don't feel comfortable with them.

Zelda: What do you mean by that? What do you mean if they are OK? I'm division chair, and I know if they are OK or not.

Rose got quiet on the phone, but still said she wasn't going to do what Zelda was demanding. She decided not to be bullied by Zelda's tone of voice. Zelda "blew a gasket" and told Rose she was her boss and she didn't have the authority to refuse her request. After this
confrontation Rose felt so "closed down" that she could hardly remember what else was said. Rose knew Zelda had started "bullying me and began her typical theatrics." "If you get to a trigger point with Zelda then you might as well walk off." She did remember, however, that Zelda hung up on her. For at least thirty minutes after the conversation, Rose was shell shocked. Zelda called back later that afternoon, apologized and set up a meeting later that afternoon to get things sorted out.

At two o'clock Rose went to Zelda's office and after about an hour of conversation she agreed to process the paper work. Zelda had been convincing in her arguments and although the discussion started to get heated at points it had been generally civilized. Zelda thought everything was amicably settled, she indicated in her later interview with me, because she and Rose had hugged when all was concluded. Rose said, at first she felt OK, but later thought she had been patronized and manipulated. "Zelda had convinced me I had done something wrong in questioning her. I was manipulated into agreeing with her." She felt bullied into submission by the threat of Zelda's explosiveness.

The next morning Rose came into the office building and Ann, the Dean's secretary, noticed Rose looked as if she had been crying. Ann alerted John, and he walked up to Rose's office to ask if she was all right. The dean was aware that there had been some sort of meeting between Zelda and Rose the afternoon before and thought something may be brewing. When asked what was wrong, Rose broke down sobbing.
Quickly John escorted her back downstairs, sat her at his large conference table and listened to the whole story.

Rose broke down and could not even speak for quite some time. Finally the story came spilling out. The dean was livid after hearing all of this. He was tired of having trouble with this errant faculty member and utterly disgusted with Zelda in her role as division chair. Later that day, a HEX meeting of all of the chairs was to occur. John had mentioned to a few of the members in attendance that he was miffed with Zelda and to get out of the way if the two of them started to go at it at the meeting. This was reported by an informant overhearing this conversation with one of faculty.

The meeting was filled with tension and in fact a confrontation between Zelda and John did occur on an unrelated issue. John indicated in his interview that Zelda's confrontational comments in HEX meetings made him lose face. All of her behavior over the last months indicated to John that she was out of control. He felt Zelda alone was responsible for the David blow up and now the conflict with Rose.

After the meeting, Zelda was called into the Dean's office and berated for her behavior in the meeting and toward Rose. Zelda was shocked that the conversation between the two women had become public knowledge and that the Dean was brought into the mix. Zelda's relationship with the dean was tenuous as it was; to have Rose "tattle" on her to the dean after all was solved was a betrayal in the worst sense of
the word. Needless to say, Zelda followed up with a visit to Rose's office where she yelled and said Rose was "a traitor and could not be trusted." For Zelda, consistently direct and honest about her feelings, the idea that someone went "behind her back" after their previous conversation was a pernicious act. Zelda felt undermined. Rose felt attacked. John was angry.

The conflict between these two women became a topic of office gossip and many faculty rushed to give Rose moral support. One of these people was Dana. Under her influence, faculty were critical of Zelda and sent her flaming e-mails over the incident. In a private conversation with a member of the initial group of women interviewed earlier, one woman related the incident between Rose and Zelda from her, and the other women's, perspective. Clearly this was one more example of Zelda's stupidity. A number of secretaries, in the confidence of Ann, also were openly critical of Zelda. Soon after the incident occurred, faculty and classified staff across campus seemed to know about it and had taken sides against Zelda.

**Escalation**

At this point Zelda was rightly feeling attacked and unprotected, but she did not anticipate the next trigger. Sara, her friend and colleague, as well as Bennett, a male colleague whom Zelda respected,
were both members of the personnel committee. John had set up a meeting with this committee, to complain about Zelda's behavior and ask for a formal reprimand. While stating his case, he had also privately encouraged Dana to support his position with letters. Others of that group wrote with their support as well.

Prior to, and during all of these other problems, the dean received two additional complaints against Zelda which he characterized to the university administration and personnel committee as part of a chronic problem with her. The dean had actually been sitting on this information for awhile. He had been waiting for the "appropriate time to discuss it with Zelda. Actually, he never confronted her directly with this information until after he had discussed these complaints with the administration. In also did not do any fact finding to test the validity of these claims.

The first complaint involved students accompanying Zelda on a field experience. Her "poor teaching, disorganization and her overly personal, emotional style during a trip" made students feel uncomfortable. Another trip was coming up and students did not want Zelda to accompany them.

The second complaint was also from students and involved a team teaching situation. Zelda had worked with another faculty member on a course which she thought was sort of an informal collaboration. She saw herself as more of a visitor to the class than a full participant in the
teaching process. Her colleague, however, thought she was a full partner in the teaching. This created friction which was reported to the dean. This faculty member asked students to evaluate Zelda as if she were a fully engaged teacher. The evaluations were poor.

When Zelda found out about this, in the midst of the other turmoil, she was fit to be tied. From her perspective, she was not the instructor of record and should not have been evaluated as such. Nor should the dean, who was clearly against her, use this information to convince the personnel committee to take action against her, particularly when he had never directly discussed it with her.

The poor evaluations, the friction with colleagues, the previous evaluation problem with David, the poor favor Zelda had with the barons and John all bundled into one picture of incompetence for Zelda. Based on the dean's testimony, the personnel committee decided to place a letter of censure in her permanent file. Sara and Bennett also met with Zelda privately and asked her to step down from her position as division chair. Sara, who felt she had Zelda's best interests at heart, was concerned that her erratic behavior was bad for the department.

Zelda was utterly crushed after this conversation. She felt tried and convicted before the facts were openly presented to the committee. In truth, no one had asked any of the participants in this conflict for information nor had fact finding by the committee occurred. I was in the middle of collecting information, but nothing had yet been reported and
intervention recommendations had not been made. The committee, Sara and Bennett acted solely on the basis of the Dean's concerns and letters from faculty who were not directly involved in the case. Action based on anecdotal and partial information was typical for administration and administrative committees alike at Red Rock.

Zelda called a lawyer to determine if a harassment law suit was an option. The female lawyer, used in the last successful lawsuit where a female faculty member settled to her advantage, was engaged to represent Zelda. This lawyer seemed to think Zelda had a case. The threat of a law suit was always the cue for the provost to step in. Zelda was ready to proceed with a case, but decided to wait until she met with the provost.

Zelda and the provost had a fairly amicable relationship on the surface. In private obvious criticisms were expressed. The provost felt Zelda was overly zealous, emotion and theatrical. "She simply did not think." Zelda thought the provost was well meaning but a bit slippery and did not take action. Sometimes she thought he could be trusted, but then he would do something that disappointed her. They both saw the advantage of developing alliance to stop the backdoor influence of the dean in this instance, however.

At this point, some of Zelda's friends in the department saw how they had been manipulated by the dean. Sara, in particular, felt used. They saw that the dean had galvanized groups against Zelda, discredited
her without evidence and manipulated many against her by playing on people’s emotional biases. The provost saw this as well. In addition he understood that the lack of clear, consistently followed policy had led to easy manipulation of the system by knowledgeable insiders. John, the dean of HEE&X, was put on notice to change. Policy, procedures and role definition as well as training were to be tightened and improved.

**Summary**

Over time, distinct groups formed to combat against perceived threats. Two law suits were pursued but later dropped. The dean was reprimanded for his behavior and put on notice to change. Zelda was replaced as division chair and a member of Dana’s group took over in that position. Sara and Zelda were no longer friends. The personnel committee had been berated for not following policy. Many people were not speaking to each other; many were afraid of how their role was perceived campus wide. A lot of time, effort and money, with little constructive result, had been wasted.

Unlike in the first case study which was allowed to proceed without interference, my recommendations for intervention were watered down. Important systemic changes were never implemented, and the interpersonal ones were left without support after the escalation phase of
conflict seemed to be in remission. On the whole, everyone involved in the conflict decided to hide it a while longer.

This conflict was different from *Tag Team Wrestlers* in a number of regards; it involved a larger group, it extended beyond the School to include a number of political constituencies and it developed over a significantly longer period of time due to the influence of institutional norms and traditional lines of power. However, the episodic development of the conflict, the escalation into autistic conflict and the inability of the disputants to exit the conflict due to the repetitive cycle of dysfunctional and escalating behaviors was similar.

Although much of the change in this particular conflict could have been constructive for Red Rock, there were problems because of how this change process evolved into dysfunctional conflict. First, people were set against each other. Vendettas developed that have not and will not easily be resolved. Second, many of the problems which occurred in this study involved problems with the organizational infrastructure. Recommendations for change in these areas was and is still being resisted. Third, the ability to do constructive problem solving did not change. This means behavioral repertoires that created conflict were deepened and new behaviors were not established. This area will continue to struggle through serious conflict. I predict they will need another consultant in three years or less.
Chapter 7
Toxic Waste

Introduction

As I begin to write this chapter, I am painfully aware of a personal conflict I am having with a colleague at work. As this problem developed, I kept reminding myself that I'm a professional in dealing with conflict. I've read extensively in the research and know conflict intervention techniques. I understand what is going on and what to anticipate. I have been documenting the incidents of this conflict in a notebook pretending to depersonalize the hostility between my co-worker and myself; I have pretended to be in control. I have fallen into the dysfunctional patterns I observe daily in my work. I wonder what makes this happen.

Truth be known, when a person is involved in a conflict, even a minor one where outcomes are not particularly important nor threats overwhelmingly grave, it is difficult to stop the personalization and escalation. I come home at night fuming over this man's arrogance. I feel myself watching him and attributing motives I cannot entirely prove through his actions. I anticipate what he will do next and take steps to protect myself. I tell my friends at work how incompetent he is and recount his stupidity with relish. They laugh at him and agree. He knows I am doing this and turns away angrily to his friends. I've not handled this conflict well. It is easy to be sucked in.
I prefer the outsider role—a voyeur, watching behavior from the outside and listening sympathetically to other's stories. As an observer, I can suspend judgments and retain my objectivity. When observing the behavior of disputants at work, it is easy to see their loss of perspective. In this personal conflict, I also understand personally how easy it is to have better judgment obscured by threats from escalating conflict. People will go to great lengths to protect themselves.

The School of XYZ

While I was working with groups at Red Rock University, a third more significant conflict developed. This story, Toxic Waste, recounts details of a serious, protracted conflict which occurred in the graduate School of XYZ. The casualties were numerous; the outcomes for the University were costly. The conflict went on for over six years before it erupted into a volcanic fury. People describe it in terms of climactic disturbances, war, sickness and mental illness. Most often they referred to it as toxic. In the twelve protracted conflicts I have been involved in as a consultant, including those in this study, this level of conflict was equaled only by two others. None surpassed it.
The Initial Briefing

One afternoon, the provost at Red Rock called me back to campus. By this time, I had spent a lot of time at the university, gotten a tan and racked up lots of frequent flier miles. I had not anticipated this when Katherine first called. The provost wanted to outline two problems that developed in the School of XYZ. In his view the conflicts were unrelated. The first involved a group of students who had complained to the president regarding problems with faculty. The second concerned an ill defined and festering conflict between faculty members in this school. Few details were known.

The Students

The student complaint outlined three key issues: (a) students were being intimidated and humiliated by a faculty member; (b) students had been unfairly denied admission to the school's doctoral program; (c) student complaints were being ignored. In particular, the students were concerned that one student, Carl, was denied admission to the doctoral program after having successfully completed his masters course work. There were no indications that he had not met program requirements for admission. His grades were good. There was no documentation indicating problems in his student file. He allegedly had not been informed of serious problems by his advisor.
Why Carl was not admitted to the doctoral program was a matter of speculation among students. They attributed it to the fact that Carl and other students had lodged a complaint against a professor in the program, who was reputed to be punitive and hostile toward certain students. The student group of retribution from this faculty member.

In addition, the director of the school had consistently mishandled students' complaints about this faculty member and about other matters. When students voiced concerns, the director's "defensive and reactive response" frightened them. Students, angry over repeated rebuffs, felt that there were no channels for problem solving. A vocal student group decided their only recourse was to involve the new President of the University. In addition, they wrote a letter of complaint to the University's accrediting bodies and to the association governing their particular professional licensing. This action captured everyone's attention. Their message concerned protections of certain rights outlined by the University and its accrediting bodies including:

- A learning environment which protects students from being singled out for hostile behavior based on the instructor's personal feelings.
- Meet with a professor without fear of verbal abuse.
- Hold opinions that differ from an instructor without harassment.
- Freedom from discourteous interruption while discussing, questioning, or expressing views which do not coincide with instructor's personal or professional opinions.
• Freedom from retaliation by instructors when formal complaints are made.
• Have formal complaints addressed in a manner which includes follow-up and prevents deterioration of student morale.
• Access professors to discuss course information.
• Consistent, unbiased evaluation on clearly stated criteria which is delivered in a respectful and truthful manner.

Students felt these rights were being violated. The provost acknowledged the seriousness of these complaints. He believed, however, these concerns were held by a small group, manipulated by Carl and a few ring leaders. The director's lack of constructive action had exacerbated the problem and forced students to take extreme measures.

The provost explained to me that the graduate program of XYZ had changed a great deal in the last five years. Originally it was "a stand alone program." In order to get appropriate accreditation, it allied itself with the University. For the first few years it only offered a master's program. With the establishment of a doctoral program, the master's program became "a way station." It was not considered a terminal degree. Every masters student expected to complete their doctorate in the program. However, to do this they had to apply and be accepted after successful completion of their masters. It was almost an unspoken
assumption that students continued unless "something horrific happened."

All students generally went on to the doctoral level with few exceptions. A feedback process and the second year review was meant to alert students to any difficulties early in their educational experience so interventions could be made. The provost suggested that the students who had not been admitted to the doctoral program were, in fact, not really doctoral material. Carl and one other student, Sheri, were not admitted to the doctoral program because they did not measure up. The provost used evidence, letters from each student, to make his case.

Carl's letter was rambling and poorly written. His concerns were very personalized; his spelling poor. Sheri's hand written letter was dotted with misspelling and punctuation errors, cross outs and poorly constructed sentences. I commented in my field notes that my fifth grade daughter could write more coherently than this masters level student. As an instructor, I could well understand the professional staff's concern about advancing such a candidate.

However, although the two year review had taken place and these two students had been placed on probation, no documentation of professors' concerns were documented in their student records. Other than in informal discussions with their advisors, Carl and Sheri had not been given any indication that they were "not considered doctoral material." Carl's letter of rejection was a complete surprise. The
rejection was especially poignant in that it followed directly on the heels of Carl's complaint against a faculty member.

From my conversation with the provost, the organizational problems seemed self-evident. The review process had obviously failed. Even though the students did not have the skills to advance to the doctoral level, the fact that faculty had done a slovenly job at the two year review made the provost conclude that "the decision not to admit [Carl] was procedurally indefensible." Obviously, faculty had made errors. They would have to "eat crow" and allow these students to be admitted to the program. The School of XYZ needed to improve their review process so it could catch inappropriate candidates earlier in the process and make sure documentation and feedback occurred. Faculty could learn from this incident and improve their processes. I asked the provost why he was involving me.

Apparently the core issues were more troubling than simple procedural oversights or the fate of two students. The student group told the president they were systematically harassed and humiliated by instructors. They were very afraid to speak out. No one would listen, and all of the faculty was not to be trusted. In fact, no one in the institution could be fully trusted. The student group felt they were taking a great risk in coming forward.

Students described a litany of concerns supporting their claims of faculty misuse of power. Faculty were capricious in their application of
the policies and procedures. As their letter stated, students were concerned about the demonstrated lack of consistent, unbiased evaluation of students based on clearly stated criteria." Many students in this group observed and experienced how faculty had "targeted students who were not in support of faculty agendas."

The group contended that students were placed on probation for "inappropriate behavior" which was poorly defined and unevenly applied. It was more than procedural oversight; it was intentional victimization and misuse of power. Students alleged that certain students were singled out in class and degraded. They were penalized in their writing seminar and grilled in the second year review. If faculty did not like a student, they would be targeted and tenaciously drummed out of the program through a variety of harassment techniques.

Alarmed at these claims, the president decided to launch an investigation into alleged wrongdoing. President P sent a letter to all students enrolled. It stated that she intended to address the "systemic problems in the culture and climate of the School of XYZ that were not in keeping with the University's vision of the school as a trustworthy, collaborative learning community." The strength of the President's language and the swiftness of her action impressed the students.

I asked the provost how long this harassment going on, according to student reports. Some students said indicated it had been going on for many years. Because the students had not brought him into the
circle nor shared their evidence with him, the provost admitted he was operating a bit in the dark. With trepidation, I asked Jim why the group had gone over his head to the president. The provost sat back in his chair and gave me the look of frustration I had seen many times in the course of our work in conflict assessment at Red Rock. He had taken off his jacket earlier and draped it over his chair. He started to roll up his sleeves, leaned forward across the table and raised his arms in a gesture of exasperation. "Lord knows. For one thing, students had gotten pretty frustrated because no one over there listens to them... The administration failed them. They're in a corner."

The provost suggested that the director, a tenured faculty member, named Ian, "had blown it." Apparently, student complaints had not been dealt with constructively for some time either because Ian had tried to protect faculty or he dealt poorly with conflict. Ian, the provost noted, worked very hard and was diligent, but he took complaints as personal attacks on his ability as a director. He "contributed to the problem escalation with inattention."

The students went to the president because they believed the faculty and director were in collusion. "There is no one to talk to or to trust." The provost, who usually dealt with matters of this nature, had been passed over because he was previously involved in the "sexual harassment intervention in that school." Students thought the provost had done nothing. The provost protested this conclusion. Issues of
confidentiality in personnel action made it impossible for him to publicly disclose the action he had taken. He assured me the faculty member in question had been disciplined. However, students believed he had glossed over the matter.

I asked Jim how pervasive the concerns were with students in the program. He said again he was in the dark; however, he believed intuitively that it was a small group of dissident students, lead by a talented trouble maker. Jim predicted that less than 15% of the students enrolled were in agreement with the complaints of this vocal student group. He thought faculty had made significant but unintentional mistakes in not documenting evidence of Carl's errant behavior. They had not followed appropriate procedures and had communicated poorly because they were "a bit on the abrupt side" in their style. Despite these faults, Jim felt strongly that faculty was not intentionally misusing power or abusing students.

My job was to gather evidence and determine the nature and extent of the problem as well as suggest interventions. This would not be easy because students did not want to talk to anyone about it. They balked at the idea of an interview because it "was not safe." I let the provost know students would have to get over it.
Faculty Conflict

The provost also explained that the eight faculty members within the program were in conflict. He believed their disputes were unrelated to the student conflict, although, the provost suggested, it may have contributed to a communication breakdown intensifying problems with students. He thought the conflict was associated with some behaviors of a male faculty member toward female students and a dispute that arose when a female faculty member rose to their defense.

Jim, the provost, believed "the polarization of faculty was also site related." The program provided both a theoretical and practicum component and these different experiences were offered on two different sites and with two groups of faculty, although the entire group was seen as one school within the university. The faculty group met twice a month in faculty meetings. They met jointly to conduct student reviews or in committee or curriculum work. The rest of the time they operated as separate groups.

The provost hypothesized additional contributing factors. An abrasive, controlling style in two strong female faculty shaped much of the decision making in the department. There had been complaints from students about sexist or sexually inappropriate behavior from two male faculty at the practicum center site. The director had been distant and unresponsive to faculty, as he had been to students recently. Many
changes had been going on in the program. Financial problems were surfacing. Faculty were working hard and, perhaps, were too stressed.

**Consultant Interview by a Student Representative**

Before beginning an inquiry into the student problem, I had to be screened by one of the student representatives to see if "I could be trusted." I called a woman by the name of Carole to set up a time to chat. Secrecy and distrust punctuated our telephone conversation.

Carole asked me all about myself and would not give me her last name. She inquired into specifics about my approach to interviewing and my previous experience. She wanted to know who the conversation information would "go to." I assured her that information would be between us except what information must be shared with the president in order to develop a secure, workable interview process for students. The fact that I was a doctoral student myself seemed to sway her decision to meet with me face to face. Hesitantly, she agreed to a specific date. We set up a meeting time at a small restaurant off of a freeway.

The trip to meet Carole was foreboding. The weather was very different than I was used to. The location of our meeting was in a lowland area near a river. Carole lived in the metropolitan area nearby and seldom traveled into the Red Rock campus. It was a foggy and rainy
morning. The fog made visibility difficult. I rented a car and had driven a long way to make this meeting. I had started out well before dawn.

Everything seemed gray and drab. I got lost twice. The restaurant itself was not marked by any singularity except its darkness. As I walked in from the outside it seemed I was going down into a Welsh coal mine. I missed a step and almost tumbled onto the floor. I thought to myself that would assure this poor frightened student. The person hired to help solve the conflict can’t even walk straight.

The thought occurred to me that the restaurant was a reflection of the conversation I had with Carole on the phone. The darkness of the room hid everyone as I walked in from the outside. We were like spies meeting secretly. I half expected to meet a woman in sunglasses and a trench coat slouched anonymously in a dark corner. As I came into the room, a small, slim figure with dark hair and eyes craned her neck to look at me, hoping for an acknowledgment. I had described myself to Carole on the phone, but had no idea what she looked like. Given the age and anxious look of this young woman, I addressed her.

We sat together and ordered lunch. A bit of small talk about the weather was tense. I finally broke the ice and talked about the conflict; she asked me many questions about myself, my experience and my alliances. We got on well, and she decided to open up. Carole was an articulate and careful person. Opposite in manner and appearance to a raving student agitator, Carole was every bit the professional. The key
impressions I noted about her were her conscientious concern, her empathy and her fear.

Carole had been appointed by the group for this assignment because she was less afraid than others. She was not certain if she wanted to continue in the doctoral program even though she had done well in courses and was admitted. The tension generated by the "oppressive control tactics and humiliation" brought on students by professors in the program was not worth it, she explained. She wanted to tell me what was going on, but at my insistence that we wait until a formal process began, she was anxious to help me design the process and solicit student information.

The process would include interviews of faculty, support staff and fifteen students chosen randomly from those enrolled in both the master's and doctoral program. These students would be invited to interview first, anonymously in fifteen to thirty minute time slots. In addition, students who volunteered to be interviewed would be scheduled following the selected students. Students did not have to give names, only program. I would review policy and procedures, student records, faculty evaluation data, letters from students and other relevant information. In addition, I promised to share findings with students in a meeting.

I asked Carole to estimate how many people in the doctoral and masters' programs felt concern. She was clear in suggesting that 75% to
80% were upset. Carole was satisfied with the process but assured me students would not be interviewed voluntarily. She worried that everyone would be too afraid to be interviewed. She suggested I go to representative classes and introduce myself. She thought my "low key, but warm manner" would encourage people to talk to me. I worked with Ian to schedule course visits to introduce myself, talk about my work and to explain the process.

Ian insisted on accompanying me. As he introduced me to students, I observed a number of telling behaviors. First, few students gave him eye contact. Second, in a number of instances he had to raise his voice in a sort of menacing way to get their attention. Ian's manner of speaking to them was reminiscent of a vice principal trying to get the attention of middle school students--- subtly threatening. Third, students were hesitant to ask questions even though I solicited student response. More than once I noted students eyeing Ian, checking for a reaction when a student hand did go up. Questions were very politically correct. The feeling of fear from students was palpable in the classes I visited.

Later that evening, Carole called me at home to say students had been threatened by Ian's presence. He was spying on them. The fears students had and the rapidity of their communication was remarkable. Carole said people were too afraid of retribution from the faculty to be
I told her that if the students wanted to have their story told, they would have to take the risk now. She understood.

**A Student Informant**

While setting up the interview process I talked to a student named Jason from the program. Jason was befriended by the provost when he was an undergrad student at Red Rock. The provost trusted Jason's judgment and had chatted with him earlier to get a sense of what was going on in the School of XYZ. Although I hesitated to involve a student enrolled in the program in an informant's role, I knew the insight I could gain would help focus the interview process. After speaking with Jason, I knew where the provost had gotten much of his initial information.

Jason was a tall, affable fellow. His freckles and round face made him appear much younger than his twenty-eight years. I gave him the option of leaving if he felt like he may be betraying confidentiality before the process had legitimately started. Jason didn't mind talking. In fact, he was anxious to share what he thought.

Jason made it clear from the outset that he was not directly involved. A group of students, that met often and "were sort of feeding off of each other," had brought a letter of complaint against Dr. Cora Jon. "That group gets together and circulates rumors. [Carl] is the leader . . .
The group can be exclusionary and secretive. One of my best friends is with them. She told me the issues. I think they are out of touch."

I asked if those students were simply potential wash outs trying to maintain their self-interest with this complaint. Jason made it clear that was not the case. These were intelligent, hard working people. Many of the students in the complaint group had not personally experienced too much trouble with Cora, although all were intimidated. They knew they could incur her wraith pretty easily. All had observed Cora's humiliation of students in class. They were outraged by Cora's behavior. Carl made things worse with exaggerated stories.

Jason described Dr. Cora Jon as a brilliant, but obnoxious professor with extensive clinical experience. It was rumored that she had been let go from another University because of her abrasive personality. At that school, students "referred to her as the black widow." But despite her treatment of students no one could fault her abilities." She has a strong academic background-- she knows her shit."

Jason explained that he had an early run in with Cora, but took time to talk to her and all was well. "When I first met her, I hated her guts. Other students felt that way, too." He recounted an incident on the first day of class when a first year student asked him, "who stuck that piece of coal up her butt?" Jason was quick to comment that he had worked hard to develop a constructive relationship with Cora. "If you prove yourself, you are OK and worthy of respect."
At the time of Jason’s interview I was taken back by his candor and use of the vernacular. He sat casually in his chair as if talking to a friend in his dorm room. None of the fear, concern over anonymity or paranoia evident in my conversation with Carole was present in Jason. He was absolutely straightforward and rather blunt. This difference puzzled me.

Jason believed that to survive in the program "he would not push faculty buttons" or cause any problems. He had heard before being admitted to the program that it was important to "act as if you were in an army boot camp. Look down and keep your nose clean." "My God, I'm only a second year student. I could be in big trouble if I weren't on their good side."

I had to comment, "then you are afraid they could hurt you." He acknowledged that they could. "In what way?" I asked. Jason had observed and heard about students who caused problems. They experienced public disgrace and hounding, sometimes their grades were dropped for unclear reasons or they were placed on probationary status for inappropriate behavior which was defined at the discretion of faculty. Students could be "screwed" in their practicum placement. My informant told me he had either seen this happen or heard stories about all of these things happening to students. The rumor mill reached far into the past and was strong in the current environment of fear and retribution.
Jason recognized in his own fears the need for students to conform to faculty expectations, standards and values. He suggested there was "a mind police" aspect to all of this. In fact, one faculty member will penalize you for believing one school of thought and another will penalize you for not supporting that school. It is schizophrenic at the very least." Jason indicated that "It would be nice if I didn't have to worry about what I said. I wish they would practice what they preached." In this comment, Jason was referring to the message faculty gave to students about valuing diversity, which implied openness to many perspectives and life experiences. In this area, however, Jason and other students felt extreme frustration. Jason indicated that valuing diversity was rhetoric. It really meant to respect the values of the faculty.

After an angry tirade about this apparent hypocrisy evident in the faculty, Jason quickly reminded me that he did not have a problem getting along with his professors. He valued their knowledge and skill. The education students received was top notch. The student group had not invited Jason to join them in protest because he was obviously happy with the program. "He was one of her favorites." Jason acknowledged that it was true.

When questioned, Jason corroborated the fact that there were favorites and scapegoats in the program. Student stories were not generated out of their paranoia, but rather observed behavior. He acknowledged that he was a favorite. To become one of these students
one had to demonstrate conformity and academic excellence. "The role of the student was conformity." "Just avoid disagreeing and do what they say. It will go well."

Jason told me Carl did not do this. Instead he had little control over his emotions or opinions. This corroborated the provost's information. Everyone knew that Carl was not really doctoral material. He was unprofessional and a blowhard. Cora and Tonya were just doing their job washing him out. I asked Jason what percentage of the students felt like this complaint group? He estimated 20% at most.

**Student Interviews**

I ended up interviewing twelve of the fifteen selected students and forty students who voluntarily contacted me. Carole had been wrong about the willingness of students to step forward to be interviewed. Some even submitted letters. Over 95% of the students enrolled in the program were interviewed. Jason and the provost were also wrong in thinking only a small group was concerned. Interview information proved that concerns were widely held, and the problems related significantly to the faculty conflict I was also asked to investigate. Over 85% of those interviewed agreed there were serious concerns.

Variations on Carole's and Jason's comments were to be repeated over the next two weeks as I interviewed student after student. The
intensity, the tone and specifics of stories differed. A few students, perhaps 8 or 9, saw protesters as "whinners" and "too sensitive."

However, the majority agreed that there were serious problems in the program. Most of the students didn't have the courage to join the protesting group. Most described themselves as "unidentified protesters" too afraid to step forward, but in sympathy with those who spoke up. Many felt the student protest agenda was a bit narrow. Carl's self-interest was obvious. Some students were being manipulated. However, they strongly acknowledged the spirit of the concern. Themes of faculty control, student harassment, ethical issues about confidentiality, student fear of retribution, arbitrary enforcement of capricious, self-interested standards on the part of faculty were painfully evident in most interviews.

Interview data corroborated the University's worst fears. The majority of students were afraid. They had either experienced or observed student abuse from faculty. Key faculty joined together in small powerful groups, played out serious conflict behaviors toward each other with students either caught in the crossfire or recruited to assist in combat. Faculty sometimes used faculty dissension as a way to leverage faculty assistance for their own conflicts.

Faculty frequently used their own interpretation of rules to further their own agenda. Students complaints were dismissed unless they supported faculty belief about the dysfunctional behavior of opponents;
leadership of the Campus Site and the Urban Site were aligned on either side of the combat zone, leaving students shell-shocked every time they crossed between the two camps. In addition, a group of faculty who were not entirely aligned in this dispute stood on the sideline unable or unwilling to call a halt to the unethical and harmful behavior of faculty towards each other and towards students.

To understand the conflict between both faculty groups and students and faculty, it is necessary to describe the key faculty personalities, their roles and the groups formed from protracted conflict behavior.

**Background and Roles**

With program changes and the development of a doctoral program, work load expectations for faculty had changed over the last few years. There were larger classes, larger advising loads and a different mix of students with older professionals and new, fresh out of undergraduate school kids. Faculty took on specialty areas so they could focus on getting students through the rigors of the program. All agreed, including the accrediting institutions, that the School of XYZ was a bit over zealous in what it required of students. The faculty was proud of that.

At the Red Rock University campus, Ian was the school director. Tonya worked with students on their dissertations. Cora orchestrated practicum placement outside of the downtown center and was the
director of an additional program at Red Rock which used School of XYZ students to operate. Mary a new faculty member and Thomas had offices in this location. At the Urban Site, Peter was director of the urban site. Jerry, and Kay were faculty at this location. Jerry, Kay, Mary and Thomas seemed to have large teaching loads but fewer administrative commitments than the others, who had significant program roles. Like everyone, they served on a number of internal and external committees at Red Rock.

In addition to a regular teaching load, faculty were intensely involved in University and professional organizations. Tonya, for example, chaired the personnel committee for grad programs at Red Rock and was active in professional organizations. She had recently put on a conference for a national organization in her subject area. Some faculty had private business interests related to their profession. All in all, they had a very full plate. Changes in the program had heightened the stress for everyone.

Alliances: Roles, Personalities, and Values

The interpersonal dynamics leading to communication breakdown, group antagonisms and threat, counterthreat behavior evident in the School of XYZ had been developing for over three years. As the provost suggested, some of the faculty division came simply from working in
different locations. Ian, Tonya and Cora developed a strong bond from simply sharing many administrative duties and from their daily interactions at the Campus Site. In the same regard, Jerry and Peter held common views about how and why the Urban Center should be run. In another regard, groups in this faculty also developed out of commonly held values that were not communicated or shared with colleagues. Four examples come to mind: (a) There were different expectations for faculty workload and for student performance; (b) there were different definitions of what "diversity" should mean in the School and how it should be enacted that were often at odds; (c) there were significant differences regarding how the Urban Site should be run; (d) each faculty group had very different styles, particularly with regard to dealing with conflict.

Personalities, values, power and position as well as student relationships with faculty added to the escalation of threat and counterthreat within the faculty group, contributing to their inability to see how students were victimized by their behavior.

The Gate Keeper Group

Tonya

Tonya was a petite, slim woman in her late 30's. Her frame was willowy, and she appeared fragile at first glance. Later I found that was a
false impression. Her hair was cropped short, her neck was long and her eyes were large and blue. In our first conversation I noticed she seldom blinked. This stare gave her look a certain intent, earnest quality. Her angular face was softened with freckles. Her manner was quiet, but there was something untrue about this suggestion of delicacy, as if her strength was hidden, perhaps intentionally. My impression was of a ballerina's softness falsely concealing the vigor of a trained and conditioned athlete.

Tonya's office was the picture of order. As with many faculty offices, it was located in the older sections of campus. The room was small and cramped. It did not have a window but opened onto the hall. Artificial light flooded the room. Air conditioning made everything just a little too cold. I always wore a sweater when I went indoors.

Tonya kept the clutter cleared away from her desk and bookshelves. Nothing personal was evident. There were no stacks of student papers or earmarked books lying around. The order suggested a certain inhospitable quality, but Tonya's orchid plants with profuse and colorful blooms disguised the starkness of the room. I was left with the sense that Tonya tried to soften the inflexible angles of her life with an imposed ornament that was not entirely natural.

Dr. Tonya was the first director of the program and had been there the longest. The support staff praised her decisiveness. Unlike Ian, she was not afraid to take action, even if it was unpopular. Due to a problem
with a student and threatened law suit, Tonya stepped down as director. She had been instrumental in establishing the school and felt strongly about maintaining standards. Tonya was considered a severe task master, but a talented writer and editor. It was her charge to work with all of the master and doctoral students on their dissertations.

Tonya held a number of important committee posts on campus and was active in professional organizations, having recently put on a major national conference. Many students were proud to be associated with a program where a national conference had taken place; however, some students resented that activity. "[Tonya] puts her own agenda before mentoring and meeting with students for theses. It is hard to get an appointment with her and when you do, she tells you to get to the point. She put on a conference this year despite the fact she tells students she has not time." Tonya's power in the group was not immediately evident, but all of the students held her in a certain awe.

Tonya's interview identified some elements contributing to the conflict escalation. Leadership weakness and different standards for student and faculty performance were areas of concern for her. Tonya was clear that she had strict standards for student and faculty performance. Tonya characterized herself as "a gatekeeper" and "standard bearer." The gatekeeper role meant to Tonya that "[faculty] have an ethical obligation not to let someone into the profession who was not eminently qualified." This meant Tonya vigorously lobbied to drop
students. Cora and Ian, to a lesser extent, agreed that not every student was equipped to enter the profession. The School of XYZ had an obligation to wash people out. Ian created a program on paper that was more than the accrediting institution required. He felt proud of how much they expected. Cora joined with Tonya in setting high writing and academic expectations. They also watched for "behaviors" that were not OK as they defined it. They watched for students who strayed outside of these personally defined standards and placed them on probation. Frequently students saw their peers punished for reasons they did not understand. Indeed some of the gatekeeping, because not clearly defined, appeared capricious.

Some faculty and students admired the women's tenacious safeguarding of standards, but some colleagues privately thought Tonya, in particular, "does the right thing but not in the right way." They had concerns over student interpretations of what was going on. "I have watched [T] drive someone out every year." "Sometimes she is capricious in why she targets students." Students reacted harshly to Tonya's role as gatekeeper. "They [faculty] claim to be the gatekeepers for the profession. That makes me sick. It would be like a bank robber guarding a bank."

Many students and colleagues complained that Tonya's strong personality and forceful influence directed faculty decisions on student probation and second year review. "She [Tonya] is the motor that makes this dysfunctional program run." Privately faculty worried she was "too
harsh with students." Students agreed. "From [Tonya] you get lots of negative feedback berating student performance... You are told you are stupid and more stupid."

Tonya considered herself a standard bearer for diversity issues as well as academic standards. In this she and Cora were of one mind. Unfortunately overly zealous behavior safeguarding the rights of gay and lesbian students had earned her the label of "radical lesbian feminist" by colleagues in the field outside of Red Rock. Both she and Cora publicly gave "straight white males a hard time." Students repeated in interviews the assertion that there was sexual orientation bias in the school of XYZ. One student came right out and said it. "It helps to be a lesbian in this program."

This alleged pro gay and lesbian agenda was not troubling to faculty or students at Red Rock University until faculty began to criticize and target white, middle-aged males for probation or humiliation. Other groups of students such as Christians and Republicans with more conservative perspectives felt censorship. This had long bothered conservative groups in town. Some of the faculty hinted that this was simply sour grapes on the part of some students. "Now the shoe is on the other foot, and they don't like it."

Students recounted incidents where discrimination against certain groups seemed evident. In one instance Cora publicly silenced a student comment by saying "that is typical of what a white male would say." In
another, a faculty member denigrated the Mormon religion and asked a student to defend the Mormon position. These and other incidents reinforced the perception that "it was not acceptable to hold views different than those of [Tonya] and [Cora]."

Some faculty had qualms about how issues of "diversity" were interpreted by Tonya. One faculty member observed, "Diversity means a place that honors culture in a broad sense--not simply representing the faculty agenda." They agreed that some cognitive dissonance was necessary to confront some of the mainstream bias of many of their students. However, sometimes the attempt to broaden student experience seemed too hostile.

Despite these disagreements, most faculty members were not strong enough to confront the collective personalities of Tonya, Cora and Ian. This was too daunting. Faculty privately noted an institutionalizing of an anti-straight bias in their program, but they turned a blind eye. This lack of action was translated by students as collusion. Students commented, "All core faculty are responsible because I consider it just as serious to turn your head away from the abuse of your colleagues."

Tonya's view was that the problems in the program lay with faculty who did not maintain and communicate standards, were not good advisors and, in fact, did not understand the new program specifics as they should. Their current leadership was weak, and feedback to faculty
or students on performance was non-existent. She could not
acknowledge that she could also be part of the problem.

Ian

Ian was tall and handsome with dark hair, glasses, pale skin. He
dressed like an English professor in natty ties, herringbone jackets, and
loafers. He always carried a briefcase and looked as if he would be lost
without it. He was from Pennsylvania and said, like me, he had trouble
adjusting to the heat and sunshine.

Our first meeting was not very pleasant. He had been called into
the provost's office to explain the problems. The humiliation of the
incident described was evident on his face. His jaw was clinched. He sat
hunched over, face down. He looked pained and embarrassed.

Ian had been director for a few years but never felt comfortable in
the job. He had been asked to take over because Tonya had to step down.
Like most directors, he supervised staff and took care of school issues,
planning and budgets. Tonya had been a strong, decisive leader. Ian
always felt himself to be rather tenuous in his own role of authority. "I do
not feel authorized, and there is not enough institutional support." His
insecurity was heightened because of his lack of training and experience,
passive personal style and the actual weakness of his position as a
faculty director.
Ian joined the program shortly after accreditation occurred; he worked with Tonya when she was director and decided to take on that role after she agreed to mentor him. At first, the help from Tonya made them close friends. Later, however, her influence pulled him in ways he did not always feel comfortable. But, Ian always remained closely allied with her during faculty conflicts. Despite misgivings, their friendship and Tonya's forceful personality continued to influence Ian's thinking and actions as the director of the School of XYZ.

Ian was personable in a quiet way. He and his wife had just had their first child. He described himself as an involved father and felt the demands of the job put pressure on his family. There were baby pictures on his large desk. In addition, stacks of paper, books and refuse littered his desk. He had the office of a person behind in his paperwork. Ian had been working on program changes, trying to reduce demands on students during their second year. The changes were nearing completion, but there had been hold ups in the committee work. Ian was analytical and meticulous. He labored over the wording in program planning documents, procedural manuals and curriculum statements. He struggled, however, when it came to actively implementing program policy and procedure.

Ian felt that the faculty should have a say in program change and involved all faculty in committee work in order to develop components of the doctoral program. Tonya and Cora were especially active in shaping
program changes and setting standards. Others worked hard, but sometimes differences between faculty made decision making difficult. For this reason sometimes policies and procedures (e.g., like those in student evaluation) were not completed in a timely way. In addition he seemed to love to tinker with these policies. My sense was that Ian was a word crafter and spent much time determining the best way to say something. I had the impression from Ian that if only the procedure was stated well, problems could be overcome.

In our meeting in his office, Ian was hesitantly warm when we talked about our families; he was intent when he discussed program changes, but he closed like a vice grip when we talked about problems. When I broached the confrontation he had with students, his demeanor changed. His face was white, and he folded his hands in front of his chest in a gesture of distancing. His eyes got smaller, and he started to sweat. I felt badly about causing this discomfort but thought he would loosen up after we talked for a while. I was wrong.

At every point in the conversation, Ian was defensive and contradicted evidence I presented. He believed a small group of students were misguided. He stated the discontent of students was fairly recent; their grumblings were personal. "They (students) overreact because someone wasn't nice to them, didn't smile or used sharp words. These students should grow up." Yes, he agreed, procedures could have been followed better. That was not his fault. Yes, there were ambiguities in
the policy and procedure information, but that was not his fault. The committee hadn't done it.

In my field notes, I remarked about Ian's lack of accountability. Students in interviews described Ian as "well defended." That was also my experience. I could envision the scene when the student group had confronted him with their demands. Carole, my initial student contact, described it in some detail. Students pulled chairs into Ian's large office. He sat behind his massive mahogany desk, with his arms crossed as defensive as he had been with me. All sitting there would be on display because Ian's office was enclosed by a glass wall and the main hallway leading to the exit ran by it. Students and Ian were in a fish bowl. I can imagine the fear in the students as faculty members walked by and observed the scene.

In later interviews many students described going to Ian with unrelated concerns and "being shut down." One woman went to him because she was not given time with her advisor. Another male student tried to talk to him about being placed on probationary status for no apparent reason. Another group of students brought serious accusations of sexual harassment against a professor in the program. Students and faculty alike felt Ian had not dealt well with student complaints.

In desperation students wrote a letter to Ian about the negative effect of program changes on students. Ian responded in writing, point by
point. His final comment was simply that "Making the school year more humane is a high priority for faculty, since those of us currently teaching in the School have lived with its pressures for as long as 8 years, with no prospects of graduation." This sort of sarcasm made students feel like children. One older doctoral student observed that his daughter in middle school was treated with more respect by her principal that he was by the director.

In addition, students expressed concern that Ian may have broken confidentiality by talking to his colleagues about student complaints. They felt he had informed on them to Cora and Tonya because after having gone to him with concerns, faculty started to treat them differently in the program. Whether this was attribution, paranoia or fact was difficult to determine. There was no evidence to support this claim, but what mattered was that students believed this of Ian.

When students came to complain to Ian about Carl's treatment and their rights to protection, he was not receptive. "I am very perturbed." Students reported that "Ian's response to the students was abrupt." He "yelled at them." Carole explained that it had taken a great deal of courage to face him. One faculty member admitted that there was so much fear of retribution that he was surprised that students finally came forward. This professor was afraid of his colleague's wrath, too.

In our interview, Ian refused to acknowledge the depth and breadth of student concern. He seemed to dismiss student complaints in the way
Germans living close to a concentration camp may have disputed the atrocities that occurred nearby. Losing my patience a bit, and tiring of Ian's justifications, I could not resist asking Ian if he thought screaming "shut up" at a student in the middle of class was appropriate behavior. He had nothing to say. Students told me in interviews that they believed that "the faculty and director let her [Cora] beat up on us." Ian was a serious part of that pattern.

Much later in the process, Ian acknowledged that he had been unsure about how to deal with student problems. "I may not have listened." The students felt let down by his lack of leadership. One student observed that "a responsive leader would be responsible for creating a safe, quality environment for learning and be sure instructors are oriented to the task of teaching and evaluation." Ultimately, many of the student criticisms were directly related to Ian's failures as a leader.

Dr. Cora Jon

Cora was an untenured faculty member. She was up for tenure last year, but due to her assistance to students in a sexual harassment complaint, she put the review process off a year. Details were murky as to why the time line was changed.

Cora was at the center of the complaint. Her highly abrasive manner infuriated almost everyone. When first hired, she and Tonya had
many serious conflicts. Since that time, they had bonded around the belief that their standards and expectations for student achievement was similar. These standards and the belief they should maintain a strong gatekeeper role for the profession put them at odds with other faculty.

Cora described herself as "a New York Jew." The first time I heard that description was with the provost, the second time with Jason, Carole, and Ian and then often in student interviews. Everyone referred to Cora in this way. I was a bit taken aback. People said of Cora that she interrupted, talked over others, debated and seemed never to listen. In our conversation, she agreed with this and waved a journal article at me proving she was a representative of a cultural style that was documented in the research. Cora described herself as a victim of discrimination.

Cora's description of herself suggested a good, hard working victim that was badly misunderstood and discriminated against. Her responses to questions in our interview indicated that she felt she was not part of a problem. Instead, others should be called to account for how they treated her. "We talk about accepting diversity, but no one accepts my differences." "Jewish discourse style is a way of communicating. So I interrupt and use a little humor. It's not in earnest. Students just don't get what I mean. I'm too loud. I am difficult, loud and argumentative. So what? That shouldn't be held against me." She believed there was lip service to valuing diversity in the program.
Students and colleagues saw more than cultural patterning in Cora's style, however. "People excuse her behavior because she is from New York. I'm from New York too, and I don't snarl at everyone." The Jewish issue was constantly referenced. Every student interviewed, even those who were strong advocates for Cora, admitted that they had observed incidents where she interrupted and belittled students. "She humiliated students as if it were a matter of course. Certain students seemed to be most often the brunt of her New York Style."

In the interview transcripts, there were over one hundred different comments by a variety of students describing harassment, humiliation and sheer rudeness from Cora. A number of students described a recent incident where she was "screaming at student eating in her class." "After one of Cora's incidents where she humiliates a student there is a full room freeze." "She almost drove me out of the program. I have a 4.0 and finished my thesis. Humiliation is a ritual thing." "The first time she yelled at me I felt terror. I went home and threw up." "She treats me like a piece of garbage. You have to work hard to ask a simple question."

Cora told students in the program that "the caring was in the confrontation." One student told me that made sense to him, but "the constant criticism over large things and small, real things and false, along with unpredictable mood swings, humiliation in front of your peers, and threats of dismissal led me to feel always afraid and off balance, unable to gain perspective. It eroded my self-confidence until I
was totally demoralized and ready to leave the program. This is not caring."

Cora also showed a lack of respect for students in her advising. One student was told, after waiting an hour for a scheduled appointment, "You've got ten minutes--talk fast." Having missed three previous appointments with another student, she was equally abrupt and dismissive. Another student was berated in the hall for a conversation he was having with fellow students. This polemic took up all of the student advising appointment time. He was forced to reschedule. To another student asking for help she replied, "Don't ask me to do more. I don't get paid enough."

Cora responded defensively to the charge she humiliated and berated students. "There is a culture here where students should not be criticized. One is not supported for giving critical feedback. There is a pervasive niceness. " Other faculty, except Tonya, were remiss in giving students candid feedback. "If other people supported critical feedback and demanded higher standards students would feel less uncertain." She had reasons for yelling at the woman eating the carrot in her course, or telling the student to shut up, or making belittling comments about straight white males in a public forum. Anyway, she was working on being more sensitive. She said, "Change took time."

Ian agreed that Cora had improved over the last year and was making an effort. Her class evaluations were not bad. In fact, I was
shocked when I reviewed Cora's student evaluations. Students had not
criticized faculty with the same vehement testimony as in my interviews.
When questioned, students explained that it was too risky to give honest
feedback, especially when the stakes were so high and the hope of
change minimal. "There is plenty of room to retaliate," Students knew
that evaluations went to Ian and Cora. Both were dismissive of student
feedback. Cora said openly about student evaluations, "Some people love
me; some people hate me. I've stopped taking evaluations seriously."

Students, over time, observed Cora's behavior and linked it to
stories they had heard from previous students regarding faculty
drumming students out of the program each year. Even other faculty
within and outside of the School of XYZ corroborated these stories. "Its
pointed out that each year [Cora] or [Tonya] seem to pick on one or two
students in class."

Students had been warned about this behavior prior to entering
the program by practitioners in the field. Most students initially
discounted the information. However, the faculty's behavior
corroborated the stories. After being enrolled awhile, students believed
this could happen to anyone. "I was stunned. I knew it could happen to
me. There were no safeguard. I had never seen a professor treat anyone
like that." "There is a tradition of selecting someone, and they make your
life hell."
On the other hand, Cora also had a few students she was close to. Students envied the relationship Cora had with certain students. Often these students in interviews self-identified. They felt lucky to work with such a brilliant woman. "Cora is rigorous and believes in challenging people to exercise intellectual rigor. People are afraid because she is a master at what she does." But many students admitted some guilt about being singled out for positive attention when others were belittled and victimized. Even her most ardent supporters knew she behaved badly. "If I could change one thing it would be for faculty to hide their personal feelings about students."

Cora's behavior towards Carl made students believe he had been targeted. The writing was on the wall. "He was not smart enough to keep his opinions to himself." Stories about students being singled out as well as evidence from observations, supported student belief that Carl was Cora's victim when he was not admitted to the doctoral program. After all, he had signed a letter complaining about her behavior. Other students who had signed the letter of complaint felt at risk.

I found, however, that Cora did not retaliate against Carl. Ironically, no one had told Cora about the student complaint. This was typical of the many lapses in leadership under Ian's directorship. In addition, Cora did not have the power to decide who would be admitted to the doctoral program. All of the faculty, over a period of time, had concerns about Carl. The decision had been made long ago based on
substantive evidence that Carl was not doctoral material. Unfortunately, no one had discussed the problems with him or put any documentation in his file.

When I found this out I asked Cora what she believed I was investigating. She thought I was investigating a complaint by faculty at the Urban Center that she had instigated a sexual harassment complaint about a colleague. There was a rumor that Cora had a conflict against Jerry and Peter and had galvanized students against them out of spite. Cora explained that students had come to her with evidence of Jerry’s misconduct. She was very concerned about the allegations of sexual misconduct from a faculty member in her department and, when Ian had not acted on the complaint, Cora felt she should provide assistance. "Students came to complain to [Ian]. They got no response. I helped the students. [Jerry] was out of line. Now Jerry has rallied students against me." Tensions between faculty had been escalating like this for some time.

The other view of this issue was equally one sided. Faculty from the Urban Center thought Cora’s involvement with the sexual harassment complaint was an act of revenge stemming from an earlier conflict over the running of the Urban Center. Cora and Peter, director of the Urban Center, often exchanged heated words in meetings. In one particular instance, Cora interrupted one too many times, causing Jerry to make some very snide remarks. Peter and Cora got into a verbal
argument as well, and Cora left the room yelling, "You'll be sorry you
crossed me." Later she threatened "to get the Urban Center shut down."
Shortly after, the harassment complaint was lodged.

Cora believed Peter and Jerry were complaining about her to the
provost and personnel committee. Her assessment was correct. Cora was
concerned because her fourth year review was to take place soon. She
was told by Ian, "Your colleagues want to get rid of you." Tenure looked
like a vanishing possibility.

After talking with Cora and later the Urban Center faculty, I noted
in my field notes that a serious pattern was developing. Faculty
dismissed student concerns that suggested misdeeds by their constituent
group. They used students concerns to undermine opponents when
those concerns substantiated their constituent group position. Faculty
rarely investigated the validity of any student or faculty complaint. This
self-serving tunnel vision was evident in the other two conflicts at Red
Rock as they became more infractible.

The open hostility between Cora and Urban Center faculty was
typical of the threat and counterthreat behavior between faculty in the
School of XYZ. As defenses between faculty cabals were raised, student
rights and concerns created a source of information for retribution. One
faculty member finally realized that "People are not hearing what
students are saying. We can't get beyond blame." Student complaints
helped to galvanize faculty against each other, as students met with individual faculty to talk about the problems they had with other faculty.

The Urban Center Advocates

Jerry

I had heard many stories, both positive and negative, about Jerry and I was anxious to meet him. Jerry was tall and thin, with a small, scraggly mustache and beard surrounding his recessive chin. He wore glasses and was unremarkable looking except for his long pony tail of graying brown hair tucked into the back of his shirt. Jerry tried to make the interview casual. His comments were cynical, terse and candid. He did not believe he would be long at Red Rock so there was little point in being politically correct.

Jerry had been at the university for quite awhile and was considered an expert in his particular area. Working at the Urban Center was better than being on campus, he said. He liked his colleagues and felt they did meaningful work. With colleagues from the main campus, he had a poor relationship. Jerry believed Cora and Tonya had agitated students against him in response to disagreements over running the Urban Center. He believed the women to be dysfunctional and controlling, abusive to students and staff; they acted
out their own agenda, disregarding policy and procedure. Other faculty were too weak to counteract them.

Jerry's interview was short. He said he had been accused of sexual harassment. He believed his comments were never anything more than joking or stories used for shock value to spur discussion. Faculty from the campus had distorted information to punish him for his outspoken questioning of their behavior. Jerry knew that scapegoating one faculty member when times got tense was a typical behavior for this group. He was on the docket for this year, and there was little he could do about it.

Students had a very different view of Jerry's behavior. Even his strongest advocates thought his behavior outlandish. A few examples of what students thought inappropriate included telling a larger woman that she should try to be more sexually attractive, using inappropriate touching and physical closeness with younger, pretty students, and farting and belching repeatedly in class.

In one class Jerry told a story of "the penis strength of Taoist monks" to demonstrate some point, and then asked a female Asian American student to corroborate that Asian male erections were of high quality. The student was mortified. In another incident, Jerry encountered the group of students just as they got on the elevator to meet with the president over program complaints. They had all dressed up and looked quite professional. According to witnesses, Jerry "looked
one of the female students up and down in a rather lascivious way” and said, “doesn't she clean up nice.”

Students agreed that acceptance of Jerry’s behavior was simply part of being in the program. Many believed that "Jerry will be Jerry." That’s the culture of the school. You have to get used to talk about "fucking." Jerry finally got in terribly hot water when he called a student "a bitch." She complained to Cora who helped students bring complaints forward to Ian and to the provost. Jerry had been called in for "a talking to." Jerry’s response was, "I'm sorry I got caught."

The complaint of sexual harassment, led by Cora, surprised Jerry’s colleagues at the Urban Center. Despite repeated student complaints to Peter, the director of the Urban Center, alleged misconduct was not investigated. Jerry’s colleagues were part of the culture that dismissed his erratic inappropriate behavior. In addition, Jerry’s colleagues immediately assumed that complaints were a result of Cora’s agitating. They immediately went to Jerry's defense in light of the threat from colleagues from Campus.

Peter

Peter was a man of medium build and sandy brown hair. The wiry hair at his temples, eyebrow, and mustache were lighter and flecked with gray. His role was administrator of the Urban Center. Peter came out of
retirement from a career as an administrator and faculty member at a larger university to take this post. His management experience was greater than most directors at Red Rock. I watched Peter in a number of meetings; his manner suggested a person who wanted to pursue his own interests, but tried to maintain some sense of civility.

Most students described Peter as one of the better advisors. He had a sympathetic ear, and although Campus staff thought his follow through a bit slovenly, Peter developed trusting relationships with many students. For this reason, he heard more of the horror stories about Cora and Tonya than many of the other staff. Peter acknowledged that his own perception of colleagues was shaped by student stories shared in the sanctity of his office. Because of the confidentiality of what students told him, and because there was a real danger to students from certain faculty if they heard students had related these stories, Peter felt he had no way to corroborate or address problems he heard. He felt he was carrying a poisonous load. Interactions with colleagues brought back negative feelings from student stories.

Peter's feelings about the campus faculty were based on concern about how they treated students, their apparent desire to threaten the Urban Center and the lack of leadership and student advocacy in the Campus director's role. Campus faculty felt equal hostility towards Peter, but for sightly different reasons. First, they felt he did a terrible job documenting student problems. This was evident in the lack of
documentation in Carl's file leading to this entire incident. Second, they felt he was not dealing with Jerry's behavior toward students. Third, they also heard stories about his patronizing, somewhat sexist behavior from female students. All of their concerns were true.

In response, Peter admitted that he tended "to be a bleeding heart with less ability in the gatekeeper role than some of the faculty." He believed one should err on the side of letting students progress in the program. For this reason, some of Carl's transgressions had not been fully documented. In addition, Peter was always uncertain if Carl had in fact done something wrong or if his colleagues were "acting out their incredible need for power." Because student evaluation meetings were dominated by those with more stringent expectations, Peter felt that in evaluations students were left without an advocate. Given the influence Tonya had on Ian, Peter felt there was no depersonalized way to determine if Carl was victim or actually not a good doctoral candidate.

Peter explained that often the "rules became too interpretive." "Some of the female staff overreacted to a few male advisees. Sometimes this process felt vengeful. Some of the male staff were searching for reasons as to why this was happening. The faculty is too influenced by a vehement argument."

Peter should have investigated and sanctioned Jerry for his behavior toward female students. Despite the fact that Peter was a concerned listener, he was not as receptive to students who complained
about the Urban Center faculty. His tireless defense of Jerry, refusal to investigate student claims of misconduct and his assumptions regarding Cora's role in student complaint indicated his tunnel vision. Like Ian, Peter had made up his mind what was right and wrong. To Peter's credit, he later admitted feeling like he had missed too much and allowed students to suffer because of his myopia.

After these interviews, a second important pattern emerged. The faculty for years had heard negative stories about each other from colleagues and students. They had no constructive ways to deal with these stories. Faculty could not discuss student problems for fear of student victimization. In addition, students asked for confidentiality in their discussions with advisors, limiting faculty's ability to address concerns with colleagues or the director, who was considered "in league" with one significant group.

Because of this, information held became toxic. Animosity and paranoia had been building for years. "We were walking around carrying toxic stories, unable to talk about what we had heard because of issues of confidentiality and fear that students could be retaliated against."

**The Sideline Group: Mary, Thomas, and Kay**

The third group of faculty was significant in its impotence. Unfortunately, all three of these faculty had insight into what was
happening; they did not address it. They did nothing and in doing nothing colluded with other faculty victimizing students.

Mary was a new faculty member and without tenure. Her voice was soft; her manner open. Mainly, she explained, she was confused. For the last six months, she stayed out of the fray and told me she had little to say about what was going on. She did not entirely understand what had happened with Carl because it was before she was hired. She knew everyone worked hard, but roles were a bit ambiguous and some faculty were controlling. Mary felt that a lot of students seemed disturbed. Quite honestly she did not know why, but there was an air or indirectness and fear in everyone. Few issues were really dealt with openly. This was a concern.

Thomas had been at the University for quite a while but seemed sort of like a shadow figure. He was seldom mentioned and, in fact, I did not get to meet him until intervention occurred. He had been on sabbatical over the summer and returned after I started the investigation.

Instead of a face to face interview, he telephoned. Thomas had been described by students as "a bystander." He was a peacemaker and liked to stay out of the fray. He had an aversion to conflict and, according to colleagues, too often he liked to step in and "make things better." One student said of him," I have always found him to be nice, in and out of the classroom. I think he is genuinely a nice and fair
individual; his main problem is a lack of courage in standing up against
the abuse of his colleagues. He has been made aware of abuses being
inflicted on some of his advisees." Students were angry that faculty did
not advocate for them against perceived capricious and self-interested
punishment.

Thomas was very measured on the telephone. He agreed that the
case of Carl had been badly handled. Documentation was poor. Students
had not been given clear feedback. He explained that faculty were
uncertain when and how to deal with student complaints that had been
delivered privately. "Were we supposed to act, confront the student or
the faculty member or were we supposed to listen?" Most faculty had
been trained to take confidentiality seriously.

Another concern was at the heart of this matter. Sometimes
information confided to advisors about faculty misconduct or student
concerns was "leaked" during the second year review or when faculty was
considering placing students on probation. Too often this information
resulted in student punishment. Students learned that if you confided
in faculty it often hurt you. "We receive dual messages." Advisors say
"you can trust me then . . . bang . . . they inform on you." One example of
this was especially powerful for students.

Glen, one of Thomas' advisees, related a story that substantiated
student concerns. More than ten doctoral students talked about this
incident as critical in the conclusions they drew about faculty misuse of
power. I spoke with Glen. His manner was thoughtful and articulate. Unlike Carl, Glen hesitated to tell me what had happened. He attempted to be balanced and factual in recounting details rather than attributing blame. It had taken him a long time to decide to come forward to meet with me.

Glen was in his late thirties. He told me he had two children and had moved his family here from the east coast so he could complete the doctoral program. He received his master's degree and worked as a professional in the field for fifteen years. During that time he had published, and the large government agency for which he worked sent him all over the world to speak and train. Glen had substantive experience and was well thought of by the students in his program.

Glen was a member of a traditional religious group and had strong ties to his faith, although students suggested he was not overly dogmatic about his beliefs. Issues of sexual preference were sometimes difficult for Glen. He acknowledged this as a problem and endeavored to broaden his thinking. Glen went to Thomas for help. They talked it over, and later Thomas mentioned it to other faculty. At the urgings of Tonya and Cora, Glen was placed on probation and asked to do extra discernment about this problem. Glen felt he was being punished for articulating his struggle with bias.

Thomas did not think his casual mention of his conversation with Glen would go this far. He felt badly about the trouble he had caused.
When discussing probation with Glen, Thomas discounted the seriousness and suggested that certain faculty were over-reacting. Despite holding down a job, having a family and taking a full course load, Glen was asked to take additional course work and do additional research on the subject. Glen worked hard to get off of probation. It was never enough. Glen received significant harassment in courses and during advising sessions. He was on probation until his last year in the program.

Glen told of the damage that had been done to him. "Two faculty put me on probationary status because my life style is different than theirs. I tried to look at my own behavior and assess where I have been inappropriate. I have tried to ensure my own views of different groups are fair and humane. However, regardless of my efforts and acknowledgment, the abuse continued. No one spoke up for me. In this program there is active mutilation of students. You are dirt. Something to dangle over the fire."

Thomas had quiet doubts about how some students were treated, and how program policy was bent to further the agenda of certain faculty. Some people were too nice and some too harsh. It was a matter of standards. This was key to faculty problems. Thomas thought faculty had been complicit in following the political agenda of some faculty members which punished students.
As with Peter, Thomas believed the faculty problems lay in their inability to distinguish between secrecy and confidentiality in their role. This experience kept people filled with information about each of their colleagues. As suggested previously, "this information from students and colleagues about each other poisoned them all. No one could let it out. It tainted their interactions. It was toxic."

Kay was the only person of color on the faculty in the School of XYZ. She was a small, round woman of Hispanic descent. Her accent made it difficult to understand her at times. Her soft voice made me lean in to listen to each word she said. Her hair was long and straight, and her smile large. She dressed casually each time I saw her. She loved to make pottery, and many times we played phone tag because she had left a bit early from her office to get home to the neighboring town and her valued studio. Kay was frequently out of the office.

Kay had a calm warmth about her that suggested she cared. Her office was full of pottery and furniture. I hardly noticed a desk, but it was tucked off in the corner as if paper work was a low priority. She had a couch, a rocking chair and another, more isolated easy chair. She said she could tell a lot about a person when they picked a place to sit in her space. The feeling of talking in a living room dominated the place.

The stories I heard about Kay varied. The only negative comments from students included that she was hard to reach and did not always follow through with students. Her colleagues felt she was not working as
hard as everyone else, her standards were low, and she was a very poor advisor. Kay and Tonya had their share of squabbles, but generally Kay elected to stay out of it. She often encouraged students to deal with their problems openly with faculty. This happened to students serving on committees with faculty. However, Kay seldom took her own advice. She remained outside of the overt conflicts, although she privately thought it would be cathartic to have the faculty finally "get into it." Students wondered why she didn't do something about the apparent wrongs perpetrated on them by a dysfunctional system and certain faculty. Kay did not see that as her role.

I asked Kay what were the main concerns students held at this point. She was able to outline them fairly accurately. She identified the behavior of certain faculty, the difficulty of the program, the lack of connection between faculty and students and the fact they had no where to go with their problems. When asked what percentage of the students had concerns she thought around 25%. She asked me directly (the only faculty to do so) if she was right. I told her it was closer to 85%; she was shocked and dismayed. All of the faculty and administration believed only a small group of students were upset. They were clearly out of touch.

Kay mentioned that the tenor of meetings had worsened within the last four months. This insight was corroborated by student reps who attended meetings. Relationships between the faculty had deteriorated.
"More and more sniping comments were made. People were even beginning to have open fights." There had been a shouting match between Cora, Jerry and Peter. There had been disagreement between Tonya and Ian, something that seldom was observed. Kay and Tonya had their usual problems, but conflict seemed more public.

She said of meetings that "everything is brought up as accusatory. Although not directly stated, there was a tone of blaming." Kay indicated that "a certain camp" was always trying to say others weren't carrying their weight and had low standards for students. In response, other faculty intimated that "certain a camp" was too abusive and controlling.

An elected student representative attending faculty meetings called this "negative synchronicity." He knew they "hated each other." Other faculty described an escalation of incidents characterized by "vicarious shaming creating a history of wounds. Scar tissue is strong." Finally they had to admit the situation had escalated out of control. "We feel under siege. We distrust what we are all about."

**Summary**

The two conflicts investigated in Toxic Waste developed over a number of years and had close connection to each other. Key influences included the struggle of faculty to determine and maintain standards and a gatekeeper role for the profession. The program began with one leader
defining and maintaining those parameters, but as the program grew and changed, different visions of the school's identity emerged. The unusually high expectations of the past translated itself into rigorous academic and practicum experience. However, the faculty and students were not realistically able to meet those expectations. Even the accrediting bodies for the profession indicated the program was too difficult and complicated.

Hostilities over the different standards, exacerbated by the inability of the faculty to talk about these differences created divisions. These divisions worked themselves out on the basis of personality, values and site. "They increased suspicion between groups."

In addition, strong feelings and different interpretations of "diversity" fueled conflict. Two faculty favored certain groups in the program, particularly lesbian women and gay men. Ethnicity was not really a factor in favoritism, although a number of students from Hispanic, Asian and African American groups felt discriminated against. Other groups, particularly white males and conservative Christian or political groups, were targeted for punitive action.

Targeting students for punishment fell under the guise of maintaining standards, giving constructive feedback and maintaining the gatekeeper role for the profession according to certain faculty. However, documentation and justification for placing a student on probation appeared capricious. A student in the favored group may be allowed to
muddle through, while a student from the unfavored group was given no leeway. Due process and "rule of law" were non existent.

Students came to their advisors complaining of this treatment. Because there were few effective vehicles for bringing complaints into the open, students felt alone and unprotected. As they talked to certain faculty, discrimination became more evident. Faculty concerns grew. However, faculty also were censored and did not have ways to talk candidly about this problem. The faculty silence became part of the problem. When they did share student concerns, there was evidence that those students then became targets. Faculty, unclear as to what to do with information and trained to keep information confidential, held everything in until it became "toxic."

Students added to the problem of secrecy. They were not honest in faculty evaluations. They were so fearful of being targeted that they did not often allow faculty to advocate for them. They were not clear about their concerns. They were too cowardly to follow up on the complaint process that opened the door to this investigation.

Toxic stories about colleagues had a significant effect on the behavior of the faculty group. They focused on the dysfunction of others and attributed negative intent. They were not able to see problems of their own. Obviously the tension between Cora and Jerry was a perfect example. Peter could not acknowledge that Jerry's behavior was uncontrollable, because he could only see that Cora threatened The
Urban Center. Collective tunnel vision limited what could be done. Instead of acknowledging the real problem, faculty fit the problem to their perception.

In the meantime, stories from each generation of students about misuse of power, discrimination, faculty divisiveness and ineffectiveness were spreading. They were even told to professional groups at other Universities. Most students upon entering the program had heard some of these stories. However, they suspended judgment until they observed or experienced those behaviors themselves.

Because the situation had built up over years as the program struggled to deal with excessive changes and financial pressures, more and more errant behavior on the part of faculty was evident. Harassment, sexually inappropriate behaviors, targeting of students, misuse of power, lack of assistance to students, hostility between staff occurred with more frequency and intensity.

Students had no where to take complaints. Students could not trust their advisors, teachers or administration. They were dubious about the University administration because it had appeared to fail them in the past, and it had allowed the current travesties to continue. Students felt their only hope was to go to the new president, who had not yet been tainted.

There was continued refusal to admit wrong on anyone's part. Blaming each other was the response. Most faculty refused to believe
students felt humiliated, belittled and that they were afraid. Faculty
circled the wagons. However, the misgivings of some of the faculty after
years of observed abuse created tension. Unfortunately, each faculty
member only saw that others had created the problem. There was no
acknowledgment that all were actively involved. For this reason, the
director was unable to deal with student concerns. Students went higher
in the organization. The conflict erupted full force.

Postscript: Comments After the Interviews

I had not fully realized the impact of this experience on students
until after the interviews. I stayed on at Red Rock to work on the
interventions for a number of weeks. Students came to me describing
nightmares. In a letter one student described what he had gone through
that helped me better understand the trauma.

Since my interview I felt dazed like I had been reduced to
babbling. Since that time I have been anxious, nervous,
depressed and sleepless. When I do sleep I have nightmares.
By chance I talked with two other students who had been to
see you. They are suffering the same symptoms, kind of a
mini-PTSD. The depth of our stress and our reaction to
talking to you surprised us, and I think reinforced just how
damaging our experiences have been. For myself, although
my experience with the program is over, I've decided it is like
coming to the end of chemotherapy but still having the
effects of the treatment linger. It's going to take a long time
to feel better again.
This passage in my field notes reminded me of how much power we have in education. As faculty and administration, we must be mindful and accountable for our actions. In all of these conflicts, students suffered. Despite the dedication of most professors in their role as teachers, student concerns became less important than interpersonal conflicts.

Dysfunctional conflict diverts us from our purpose. It consumes us. As we become immersed in it, we forget others. There is a narcissism in people obsessed by their conflict. The terribly sad thing is that everyone is a victim in this situation, but in education often the most serious victim is our students. Seldom, in the interviews did faculty or administration talk compassionately about students or indicate concern for the quality of their learning experience, unless it served their purpose in attacking opponents. I've been a teacher for over twenty years. I was appalled. Students are in our care. How could we forget?
Chapter 8
Analysis of Findings

Introduction

Conflict is part of life. As organizations empower people to make and enact decisions together, they are more likely to experience conflict. Conflict can be a positive experience. It can lead to new thinking and teach successful problem solving behavior. However, as the research suggests, conflicts are most frequently negative experiences (Tjosvold, 1991). When protracted conflict develops in work groups, there are serious ramifications for the organization.

The purpose of this study was to explore factors and identify patterns leading to the development of severe, protracted conflict within work groups at an institution of higher education. In analyzing three cases, a number of patterns emerged. This chapter summarizes these patterns and proposes a phase model of conflict development. It also provides a description for the proposed phase of autistic conflict and outlines contextual factors influencing conflict development.

To determine patterns and identify factors that contributed to conflict development in these three cases, I reviewed institutional reports, field notes, interview transcriptions, affinity groupings and process maps created during each consultation.
From these data it was found that common patterns and contextual influences existed in all three cases at Red Rock University. First, each of these three cases developed in phases which appeared to have common characteristics. In many ways, these conflicts corroborate previous research supporting the episodic development of conflict.

Second, conflict in these groups escalated to a similar level of dysfunction, which I have termed autistic conflict because of the parallels between the behavior and perspectives of disputants in the cases and those evident in the state of autism.

Third, institutional influences affected the conflict escalation in all three cases. The patterns of this influence fall into the specific areas:

1. Administrative, leadership and systemic elements;
2. Faculty standing and position; and

Because the study is based on cases from a single university these patterns of influence will be considered contextual findings, but such findings may have broader application, particularly in conflicts originating within other institutions of higher education.

Research Questions and Findings

Findings from this study are discussed below in the context of the research questions that guided this inquiry. The first question asks the
following: How and why does protracted conflict develop and escalate in work groups? Can patterns be observed within and across groups in conflict development?

**Conflict Phases**

Individuals, groups and institutions have unique ways of acting in conflict situations (Folger et al., 1997). However, all of the cases in this study supported existing research stating conflicts that escalate have common developmental phases (Newell, 1991). Each of the three cases documented in this study moved through a latent phase, a recognition and power building phase, a conflict testing phase, an escalation phase and, finally, an autistic conflict phase. The duration of each phase varied in each case; however, each group experienced elements of each phase.

Process maps describing the escalation of conflict were created during the facilitation of each case before intervention. Each map depicted behaviors as they fell into the various phases of conflict. The map was used to illustrate my interpretation of events and to triangulate conflict development phases with disputant groups.

The process maps presented in this study are not attempts to quantify conflict data in any way, despite their linear appearance. Given the nature of this research, it was not possible nor even preferable to quantitatively measure people's feelings, their impressions of the
intensity of conflict events, or even the accuracy of details related. The maps simply indicate my interpretation of each disputant group's impression of time, intensity, events, reactions, triggers, and influences. A generalized process map outlining characteristics of each phase is shown in Figure 8.1. Process maps for the phases in each case are also shown in Figures 8.2, 8.3, and 8.4.

**Five Phases of Conflict Escalation**

*Phase 1: Latent*

At first conflict was underground in all three cases at Red Rock. This was evidence of a latent stage. Although no conflict was overt, there was a growing feeling among participants that something was wrong. The intensity of the differences was low. Work continued at normal levels. People felt a bit disconcerted and tried to figure out what was wrong, but the feeling was more of annoyance than of conflict.

For example, in the first case, Katherine and Penny felt irked when they had to work together because of their style differences. The subsequent shift in power within the School of D created more discomfort. Overt confrontation between the two women did not occur for at least three months after the new school had formed, despite their general discomfort with each other.
Figure 8.1: Synthesis of Findings

Institutional Influences

Laissez faire management style
Power vacuum
Desire to suppress conflict
Trained incapacity within leadership
Treating trigger events instead of root causes
Loss of credibility within the organization
Administrative controls attempt to create change but catalyze threat & counterthreats

Public - Within the larger institution

Phase 1: Latent
Phase 2: Recognition & Power Building
Phase 3: Testing
Phase 4: Escalation
Phase 5: Autistic Conflict

Private - Within the constituency group

Threat not yet apparent
Threat recognized - Groups begins to form
Threat & counterthreat behaviors begin
Group reinforces paranoid belief
Group becoming insular
Limited behavioral repertoires reinforced
Attribution
Social categorization
Group differentiation
Attribution
Face saving
Threat & counterthreat

Constituency Group Influences

Illness
Sadness
Anger
Loss of perspective at its height
Increased conflict activity
Group work stops; Constant conflict in all interaction resulting in stalemate

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Figure 8.2
Case 1: Tag Team Wrestlers
Group Process Map

Phase 1: Latent
1a: Style Differences.
1b: K made Interim Director.
1c: K takes unilateral action with regard to budget.
1d: K confronts J privately over work performance.

Phase 2: Recognition & Power Building
2a: K makes unpopular budget decisions.
2b: P reacts to K’s budget.
2c: P writes memo of complaint - beginning of memo campaign.
2d: K exerts more control over meetings, agendas & minutes.
2e: P reacts to K’s control of meetings, agendas & minutes.
2f: P complains to Provost.

Phase 3: Testing
3a: K controls meetings & minutes; P reacts with memo.
3b: K attempts to be appointed permanent Director - P/J oppose.
3c: K appointed interim for an additional year. P/J oppose.
3d: K complains about J’s work. P defends J.
3e: P attacks K in meetings over accuracy of meeting minutes.
3f: T attacks P & defends K.
3g: P threatens to write a governance document.

Phase 4: Escalation
4a: K continues to control meetings, minutes & agendas, as well as budget. Makes increasingly unilateral decisions - P reacts.
4b: K tries to take the vote away from J in faculty meetings - quotes policy. Everyone reacts. P especially goes on the offensive & attacks K. J leaves the meeting in tears.
4c: P increases memo writing campaign. Sends copies all over campus.
4d: K threatens to share P’s crazy memos with new staff.
4e: P begins work on a governance document to circumvent K’s power.
4f: There is increasing face saving behaviors in meetings - low level attacks occur often. K begins to bring documentation to justify actions.
4g: K again attempts to get Director position - tries to influence search process.
4h: J & P lobbies group to prevent K from being appointed Director.

Phase 5: Autistic Conflict
5a: K tries to weaken J’s role on advisory committee.
5b: P attacks K in meetings over every issue; K is defensive in response.
5c: T & P have open conflict - all others are silent.
5d: P/K have problems over faculty appraisal.
5e: Faculty can’t agree to Director search process - Internal conflicts are too great.
5f: K tries again for Directorship - P/J react - T reacts to them.
5g: P tries to introduce governance document.
5h: All meetings deteriorate into conflict events over all issues large & small. Conflict ends in stalemate (e.g., selecting a consultant for a four hour meeting took two weeks). Meetings are suspended. Memos between P & K with CC to Provost continue.
Figure 8.2 Case 1: Tag Team Wrestlers

Institutional Influences

Dean of HEE+X keeps order
School of D established - Power ambiguity
Autonomy for new school creates leadership ambiguity
Director search fails

Public - Within the Institution

Provost reappoints K as Interim Director
P/K meet w/ Provost over J's vote - He says "Your group should decide."

Provost discoursages governance document
P complains to colleagues outside the group about K including Dean of HEE+X

K doesn't have tenure
P lobbies to be on Personnel Committee

P & K complain about each other publicly
K goes to faculty outside university

Provost refuses new school initiative
Provost says no to K as Director - She applies anyway
School of D losing credibility

Private - Within the Constituency Group

P & J friends
P & S friends
Style differences
Cabals building
K/P lobby faculty to join group
S joins P, M secretly joins K
Cabals meet & gossip
P spreads rumors re: P
Power struggle but K attempting power move
New faculty increasingly afraid & disenfranchized
M increasingly concerned about P & K
Attrition & paranoia developing

Overt conflict between J/S & K
Hostility in & out of meetings
Overt conflict between T & P
New faculty lobbed - They continue to withdraw

Conflict heightened
Faculty start using students against each other

Constituency Group Influences

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**Figure 8.3**

**Case 2: Splinters**

**Group Process Map**

**Phase 1: Latent**

1a: Extended discrimination against women and dismissal of women's issues.

1b: D/D conflict over dating students - interpersonal differences.

1c: Women's issues brought to administration - some changed, but slow in coming.

1d: Women frustrated over Dean of HEE+X's back room style - feel disenfranchised.

1e: More dissonance with Dean and Barons in HEE+X.

**Phase 2: Recognition & Power Building**

2a: Disapproval over David and others dating students.

2b: Disapproval over gender issues resulting in lawsuit.

2c: Complaint Re: David's and other males teaching style.

2d: Anger over David's use of radical speakers for feminism and his desire to be on women's studies committee.

2e: Women confront males through support of lawsuit - University settles and women are elated.

**Phase 3: Testing**

3a: Zelda beginning to disagree with Dean in HEX meetings - growing dissonance.

3b: David lobbies Dean to be on women's studies committee - women react.

3c: Zelda evaluates David and surfaces problems.

3d: David and Zelda explode and Zelda names women who have complained.

3e: Barons overtly hostile to Zelda and back David.

**Phase 4: Escalation**

4a: David confronts women including those without tenure.

4b: Women react and complain to Provost, Dean and personnel committee.

4c: David complains to Dean, Provost and personnel committee.

4d: David considers lawsuit.

4e: Zelda and Dean conflict.

4f: Zelda and Barons conflict in meetings.

4g: Zelda and Dana conflict.

4h: David taken off women's studies committee.

4i: Women and Zelda conflict.

**Phase 5: Autistic Conflict**

5a: David petitions to get back on women's studies committee. Dean agrees.

5b: Rose and Zelda have confrontation.

5c: Zelda and Dean have confrontation.

5d: Dana and Zelda have confrontation.

5e: Dean lobbies personnel committee to ask Zelda to step down.

5f: Sara / Bennett ask Zelda to step down.

5g: Zelda reacts negatively and gets lawyer.

5h: Zelda and Provost form alliance.

5i: Dean and Provost have confrontation.

5j: Continued Baron / Women conflict.

5k: Zelda replaced as chair.
Young women hired by powerful male group "barons" influence power, which includes President & Provost. Concern over dating students, high expectations for women to be "stars". Barons feeling attacked by new female president. Women gaining ground but baron's still in power. Provost remains "out". Dean upset with Zelda. Women taking on more leadership roles. Barons aware of gender concerns. Provo's committee forum to surface issues. Public - Within the Institution.


Institutional Influences

Private - Within the Constituency Group


Constituency Group Influences

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Figure 8.4
Case 3: Toxic Waste
Group Process Map

Phase 1: Latent
1a: Strong standards enforced.
1b: Tonya steps down as Director.
1c: Ian becomes Director.
1d: Complaints from students surface.
1e: Conflicts between T & C.

Phase 2: Recognition & Power Building
2a: Gatekeeper & standards issues cause internal differences; T/C/I win out.
2b: Conflicts between faculty at campus & urban site rumbling.
2c: Tonya sets strict standards with I/C support - students seen as victims.
2d: Cora openly aggressive toward students.
2e: Students complain to Ian - complaints not addressed.

Phase 3: Testing
3a: Cora openly harassing students.
3b: Faculty capriciousness in applying standards.
3c: Faculty skirmishes in staff meetings between urban center & campus faculty.
3d: Faculty conflicts over interpretation & enactment of the diversity policy - incident with Glen.
3e: Students speak out to Director over numerous concerns - no action taken.
3f: Repeated sexual harassment against students.

Phase 4: Escalation
4a: Serious, overt conflicts between Cora & P/J over Urban Center.
4b: Differences between T/Sandy.
4c: Sexual harassment complaints against J escalate.
4d: Student harassment by Cora & T continues & escalates.
4e: Letter of complaints against Cora by group of students.
4f: Students leader denied admission to doctoral program - no documentation as to why.
4g: Repeated student/faculty conflict.
4h: Student letter.
4i: Repeated faculty/faculty conflict.

Phase 5: Autistic Conflict
5a: Continued harassment.
5b: Continued conflicts between faculty & students.
5c: Lack of understanding of impact of behavior.
5d: Increased isolation.
5e: Lack of acknowledgment of behavior.
5f: Faculty only listening to students who support their story.
5g: Illness/lawsuits.
5h: Many students drop program.
Figure 8.4 Case 3: Toxic Waste

Institutional Influences

New school formed
T steps down as Director due to student lawsuit
Ian becomes Director
Change in school causes tension
Conflict suppressed
Students complain to Ian - Complaints not addressed
Conflicts are public knowledge
Provost disciplines J - Students uninformed; J's behavior continues
Constant faculty reactivity
Constant student complaint
Lawsuits pending
School loses credibility
Additional student concerns unearthed

Public - Within the Institution

Complaints by students against faculty to faculty
Faculty groups isolate themselves
Faculty concerns over victimization of students by their opponents

Private - Within the Constituency Group

Rumors regarding favoritism & student harassment begin
Ian & T allied
Conflicts between T & C resolved
Group strong gatekeeper role
Conflicts between C/T & J/P grow

Stories from the past
Three student groups form and vilify opponents
Faculty groups vilify opponents
Some students ally with faculty groups to vilify opponents
Groups re-enforce paranoia
Some students withdraw
Paranoia: Fear
Increased faculty isolation
Increased threat
Increased denial
Paranoia
Counterthreat
Increased threat
Increased denial
Strong group conflicts

Constituency Group Influences

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In the second study, latent conflict for the women in HEE&X was longer standing. It involved a number of broad cultural issues for female faculty members at Red Rock. Strong feelings of uneasiness expressed by female faculty was attributed to the male dominated culture and the continued dismissal of feminist issues within the University. The majority of the women interviewed indicated their concerns with the University were, at first, underground because female faculty were untenured.

In the more specific conflict between the women and David in HEE&X, a similar vague sense that something was wrong with David was evident. They "disliked" David; his hulking manner "physically threatened" them. He used language they "found repulsive." He gave them the "creeps." When asked what David had specifically done to offend, there were few clear examples of overtly inappropriate behavior.

Also in the second case, the problems between Zelda, members of the women's group and the dean were vague and ill defined. No one could actually pin down what had bothered them at first. The dean's back door negotiating encouraged attribution and exclusion; however, until the conflict began to escalate, none of the disputants described specific actions that were outside of the acceptable role of a dean at Red Rock.

In the third case, a vague feeling of dispute was evident between faculty of XYZ that no one could clearly identify. The provost, even after having taught as an adjunct faculty member in the school for years,
could not put his finger on what was wrong. A difference in values, roles, and workload built over time. Tension worsened with program and leadership changes, but still no one had identified what caused the dissonance until triggers set conflict in motion.

In the process map for these three cases (Figures 8.2, 8.3, and 8.4,) activity in each conflict was occurring in the private area. This means most disputants were thinking about the conflict and may have shared a few of their concerns with friends, but overt displays of conflict within the group or the larger institutional setting had not yet occurred.

Institutional influences that impacted this phase in all three cases included weak involvement of upper administration and the ambiguity in role and authority of the faculty manager. Influences from within the constituency groups vary in each case, but generally are less of a factor in this phase than later in conflict escalation.

Phase 2: Recognition and Power Building

The undefined angst of the latent phase slowly became recognizable conflict in each of the cases at Red Rock. Conflict recognition was accompanied by an ominous feeling of threat and hostility. There are many examples of this in the three cases observed.

Penny described Katherine's actions as "controlling and threatening." Other faculty in the School of D indicated either Katherine
or Penny was "out to get them." In the School of HEE&X, one of the first statements Rose made was that "Zelda threatened her." Female faculty in the school of HEE&X stated clearly that David was "evil," "not to be trusted," "a threat to the woman's studies program."

The students in the School of XYZ believed they would be hurt, punished, and harassed if they became targets of the faculty. Threat was evident in the rumors that the faculty "hounded one student out of the program each year." Threat was often applied to a student scapegoat. This scapegoat was an example to all students not to get out of line.

Once threat was perceived in a group, disputants began to defend their territory. This resulted in power posturing. People in these conflicts wanted to be seen as powerful. They did not back down from threat nor did they shy away from getting in a blow or two themselves. This type of behavior is common and well documented in conflict research (Folger et al., 1997; Holmes & Miller, 1976). One name for this behavior is "tit for tat." Tit for tat involves a sequence of behaviors where one group or individual is perceived as acting in a threatening way, and the other group or individual is obliged to counterthreat.

The entire memo sequence from the School of D was an early example of how perceived threat became threat-and-counterthreat behavior. Penny wrote disparaging internal memos to Katherine. Memos were later copied to the provost. In response, Katherine wrote memos and met with the provost. Katherine threatened to distribute Penny's
"over the top" memos to new faculty in the department just to show how out of control Penny was. Other staff started writing memos.

In addition to identification of conflict and the beginning of threat-and-counterthreat behavior, Phase 2 included assessment of group strength. In response to the strength of opponents, groups attempted to build up their own power base and test their ability to "win" in conflict situations.

Students in the School of XYZ developed into three groups: (a) those who banded against faculty and developed a strategy to confront the faculty through the University system; (b) those who banded with specific faculty constituencies; and (c) those who separated from everyone and tried to hide. Faculty in this conflict did a similar thing. Cabals developed between Tonya, Cora, and Ian versus Jerry and Peter. Kay, Mary, and Thomas stood off to the side, observing and trying to stay out of the line of fire.

In the School of D, constituency building was active. Faculty members with more longevity in the school believed one of the two women was out to get them. Jane was worried about Katherine and Terry feared the negative power of Penny. They chose sides for protection. Penny and Katherine solicited support from new untenured faculty, the dean, the provost, advisory boards, and faculty on powerful committees. Katherine even went outside of the university system to garner support from former faculty members.
The women's group in HEE&X was so strong that individual members lost their identity. They were considered a "swarm" by others. As they were granted tenure in the system, their power as a group increased. Their attempts to influence the system through collective action also increased. That was necessary, from their point of view, because this group of female faculty were in combat with another swarm, the males with tenure who were in control of the University. In Phase 2, groups assessed and tested opponents' strength. In Phase 3, conflict testing became more intense.

In the process maps (Figures 8.2, 8.3, and 8.4), conflict activity was evident within the work group. Testing occurred but was not yet public. Constituency groups within the school were growing because potential threats from opponents were evident. As conflict escalated, constituency building outside of the group increased. At this point, conflict moved from private and group awareness into the broader institutional environment.

Institutional influences in this phase include midmanagement's attempts to control and even suppress conflict. The directors and dean did not want a broader public exposure that may suggest their inability to deal constructively with faculty disputes.

Constituency group influences in this phase included strengthened alliances, increased isolation from opponents and development of group
behaviors that will in the future lead to increased isolation and paranoia and reinforce limited behavioral repertoires.

*Phase 3: Conflict Testing*

In the testing phase of conflict development at Red Rock, groups flexed their muscles. The goal for each group was, of course, to be powerful enough to win. Because most groups in conflict at Red Rock were equal in their power and ability to leverage power, no single group was able to establish dominance. This produced conflict skirmishes often resulting in stalemate.

The smaller conflicts of Phase 2 evolved into larger skirmishes which reinforced the feelings in disputants that threats were real. People perceived the need for increased membership within their group. Power and alliances were sought throughout the organization. Threat-and-counterthreat behavior, shored up by constituency building, occurred.

For example, Katherine continued to vie for the director's position. Penny constantly undermined Katherine's ability to become director, including curbing her use of discretionary power in the director's role through a proposed "governance document." Each of these moves and countermoves had more political significance than the memo incidents. Long-term issues of power and control were at stake in this conflict interaction.
In the School of HEE&X, Zelda attempted to discredit David, a male faculty member whom the female faculty found offensive. In response, David went to the dean and "barons" in Zelda's department, who worked to discredit her at the school, division, and university level. With each threat, the stakes were raised for participants.

In the school of XYZ, threats from one group, the students, were never powerful enough to affect faculty directly. The director kept complaints underground. However, conflict testing occurred through different strategies. Students developed faculty alliances and set faculty against each other. Cora helped students in a sexual harassment suit against Jerry; Peter helped students in complaints blocking Cora's tenure bid. Alliances with faculty in this back door bid to discredit opponents proved effective for some students and furthered the conflict agenda of some faculty. Students also built a significant power base internally, which later emerged to draw the attention of upper administration to internal problems.

During this phase the process map indicates increased conflict activity in group and public areas. In Figures 8.2, 8.3, and 8.4, disputant groups solicited involvement of powerful others, particularly the provost or senior faculty, to leverage power within the system with the hope of silencing opponents. Most often, due to the hands-off management style of educational institutions, the constituency's attempt to recruit additional support outside of the work group only managed to
escalate tensions. It certainly did not bring closure. It created frantic efforts on the part of opponents to counterthreat with power moves of their own. As activity moved into the public arena, so too did the degree of threat and the frequency of conflict activity within the work group leading to escalation.

Institutional influences on the conflict phase at this point included the inability of leadership to act constructively. Instead, age-old behaviors of trying to bully compliance or avoid or suppress conflict or build constituencies to defeat opponents continued at the midmanagement level. At the provost's level, the desire to maintain a hands-off style continued, but the provost's patience with disputants was growing thin.

As mentioned, the constituency group was attempting to gain additional power. Insularity, attribution, paranoia, and other dysfunctional behaviors contributed to building internal mental models about opponents and the conflict situation. Communication between cabals was entering breakdown mode.

Phase 4: Escalation and Public Display

At Red Rock, the threats and counterthreats increased in frequency and ferocity. As groups moved into the escalation phase, each move was considered a defense against previous action, so each new
action could be justified. Power building occurred, adding to the level of threat in each attack. Conflict events were quickly becoming full-blown public displays or "triggers." As conflict triggers became more frequent and more public, the groups moved more fully into the escalation phase.

A trigger event is often a symptom of deeper, long-term problems within a group. The trigger becomes a focal point, justifying defensive behavior of groups in conflict. The frequency and intensity of the triggers, according to participant testimony, formed a pattern of escalation. When asked during the interviews, participants were able to identify key trigger events during escalation and place them along a continuum. These trigger events are noted in the process maps (Figures 8.2, 8.3, and 8.4).

It is important to understand that, at this point, conflict triggers were not necessarily based on issues of great organizational importance. Because threat-and-counterthreat behavior was so common, trigger events seemed to outsiders to be rather petty. However, these triggers were acted out in very public ways. In this phase, the university administration was privy to what was happening in groups through information from disputant groups themselves. Frequently, this information was very distorted. Administrators often scratched their heads and wondered why in the world groups were fighting over such silly things.

What the administration failed to realize was that conflict, in this phase, had moved from differences of substance to those of ego. As with
most ego conflicts, people were not interested in solving problems. Their
aim was to save face, safeguard interests, and defeat opponents. At most
early levels of conflict development, problem solving can occur, albeit
laboriously. However, once ego conflict developed in this phase, the sole
purpose for disputants was to win at any cost.

For example, Penny disputed Katherine's interpretation of meeting
minutes, regardless of their accuracy. Zelda undermined the dean in
meetings, even if she agreed with him. Ian disputed student complaints
even when he knew they were justified. No matter what the issue,
disagreement was inevitable. Conflict was personal.

In addition, disputants at Red Rock bundled perceived "wrongs"
together and in doing so created large, complicated problems. This is
another characteristic of ego conflict, because again, the ambiguity and
complexity of the problem makes a solution impossible. This bundling of
problems justifies reactive and defensive behavior of disputants, because
they can point to many wrongs perpetrated on them by "the others" to
validate their own behavior.

For example, the students in the school of XYZ interpreted all
faculty action through the lens of faculty misuse of power, which
included everything from yelling to fraud. Peter listed a litany of
complaints against Cora, with each closely related to the next, making
action difficult. Students also did this with both Cora and Jerry. Some of
these actions seemed minor to an outsider. For example, in interviews
students wished faculty were nicer to them. Other actions seemed major; there was evidence that faculty had targeted and harassed certain types of students.

Ego conflict created bundling; bundling created justification for conflict behavior; conflict behavior created more ego conflict. Because of the extent of the wrongs, complexity of the problems, and ingrained nature of the behaviors, conflict resolution became impossible. Nothing constructive could be done to address issues. The only viable response was to defend.

As conflict intensified, it became more public. Katherine and Penny went to the dean of HEE&X and to the provost. Penny went to her friends on the personnel committee; Katherine went to the advisory boards of the department. Students in the School of XYZ complained to their advisors about different groups of faculty. They also complained to other students, thereby reinforcing the stories and building a climate of fear.

In the School of D, one significant trigger included Katherine's second bid for the permanent director position. Penny gathered forces to oppose Katherine. She wrote to everyone who would listen. She warned the provost that conflicts would get much worse if Katherine were director. She overtly and subtly threatened faculty who did not support her in her work group.
Another important trigger involved the incident where Katherine tried to block Jane from voting in faculty meetings, thereby disenfranchising her. Katherine took straight aim at Penny's constituency in the faculty group. Silencing Jane would have taken away one of Penny's most ardent supporters. This happened twice in different forms. However, Katherine and Penny's power was virtually equal. Neither could win. They simply brought all issues to stalemate.

The introduction of a governance document by which Penny meant to undermine Katherine's authority represented another trigger event. Katherine appealed to the provost to "do something." She was as powerless as Penny to do anything but react. Both women were aware their department had lost credibility because of the negative publicity generated from their conflict. No one seemed to care. There was talk of putting the school of D back under the control of the Dean of HEE&X. Still the conflict and stalemate continued.

In the School of HEE&X, a number of triggers were noticed by the administration, as conflict became more intractable and more public. The initial incident with David precipitated threats of lawsuits and complaints to the personnel committee over the handling of David's evaluation. A second trigger occurred when the female faculty complained to the personnel committee, dean, and provost regarding David's threatening behavior toward untenured female faculty. A third trigger followed when David threatened action against Zelda and elicited
the help of the barons. In response, the female faculty group sent envoys
to the new female president.

The conflict between Rose and Zelda precipitated triggers. The
dean punished Zelda for errors in judgment and reprehensible behavior
toward both David and Rose. The dean lobbied members of the personnel
committee to ask Zelda to step down as division chair. Two members of
the personnel committee, also members of Zelda's department, took
things into their own hands at the urging of the dean and others. The
two faculty members confronted Zelda. They told her to step down as
division chair. Zelda, aghast at the lack of due process, threatened legal
action and retained a lawyer. The provost confronted the dean and
redefined the preview of the personnel committee. The dean's power base
and the credibility of the personnel committee were left in shambles.

In the School of XYZ, this escalating conflict behavior was
exemplified in three major trigger events: sexual harassment allegations
against Jerry, Urban Site conflict between Peter and Cora, and student
complaints against the faculty to the new president.

The first two triggers were catalyzed when Cora, Jerry, and Peter
disagreed in a meeting. Jerry interrupted Cora; Cora interrupted Peter.
Jerry told Cora to stop interrupting. They started yelling. Cora left the
room saying they would "be sorry" for how they treated her and openly
threatened to get the Urban Center closed down.
Following on the heels of this, a sexual harassment claim from students was lodged. Peter and Jerry believed Cora had instigated it. In fact, she had assisted students. Sexual harassment complaints regarding Jerry's behavior toward students were brought to the administration where they were "treated" and dismissed. Triggers continued.

Peter wrote to Ian, the director, complaining of Cora's intimidation of students and staff. He and certain students had concerns. He encouraged students to discuss Cora's abusive behavior with the director. Peter also stated he could not support her for tenure because of her threats to undermine his work. Ian told Cora her colleagues wanted her out.

Students lodged a protest against Cora with Ian, the director, he acted defensively and dismissed student concerns. Later, one of the student leaders involved in the complaint was not allowed to progress to the doctoral level of the program. The decision, like many, appeared capricious. Students angrily took their complaints to the new president.

In the escalation level of conflict, trigger events caught the attention of the organization and attempts were made to fix specific problems. Often the symptoms of each conflict became the focus of conflict intervention attempts by the administration. For example, the provost suggested procedural justification for changing Jane's voting status in the School of D. This attempt to objectify information did not change or de-escalate the conflict between Penny and Katherine. Dealing
with one sexual harassment complaint in the school of XYZ when other misdeeds were evident appeared superficial and had no lasting effect.

By treating the symptom rather than the root causes of conflict, the administration often exacerbated the conflict through increased threat and changed power distribution. Their actions also created frustration and cynicism about conflict resolution attempts. Disputants believed "the administration doesn't care." "They won't do anything." "The provost said he would do something before but he didn't. You can't trust them." This type of misplaced intervention attempt happened in each of the conflicts.

Trigger events in conflicts at Red Rock University were symptoms of much deeper root causes. At the institutional level, administration attempted to intervene and create quick fixes for trigger events. Over time, the conflicts emerged in other forms. In addition, this type of intervention undermined faculty confidence in the ability of administration to constructively deal with conflict. In addition, stories about groups in conflict were circulating around the University. The credibility of the leadership and the group membership was being undermined at the institutional level. As trigger events rather than root causes continued to be treated, conflict moved to the next level, which I have referred to as the autistic conflict phase.
Phase 5: Autistic Conflict

The fifth phase of conflict development involves a link between protracted conflict behaviors with four generalized aspects of autistic behavior (Reid, 1995).

Each of these generalized autistic behaviors will be discussed in light of the conflict behaviors evident in group conflict at Red Rock. It is important to reiterate that the purpose of developing this descriptive construct of autistic conflict is simply to better understand the intensity, insularity and level of distorted thinking and communication operating in groups at Red Rock.

1. Impairment of social interactions, which may include isolation from others, leading to fixed beliefs and self-perpetuating behaviors. As described earlier, disputant groups at Red Rock University formed cabals that created and reinforced negative speculation about the intent of opponents. As they felt increased threat, these groups isolated themselves further. This self-imposed insularity reinforced group beliefs and limited objective information from outside sources.

In the School of D, groups formed early. Faculty sat with their aligned groups in meetings; they met in offices to discredit opponents and determine strategy. They stopped talking to each other on most subjects. This was especially true when staff meetings were suspended for a significant period of time.
The female faculty in the School of HEE&X obviously developed strong group identity that isolated them from other groups on campus. Insularity fueled paranoia about the intent of others. Students in the School of XYZ developed groups that stopped communicating and cut themselves off from discussion with opponents. Faculty in this school isolated themselves along lines of location, expectations of student and staff performance, and sexual orientation.

2. Impairment of communication, which may involve paranoid thinking, attribution, and a limited ability to access objective outside information. It was impossible for individuals at this stage of conflict at Red Rock to distinguish clearly the reality of what was happening. They viewed all events through the lens of the group perception. Views were colored by paranoia and attribution. Groups were not open to new perspectives. Threat was so great, people stopped hearing external voices, including that of the administration. Internalized group messages discounted objective information. Group belief propelled individuals to action in defense of the group. These actions limited behaviors to threats and counterthreat.

For example, in the School of D, participants admitted that after meetings or incidents, cabal members joined together to vilify the other group. Katherine would share Penny's last memo with her supporters. Penny would go through Katherine's meeting minutes to document egregious errors meant to undermine the power of her group. When
interviewed, each member of each group spouted similar grievances, as if
the litany of complaints had been rehearsed.

In the School of HEE&X, stereotypes and group messages had been
developed in the university for years. Both the male and female group
created assumptions about the other group and their intent. Because
differences had not been addressed openly, these conflicts simmered.
When issues started to surface, they did so in confronting ways. Threats
seemed very great to both sides.

In the school of XYZ, faculty groups were isolated in different
locations. They were also isolated by differing values regarding student
standards and faculty workload expectations. Although open conflict
between faculty was seldom observed, unspoken differences created
barriers for communicating ideas and taking action. In this school,
student groups formed reinforced stories about faculty treatment of
students. As students talked about faculty mistreatment, beliefs were
substantiated.

3. Limited activities, behaviors, and interests that are repetitive,
restricted, and stereotyped, which may involve building limited behavioral
repertoires, particularly in regard to distinguishing futile action from
productive action. Misapplication of skills in adapting to environmental
factors occurs. As groups cut off constructive communication with
opponents and other source information within the University, isolation
created self-absorption and an obsessive focus on one's own group
needs. People acted irrationally to further futile, self-interested goals. At this point individuals seemed to be going down a tunnel of limits. Groups limited contact, information, perspective, behavior, and action.

Groups encountered all interaction with certain behaviors designed to react to threat and counterthreat. They lost touch with what was right and wrong in their attempt to support their group and defend against threat. Individuals and groups developed limited behavioral repertoires that were constantly reinforced in conflict behaviors.

These behaviors were continued despite their apparent lack of success. Groups in continual conflict over issues large and small were also caught in stalemate, because no group was strong enough to defeat their opponent. It was as if people had to live in trenches on the western front with a no-man's land separating positions. Atrocities seemed justified in the hopes of gaining ground. No one was winning despite monumental effort. In all three cases, there were many examples of repeated, unsuccessful behaviors.

In the School of D, Katherine and her faculty group continued to pursue the position of director, despite the fact that the provost told her it was futile. Penny started to draft a governance document "so we can be safe from [Katherine's] capriciousness." The provost told her to stop. Penny continued her efforts regardless of inevitable stalemate.

The issue of Jane's role continued to crop up in meetings. After Katherine's unsuccessful attempts to disenfranchise Jane in faculty
meetings, she tried to change Jane's role on the School of D's advisory committee. This again deeply threatened Jane and Penny. Fighting and stalemate were always the result.

In the school of HEE&X, the conflict behavior of disputants seemed increasingly out of touch. Back-door manipulation, lack of direct and constructive discussion of concerns, and the use of emotion and prejudice to stir action were common in the behaviors of disputants in the School of HEE&X. These behavioral repertoires were seen at many levels of this particular conflict.

In the School of XYZ, self-interested thinking was reinforced. Naturally, negative behavioral repertoires built each day. The most obvious example of this was the paranoia between faculty members in the School of XYZ. Jerry knew Cora was out to get her. Tonya thought Jerry and Peter were out to get the women on the campus site; Peter thought Cora and Tonya conspired with Ian against him, Jerry, and the Urban Center. Peter refused to see that Jerry was victimizing students. Ian thought students, in particular Carl, were against him. Cora thought Jerry was instigating a complaint against her.

Ian, the director, wore blinders. He would not see validity in student complaints, regardless of the evidence presented. He continued to defend faculty, especially Tonya, whom he saw as part of his group. In fact, all of the faculty at XYZ had no idea that problems were so widespread. They believed, as Ian had, that a small group of dissident
students did not represent common student sentiment. It was only when student interviews indicated that over 85% of the students thought there were serious systemic problems that Ian and faculty had to acknowledge what was going on.

4. A cycle of conflict escalation which resembled a state rather than a phase continued to repeated itself. This level of conflict offered no escape. People's behavior seemed frantic and delusional as they were unable to win at Red Rock. They stopped functioning effectively at most levels of work. All interaction between disputants resulted in more threat and counterthreat. This cycle perpetuated itself; there was no exit. Despite the damaging effects of this conflict phase, no one could stop the cycle; no one could get perspective. Even on petty matters, conflict grew way out of proportion to the problem's importance.

When administrators attempted to bring different views to the situation, disputants closed ranks. They discounted feedback from outside sources. They refused to believe any message not perpetuated by their own group. In this phase, conflict behaviors of disputants resembled a mental illness.

Open warfare in meetings totally disrupted group functions, in the School of D, trigger incidents occurred daily, if not multiple times in a day. These triggers made intervention and problem-solving impossible for the group, because so many concerns, issues, and feelings were lumped together. In conflict that has reached final breakdown, it is not
untypical to find rapid and prolonged incidents that bleed into each other.

People in the School of D were getting sick. A number of the new faculty said they had constant stomach aches and headaches or their bodies hurt all of the time. One new faculty member was hospitalized three quarters of the way through the school year; it was unknown whether stress or some other reason was the cause. Every member of the work group described physical illness, sleeplessness, or eating disorders as a reaction to the climate in their work group. People talked about looking for new jobs.

The School of D lost all credibility with the University administration. The provost discussed putting the school back under the wing of the dean of HEE&X. "Katherine is not a diplomat. Penny digs in. It is a point of honor with them not to give in, even if they figure out they are in the wrong." One faculty informant outside of this work group suggested they were acting like "babies and should get realistic about how bad they looked." The provost put a stop to an expansion opportunity because "the faculty could barely handle what they had." Still dysfunctional behaviors continued.

Likewise, things had deteriorated significantly in the School of HEE&X. By the time conflict reached autistic levels, over 25 faculty, the provost, the dean, and 10 classified staff had become involved. Far more Red Rock employees knew what was going on because the rumor mill
operated efficiently. Zelda and Rose were not speaking; Rose was feeling depressed and apathetic; she did not want to go to work in the morning. Dana and her group were still undermining David; Sara and Bennett were set against Zelda; Dana and Zelda were in serious conflict; the dean had lost credibility with upper administration. The relationship between the dean and the provost became more adversarial.

In the School of XYZ, one faculty member was asked to leave. The director was replaced. Faculty were not speaking to each other. Carl, the student, gained great power and constantly belittled and attacked faculty. He launched a successful lawsuit. Students became increasingly militant and hysterical. Cora nearly had a nervous breakdown. She was not granted tenure. All of the faculty were distrusted by the new president who was ready to look for a new director who could clean house.

At Red Rock, the cycle of conflict over issues small and large escalated so that conflict occurred daily. All effort was focused on leveraging a win or creating stalemate. Group meetings were a disaster. Most groups completely stopped meeting. Frustrated and ill, people looked to the institution for help. Unfortunately, no one from outside of the group seemed to "understand." Outside intervention really meant "agree with us and force them to change." When the response from administration differed from a constituency group's interests, intervention of any kind was often seen as a threat.
At the administrative level, lobbying occurred by both sides of the dispute; when conflict did not end, each side believed administration acted in their opponents' favor. Group members dismissed administrative attempts at intervention as feeble whenever those attempts did not further their own group's cause. Needless to say, it was a lose-lose situation for administration. The provost's full attention was focused on each conflict at this point. He attempted coercion, threats, limits, and outside intervention. As well, he reduced faculty and midmanagement power in order to punish groups for their errant behavior. In private, however, he continued to try to use counseling skills to bring an end to the incessant squabbling. The provost wisely understood that there were some arenas where his influence was limited. This included faculty committees and tenure process. Unfortunately, conflict shifted to these areas when the provost became less sympathetic about each group's behavior.

Within the constituency groups, all hope for communication between disputants had ceased. In fact, very little opportunity for communicating occurred as groups stopped scheduling staff meetings. This increased the unilateral action of directors and the dean, again increasing tension. Attribution, threat-and-counterthreat behavior, and paranoia continued and intensified group beliefs. A reinforced system of behavior fueled conflict in an escalating cycle.
Autism as a Descriptive Construct for Protracted Conflict

In this study, autistic conflict represents a level of conflict which escalates to extreme group dysfunction. I have used autism as a metaphor to describe this phase of conflict because of the parallels that appear to exist between behavior of disputants in protracted conflicts and autism as a mental illness. Autistic conflict, as a descriptive construct for this phase of protracted conflict is considered in a second research question guiding this study: What is the nature of chronic, autistic conflict?

Although autistic conflict has not been utilized consistently in the literature of conflict development nor applied to phases of conflict development, other researchers have used the term in passing to suggest a certain state of dysfunction in groups. Theodore Newcomb in Social Psychology refers to a state of extreme social conflict as autistic hostility. Holmes and Miller (1976) refer to severe conflict as "autistic." Susan Long (1991) referenced autism with regard to group isolation in her study of small group interactions.

To expand on this metaphor, it is necessary to describe characteristics of autistic behavior and draw an analogy with behaviors evident in protracted group conflict in this study. Application of this description is not meant to be viewed as a clinical diagnosis. There are undoubtedly aspects of autistic behavior not relevant to group conflict;
however, this descriptive construct may illustrate aspects of protracted group conflict not evident without the analogy.

Autism and Conflict in Work Groups

According to the Diagnostic Manual of Statistics MS IV (Reid 1995), autism as a mental condition is marked by the disregard of external reality and is characterized by an extreme preoccupation with the self. Autistic patients are often not able to comprehend, organize and process incoming stimuli and information. They struggle to form social bonds. They isolate themselves and live in a world of their own making.

Autistic individuals do not adapt well to a changing environment. They repeat behaviors and have a limited set of behavioral repertoires which may not always be successful in the environments to which they are applied. Their autistic condition focuses thinking in an absorption with satisfying their own needs, which is rather obsessive and overly narrow (Reid, 1995). They like and reinforce patterns that are known and comfortable. These patterns become almost rituals. Fitting into a larger, social group is not relevant. When autism becomes pathological, a person loses contact and retreats into a private world of delusion. Behavior seems detached from reality.

Autistic individuals may be extremely intelligent and have very well developed skill levels in certain areas. Application of these skills is
sometimes misguided, in that they cannot be used for specific outcomes in employment or life skills. Instead, the skills exist without successfully being accessed, because the interface of the person and the environment is disconnected.

Characteristics of autism can be found in work group conflict. Using examples from research describing dysfunctional group behaviors, it is possible to see the connection between autism and protracted conflict behavior.

A number of parallels can be illustrated through this study. These include: (a) insularity leading to self-perpetuating messages and behaviors; (b) self-perpetuated and delusionary beliefs resulting in action, brought on by the cycle of threat-counterthreat and the inability to access outside information; (c) the inability to distinguish futile action from productive action accompanied by the misapplication of skills in adapting to environmental factors and limited behavioral repertoires; and (d) the repeated cycle of conflict escalation, which resembles a state rather than a phase, because the cycle continuously perpetuated itself.

**Contextual Factors**

At Red Rock, not only did conflict develop in common phases, it was influenced by common contextual factors. This leads to a discussion
of the final research question: How do organizational culture and systems affect the development of protracted autistic conflict?

A number of contextual factors influenced conflict development in the three cases at Red Rock University. These factors fall into three areas: (a) administrative roles and authority; (b) faculty roles and tenure; (c) University approaches to problem solving. The three conflicts were within one organizational setting, which made tracing contextual factors and finding common influences less difficult than in multiple sites.

Administrative Role and Authority

Power was one of the key issues that contributed to conflict development at Red Rock. The hesitation to use power at the upper administrative level contributed, over time, to all of the conflicts in a number of ways. The upper administration of Red Rock was not directly involved in the management of each of the schools studied; however, the provost served as a link between the University and each unit. He influenced conflict development in these three cases more than any other individual outside of the work groups by refusing to intervene early and by using unclear and conciliatory messages with disputants.

Previous experience with the provost in conflicts left most faculty feeling he would not pose a real threat to their power or their goals. He was perceived as ineffectual. This was not the case, however. In fact, the
provost could put teeth into his threats to quell conflict if he understood what was needed. This was finally done with the director position of the School of D and the School of XYZ. The provost most often chose to wait to see if conflict could be solved internally. This was part of his expected role within the University culture. As well, directors did not volunteer information about internal problems until they had come to the attention of administrators as trigger events that could no longer be suppressed. This meant upper administration, when they intervened in conflict, often were not well informed.

The provost's role was one of troubleshooter, and like many University structures which are rather laissez faire in treatment of local operations, the provost did not micromanage. Instead, he saw his role as assisting faculty directors in managing program resources and problems.

In this consultative role, the provost was rather unobtrusive. His style was more of a counselor and mentor. He met with directors as needed. He did not intrude until problems occurred and then he was readily available. As a result, disputants could assume the provost would not intervene with authority.

In situations where power and lines of authority are weak, conflict in groups can be exacerbated. Researchers suggest that, where there is a clear definition of power and role, conflicts usually do not move past the testing phase (Newell, 1976). However, where ambiguity of power occurs, movement into the next phase of conflict is rapid. At Red Rock,
the power of directors in the School of XYZ and D was unclear. The dean of the School of HEE&X was relatively strong; however, when conflict could not be resolved at his level, a definitive word from the provost could have halted the conflict escalation. Hesitant to be intrusive and generally uninformed about the level of conflict actually occurring in each of these programs, the provost took a hands-off stance. This left the group to deal with conflict.

A number of problems occurred because of the balance of power between disputant groups. Because groups were equal in their ability to leverage power, threat-and-counterthreat behavior went on unabated and almost always resulted in stalemate.

Power dynamics of the University as a whole were affected by the significant change in leadership with the instatement of a new progressive female president. Previously the "good ole' boy" system had reigned supreme. A group of "barons," older tenured faculty and administrators, set norms for culture and behavior. This group held consequential power and used it to disenfranchise groups who did not conform to their belief system.

Female faculty had slowly gained recognition at the University as they aspired to tenure status. They developed allies to throw the traditional power structure off balance. Pres. P certainly had the credentials to do just that. The president was new and therefore untainted by the male alliance system. Her position afforded her
significant influence immediately, and she fostered a reputation as a reformer. Her presence threw confusion into the struggle between the older power brokers at the university and the new, energetic and often assertive women. This power struggle may not have emerged for years without the new president and the fact she was a woman.

Red Rock University's organizational structure is typical of those found in higher education in the 20th Century. Much power resides at the department or school level, with little infrastructure in place to guide, inform and lead mid-level managers around an overarching organizational vision.

Department directors were seldom evaluated in any systematic way. Most had moved up through the faculty and were still faculty. They lacked management experience and training to deal with key management issues such as planning, policy and law, conflict, and evaluation at Red Rock. There were no overarching midmanagement groups that met regularly to support or mentor faculty directors. Most directors operated autonomously. The provost did not meet regularly with a mid management group. There was little to no training for midmanagers and certainly no support group.

In addition, midmanagers at the University were dealing with multiple power constituencies. Unlike in the private sector, managers had to negotiate or broker settlements instead of simply demanding action. Tenured faculty, personnel committees, and union groups all
exerted influence on the system. Their views had to be considered. Frequently, the ability to finesse action with multiple power groups was lacking, especially when all faculty knew midmanagers had no strong arms behind them to back up demands. Or the ability to do this was perceived as secretive or manipulative, as in the case of the dean of HEE&X. Faculty resented and resisted it. Given the infrastructure weakness, it is not surprising that directors floundered badly in protracted conflicts. It is also not surprising that they had problems they wanted to keep hidden.

The hesitancy of midmanagement to share information about problems was common at Red Rock. Research suggests that it is also common in most organizations. Organizations frequently convey the message to managers that they should not have any group problems. If conflicts occur, managers should deal with them. To acknowledge internal conflict suggests management incompetence and results in fewer resources (Tjosvold, 1991). Because information about conflict at Red Rock was systematically hidden or suppressed, upper administration was surprised when trigger events erupted. To treat perceived problems, administration acted on inaccurate information. Red Rock had few system checks and balances in place to assure that problems were communicated between administrative levels of the organization.

The provost's expected role in the university influenced the development of conflict more than any other systemic factor at the
University. These expectations included (a) to not intervene in
department business, (b) to broker consensual agreements, and (c) to put
out fires. It seems appropriate then that he spent a great deal of time and
effort trying to make things right only after they went wrong.

He took responsibility for the failure of the administration to deal
constructively with lower levels of management. He met with faculty; he
tried to help with students. He listened for hours. The University as a
system was very willing to invest in the problems once they had escalated
but was unwilling to look at systemic structures that contributed to the
conflict. Higher education's ambiguity about roles and lines of authority
was a factor influencing conflict escalation in this study.

Another systemic issue was the chronic attempts to treat the
manifestation of a core problem rather than the problem itself. This led to
a series of quick fixes. The University culture encouraged managers to
hide problems until they erupted in dysfunctional public activity. Once
eruptions occurred, administrators had little choice but to "do
something." Usually dealing with an event was so much easier than
actually untangling the great snarl of conflict evident in these cases.

Treating these events alone added to conflict escalation for a
number of reasons. First, when symptoms rather than root causes were
treated, conflicts reoccurred. This created cynicism on the part of
disputants, reinforcing the belief that conflict interventions are
ineffectual. Behavioral repertoires and learned incapacity within the
groups were reinforced.

Power imbalances temporarily created by administration's quick
fixes resulted in renewed efforts by opponents to gain power through
threat-and-counterthreat behavior. In addition, the administration was
discredited, which undermined their ability to proceed with effective
intervention.

Another important issue regarding conflict escalation and
administrative roles involved the effectiveness of faculty in
midmanagement roles. Faculty managers interviewed in this study said
they felt they were inadequately prepared. "Flying by the seat of our
pants," was one apt description used. They felt unsure. They did not
always understand the role. Their authority was "tenuous." All of the
faculty interviewed in all three cases agreed that training and support for
midmanagement was poor and inconsistent. The provost concurred. This
University weakness was hard to dispute, but it was also common for
organizational structure in higher education.

In addition, the failure of Red Rock management to conduct annual
faculty and staff evaluations contributed to conflict escalation in the
three cases studied. Conducting annual faculty and staff evaluations as
a key managerial responsibility did not occur in the any of the groups in
conflict. This significantly contributed to confusion about expectations
and standards which, in turn, affected tenure. Conducting evaluations
based on University standards and expectations was an area of leadership seriously lacking. In all three schools, disputant groups held different beliefs about expectations and standards for their own performance and that of others. This created confusion.

The final authority issue concerned responsibility and policy standards for faculty for committees. It was evident that faculty on the personnel committee were unclear about confidentiality, tenure protocol, and the limits of their responsibility. Had this role been clearer, committee members would have been less manipulated by the dean of HEE&X and other powerful faculty.

Faculty Roles and Tenure

Tenure was a significant element influencing power building in the three cases discussed in this study. Certain factors in the tenure system added to conflict escalation at Red Rock. Ambiguity in the role, responsibility, and professional expectations for faculty serving on the personnel committee allowed powerful individuals to manipulate the tenure process. Standards, limits, and protocol in these committees were often unclear or not followed.

In addition, as the ambiguity of the tenure process leaked from the personnel committee, the power of tenured faculty to intimidate new faculty grew. New faculty understood through rumor and innuendo that
powerful tenured faculty could influence their future. They aligned with those who could protect them. Censorship and groups with extended influence outside of the upper administrative structure grew.

There were many examples in the conflict at Red Rock of tenure’s influence on conflict development. In the School of D, Penny lobbied new faculty and Katherine to support her tenure bid. Once she had it, she used her status to threaten those without it. The fact that new faculty did not have tenure silenced them in many of the conflicts between members of the School of D. Threats to their status were too real. They could not contribute, or interject rational thinking because they were at risk.

In the school of HEE&X, the women faculty felt disenfranchised until they, as a group, had tenure. Then they felt more able to confront the male dominated power structure. They were outraged when David appeared to confront members of their group without tenure, because they were aware of the high degree of threat involved in a conflict between a tenured male and a nontenured female at Red Rock.

In the School of XYZ, Cora did not have tenure. Faculty were fighting to either "get rid of her" or keep her. Students also got involved in the frantic attempt to influence this decision. Cora’s tenure bid was the precipitating factor convincing the student group to step forward and challenge her outrageous behaviors.
University Approaches to Problem Solving

A key factor influencing conflict development in these groups was the inability of individuals, leadership, and groups to assess conflict development, target issues, and conduct successful problem solving processes early in the conflict. I observed over 80 hours of meetings in which conflict erupted frequently. I did not observe a single instance in which problem solving protocols were suggested and used by a group in conflict. Instead, dialectical attacks with differing levels of intensity were observed. Often these attacks were personal. Once a group entered the conflict escalation phase, attacks always ended in stalemate.

The desire to suppress conflict or treat superficial levels of conflict is strong with most people. Once problem solving begins it is followed by having to confront difference, an often difficult process. For that reason, at Red Rock most groups buried rather than dealt with conflict. The fact that groups had not experienced previous success dealing with differences reinforced participant belief that problems could not be solved. Instead, they were left to fight and defend.

Ironically at least one of the groups involved in this study had a clear idea of what their dysfunctional "behavioral repertoires" were. In our second meeting, they were able to identify them. The following "derailers" were listed in a simple group process exercise.
• The new faculty's desire to keep meetings superficial in order to avoid differences of opinion.

• Power groups lobbying and taking positions against each other.

• Individuals acting unilaterally because they thought they knew what was best for everyone else.

• Individuals reacting because they believed others were doing something threatening with malevolent intent.

• Assumptions that everyone had the same interpretation of an agreement when no attempts of clarification of those assumptions had been made.

• Judging people harshly and reacting when other group members were believed to have broken agreements or had insidious intent.

• A pervasive belief by all group members that nothing could be done to deal constructively with the conflict.

• A belief by individuals that group agreement meant agreement with them.

• Continuous attempts to get the group or individuals to do what an individual wanted them to do, regardless of their own decisions.

• Talking about those people behind closed doors.

• Overreacting or not expressing needs and concerns in a depersonalized manner.

It seemed evident that even when a group or individual knew what they were doing to add to the dysfunction, they were not able to
substitute productive behaviors or processes. Patterns of hostility were strong; new patterns were difficult to incorporate.

This lack of desire to acknowledge inappropriate behavior was evident at different administrative levels at Red Rock. First, at the school level, directors or deans did what they could to suppress or contain conflict. Second, the university level looked the other way until conflict had escalated beyond reasonable bounds.

It is difficult to understand that the University had so little idea of the extent of the conflict. There were many clues that each of the schools studied in this research were in trouble. The memos, the meetings, the number of people involved, and the ferocity of the language did not get attention until specific events caused a total breakdown of the group's functioning. Students from XYZ had complained and outlined recurrent themes. When conflict was finally acknowledged by the University it was in recognition of trigger events. These events were treated as the problems rather than the symptoms.

The result of treating triggers rather than root causes created a feeling of hopelessness in disputants when conflict elements continued to occur. Again, this reinforced the view that conflicts could not be solved. Often tampering with triggers meant changing the power structure as well. If the power structure changed, it precipitated more moves and countermoves making the conflict escalate to a higher level.
Generally speaking, the University did not do well in encouraging problem identification or problem solving. Few people, other than the provost, exhibited any skill in this area. In fact, when problems were finally irrefutable, participants were treated like children. Their autonomy was removed; they were threatened and chastised; they were given new leaders. However, where problem solving over time did not occur, and conflicts were dealt with superficially by removing people or changing roles, conflict emerged again. This resulted in deeper, more serious problems.
Chapter 9
Conclusions, Recommendations, and Questions for Further Study

Conclusions

Due to the qualitative nature of this research, it is not appropriate to generalize conclusions beyond this study. Having access to three different sites within one institution of higher education for over a year, however, provided rich data from which hypotheses for future inquiry can be postulated.

The fact that all three case studies involved a single organization allowed the researcher to explore institutional influences and identify common patterns. Findings suggest areas of further study particularly relevant to conflict development in institutions of higher education. From these findings, a number of hypotheses can be formed.

Protracted conflict in institutions of higher education develops in five phases, which include the following:

- The latent phase, where conflicts are developing but seem to be characterized by annoyance rather than serious dispute;
- The recognition and power building phase where conflict is identified as a barrier to achieving individual or group goals, and opponents begin to build constituencies to combat potential threats;
• The conflict testing phase, where constituency groups flex their muscles in order to leverage advantage and engage in conflict skirmishes to assess their own power and that of their opponents;
• The escalation phase, where conflict incidents increase until all interaction becomes an occasion for dispute and disagreement.
• The autistic conflict phase, where conflict spirals out of control and the dysfunctional behavior of disputants precipitates conflict in most interactions and where the aim of the conflict is self-protection and destruction of opponents rather than solution of problems.

When conflicts escalate among groups in higher education without successful resolution, groups develop
• Insularity
• Limited behavioral repertoires
• Trained incapacity
• Limited communication patterns

These behaviors encourage a repetitive cycle of threat and counterthreat, fueled by paranoia, face saving and attribution. In this phase, conflict becomes intractable, and self-perpetuating, and the behavior of participants resembles behavior evident in autism.

A number of contextual factors evident within institutions of higher education contribute to autistic conflict development and include
• Ambiguity about roles and lines of authority for managers;
• Lack of training for faculty serving as directors, chairs and deans;
• Lack of clarity regarding the role and responsibility of faculty on personnel committees;
• Failure to conduct annual faculty and staff evaluations against defined standards;
• System incentives that hide conflict;
• Failure to conduct problem solving processes early in the conflict;
• Treatment of trigger events rather than root causes in conflict intervention;
• Tenure, as an ingrained institutional element typical of institutions of higher education, contributes to power imbalances resulting in threat and counterthreat behaviors.

Questions for Further Study

Because this study involved only one institution of higher education, the previous hypotheses should be tested in other institutions of higher learning. Additional research questions with broader implications for any organization include the following:

1. To what extent are the phases of conflict development present in other kinds of organizations?

2. Can work groups reach a level of autistic conflict without moving through previous phases?
3. What intervention techniques work effectively at the different phases of conflict development?

4. Does clarification of leadership roles and authority in organizations reduce evidence of conflict escalation?

5. What effect does training in problem solving processes have on conflict development?

6. Are certain contextual factors more or less influential in encouraging conflict escalation?

**Recommendations for Improvement of Practice**

The following recommendations suggest ways in which institutions of higher education may avoid some of the problems experienced at Red Rock University where time, emotional distress, stunted decision making, bad publicity, and unnecessary expense resulted from an inability to deal constructively with conflict. Recognition and change of significant institutional factors, both cultural and structural, is necessary if productive conflict approaches are to be incorporated.

1. Clarify the roles and responsibilities of all persons in authority; align authority with organizational mission.

2. Develop system safeguards to prevent the tenure process from silencing differences and disenfranchising groups within the educational system.
3. Train, support, and implement effective problem solving processes.

4. Strengthen upper administration's role in conflict intervention.

5. Develop stronger communication links between mid and upper management in order to encourage early problem identification.

6. Conduct thorough conflict assessment and intervention focused on root causes rather than trigger events.

7. Provide ongoing training for midmanagers in
   - personnel evaluation
   - planning
   - problem solving
   - resource management
   - conflict assessment and intervention techniques

8. Develop a support system for training to strengthen faculty/staff group process skills.

*Summary*

A few weeks ago, I stood at Hyde Park Corner listening to three English gentlemen express radical views to a crowd of onlookers. A follower of The Nation of Islam polemicized about the white man's inferiority; a "born again" Christian told us to repent; a fellow with no point that I could determine ranted on about various topics. Although
often appalled at the content of what I heard, I felt somehow reassured that people were able to express their views without fear of censorship.

When I looked closely around the crowd, I felt less optimistic. The follower of Mr. Farrakahn had body guards scattered among us, eyeing people with suspicion and hostility. There was a subtle, but notable police presence—more "bobbies" than I had seen anywhere in London or Ireland. Hecklers were fairly vocal and tried to shout one of the speakers down. I have no idea if the long tradition of speaking on a soap box has always had the hint of violence attached to it. Perhaps so. My experience at Hyde Park suggested something ominous. There was a lurking menace of violence and censorship that threatened the expression of dissent. Often I feel this same threat as I work with groups in conflict, and it raises concerns.

Over time, the insidious inability of people and institutions to surface differences, to allow expression of needs and concerns, and to discuss different perspectives creates a diseased environment. At Red Rock University, I sat with people who were often in tears. People felt sick. They dreaded every minute of their work, despite the fact they had prepared for years to teach and cared deeply about the profession.

Inside of universities, high schools, community colleges, and even elementary schools, conflicts are brewing that will hurt people, detract from teaching and learning, and add a huge burden to an already staggering job. Education is not alone. It occurs in private businesses,
state agencies, and religious organizations where conflict is perpetuated by ego needs and lack of skill.

I believe the right to express our views is an ingrained value which is deeply rooted in our historical identity as Americans. Perhaps I over-idealize how well Americans have employed this right in the past. In our institutions of work and in our schools, I have observed an erosion of these skills. Time, resources, desire for conformity, ego threats, and our own negative experiences with conflict encourage us to avoid or stifle problem solving that requires looking at our differences. This is both an institutional and personal issue which has broad implications.

Even in education, where academic freedom and inquiry are deeply valued, we see intrenchment of behaviors undermining dissent. At Red Rock, for example, three separate work groups developed conflicts that became utterly intractable. Conflict was allowed to escalate beyond reasonable bounds. Educated and compassionate people acted with petty vindictiveness. They stopped listening to each other; they tried to undermine each other. They hurt each other. As conflict became deeply personal, it created an atmosphere antithetical to good teaching and inspired learning.

This erosion of skill is happening not only in education but also in many places in our society. We are building limited behavioral repertoires and patterns of trained incapacity that do not include the
ability to resolve differences peacefully, and we are seeing the result of this throughout our society.

There is daily evidence of this in the news: the Oklahoma City bombing, postal shootings, explosions at abortion clinics, armed conflicts with militia groups. These may be growing indicators of our increasing inability to move through the tension of strongly held differences to constructive problem solving. Losing our ability to deal well with conflict may result in forfeiting our freedom to express differing views with safety in a larger societal context. Over time, I wonder if we are condemning aspects of our democratic system to failure. Certainly, in some ways, we are constructing our own autistic conflict scenario.

This study suggests there are ways we can rebuild our ability to deal with conflict in the academic community. Training leaders to understand conflict development and to conduct successful problem solving is important to prevent conflict escalation. Training faculty, staff, and students in problem solving processes can assist in depersonalizing problem solving. But those efforts alone are not enough.

Even more critical than training is strengthening the will to confront and deal constructively with conflict. An institution must confront the underlying organizational culture and systems that belie constructive problem solving. This is particularly true in higher education where those norms are stronger than in many organizations. This means addressing organizational ambiguity and creating a level of
safety for all members to openly express differences. It also means modeling and supporting productive conflict resolution and problem solving.

As well, individuals must demonstrate a willingness to give up narcissistic behavior. Clear focus on issues, patience through the difficult process of differentiation and belief that problem solving can result in positive outcomes makes a substantial difference in how people behave with each other during disagreements. To do these things in a conflict situation takes resolve as well as skill.

Changing our organizations, especially educational institutions is critically important. An educational institution has the responsibility to be an example of a healthy environment where exploration of differing perspectives is valued. Understanding and strengthening our ability to deal with conflict constructively has broad and important societal importance. Building and supporting skills that allow constructive dissent can happen anywhere. But this effort needs to happen on several levels if we are to have healthy institutions, communities, and families.

There are steps we should consider in retooling our organizations and ourselves to deal with conflict constructively. I hope this study has contributed to an understanding of some of those steps.
Epilogue

Having described conflicts at Red Rock, I want to leave the reader feeling hope for the plight of the people described. Although this study did not address intervention, reasonably successful interventions were conducted in all three cases. I can assure you, situations improved.

Recently Kay, a faculty member from Red Rock, called me. I hadn't heard from anyone from Red Rock for awhile. We chatted and I asked how things were going. Kay made it clear that the conflict had changed. The group had learned to deal with things better. She laughed when she described the faculty preparing for accreditation reports. "We pull out your report, and everyone groans. We don't like to look at it, but we do and even follow up on things we've avoided in the past. It opened a door."

Change is never easy. When working with groups, I find they are always disappointed when things are not fixed quickly and are not painless.

Over time, people can develop their own problem solving skills, change their hesitancy to address problems and force institutional change so that they are allowed to address problems reasonably if things are really to be fixed. Those changes take awhile. A Red Rock, it is good to know people have the opportunity and skill to constructively approach their differences.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Seeman, A., & Seeman, M. (1976). Staff processes: The study of teacher participation in educational change. Human relations 21, 1 24-40


Appendix
August 15, 1996

Principal Investigator:
The following project has been approved for exemption under the guidelines of Oregon State University's Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services:

Principal Investigator(s): Ruth Stiehl

Student's Name (if any): Susan Murray

Department: Education

Source of Funding:

Project Title: Organizational Conflict Study

Comments:

A copy of this information will be provided to the Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects. If questions arise, you may be contacted further.

Sincerely,

Mary E. Nunn
Sponsored Programs Officer

cc: CPHS Chair