

**THE PROCESSING OF CONFLICT IN ORGANIZATIONAL GROUPS:
A Case Study in a Greek Industrial Company**

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Thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

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To my parents, Giannis and Eleni.

Abstract

The purpose of the research was to investigate the way in which employees in two departments of a Greek industrial company resolved conflict situations encountered in the context of their department. The premises are that (a) the positive effects of conflict for the organization are related to the way in which it is resolved; (b) the investigation of the phenomenon of conflict resolution necessitates the examination of employees' conflict handling behaviour during a conflict episode, as well as of their representation of the particular episode; (c) the bureaucratic culture of the organization and the wider social culture determine the conditions within which employees represent and deal with conflict situations.

The research used a single case design to develop new ways to model the conflict resolution process. The use of open-ended interviews constituted the methods of data collection. Employees from two departments (Research/Design and Supplies) of the organization were selected. The analysis of data in the first part of the thesis led to the development of a net model, indicating patterns of conflict handling behaviour during any conflict episode; the generic structure of the net model, which was found to be common to both departments, was discussed in the light of Greek culture, as well as of the bureaucratic practices of that particular organization. On the basis of this analysis, a further analysis was made of the data relating to those nodes of the net model where employees were found to be involved in a decision making process. The methodology selected enabled the representation of the process of the conflict management problem by organizational members. The basic assumption incorporated within this methodology is that the conflict management problem can be represented in more than one way. The identification, via employees' discourse, of the way in which conflict situations are conceptualized in the context of the two departments, indicated how this representation relates to the wider social and organizational nexus within which it is embedded.

The contribution of this study lies in identifying the conflict resolution structures and processes within two departments of the organization studied and, to a certain extent, the wider organization, while offering an insight into how this organization shapes the way in which conflict situations are processed by organizational members, using their own discourse.

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During the four years of this research, there are still vivid to me a number of times, during which I was optimistic and enthusiastic, and others, during which I despaired of there being any end to this lonely journey called 'scientific research'. All these different phases, which probably sound familiar to anyone who has made the same 'journey' - and which, in my case, would often alternate in sequences of days and, sometimes hours - further intrigued my patience and determination to complete this project; these qualities enabled me to resolve some of my 'inner conflicts' and to make it to this point. In the meantime, I am aware that this project owes much of its existence to the encouragement and support of a few people who will always occupy a special place in my heart. Among this precious handful of people, I would like first to express my gratitude to my family for their enduring support in all respects. Héctor Santana, Anna Athanasopoulou and Razmik Panossian are parts of the best that life in London has offered me; in them, I found friendship and support, which enabled me to keep things in perspective. I also wish to thank the people who, even though they did not share my daily experiences in London, were directly affected by my emotional upheavals and 'inner conflicts'; these people have been a source of constant strength and, in their own way, they were with me throughout this process. Most of all, I wish to express my gratitude to Lucia Garcia for her friendship, and thus invaluable support during the entire period of research. With her help, I learned how to find the courage to resolve conflicts without fighting over them.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 1: APPROACHING CONFLICT AS A PROCESS	6
1.1. Overview	6
1.2. Defining the Conflict Problem- A Social Psychological Perspective	6
1.2.1. The Phenomenological Nature of Conflict	7
1.2.2. The Interactive Nature of Conflict	8
1.2.3. The Contextual Nature of Conflict - Organizational Conflict	9
1.3. Conflict within Organizational Groups	10
1.3.1. Organizational Bureaucracies	12
1.4. Conflict Research and Organization Theory	13
1.5. Conflict Solution or Conflict Resolution?	15
1.6. Approaching Conflict as a Process - The Notion of Conflict Episode	16
1.7. The Dynamic Nature of the Conflict Episode - Visible Behaviour and Internal Processes	18
1.8. Studying the Process of Conflict Resolution - The Aim of this Study	21
1.9. Summary	24
 PART I - THE PROCESS OF CONFLICT HANDLING BEHAVIOUR	
CHAPTER 2: RESEARCH ON CONFLICT HANDLING BEHAVIOUR - A REVIEW	26
2.1. Overview	26
2.2. Developments in Research on Conflict Behaviour - A Historical Review	26
2.2.1. Experimental Research on Negotiation Behaviour	26
2.2.2. Field Research on Conflict Behaviour	31
2.3. Definition of Conflict Handling Strategies	34
2.4. Conflict Handling Practices beyond the Dyadic Level	37
2.5. Models of Conflict Behaviour	38
2.5.1. Structural Models of Conflict Behaviour	38

2.5.1.1.	The Dispositional Approach to Conflict Behaviour	38
2.5.1.2.	The Situational Approach to Conflict Behaviour	40
2.5.1.3.	Need to Study the Evolutionary Nature of Behaviour within a Conflict Episode - Critique of the Structural Models	41
2.5.2.	Process Models of Conflict Behaviour	43
2.5.2.1.	Phase Analysis	43
2.5.2.2.	Escalatory Models of Conflict Behaviour	46
2.6.	Conflict Behaviour in the Organizational Context	51
2.7.	Developing a Process Model for Conflict Handling Behaviour - Main Characteristics	53
2.8.	Summary and Overview of the next Chapter	54
CHAPTER 3:	ON THE METHODOLOGY	56
3.1.	Overview	56
3.2.	The Use of Accounts for the Investigation of Conflict Resolution	57
3.3.	Argumentation Analysis	60
3.3.1.	Toulmin's Layout of Argument Structure	64
3.3.1.1.	The Problematic Related to the Application of Toulmin's framework in Practice	69
3.4.	Examining Accounts of Conflict Episodes from Employees of One Particular Organization - The Choice of a Case Study Approach	78
3.4.1.	Focusing on One Organizational Setting - The Paradigm of Organizations as Cultures	81
3.5.	Conducting Open-ended Interviews	85
3.6.	Establishing the Quality of the Present Empirical Study	87
3.7.	Using Accounts as a Means of Modelling Employees' Conflict Handling Behaviour and Conflict Management Process	91
3.8.	Summary	93

CHAPTER 4:	E.P.E.:THE ORGANIZATIONAL CONTEXT OF THE STUDY	95
4.1.	Overview	95
4.2.	E.P.E. - Initial Contact	95
4.3.	History of the Company	96
4.4	E.P.E.: A Manufacturing Industry	98
4.4.1.	E.P.E.: A Typical Bureaucratic Organization	100
4.4.2.	Working in E.P.E.: Reciting my Personal Observations and Experiences in the Firm	102
4.5.	The Research/Design Department	104
4.6.	The Supplies Department	109
4.7.	Overview of the Next Chapter	112
 CHAPTER 5:	 DEVELOPING A PROCESS MODEL OF CONFLICT HANDLING - GENERAL PROCEDURE	 113
5.1.	Overview	113
5.2.	Subjects	113
5.3.	The Interview Schedule	115
5.4.	Distinguishing between Behavioural Intentions and Actual Conflict Behaviours	117
5.5.	Distinguishing between Units of Analysis and Units of Recording	120
5.6.	Definition and Identification of the Units of Analysis	121
5.6.1.	Actual Conflict Episodes	125
5.6.2.	Hypothetical Conflict Episodes	126
5.6.3.	Complete versus Partial Episodes	127
5.6.4.	Generalized Action Statements	128
5.7.	Definition and Identification of the Units of Recording	129
5.8.	Developing the Process Model in Practice - A Cyclical Process	136
5.9.	Enhancing the Reliability of the Coding Scheme - An Inter- coder Test	143

CHAPTER 6:	CONFLICT HANDLING PRACTICES IN E.P.E. - PRESENTATION OF THE NET MODEL	146
6.1.	Overview	146
6.2.	Characteristics of the Model	147
6.3.	Discussion	151
6.3.1.	The Upper Part of the Model: Keeping Conflict behind the Scenes or The 'Dialectic' Paradigm?	151
6.3.2.	The Bureaucratic Model - The Bottom Part of the Model	156
6.3.2.1.	The Bottom Part of the Model - The Other Party is Subordinate	157
6.3.2.2.	The Bottom Part of the Model - The Other Party is the Supervisor	160
6.3.2.3.	The Bottom Part of the Model - Conflict between Colleagues	165
6.4.	Assigning Reported Frequencies to the Net Model	170
6.5.	Analysis of Hypothetical Episodes - Comparing Actual and Hypothetical Patterns	177
6.6.	Accounting for Consistencies in the Structure of the Conflict Handling Model	181
6.6.1.	The Paradigm of the Greek Democracy and of the Socratic Dialogue in the Upper Part of the Model	181
6.6.2.	The Use of the Bureaucratic Model in Everyday Practice - The Bottom Part of the Model	185
6.6.3.	Generalized Action Statements - A Reflection of the Organizational Myth	188
6.7.	Accounting for Discrepancies in the Frequencies Reported - Particularities across the Two Departments	189
6.8.	The Case of Mr. X: An Exception to the Conflict Handling Model	191
6.9.	Results of the Analysis of the Conflict Episodes Reported in Both Departments - A Summary	195
6.10.	Limitations of the Conflict Handling Model	197

PART II - THE PROCESS OF CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

CHAPTER 7:	INVESTIGATING THE PROCESS OF CONFLICT MANAGEMENT - SELECTION OF A METHODOLOGY	202
7.1.	Overview	202
7.2.	Conflict Management as a Decision Problem	203
7.3.	Conflict Management: A Personal or an Organizational Decision Problem?	205
7.4.	Review of the History of Decision Theory	207
7.4.1.	Normative and Relativistic Paradigms in Intuitive Decision Making	207
7.4.2.	Early Value and Utility Models	208
7.4.3.	Subjective Expected Utility	209
7.4.4.	Behavioural Decision Theories	209
7.4.5.	Problem Representation in Real-World Problems	212
7.4.6.	A Systems Perspective on the Process of Problem Solving	213
7.5.	The Normative Paradigm in Conflict Management Research	215
7.6.	Modelling the Process of Conflict Management - Conclusions drawn from the Review	217
7.7.	The Five Levels Framework for Knowledge Representation	218
7.7.1.	Level Five: Exploration of the Employee's Small World	222
7.7.2.	Level Four	225
	7.7.2.1. Argumentation Analysis - Using Toulmin's Layout of Argument Structure as a Means of Eliciting the Operations Carried out at Level Four	227
7.7.3.	Level Three	230
7.7.4.	Level Two: What-if Questions	235
7.7.5.	Level One: Best Assessments	235
7.7.6.	Usefulness of the Five Levels Framework in the Context of This Study	236
7.8.	Coping within the Process of Managing Conflict	238
7.9.	Summary	240

CHAPTER 8:	INVESTIGATING THE PROCESS OF CONFLICT MANAGEMENT - GENERAL PROCEDURE	242
8.1.	Overview	242
8.2.	Interviews	242
8.3.	Analytic Techniques Incorporated in the Methodology Used	243
8.3.1.	Propositional Analysis	244
8.3.2.	Argumentation Analysis	244
8.4.	Units of Analysis	251
8.5.	Units of Recording - Definition	252
8.6.	Reliability of the Coding Frame	259
CHAPTER 9:	THE INVESTIGATION OF THE PROCESS OF CONFLICT MANAGEMENT - ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION	265
9.1.	Overview	265
9.2.	Level 5 Analysis - Discussion	266
9.3.	Argumentation Analysis - Diagramming Employee's Arguments	276
9.3.1.	Identification of Warrants and Backings in Employees' Arguments - Eliciting the Inference Structure of Employees' Argumentation	283
9.3.2.	Examining How Employees' Inferences Work - The Assumptions Underlying Employees' Argumentation	292
9.3.3.	The Implicit Nature of Assumptions Underlying Employees' Argumentation	299
9.3.4.	Looking at Employees' Assumptions withing the Social and Organizational Nexus	301
9.3.5.	Drawing Conclusions from the Present Study for the Argumenation Analysis Research	304
9.4.	Level 4 Analysis - Discussion	308
9.5.	Level 3 Analysis - Discussion	309
9.5.1.	Past Reconstruction - Coming to Terms with the Decision Taken	313
9.6.	Level 2 Analysis - Discussion	309
9.7.	Level 1 Analysis - Discussion	318
9.8.	Representation of the Conflict Management Problem in Mr. X's Discourse	318
9.9.	Conclusions	320

PART III - THE PROCESS OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION - PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

CHAPTER 10:	CONCLUSIONS AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE PRESENT STUDY	327
10.1.	Overview	327
10.2.	Conclusions of the Analyses	328
10.2.1.	Conclusions of the Findings on Conflict Handling Behaviour	328
10.2.2.	Conclusions of the Findings on Conflict Management	332
10.2.3.	General Conclusions about the Process of Conflict Resolution in E.P.E. - Integrating the Findings from Both Analyses	335
10.3.	Implications of the Present Study for Future Research on Modelling Conflict Resolution	339
10.4.	Implications of the Present Study for Argumentation Analysts	343
10.5	Limitations of the Present Study - Areas for Further Research	345
10.6	Practical Considerations of the Present Study for the Conflict Resolution Research	347
10.7.	The Researcher as an Organizational Analyst and Consultant - Investigation, Analysis and Creative Synthesis of Possibilities	348
10.8.	Conflict Resolution as an Adaptational Communication Process - A Reciprocal Relationship between Conflict Resolution and Organizational Culture	350
10.9.	Practical Considerations for Conflict Resolution in E.P.E. - Proposals for Creative Transformation of the Organization	352
REFERENCES		359
APPENDICES		381
Appendix I		382
Appendix II		383
Appendix III		402
Appendix IV		413

Appendix V	414
Appendix VI	428
Appendix VII	432
Appendix VIII	434
Appendix IX	448

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1.	Thomas's Process Model of a Conflict Episode	17
Figure 2.1.	The Prisoner's Dilemma	28
Figure 2.2.	The Nash Solution	39
Figure 2.3.	Blake and Mouton's Taxonomy of Conflict Handling Strategies	33
Figure 2.4.	A Model of Account Episodes	45
Figure 2.5.	Rahim's Model of Organizational Conflict	49
Figure 3.1.	Conventions Used in Net Modelling	92
Figure 4.1.	The Organizational Chart	99
Figure 4.2.	The Structure within the R & D Department	105
Figure 4.3.	The Structure within the Supplies Department	110
Figure 5.1.a	Map of the Employees Interviewed within the R & D Department	114
Figure 5.1.b	Map of the Employees Interviewed within the Supplies Department	114
Figure 5.2.	Graphical Representation of the Above Conflict Episode (Example : 1)	133
Figure 5.3.	Graphical Representation of the Above Conflict Episode (Example : 2)	135
Figure 5.4.	A 'Meta-Model' of Two Graphical Representations as Merged Together	137
Figure 5.5.a	The Process of Model Constructions - The First Version of the Conflict Handling Model	139
Figure 5.5.b	The Process of Model Constructions - The Second Version of the Conflict Handling Model	141
Figure 6.1.	The Approximate Net Model for Conflict Handling Behaviour	149
Figure 6.2.a	Conflict Handling Practices in the R & D Department - Actual Episodes	171
Figure 6.2.b	Conflict Handling Practices in the Supplies Department - Actual Episodes	172

Figure 6.3.a	Conflict Handling Practices in R & D - Hypothetical Episodes	178
Figure 6.3.b	Conflict Handling Practices in Supplies - Hypothetical Episodes	179
Figure 6.4.	The Net Conflict Handling Model for Mr. X	192
Figure 7.1.	Humphreys and Berkeley's Five Levels of Knowledge Representation	220
Figure 8.1.	An Illustration of the Argumentation Scheme	250
Figure 9.1.	The 10 Domains as Identified in the Analysis of the Interviews	266
Figure 9.2.	Graphical Representation of the Percentages of Propositions Identified in each Domain	269
Figure 9.3.	Graphical Representation of Employees' Arguments in the Frames	310

LIST OF TABLES

Table 5.1.	The Distribution of the Conflict Episodes Included in the Analysis	124
Table 5.2.a	The Distribution of the Conflict Episodes Included in the Analysis across the Employees Interviewed in the R & D Department	124
Table 5.2.b	The Distribution of the Conflict Episodes Included in the Analysis across the Employees Interviewed in the Supplies Department	125
Table 5.3.	Reliability Analysis of the Conflict Episodes	144
Table 6.1.a	Frequencies and Percentages of Conflict Handling Behaviours for 'Avoid' and 'Communicate Disagreement' Nodes in Each Department	173
Table 6.1.b	Frequencies and Percentages for Resolved and Non-Resolved Conflict Episodes in Each Department	174
Table 8.1.	The Distribution of the Conflict Episodes Included in the Analysis	252
Table 8.2.	Reliability Analysis of the Classification into Domains of the Propositions Identified in Employee's Discourse	263
Table 8.3.	Reliability Analysis of the Frames Identified in Employees' Discourse	264
Table 9.1.	Total Number and Percentages of Propositions Allocated to Each Domain	268
Table 9.2.	Classification of Arguments for Each Decision Node in the Frames	309

Introduction and Overview

Conflict is an ubiquitous aspect of human existence. It occurs at the levels of personal functioning - under the form of intra-personal conflict - as well as in all forms of social interaction. Although the topic has aroused the interests of various disciplines, its systematic study is relatively recent and the key elements of the field have yet to be explored (Deutsch, 1991).

As a social phenomenon, conflict is also a persistent fact of organizational life. According to Robbins (1974), research on organizations is incomplete unless it offers an understanding of conflict and of techniques for its management. The importance of conflict occurring in organizational groups is determined by the fact that people in organizations mainly work in groups. Yet, despite groups being the building blocks of an organization, little research has focused on organizational groups, as units of analysis for conflict. Even though conflict in organizations does not usually take the form of overt hostilities, or necessitate official negotiation and the intervention of third parties for the differences to be resolved, such differences are embedded in the interactions between organizational members in the course of their daily activities, and take the form of ongoing skirmishes or small 'vengeances' (Kolb & Putnam, 1992). Nowadays, with the increasing complexity both of organizational life and of task interdependence, conflict is an indispensable and vital aspect of everyday organizational reality, which may well be troublesome, depending on how it is handled. Its positive or detrimental effects are determined by the communicative strategies that are used to deal with it (Deutsch, 1969).

Purpose of the study

The research focus of this thesis is to propose a methodology for modelling the process that employees follow in their attempts to resolve conflicts in the context of their department. As the argument of the present research holds, this process is portrayed in the way that conflict behaviour evolves during the unfolding of a given conflict

episode over time (e.g. conflict handling process), as well as in the way that the employee represents and structures the conflict problem (e.g. conflict management process). Since, up to date, the dynamic nature of both conflict handling behaviour and conflict management have been little studied, the present study aims to fill this gap by modelling both employees' handling behaviours and their representations of the conflict situation. Accounts of conflict episodes reported by employees of a particular organizational context (i.e. a Greek industrial company) are used as the basis for modelling employees' representations of these conflict situations, as well as the subsequent practices used in their handling. Modelling the process of conflict resolution through information collected from employees working in a particular organizational context is associated with this study's postulate that the particular organizational context sets the constraints within which employees conceptualize and handle conflict situations.

Outline of the thesis

This thesis consists of three parts. Part One: The Process of Conflict Handling Behaviour (Chapters 2-6) reviews research on conflict behaviour and highlights the need to model the evolution of conflict behaviour during a conflict episode. It then develops a process model of conflict handling behaviour, which is rooted in a specific organizational context. Part Two: The Process of Conflict Management (Chapters 7-9) discusses the assumption that conflict management can be studied as a decision making process. For this reason, it revisits research on decision analysis with the aim to establishing a methodological framework suitable for the modelling of the conflict management problem. Part Three: The Process of Conflict Resolution (Chapter 10) integrates the main points of the discussions held in both parts of the thesis and discusses the practical implications of the study. Building on the process model of conflict handling behaviour, as well as on the findings of the way in which employees conceptualize and represent their conflict problems, this research concludes with a discussion of its possible implications for both conflict resolution research and practical

considerations in the context of the case study organization. A more detailed outline of the chapters is given below.

Chapter One of the thesis reviews how organizational conflict has been conceptualized and studied over the years from a static viewpoint. Rather than looking at conflict situations as a single-occurrence event, this study stresses the importance of examining conflict as a process which may evolve in different conflict episodes or rounds within the same episode.

On the grounds of the theoretical background presented in Chapter One, Chapter Two is devoted to a review of existing research on conflict behaviour. The behavioural practices which have been used in order to describe conflict handling behaviour in organizational settings are identified. Studies from the conflict resolution and the bargaining arena are revisited with the aim of pinpointing the small amount of research which has examined the evolution of conflict behaviour within a conflict episode. The methodological drawbacks entailed in these studies - which the present research aims to address when modelling the process of conflict handling - are highlighted. One of the major discrepancies identified in this kind of research is that it falls short of properly taking into account the contextual background within which the conflict resolution takes place.

Chapter Three discusses methodological issues related to my choice of using employees' accounts of conflict episodes as a basis for the investigation and the modelling of the process of conflict resolution. The use of open-ended interviewing is also justified in the context of the research design selected. Building on this study's assumption that the organizational context is important for the better appreciation of the way in which employees endeavour to resolve conflict situations encountered in their workplace, Chapter Four offers a general picture of the organization within which the process of conflict resolution was examined; this account mainly draws on information from interviews conducted in the particular organization. The emphasis on the presentation of the Greek industrial company, E.P.E., is placed on its bureaucratic

structure and functioning; this bureaucratic system shapes the culture of the organization and promotes certain interactional patterns over others. The purpose of the outline of the company is justified through the assumption that the culture of the organization constructs the social 'reality' within which the organizational members perceive the conflict problem and handle it. The research question to be addressed in this study is formulated in the light of this assumption.

Chapter Five is devoted to the presentation of the methodological procedure which was followed in the study. It describes how the model of conflict handling behaviour was initiated from accounts of conflict episodes reported during the interviews conducted with 26 employees working in two departments of the company. Finally, it discusses how the units of analysis were defined for this part of the analysis.

Chapter Six deals with the actual analysis of the information collected through the interviews. A process model of conflict handling behaviour is presented as generated through this analysis. The discussion of the net model raises issues related to the way in which accounts of conflict episodes were modelled in the present study. Based on the findings of the conflict handling practices enacted by employees of the two departments in E.P.E., the discussion also illustrates how and to what extent conflict behaviour practices portray and foster organizational culture, while some parts of the model are also discussed in the light of the cultural framework which is shared by organizational members. Part One concludes by pinpointing certain parts of the model which cannot be fully explained within the bounds of the model for conflict behaviour.

Part Two addresses these issues by introducing the assumption that conflict management can be seen as a real-life decision-making process. Chapter Seven argues that conflict management is a personal decision problem and briefly reviews the relevant literature on personal decision making. The main purpose of this review is to bring to the fore certain concepts which are salient for organizational conflict management: first, the investigation and modelling of the conflict management process should allow for employees' subjective ways of perceiving the conflict problem;

second, it should take into account the constraints set by the social situation within which the conflict problem is situated, and third, it should offer guidelines in order to track individuals in the process of conflict management. Building on these principles, a methodological framework for the modelling of the conflict management problem, which meets these issues, is identified.

Having established a methodology for the process of conflict management, Chapter Eight discusses the methodological procedure followed in this part of the analysis. Chapter Nine discusses the analysis of employees' accounts of conflict episodes, as modelled according to the different levels of the analytical framework selected. Employees' representations of conflict situations are also discussed in the light of the particular organizational context.

On the basis of the conclusions presented in both parts of the thesis, Chapter Ten (Part III of the thesis) offers an integrative account of the findings of this thesis. It raises issues related to ways of modelling organizational conflict resolution, while it also points out implications that the present research bears for practice on conflict resolution in organizational settings.

CHAPTER ONE

Approaching Conflict as a Process

"The paramount fact about human interactions is that they are happenings, that they are psychologically represented in each of the participants."

Asch, 1952; p.142

1.1. Overview

This chapter reviews research on conflict. Following its development over the years, we gain an understanding regarding how the original view of conflict as a destructive phenomenon gradually changed to acknowledge the possible positive effects of conflict. It is also suggested that conflict in organizational groups is a special form of conflict, due to the special nature of the social environment and the relationships between the parties in conflict. Finally, the concept of conflict episode is adopted as a means of investigating the processual nature both of behaviour used in the conflict episode, as well as of the representation preceding the behavioural choice.

1.2. Defining the Conflict Problem - A Social Psychological Perspective

A review of the body of research on conflict indicates that, so far, there has been little consensus on the definition of conflict as a social phenomenon. Instead of referring to the phenomenon as such, most definitions list the causes of conflict (Schmidt & Kochan, 1972), types of conflict (Ross, 1989), or criteria for differentiating conflict from other constructs such as competition (Fink, 1968). Despite emphasizing different aspects of the conflict phenomenon, these definitions can be divided into two general categories (Schmidt & Kochan, 1972; Wall & Nolan, 1986). In the first category, primary focus is given to behaviours that 'interfere' with the behaviour or goals of others ('action-centred' definitions), while the latter category emphasizes the

importance of the perceptions of the parties involved in the conflict-situation ('motive-centred' definitions). Even though the perception of incompatibility appears in all definitions, there is an inherent difference between the two approaches; in the first case, overt (behavioural) displays of 'hostility' are a prerequisite for a situation to be called a conflict. According to this approach, conflict research has often regarded a situation as a conflict only if it openly escalates to such an extent that it takes on the appearance of an outright fighting situation (Mastenbroek, 1987). The second perspective - which represents the social psychological paradigm in the study of conflict - is primarily concerned with the perceptions of the parties; it is sufficient that incompatibilities are perceived by one of the parties involved, for a situation to be called a conflict (Pondy, 1967).

The present study adopts a social psychological perspective on conflict research and views conflict in terms of perceived incompatibilities, as far as views, wishes, desires and/or actions are concerned (Boulding, 1963). Such incompatibilities should, at a minimum, be perceived by one of the parties directly involved, in order for a situation to be called a conflict. Conflict situations may range from mild disagreements and personal grievances to overt hostilities. Research in the discipline of social psychology has highlighted the prominence that perception, communication and social context play in conflict situations (Fisher, 1990). The following sections offer a brief review of these elements and their importance to the phenomenon under investigation.

1.2.1. The Phenomenological Nature of Conflict

In the previous section, I defined conflict in terms of the perceived incompatibilities of the party/ies involved in the situation. According to Pondy (1967), a situation is regarded as conflict when at least one of the parties perceives it as such. This approach renders the manifestation of any kind of overt hostilities unnecessary. According to this line of thinking, there is no need for the existence of any 'real' or 'objective' cause of conflict to emerge. Our lives comprise situations where conflict is experienced even though there is no apparent reason, and other situations where

conflict is never manifested, despite the existence of an 'objective' cause for it. The way that individuals define, interpret and choose to handle conflict is more critical than the nature of the conflict itself (Shockley-Zalabak, 1988).

The notion of subjectivity is inherently associated with that of conflict; it is manifested in the process of the perception of conflict, the communication exchanged between the two parties, the choice of a particular way of dealing with a given conflict situation, as well as during the evaluation of the conflict outcomes. According to Felstiner et al. (1980-81; p.631-32), "disputes are not things; they are social constructs [...] a significant portion of which exists only in the minds of the disputants". People interact on the basis of the meanings they assign to the world around them. Individuals respond to each other in terms of their perceptions and cognitions of each other, which reflect their own expectations and may not correspond to the other's actualities¹ (Pondy, 1964). Even if people are 'mistaken' in their interpretation of a situation, such interpretations have, nevertheless, 'real' consequences (Jorgensen, 1989).

1.2.2. The Interactive Nature of Conflict

A conflict interface is a form of social interaction and, as such, acquires its social definition through communication (Nadler et al., 1985). Any study of human interaction calls for a focus on communication, since the latter is the 'sine qua non' of the former. Communication permeates every stage of a conflict episode and constitutes the essence of the latter. For example, both the conceptualization of the controversy and the definition of the issues involved occur through normal channels of communication. Similarly, communication underlies relationships between disputants, the selection and implementation of conflict behaviour, as well as the extent to which conflict escalates or is managed (Putnam & Poole, 1987).

¹Such expectations are determined by both social and personal constraints.

Research has often referred to conflict in terms of a sequential process of social interaction between the persons directly involved (Wolf, 1983; Ross, 1993). Existing evidence has suggested that both actual behaviour and the goals of the parties in conflict are likely to change over time as a function of the social interaction (Wolf, 1983). Similarly, behavioural and/or perceptual changes may also emerge in the course of the interaction between the parties, as new information concerning the situation in hand is unravelled.

1.2.3. The Contextual Nature of Conflict - Organizational Conflict

As any other form of social interaction, conflict does not occur in a vacuum. Since individuals do not live in isolation, the way in which they behave and interact with each other takes place within a social environment (Deutsch, 1973). As Bateson (1978; p.13) notes, "all communication necessitates context, without [which] there is no meaning". Even processes, such as motivations and cognitions which have usually been approached uniquely from the perspective of the individual, operate in a social context (Condor & Brown, 1988). In regard to conflict studies, Morley argued that negotiations can only be appreciated when examined within "the historical contexts of which they form a part, and which they help to produce" (Morley, 1992; p.205). Since this research focuses on dyadic conflict interfaces in organizational groups, the organization constitutes the social context of the conflict situations to be studied.

A great number of organizational studies have investigated the phenomenon of conflict; the abundance of research conducted in this area is related to the persistence of conflict in organizational life. For instance, it has been noticed that a great deal of a manager's time is typically spent in being involved in the resolution of conflicts (Sheppard, 1984). The focus of this study is to model the way in which incidents of dyadic conflict are resolved between members of the same organizational group. According to Rahim (1986), intra-group conflict situations - and the way they are resolved - within an organizational group have different characteristics from other conflict interactions

occurring in an organizational context. For this reason, the next section discusses the special nature of intra-group conflict.

1.3. Conflict within Organizational Groups

Conflict within organizational groups has so far been little studied, even though its importance has been highlighted by existing organizational research. Research has demonstrated that frictions among group members reduce employees' satisfaction regarding their work group, while they increase the likelihood of job quittal (Jehn, 1992). The same applies in cases where employees feel they are in conflict with another member of the group, even though the friction between them is not apparent. For instance, studies have indicated that group members' perceptions of conflict have an impact on both group and individual outcomes (Deutsch, 1969; Kabanoff, 1985).

The bulk of organizational research on conflict has concentrated on situations where parties have competing interests or incompatible objectives (Jehn, 1992). This approach can be seen as a reflection of the fact that much of this body of research has focused on conflict at an inter-group level (Ross, 1989). Nonetheless, even conflict research at an intra-group level has focused primarily on conflicts of goals within the group (Levine & Moreland, 1990). Placing such an emphasis on goal incompatibilities among members of an organizational group seems to disregard the fact that most organizational groups are common-goal groups. The existence of a common goal or purpose is a key element in the definition of a work group, in the sense that organizational groups (in the form of work-teams, units and departments) are formed in order to achieve a common task goal (Jehn, 1992).

However, despite the existence of a common task goal which unites employees working in the same group, social interactions amongst organizational members are complex since they reflect a fundamental incompatibility (Boulding, 1963); they are often characterized by a mixture of co-operation and competition. For example, on the one

hand, in their everyday interaction, employees have to rely on each other in order to accomplish the task assigned to the unit in which they work; due to the regular interaction, emotional ties also develop among employees. However, at the same time, they often find themselves competing with each other for power and scarce resources (Mastenbroek, 1987). Since the work that members of the same group perform is usually interdependent, effective organizing cannot take place unless such interdependencies are managed effectively, and a balance is reached between co-operation and mutual dependency on the one hand, and rivalry and autonomy on the other hand. However, nowadays, organizations grow in size and diversity and problems emerge about which members of these organizations are likely to have quite divergent perspectives; the conflicts experienced by employees can range from competition over resources and struggles for power, to failure to co-ordinate their efforts and to discrepancies in the way in which personal relationships are handled. Therefore, conflict interfaces between employees working in the same group occur, even though they have common interests and basically agree about the goals to be achieved. In other words, these are situations where people

"who believe they should be working together find that they are unable to do so effectively; that is,..conflict that develops primarily from people's normal attempts to cooperate or coordinate their efforts."
(Kabanoff, 1985; p.114)

Moreover, sometimes personal goals are intermixed with organizational ones; in the work environment, employees find it difficult to separate their personal identity from the tasks they have to perform, from the organizational goals, as well as from the beliefs and the norms in use in the particular organization or work group (DeCosta, 1993). This can be seen as another indication of the special nature of conflict situations in organizational groups, while it also explains why disputes between organizational members are usually seen as personality clashes (Rahim, 1986).

So far, I have referred in general to the special nature of relationships between members of the same work group, and how such relationships give organizational conflict a form which is quite distinct from other forms of social interaction. Even

though these relationships and interactions among organizational members apply to multifarious organizational settings, there are bound to be differences depending on the various characteristics of work organizations (e.g. technology employed, structure of the organization). The present study focuses on bureaucratic organizations. For this reason, references will be made to the way in which employees perform their tasks and relate to each other in organizational bureaucracies.

1.3.1. Organizational Bureaucracies

When talking about bureaucracies, we refer to employment systems which are established within institutions. Therefore, bureaucracies are secondary and dependent institutions which are set up by organizations. They are social systems which call upon individuals to work in a setting which employs them to carry out work and pursue goals which are set by the employing institution (Jaques, 1976). Accordingly, one can consider a bureaucratic organization to be a special form of formal organization, which has specific characteristics (Mouzelis, 1967).

The principal aspects of bureaucracy were first defined by Weber, who focused on a sociological description of bureaucracy and approached it as the product of modern civilization (Weber, 1948; Baum, 1987; Diamond, 1993). According to Weber, a major principle of bureaucratic structures concerns the hierarchy of subordinate-supervisor relationships, which also constitutes the social structure of bureaucratic systems. The essence of the hierarchical authority structure is that the manager delegates some of the work to others, for whose work s/he is thus accountable. This accountability must be clearly and directly ascribed in order for the bureaucratic hierarchy to function effectively (Baum, 1987). These networks of role relationships form a pyramid-shaped hierarchical structure, which is characteristic of bureaucratic systems. Hence, while authority - and consequently, the decision making system of the organization - is centralized, responsibility for the work done is dispersed (Baum, 1987). While work is divided and allocated among relatively specialized workers, tasks are carried out in a prescribed manner. The employee's role, and the subsequent role

expectations that others have of the person in that role, are clearly demarcated and defined by formal rules. Since supervisors are usually held accountable for the work of a large number of employees, close personal contact is replaced by impersonal relationships which are governed by formal rules and procedures. Bureaucracies are basically managed through written documents, regulated channels of communication and fixed rules which limit the actions of organizational members. Thus these rules specify the way in which employees holding the same position are expected to act. Moreover, they contribute to a limited contact among specialists working in different organizational areas. Overall, bureaucracy refers to

"[...] the existence of a system of control based on rational rules, which regulate the whole organizational structure and process on the basis of the technical knowledge and with the aim of maximum efficiency."
(Mouzelis, 1967; p.38)

Even though these characteristics portray all organizations to a certain degree, the extent to which bureaucratic systems display these characteristics has often added pejorative connotations to the bureaucracy concept (Clegg et al., 1988). For example, bureaucracies usually have too many levels of organization, which makes reaching decisions a lengthy process. This may also result in by-passing so that the 'red-tape phenomenon' (i.e. long delays) is avoided. Elsewhere, there may be uncertainty about who is really accountable for whom and vice versa. Or, job descriptions can become so fixed that employees may feel constrained from getting on with the work in hand, or with the changing work requirements.

1.4. Conflict Research and Organization Theory

In section 1.2.1., we have seen that the manifestation of friction - and/or behavioural 'hostilities' - is not necessary for one party to feel that s/he is in conflict with another. Having associated the conflict concept with the perception of differences in regard to objectives, competing interests and failures in the coordination of effort, organization research soon realized that conflict is a pervasive phenomenon in organizational life.

Conflict was then recognized as being one of the most challenging problems organizational members have to face and, often, one of the most troublesome (Putnam, 1988). As a consequence, organization theorists focused much of their attention on conflicts within the workplace, their causes and the ways in which they could be resolved. It was then that research on organizational conflict and its management became closely associated with the body of organizational research. Since organizations have been regarded as microcosms of society with their cultures, norms, beliefs and goals (Burrell & Morgan, 1979), it was inevitable for organization theory to parallel the movement in the wider realm of philosophy and sociology.

The philosophical examination of conflict started with Aristotle and Plato, who saw conflict as being harmful to the state which therefore should aim towards the elimination of all conflict (DeCosta, 1993). Despite Darwin's early ideas² that conflict plays an important role in nature and provides the opportunity for growth and development of the species (Rahim, 1986), conflict continued to be viewed as a dysfunctional phenomenon within the framework of a stable society. Following the same perspective, classical organization theory (i.e. Weber, Mayo, Taylor) assumed that conflict was detrimental to organizational functioning. Theory, as well as empirical work, focused on the adverse effects of conflict on group performance, work satisfaction and overall organizational effectiveness (Jehn, 1992). Attention was focused on the potential causes of conflict in order to eliminate it altogether from the workplace, especially since human beings were believed, by nature, to aim towards the alleviation of stress and an increase in harmony (DeCosta, 1993). However, elimination or minimization of conflict was attempted through the development of hierarchical and rigid organizational structures and procedures which restricted creativity and led to 'behind-the-scenes' types of problems.

As early as 1940, Follett advocated the value of conflict in organizations and thus she was opposed to a mechanistic approach to organizational life (Rahim, 1986). However,

²These ideas were followed by those of Georg Simmel who viewed life in terms of a continual change between what exists and what needs to emerge (Simmel, 1968).

her position was only acknowledged much later, when attention was first paid to the beneficial side of conflict, which was then regarded as leading to innovation and, consequently, to a new equilibrium (Coser, 1956). Further research focused on measuring conflict management styles in different situations, and thus determining which style was most appropriate for each situation. The negative effects of conflict were associated with instances where conflict escalated to a point that failed to be managed. Taking into account both the possible beneficial and destructive effects of conflict, organization theorists and practitioners placed an emphasis on ways of resolving conflict, rather than suppressing it.

1.5. Conflict Solution or Conflict Resolution?

Early movements within organizational research examined conflict with a view to reducing it, or even eliminating it altogether, from the work context. Their main objective was to solve conflict in the sense of reducing its amount, instead of attempting to manage it, which does not necessarily imply such a reduction (Wall & Nolan, 1986). Such an approach to conflict originated from the use of negative value-laden definitions of conflict, which led to the assumption that the latter has only destructive effects and should therefore be avoided altogether. Organization theorists have currently reached a consensus that a moderate amount of conflict is necessary for attaining an optimum organizational effectiveness, and that the relation between the latter and conflict approximates an inverted-U function (Rahim & Bonoma, 1979). While a low level of conflict leads to stagnation, uncontrolled conflict may cause chaos (Hampton et al., 1973).

Some optimum level of conflict - and associated personal stress and tension - is necessary for progress and productivity (Pondy, 1967). It serves as a means of social change and of an increase in an organization's adaptability, since the latter learns to adapt to changing internal pressures. It eliminates sources of dissatisfaction and readjusts the balance of power (Deutsch, 1973). However, conflict may also have

dysfunctional effects. For instance, it may threaten the emotional well-being of individuals by the rupture of their social relationships with other individuals within the group. It can also be the source of misperceptions, withholding information and of suspicious, hostile attitudes which increase sensitivity to differences and threats, while minimising awareness of similarities (Deutsch, 1973).

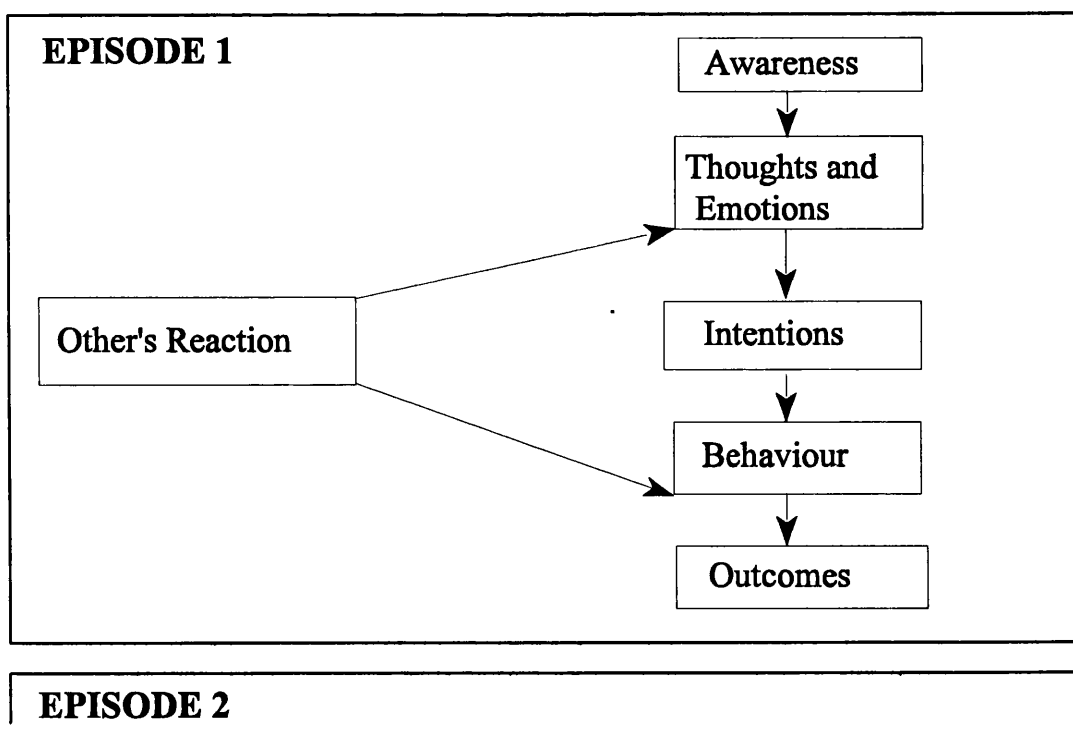
Taking into account that conflict may have positive effects, while keeping in mind that organizational groups are complex networks of interdependencies, giving rise to constant and inevitable sources of conflicts (see section 1.3.), there is no longer any question of how to eliminate conflict from the workplace. Rather, there is a rising interest in understanding the conditions that lead to the effective management of conflict situations. For instance, a review of conflicts having detrimental consequences - for both organizational members and their work context - reveals that these instances refer to situations in which conflict has escalated to a certain point and thus failed to be managed. It is only by following the process of conflict, and by understanding how it evolves through time, that we will understand the mechanisms inherent in the conflict situation, as well as detecting mechanisms leading to either escalation or resolution of this situation. This will be of vital importance for both organizational researchers and practitioners, in the sense that it will provide "a link for moving from abstract conceptualization to organizational application" (Kochan & Verma, 1983; p.21).

1.6. Approaching Conflict as a Process - The Notion of Conflict Episode

The term 'conflict' connotes an event; however, as Ross (1993) postulates, it is more useful to think about it as a process. Approaching conflict as a process corresponds to the social psychological perspective that the present study has adopted; the social psychological approach to understanding conflict places emphasis on the process followed (i.e. how conflict evolves over time) rather than on the content of conflict (i.e. what the conflict is about) (Fisher, 1990).

Generally, the development of conflict episodes has been closely associated with the interaction between the parties in conflict. Accordingly, conflict episodes are seen as sequential processes of social interaction between the two parties involved in the situation (Wolf, 1983). Thomas (1992) developed a process model of a conflict episode which accounted for the importance of interaction in conflict situations. As the model indicates, there can be more than one episode within the same conflict situation; any previous episode is likely to affect subsequent episodes. The model accounts for the importance of interaction which has an impact on the way that the party perceives, feels and behaves in regard to a given situation. The model is dynamic, in the sense that it allows for changes in the person's thoughts, emotions, intentions and behaviour, as a result of the interaction with the other party. Each episode "ha[s] an internal logic with each preceding event causing later events and outcomes" (Thomas, 1992; p.654).

Figure 1.1. Thomas's Process Model of a Conflict Episode
(adapted from Thomas, 1992)



Research has provided evidence that conflict episodes are dynamic and not independent. According to Thomas's model, a given conflict situation may evolve in a series of episodes, each of which may be characterized by changes in the perceptions and emotions of the party as well as in his/her behavioural choices. In this way, a conflict situation may keep recurring, often under different guises (in terms of different perceptions of and/or feelings about the situation, as well as use of different behavioural patterns). Following a similar vein of thinking, Laue (1987) posited that conflicts can be solved and then re-solved and re-solved. Taking the same idea one step forward, he advocated that individual conflict incidents or episodes may terminate, but "conflict per se is never solved. Each solution creates, in a Hegelian sense, a new plateau or a new synthesis against which the next scenario is played." (Laue, 1987; p.18).

The call for developmental research on the conflict has already been highlighted by other researchers in the field (Knapp et al., 1988). Rather than looking at it as a single occurrence, conflict needs to be seen as a dynamic process which consists of a sequence of successive events. Adopting a developmental approach to conflict will facilitate research on interpersonal conflict not only to track the changes in the choice of conflict behaviours across the stages of a conflict episode (Putnam, 1985), but it will also shed light on the way that each conflict episode unfolds.

1.7. The Dynamic Nature of the Conflict Episode - Visible Behaviour and Internal Processes

The last section discussed the dynamic nature of conflict in terms of sequential episodes occurring within a conflict situation. However, the dynamism of conflict resides even within the notion of the conflict episode. For instance, in Thomas's model, we have seen that an episode consists of an original awareness of the conflict situation which leads to various thoughts and emotions on behalf of the party concerned. As a consequence, intentions are formulated regarding how to cope with the conflict which

are enacted in some form of behaviour towards the other party (see Figure 1.1.). In this way, the model acknowledges the existence of internal processes leading to the choice of a conflict behaviour at the end of the episode.

The idea of internal processes which precede observable behaviour is not new in conflict research. As early as 1964, Pondy developed the concept of 'conflict episode' and stressed the need to examine the sequence of conflict events within the episode.

He identified five stages in a conflict episode (Pondy, 1964):

- (a) antecedent conditions;
- (b) cognitive states of the parties (i.e. awareness of the conflict situation);
- (c) affective states (i.e. tension, hostility);
- (d) conflict behaviour;
- (e) conflict aftermath.

According to the model, the conflict episode starts when the conflict situation is still **latent** - in the sense that the person is not even aware of experiencing conflict - and thus refers to the underlying causes of a given conflict situation. As a next step, the situation is **perceived** by the person as conflict ridden. Conflict is **felt** only when it becomes enriched by feelings (e.g. anger, resentment). Finally, the conflict becomes **manifest** by means of a variety of conflict (handling) behaviour. Each conflict situation leaves an aftermath which has an effect on the conflict episode to follow. An important element in Pondy's model of conflict episodes is that it is not necessary for every conflict episode to pass through all of the stages described. For instance, a potential conflict may never be perceived by the parties involved in the situation, or it may be resolved before the conflict becomes manifest (Pondy, 1964).

Rahim (1986) proposed a theoretical model for organizational conflict which is applicable to interpersonal, intra-group as well as inter-group conflict. It proposes three stages of a conflict episode: (a) antecedent conditions which refer to possible sources of conflict and can be behavioural, demographic and structural; (b) conflict management processes which are further distinguished into behavioural and attitudinal

changes, structure formation and decision process³; (c) conflict aftermath which is likely to affect the way in which the parties relate to each other in the future.

I have presented above some conflict models which are indicative of the work that has been conducted in the area of conflict research regarding the dynamic nature of a conflict episode. These models are theory-driven and have emerged from a review of the conflict literature. As Pondy posited in his paper, his model only provides a framework within which questions like "which specific reactions take place at each stage of a conflict episode, and why" remain to be answered (Pondy, 1964; p.515-16). For this reason, there are no immediate references to elements of the system within which the conflict occurs, even though it is advocated that these processes do not occur in a vacuum (Pondy, 1967; Thomas, 1992). Only Rahim's model was initially developed for the investigation of organizational conflict.

The aim of this presentation has been to show that research in this field has referred to processes situated within the individual which take place prior to the behaviour used by the party. In all of these models, there is a reference to internal processes (i.e. cognitive and affective states in Thomas's and Pondy's models; attitudinal changes in Rahim's model) which have an effect on the behaviour used in order to handle the conflict situation. In this way, conflict behaviour is seen as the final outcome of the parties' conflict management process.

We have already seen that Thomas described conflict episodes in terms of a set of events, each of which affects subsequent events and outcomes. According to him, "these events include the internal experiences of the parties, as well as their externally visible behaviours" (Thomas, 1992; p.654). Similarly, Ross (1993) advocated that conflict stages of any given episode are characterized by different actions, as well as perceptions, associated with each particular stage. In the context of the present study,

³The three processes of conflict management correspond to conflict situations which have an increasing intensity, and can thus be associated with conflict escalatory processes. For this reason, this model will be looked at in further detail in Chapter Two (section 2.5.2.2.).

a conflict episode consists of a set of events, each of which is characterized by different actions and conceptualizations of the situation.

The interrelations between internal processes and conflict behaviour used in a conflict episode, have been, for a long time, a subject of research. For instance, according to Pinkley, disputants' perceptions of conflict may alter conflict behaviour, the selection of strategies and the way in which conflict is evaluated (Jehn, 1992); Stefanakis (1992) demonstrated the importance of emotions throughout the process of conflict management. Similarly, within the realm of negotiation research, the need to relate the processes used to resolve conflict to the goals of parties has been acknowledged (Kochan & Verma, 1983). Despite this call, existing research has often fallen short of investigating the evolution of behaviour during different stages of a conflict episode and how this evolution is related to changes in the party's representation of the situation. In this respect, Gray and Purdy (1990) advocated that even process models of negotiations have neglected the investigation of negotiators' interpretations which guide their decisions about action.

1.8. Studying the Process of Conflict Resolution - The Aim of This Study

The main focus of the sections 1.6. & 1.7. has been to provide a brief overview regarding how conflict has been approached so far by existing research on the field. This overview has enabled the identification of the following gaps in existing research on the investigation of the process of conflict resolution, which the present study aims to address. First, conflict resolution has mainly been approached as a static event, rather than a process which evolves over time. Second, the mainstream of research on conflict resolution has examined separately the way that individuals behave during a conflict situation from their conceptualization of this particular situation.

Having as an objective to fill in these gaps, the present study sets out to develop new ways for the investigation and the modelling of the way in which conflict situations are

resolved by organizational members. In order to achieve a global understanding of the phenomenon under study, this research focuses on (a) conflict resolution as it evolves from the beginning of any particular conflict episode till the end of this episode and (b) both the specific behavioural practices that employees use when dealing with conflict situations, as well as the way in which they represent and make sense of the situation in hand. Therefore, on the one hand, the examination of the way in which employees handle conflict interfaces encountered in their work group aims to reveal the behavioural patterns that employees use in different conflict situations and thus, enable the modelling of these behavioural practices throughout the evolution of a conflict episode. On the other hand, the investigation of these employees' process of representation of the conflict episode as a decision making problem, in which they are involved, will enable an illustration of the different stages of this process; from representation of the conflict problem to implementation in action (i.e. choice of conflict behaviour).

Seeing the process of conflict representation as a decision making process - which incorporates cognitive, affective and behavioural elements - the study of conflict behaviour is inherently associated with the examination of the parties' internal processes which, so far, have been neglected. Decision making can thus be seen as a management system in the sense that it helps the individual to manage information coming from the interaction with the other party, as well as from personal and situational constraints; on the other hand, the conflict behaviour to be used represents the means by which the individual carries out the decision taken (i.e. the chosen alternative). Following this line of thought, I shall refer from now onwards to the process of deliberating about which conflict behaviour to use in terms of a **conflict management** process; on the other hand, the observable behavioural patterns will be referred to as **conflict handling** patterns. Both of these processes constitute integral parts of the **conflict resolution** process which is the ultimate focus of investigation of this piece of research.

Having as a point of departure the premise that the investigation of the phenomenon of conflict resolution in organizational settings necessitates examination of both actual behavioural practices which employees use when encountering a conflict situation, as well as examination of how they conceptualize this situation and how they actually make the decision for committing themselves to a particular course of action, the present research aims to propose new ways of modelling employees' conflict resolution process, as this process is revealed through their accounts of conflict situations encountered in the context of their department. In order to achieve this aim, I intend to follow a two-step procedure. First, I aim to develop a methodology for modelling the different ways in which employees' conflict behaviour may evolve in the course of specific conflict episodes. Second, I aim to model the way in which conflict episode are represented in employees' discourse by proposing a methodology which will enable us to trace the various stages of this process, that is, from initial awareness of the situation till the employee's commitment to action. The modelling of conflict resolution process will be based on employees' discourse when constructing accounts of conflict encounters in the workplace. The research question to be addressed as a result of modelling the process of conflict resolution is to find out how this process reflects aspects of the organizational context within which it has been modelled, both in terms of the behavioural patterns employees use in conflict situations, as well as the way they conceptualize and structure such situations.

Keeping in mind the distinction between conflict handling and conflict management process, the rest of this thesis will be divided in two parts: (a) Part I is devoted to the study of conflict handling behavioural patterns, as displayed by employees working in two departments of a Greek industrial company, and (b) Part II investigates the conflict management processes of these employees.

1.9. Summary

At the beginning of the chapter, I explained the social psychological perspective according to which the present study approaches the phenomenon of conflict; the subjective, interactive and situational nature of the phenomenon were highlighted, in an attempt to illustrate the dynamism and the complexity entailed in conflict situations. The notion of the conflict episode was highlighted as a means of enabling us to trace possible changes in terms of communicative behaviours used during a given conflict situation. The ultimate aim of this chapter has been to stress the need for the investigation of conflict resolution as a process, both in terms of the conflict handling behaviour used as well as of the representation of the conflict management problem.

Chapter Two (which belongs to Part I of the thesis) revisits existing research on conflict behaviour. Relevant research pertains to the realm of conflict, as well as negotiation research. The aim of the review will be to find out how such research can be helpful for the investigation and modelling of conflict behaviour as a process.

PART I

THE PROCESS OF CONFLICT HANDLING BEHAVIOUR

CHAPTER TWO

Research on Conflict Handling Behaviour - A Review

2.1. Overview

This chapter reviews existing research on conflict handling behaviour. This research comes from two areas: negotiation and conflict resolution. A review of the existing literature suggested different classification schemes that describe behaviour in conflict situations. Whilst, in the beginning, conflict behaviour was attributed to stable characteristics of the personalities of the parties involved in the conflict, later developments in the field acknowledged the importance of situational elements in the handling of the conflict. While the bulk of existing research in the area has examined conflict behaviour as a single-occurrence phenomenon, it has mostly been research on negotiation which has examined the handling behaviour as it evolves within a conflict episode.

2.2. Developments in Research on Conflict Behaviour - A Historical Review

A review of the relevant literature has indicated that research in the field has shifted from an early focus on experimental designs towards more field studies of conflict behaviour in organizations.

2.2.1. Experimental Research on Negotiation Behaviour

Until recently, the theoretical approaches to bargaining and negotiation have drawn on mathematical decision theory and economics (Smith, 1987). These disciplines studied conflict behaviour through an examination of people's behaviour in various experimental games. Experimental techniques were used in an attempt to analyze the

social interaction between the players. According to game theory - which is typically used to inform and interpret this research - conflict behaviours of the participants in a game comprise patterns of cooperative and competitive behavioural moves (Sillars, 1981). The players follow a sequence of moves that are either their own decisions or the outcomes of chance events; whatever strategy the players follow, that is whatever set of decisions they make at different possible points in the course of the game, they receive a *payoff*, which may be an actual reward, or the utility of the outcome of the game to the players, or indicate the preference ordering of this outcome amongst all possible outcomes of the game (Thomas, 1987). Research based on the mathematical theory of games has focused on analysing models of conflicts of interest, and conclusions have predominantly evolved from laboratory testing. Even though this was primarily interested in the logical possibilities available to the players, rather than their actual conflict behaviour (Billig, 1976), it has been thoroughly used by negotiation researchers in the study of conflict behaviour¹.

The best-known game is the Prisoners' Dilemma. There are two possible strategies between which each of the players can independently choose: s/he can either cooperate or compete. If both players cooperate, each of them receives a positive payoff of 1. If they compete each receives a negative payoff of -1; if one cooperates and the other competes the payoffs are -2 and 2 respectively. As shown in Figure 2.1, the best result for both players is achieved when they both cooperate. The strategies used by the parties are assessed when choosing between cooperation and competition at a certain point during the game.

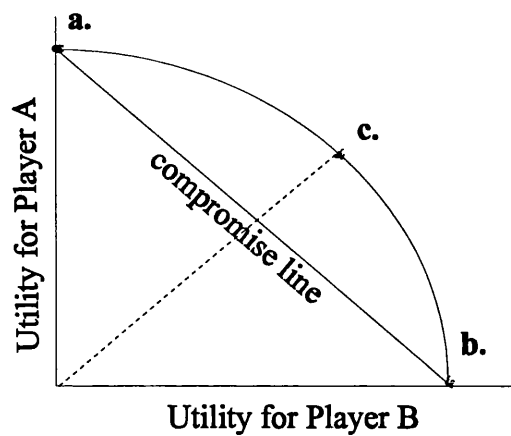
¹It is, therefore, these researchers - and not the economists - who used principles, which underlay the theory of games and were not fully adequate in accounting for actual behaviour, in order to predict how individuals behave in conflict situations (Farr, 1979).

Figure 2.1. The Prisoner's Dilemma

		PLAYER A	
		Cooperate	Compete
PLAYER B	Cooperate	1,1	-2,2
	Compete	2,-2	-1,-1

Early research on Prisoners' Dilemma was used to test Nash Solutions (Rognes, 1987). A Nash solution is associated with the notion of the Pareto efficiency frontier which refers to "achievable joint evaluations from which no joint gains are possible" (Raiffa, 1982; p.139). Once on the efficiency frontier, the gain of Player A is the loss of Player B and vice versa. Within this context, the parties make trade-offs across issues in negotiation. There are different possible treaties, (i.e. settlement points) bounded within the efficiency frontier, each of which is associated with a distinct utility for each of the parties (Balke, 1992). In Figure 2.2., a Nash solution is indicated graphically by treaty \underline{c} which gives the greater utility for both players.

Figure 2.2. The Nash Solution



Treaties achieved between the parties which lie above the compromise line are labelled 'integrative' solutions in negotiation research. An integrative solution is one that maximizes the size of possible benefit for all parties concerned; such a solution necessitates the use of problem solving tactics where parties jointly work towards a solution to the problem which would maximize the joint gain (Balke, 1992). A salient aspect of integrative bargaining is open communication between the parties, as well as willingness to share information and work together for the solution of the problem (Lewicki et al., 1988). However, the studies adopting this game structure have also identified the use of negotiating strategies which lead to 'distributive' solutions (i.e. solutions below the compromise line shown in Figure 2.2.). Distributive solutions result from each party's attempts to maximize their own benefit at the expense of increasing the size of the joint share of payoffs; in such cases, the parties use contentious tactics and thus exclude any possibility of reaching a solution which may yield joint benefit for all parties. This way of negotiating has also been called 'win-lose' strategy, since "one party will lose what the other wins" (Lewicki et al., 1988; p.27). The 'integrative' and 'distributive' strategies used in this game structure, as well as the solutions originating from them, have been identified by examining the behaviour of the parties at a single point in time at the final payoff in the games (Rognes, 1987).

Most of the criticism directed at the kind of negotiation research I have outlined above relates to its origins in traditional economic theory (Morley et al., 1988). One of the tenets of games theory has been that conflict behaviour can be explained in terms of cooperative and competitive moves. This approach can be appreciated better when taking into account that, even though the primary concern of games research has been the analysis of behaviour in conflicts of interest, social psychologists and negotiation researchers have attempted to extend solutions applicable to zero-sum type of games to the non-zero-sum ones (Farr, 1979). However, this focus is of limited utility for understanding conflict behaviour in organizations. In Chapter One (section 1.3.), we saw that conflict interfaces in the workplace - especially in an intra-departmental context - are not always related to issues concerning competing interests; instead, many conflict situations arise in employees' attempts to cooperate effectively with each other.

Another point of criticism is associated with the tradition of empirical research which games theory has generated; experimental designs have treated the negotiation process more or less independently of the context within which it occurs and thus lose sight of negotiation as a form of social action (Billig, 1976; Morley et al., 1988). This approach originates from the premise that the social context and the structure of the situation do not affect negotiation behaviour. The disregard for the social context comes to the fore in attempts to develop a general theory of negotiation which would be applicable in any context (Pruitt, 1981). However, people do not act in a 'social vacuum'. Even though some laboratory studies have accounted for the effect of certain aspects of the structure of the negotiation situation (e.g. prior contact between parties), these accounts were limited, since experimental situations bear little resemblance to real-life negotiations, and thus fail to account for the complexity entailed in everyday conflict situations. For instance, the theory assumes perfect information between the parties; however, in everyday life, conceptualization of a situation and consequent behaviour often occur with only limited information available.

Another source of discrepancy is associated with the roots of negotiation research based on the economic theory approach. The abstract character of the analysis of the

negotiation process is explained under the assumption that the 'bargaining problem' has already been defined; thus, this process is viewed as something 'given', rather than constructed by the individuals involved in it (Morley et al., 1988). Since games theory's "main interest was not the psychology of conflict" (Billig, 1976; p.183), negotiation has often been studied as moves in games of strategy (e.g. a sequence of bids and counterbids), while the main focus has been put on the point where the tactics of individuals converge, which is seen as the 'solution' to the problem (Morley & Stephenson, 1977). Even though the notion of subjectivity has entered the games arena by recognizing, for instance, that utilities may vary from one player to another), little attention has been paid to negotiation as a form of communication exchanges (e.g. sequences of messages and meanings) which are subjectively shaped and thus may differ even between two parties engaged in the same conflict². Moreover, when we take into account that, in real-life, most conflict situations are mixed-motive cases, the issues involved in the negotiation process are far from defined at the outset of the process.

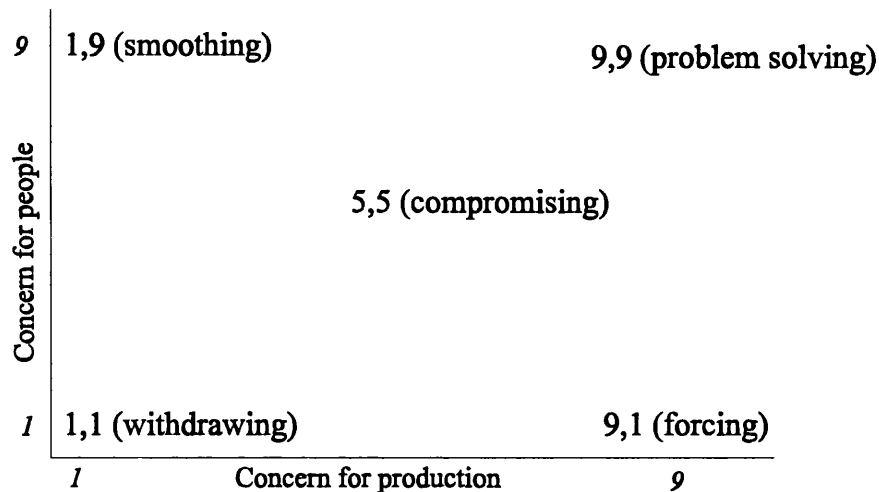
2.2.2. Field Research on Conflict Behaviour

The paradigm of field research on conflict behaviour has focused on empirical research based on real-life situations. However, early empirical research followed the line established by the game theory approaches. For instance, Deutsch (1949), in his field work on summer campuses, examined conflict behaviour in terms of two behavioural alternatives for the participants; cooperation or competition. The same framework (i.e. integrative and distributive strategies) was adopted by early research on intergroup relations and management in various work environments (Walton et al., 1966; Thomas et al., 1972). However, it was soon acknowledged that this dichotomy - which evolved from game theory research (Putnam & Wilson, 1982) - could not possibly capture the diverse and intricate nature of employees' conflict behaviour in their workplace.

²For instance, one of the few studies which has followed the symbolic interactionistic tradition, has indicated that behaviour in games is affected by changes in the social interpretation of the parties (Alexander & Weil, 1969).

A major development in the study of conflict behaviour in organizational settings came from Blake and Mouton (1964), who were the first to propose a two-dimensional model for conflict handling behaviour, mapping five distinct ways of dealing with organizational conflict. Their conceptual framework on conflict behaviour was presented in their "Managerial Grid" which was developed for the purpose of providing managers with a learning framework to deal with conflict, as well as with other issues. Their conceptual design is based on two principles. First, there are some characteristics of organizations which are `universal', such as a purpose, people, and a hierarchy. In other words, every organization exists for a certain purpose which is achieved through the efforts of people; in the course of this process, certain people attain authority over others. Production is the most indicative aspect of the organizational purpose which is realized through the efforts of people. The second principle holds that understanding management involves recognizing that managers make certain *assumptions* regarding how supervision should be exercised. These assumptions reflect the managers' concern about production and about people, and guide their actions as well as their conflict handling behaviour. In their descriptive model, Blake and Mouton proposed the five conflict strategies which are presented in Figure 2.3. What is interesting to note is that the model includes withdrawal from the conflict situation as a way of handling conflict situations; this strategy could not be captured by earlier experimental studies which examined only observable behaviour.

Figure 2.3. Blake and Mouton's Taxonomy of Conflict Handling Strategies



In Figure 2.3, 1,9 strategy represents low concern for production and high concern for people; 9,9 strategy indicates high concern for production and people; 9,1 strategy involves high concern for production and low concern for people while 1,1 strategy is indicative of a person with low concern for both production and people; 5,5 strategy stands as a middle point for both types of concern. Each of the strategies proposed is characterized by a distinct set of behaviours (i.e. tactics) which people enact in actual situations³. Moreover, the use of one strategy excludes the use of any other in the course of the same situation. This is due to the fact that, rather than referring to actual behaviour, these strategies reflect the motivational orientations of the persons in conflict (Rognes, 1987). Despite the inconsistencies inherent in Blake and Mouton's conceptual framework, their model constitutes a significant contribution to conflict research since it has instigated the break-away from one-dimensional schemes of conflict behaviour.

This brief review of both experimental and field work on conflict has revealed a common approach that both threads of research share regarding the investigation of conflict approach. In all these studies, conflict behaviour has been studied at a certain

³In the context of this study, the notion of strategy refers to a broad plan which encompasses a series of tactics.

point in time, this point being the decision point at the end of the conflict situation. Such a **static approach** to conflict behaviour can only be appreciated in relation to how little research has been done in studying the conflict episode as an ongoing process (see Chapter One, section 1.6.). Since the conflict situation is regarded as a single-occurrence event, how individuals handle a given conflict situation is regarded as a single-occurrence event as well. For this reason, the choice of a certain conflict behaviour excludes the possibility of using another conflict behaviour during the same conflict episode. The major consequence of such an approach to the study of conflict behaviour has been the emergence of various taxonomies and classification schemes describing patterns of handling behaviour which are seen as distinct from each other.

2.3. Definition of Conflict Handling Strategies

The bulk of research followed in the field of conflict in organizations has been based on Blake and Mouton's framework, and has generally adopted the five category scheme they proposed. A great number of inventories were designed to measure the five conflict management styles introduced by Blake and Mouton (e.g. the Hall Conflict Management Survey, the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict MODE Survey, the Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory) (Putnam, 1988). These inventories - some of which had a forced-choice character - were primarily used as learning frameworks or as training resources in organizations (Carlin, 1991). This trend can be appreciated better in relation to the focus of organizational research which, at the time, favoured predicting and controlling organizational phenomena, rather than understanding them (Buckley, 1967). Despite variations in the terminology used by the various instruments, the conflict behavioural patterns they propose - and which relate to dyadic conflict situations - are the following (Rahim, 1986; Carlin, 1991):

(a) **Problem solving.** This is also reported as "collaboration" or "confrontation". It involves direct communication on the part of the party/ies involved in the conflict situation. The person openly expresses his/her views regarding the conflict and brings issues of concern and conflict out into the open. Different perspectives are examined

with the aim of collaborating towards a mutually agreed-upon solution to the conflict. This may lead to creative solutions which integrate the differing points of view, whilst the other's feelings are also taken into account.

(b) **Smoothing.** The terms "obliging", "accommodating" or "yielding" have also been used to describe this behaviour. It is mainly characterized by attempts to smooth over or even ignore disagreements. The person downplays the differences so that a superficial harmony prevails. One is preoccupied with satisfaction of the other's welfare, even at the expense of neglecting one's own concerns and interests.

(c) **Forcing.** This is also called "dominating" behaviour. It is represented by the person's attempts to enforce his/her own perspective on others. The person may make use of any form of power s/he may possess in order to win his/her position and meet his/her own objectives; meanwhile, the needs and the expectations of the other are ignored. Rather than seeking a mutually-acceptable solution, emphasis is placed on 'winning'. Suppression or coercion tactics may be used.

(d) **Avoiding** or "withdrawing" or "non-confrontation" behaviour. The person chooses not to express (verbally) his/her disagreement with the other person; rather, s/he sidesteps the issue and maintains neutrality. S/he may shy away from any possibility of open discussion or postpone dealing with the issue until later. S/he may even withdraw altogether from the conflict situation, physically or psychologically.

(e) **Compromise.** This behaviour is indicated by the person's attempts to bargain and to seek "a quick middle-ground position" (Rahim, 1986). The parties involved attempt to split the differences between them and each is willing to give up something in order to reach a mutually acceptable agreement. Unlike problem-solving, the main preoccupation is to find 'workable', rather than "best" solutions (Blake & Mouton, 1970).

Focusing on the importance of interaction during a conflict situation, conflict studies within the realm of the communication paradigm have proposed three conflict strategies for handling conflict, which are enacted through distinct communicative patterns. These patterns reflect concrete communication behaviours and are based on empirical

data⁴. The three strategies proposed are the following (Wilson & Waltman, 1988):

(a) **Solution-orientation** entails direct communication and attempts to find a common solution to the conflict. The person searches for integrative solutions and is willing to compromise.

(b) **Control** is characterized by the person's arguing persistently for his/her own position.

(c) **Non-confrontation** is characterized by managing conflict indirectly. The person changes the topic of discussion away from the conflict and glosses over differences. This behaviour can escalate to the point where the person withdraws from the disagreement or the relationship, altogether.

Evaluation of the convergence between the three conflict strategies, and other strategies proposed by conflict measures, indicated that there is a significant correlation between non-confrontation and both smoothing and avoiding behaviour; moreover, solution-orientation is related significantly with both confrontation and compromise (Wilson & Waltman, 1988). In other words, non-confrontation extends from one (or both) party/ies' attempt(s) to smooth over differences, even at the expense of one's own interests, to an overall withdrawal from the interaction. Similarly, solution-orientation can be seen as including problem-solving behaviour, where collaboration leads either to an optimal solution for both parties or to compromising behaviour, where parties have to accommodate their needs in order to reach a common solution. I believe that the boundaries between problem-solving and compromising behaviour are less clear-cut, especially in the case of organizational conflict. As argued in section 1.3., most organizational conflicts arise from employees' attempts to coordinate their efforts. When dealing with conflict situations, employees are likely to strive for the 'optimal solution' for the issue involved (problem-solving). However, since both of them work for an organization which has a certain purpose, the solution which is 'optimal' to the organization may call for concessions on behalf of one or both of the parties in order

⁴However, there is a vigorous criticism regarding the conceptual background of this research paradigm (Carlin, 1991).

to reach a common solution. For this reason, both problem-solving and compromising behaviour are often interchangeable.

2.4. Conflict Handling Practices Beyond the Dyadic Level

Even though most literature on conflict behaviour has focused on interpersonal encounters and dyadic relationships (Kofron, 1986), empirical studies have also identified conflict strategies that go beyond the dyadic level, by bringing other parties into the conflict situation (Rognes, 1987). For instance, coalition behaviour (i.e. getting the support of other organizational members) is frequently used. Moreover, request for - or provision of - intervention from a higher authority is also empirically demonstrated. The frequent use of higher authority intervention is also indicated by the fact that managers spend a great deal of their time trying to resolve conflicts between subordinates (Sheppard, 1984). Indeed, most organizations allow for **appealing to authority** as a means of resolving conflict situations between employees which would otherwise escalate. For instance, when the two parties work at the same organizational level, their supervisor may intervene and decide on the conflict issue; moreover, employees may appeal to a higher level manager in cases where they are not satisfied with the way that their supervisor has handled a particular situation. According to Rahim (1986), the opportunity to appeal to authority is a structural technique designed to enable members to resolve routine conflict situations quickly.

Therefore, it seems appropriate to consider third party involvement (i.e. higher level management involvement and coalition behaviour) as one of the strategies people use when handling conflict situations. In this case, third party involvement can be treated as a structural way that employees deal with the conflicts concerned. The fact that most organizations cater for such occasions can be seen in connection with attempts to improve the organizational effectiveness by changing its structural design characteristics (Rahim, 1986).

2.5. Models of Conflict Behaviour

The following review of various analytical schemes of conflict is divided into a consideration of two general classes of models of conflict analysis; these models focus on different aspects of conflict behaviour and provide different methodologies for investigating conflict (Kilmann & Thomas, 1978). First, I shall refer to the structural models which are primarily concerned with the origins of conflict behaviour. On the other hand, the process models of conflict behaviour, considered next, explain the sequence of behaviours as they unfold in the course of the parties' interaction taking place in a conflict episode (Kofron, 1986).

The various models of conflict behaviour will be briefly reviewed with the aim of situating the approach of the present study on conflict behaviour within the realm of existing research in the field. In Chapter Seven (section 7.5.), I shall revisit these models and relate them to the wider context of descriptive and prescriptive research on decision making.

2.5.1. Structural Models of Conflict Behaviour

So far, structural models have accounted for conflict behaviour in terms of internal and external structural elements. While early research has advocated the dispositional nature of conflict behaviour (i.e. conflict behaviour is seen as the result of personality characteristics), more recent studies emphasize the prominence of situational cues for conflict handling behaviour.

2.5.1.1. The Dispositional Approach to Conflict Behaviour

Early research on conflict has attributed conflict behaviour to the personality characteristics of the individual; according to this reasoning, conflict behaviour was examined in terms of 'behavioural styles'. The trend of looking at conflict behaviour in terms of a few personality characteristics resulted in the emergence of two-

dimensional schemes of conflict behaviour. According to these schemes, conflict behaviour can be framed along two dimensions. For instance, in their "Managerial Grid", Blake and Mouton advocated that individuals are **predisposed** to prefer one approach over another (Carlin, 1991); they also mapped conflict behaviour in terms of the person's concern for people or for production. Thomas (1976) proposed a classification of conflict handling modes, based on the degree to which each party attempts to satisfy his/her own concern (i.e. assertiveness) or the concern of the other party (i.e. cooperativeness). Similarly, Rahim and Bonoma (1979) conceptualized conflict handling behaviour in terms of the person's concern for self and for others, while Riggs (1983) based his classification scheme on two other dimensions: activity and flexibility. The fact that these dimensions differ across the different models of conflict resolution, indicates inherent inconsistencies within the realm of trait-based models, regarding which personality dimensions determine people's behavioural approach at conflict interfaces.

In order better to appreciate research on conflict behaviour, one has to take a step back and reflect on the wider realm of research in psychology conducted during the same period. During the late 1960s, the dominant paradigm in social psychology was laboratory testing of personality traits. The trend of viewing conflict behaviour as a trait-based phenomenon by researchers can be understood in relation to the research paradigm used at the time (Knapp et al., 1988). During experimental designs on studying people's conflict behaviour, the researcher was assuming the role of the observer of his subjects' behaviour. Studying the way in which we make inferences about other people, based only on conjectural information, Heider (1958) referred to people's tendency to attribute their own reactions to the objective world, while they attribute the reactions of others - when they differ from their own - to personal characteristics of the person. Heider also referred to man as an observer of others and thus introduced the perspective of the observer. His ideas were supported by Jones and Nisbett (1971), who posited that actors tend to attribute their behaviour to situational cues, while they attribute the behaviour of the other to dispositional cues. Following this line of reasoning, the differences between actor/observer's perspective determine

the way in which employees make attributions in their daily interactions with their colleagues. However, making sense of the other's behaviour by observing the other person is based on the observer's inferences in regard to what has been the cause of the other's behaviour (Farr & Anderson, 1983; Farr, 1984). Since most of the early research on conflict behaviour has relied on the researcher's observations of the conflict behaviour of persons participating in the study, the explanation of conflict behaviour was thus based on the researcher's inferences, which went beyond the evidence available to him/her. The ascription of conflict behaviour to others' personality traits can therefore be explained in terms of attribution theorising.

2.5.1.2. The Situational Approach to Conflict Behaviour

The 'deep-rooted' nature of conflict behaviour - as theorised by early research in the field - led to a static representation of the phenomenon under study, since the way in which people deal with conflict was not amenable to change. In an attempt to surpass this shortcoming, Blake and Mouton (1964) postulated that people's assumptions should be seen as '*managing orientations*', rather than as fixed characteristics. In other words, people may alter their way of dealing with conflict when the latter has proved to be unsuccessful in the past under certain circumstances. Following this reasoning, they continued to advocate that conflict behaviour may be affected by the organization that they are working in, the situation (explosive versus routine), their values, their personality, or chance (Blake & Mouton, 1964). Even though Blake and Mouton contradicted themselves, sometimes regarding conflict behaviour as a fixed behavioural style of the individual while, at other times, as flexible behaviour determined by a range of factors (Carlin, 1991), the trait-based approach to the study of conflict behaviour gave way to contingency models.

While further research in the field has ceased looking at conflict behaviours in terms of behavioural 'styles', it has mostly built on Blake and Mouton's foundation. Studies of conflict behaviour in organizational contexts focused on the effects of various organizational characteristics on conflict behaviour. For instance, studies have shown

interest in diverse aspects of an organization (i.e. organizational structure, power relationships, different elements of job structure), which affect the way that employees handle their conflict situations. In the main, these studies have used a questionnaire design where the items included stemmed from a pre-defined conceptual framework (Putnam & Wilson, 1982). In general, organizational studies have been characterized by the lack of an integrative approach concerning the aspects of organizational structure, which affects the way that conflicts are handled; this is illustrated by the fact that different studies have tapped different structural features of the organization. This deficiency is primarily due to the lack of an integrative conceptual framework regarding organizational conflict. The choice of the structural aspects to be investigated has often been made on an ad hoc basis; independent variables were often selected on the basis of the intuitive sense of the researcher regarding what affected the course of conflict (Deutsch, 1982).

2.5.1.3. Need to Study the Evolutionary Nature of Behaviour within a Conflict Episode - Critique of the Structural Models

Current research in the area of social psychology and personality, as well as negotiation research, suggest that both personality and situational cues influence the resolution of conflict (Gray & Purdy, 1990)⁵. Therefore, there is no reason for trying to distinguish between personality and situational influences, both of which undoubtedly have an impact on the conflict behaviour used. Instead, what we need to do is to understand how conflict behaviour evolves within a given conflict situation; in order to do so, we need to understand not only what happens before conflict (i.e. origins of conflict behaviour), but also what happens during the conflict episode (Gray & Purdy, 1990)⁶.

⁵This approach can be seen as a reflection of the divergence in perspective between actor (where the situation is salient) and observer (where dispositional 'traits' are salient). As seen in section 2.5.1.1., these perspectives are not necessarily compatible with each other.

⁶As seen in section 2.2.2., research has often examined conflict behaviour in terms of the outcome of the conflict episode; in this way, conflict handling behaviour was regarded as the final point of decision making, taking place at the end of the episode.

It is only then that we are able to appreciate what is happening from the original acknowledgement of a conflict situation through to the outcome.

The evolution of conflict behaviour within a conflict episode has been acknowledged for a long time. For instance, Blake and Mouton (1964) have postulated that the individual's behaviour when handling conflict may change as a consequence of a change in his/her motivational orientation. Within the communication paradigm, Putnam and Wilson (1982) have posited that one pattern of behaviour may evolve into another as the conflict develops over time as a result of various circumstances (e.g. the other party's communicative behaviour, the possibility of escalation of conflict). Finally, research has demonstrated that ongoing communication and changes in the environmental context may alter parties' utilities and keep preferences changing (Rangarajan, 1985; Thomas, 1987).

Studying the evolution of conflict behaviour in the course of a conflict episode is important for organizational conflict interfaces, which usually are complex situations (see section 1.3.). The broad range of conflict situations within an organization, as well as the multiplicity of behaviours that people can employ, indicate the possibility of employees' using different behavioural patterns in their attempt to handle the conflict situation in hand. For instance, an employee may use integrative behaviour and discuss the issue with the other person with the aim of reaching a mutually-agreed solution. In the meanwhile, s/he may feel that the other, instead of being willing to compromise, is attempting to enforce his/her own perspective at the expense of the former. Then, the first employee assumes an assertive position as well, until the situation comes to a deadlock, and both parties ask for the intervention of the supervisor in order to sort out the situation. This hypothetical example - which can be a very common situation in organizational settings - shows how conflict behaviour may change within a given conflict situation: taking the entire conflict episode as a unit of analysis is the only means by which we can trace the employees' conflict handling process and gain insights into its evolution.

2.5.2. Process Models of Conflict Behaviour

Process models of conflict behaviour have dealt with the issue of conflict process by focusing mainly on the interaction between the parties involved in the situation. In this way, process models accounted for the sequence of conflict behaviour as the latter emerges in different stages of the conflict episode. Studies which have adopted a developmental and processual approach to conflict behaviour, and to the communication exchanged between the parties concerned, are more prominent in the bargaining arena than in the interpersonal conflict research (Putnam, 1988); negotiation has been one of the few research arenas to incorporate a sequential stage analysis of the development of conflict (Putnam & Poole, 1987). According to Thomas (1992), most research on the evolution of conflict behaviour in the course of a conflict interface can be grouped into two categories; phase analysis or escalation research.

2.5.2.1. Phase Analysis

Late developments within the field of game research enlarged the scope of the original theory in the sense that they attempted to account for changes of conflict behaviour over time within the same conflict situation. Within this approach, *supergames* acknowledged the importance of interaction between the players, and focused on possible pairs of strategies that are likely to be played over (Billig, 1976). For instance, 'Bilateral Monopoly' games⁷ were used to examine the patterns of concession making between parties over time, and explained the different sets of moves followed by each party, in terms of the moves of the other party (Rognes, 1987). Moreover, analysis of multi-stage games accounted for the strategies used at each stage, in terms of the ones used in previous stages of the game. However, as we have seen in the review of experimental research on negotiation (see section 2.2.1.), games theory's experimental designs fail to take account of the social context. Within the area of field research on negotiation, 'phase analysis' was employed to investigate the interaction

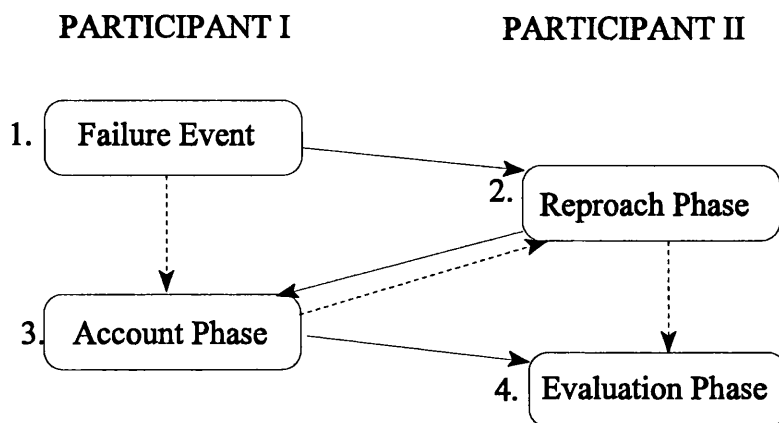
⁷These games stimulated the market situation, by presenting subjects with profit tables and asking them to negotiate the price and quantity of goods to be exchanged.

between the parties as a sequence of recognizable time periods (i.e. phases), each of which is characterized by different behaviours (Folger & Poole, 1984). Here, the change in behaviour of the parties is explained in terms of the different phases of conflict interaction. Direct analysis of communication elicited the nature of bargaining, the conflict strategies employed, and the nature of the outcomes of the conflict situation. These studies are grounded in empirical data, rather than theoretical assumptions (Putnam, 1985); however, this work has been primarily interested in sequences of conflict interaction which are seen as sub-tasks in reaching mutual agreement (Thomas, 1992). For this reason, these stages are not applicable in cases where there is a failure to reach such an agreement, or even in cases where the other person does not enter the negotiation process at all (e.g. avoiding expressing his/her disagreement).

Within the realm of the communication tradition, Schonbach (1980; 1990) postulated a basic model of conflict interaction. He focused on the interaction between parties in a conflict situation, and viewed a conflict episode as a succession of stages of events. His model referred to cases in which an individual feels that s/he is 'wronged' with respect to something that the other person did. The model traces four phases across which the two parties engage in an interaction; at the outset, the person perceives a "*failure event*" and holds the other responsible - at least partially - for this event. The 'offended' party then somehow asks for 'repair' (*reproach phase*); in his turn, the 'offender' offers an account (*account phase*), which provides explanation of the situation⁸. Finally, during the *evaluation phase*, the 'offended' assesses the adequacy of the account offered. Figure 2.4. presents a graphical representation of Schonbach's model of account episodes.

⁸Such accounts include retrospective 'excuses' in the sense that the 'offender' reconstructs the past in such a way that sh/he maintains self-esteem and appears more appealing (Weber et al., 1987).

Figure 2.4. A Model of Account Episodes
(adapted from Schonbach, 1990)



Even though, in the early stages of the development of the model, the order of events in an account sequence was strictly determined (Cody & McLaughlin, 1985), later developments allowed for multiple combinations of events (see dotted lines in Figure 2.4.). Schonbach's model was generated by using an experimental design; as a consequence, the interactions between the parties were studied more or less independently of the context within which they occurred. Moreover, it only accounts for cases where one of the parties in conflict feels 'wronged' by the conduct of the other party. However, when referring to the way in which this study approaches conflict, I have indicated that focus will be placed on perceived incompatibilities regarding views and desires, as well as actions (see section 1.2.). Moreover, in section 1.3., we have also seen that many conflict instances at the intragroup level stem from divergent views regarding how the common task should be accomplished. In these cases, Schonbach's model is not applicable, since there may be no feeling of 'being wronged'.

2.5.2.2. Escalatory Models of Conflict Behaviour

Most of the work on the evolution of conflict behaviour has been conducted within the realm of conflict escalation research. The abundance of studies in this area should be associated with the possible destructive effects that conflict escalation, and consequent failure to resolve conflict, may have⁹. Contemporary thinking on conflict has associated its destructiveness with instances where the conflict situation passes a certain threshold, and escalates to a point where it disrupts the relationship between the persons involved in it, or even the normal functioning of the organization (Rahim, 1986). Broadly speaking, the notion of conflict escalation refers to changes in the intensity of conflict. A conflict situation escalates from one stage to the next when the parties involved "[.] pass a threshold of progressively extreme tactics or behaviour" (Thomas, 1992; p.679). While, most of the time, conflict escalation is associated with the use of win/lose strategies which are communicated at the dyadic level, escalation is also associated with more 'public' forms of conflict resolution, where other members are also involved, and the resolution rests on more official forms of bargaining (Nader & Todd, 1978; Rahim, 1986). Overall, research on conflict escalation has accounted for the constituent processes of a conflict episode by mapping the range of escalatory stages considered possible in a conflict (Thomas, 1992).

Various studies have investigated conflict interaction in terms of cyclical patterns; the focus of this work has been to explain how 'conflict spirals' (i.e. a form of vicious circles) are created in a conflict situation which has escalated. More specifically, this stream of research examines how cycles and issues develop. Moreover, the sequence of messages communicated are examined with a view to identifying patterns that recur over time (Putnam & Poole, 1987). The rationale underlying this research lies in Deutsch's 'crude law of social relations', which explains escalation in terms of reciprocation of negative actions (Deutsch, 1969). Specifically, in mixed-motive

⁹This dysfunctional view on conflict, which underlies a great deal of conflict research, has guided - and, at the same time, constrained - conflict studies towards the examination of escalation, rather than de-escalation cycles (Lewicki et al., 1988).

conflicts where parties may both cooperate and compete, cooperation tends to breed more cooperation while competition tends to breed competition (Deutsch, 1973). Following this reasoning, research on conflict spirals has centred on integrative and distributive strategies, and their consequent effect on the process of escalation and de-escalation of conflict. Research on conflict spirals - like work on conflict phases - is restrictive in the sense that they only refer to stages where there is an interaction (e.g. negotiation) between the disputants. However, a conflict situation usually has a longer history than the negotiations relating to it (Rangarajan, 1985); disputants may not be keen on entering the negotiation process but, instead, they may avoid confrontation altogether. Research on bargaining - due to its focus on direct interaction between the two parties, during which information relevant to the issues is exchanged - is thus unable to account for conflict stages where conflict has not developed at an interactional phase. Moreover, this research has only concentrated on a micro-analysis of the conflict interaction; in other words, the analyses of the cycles and phases of negotiation do not incorporate issues such as the past history of bargaining, or features of the context within which the conflict interaction is situated.

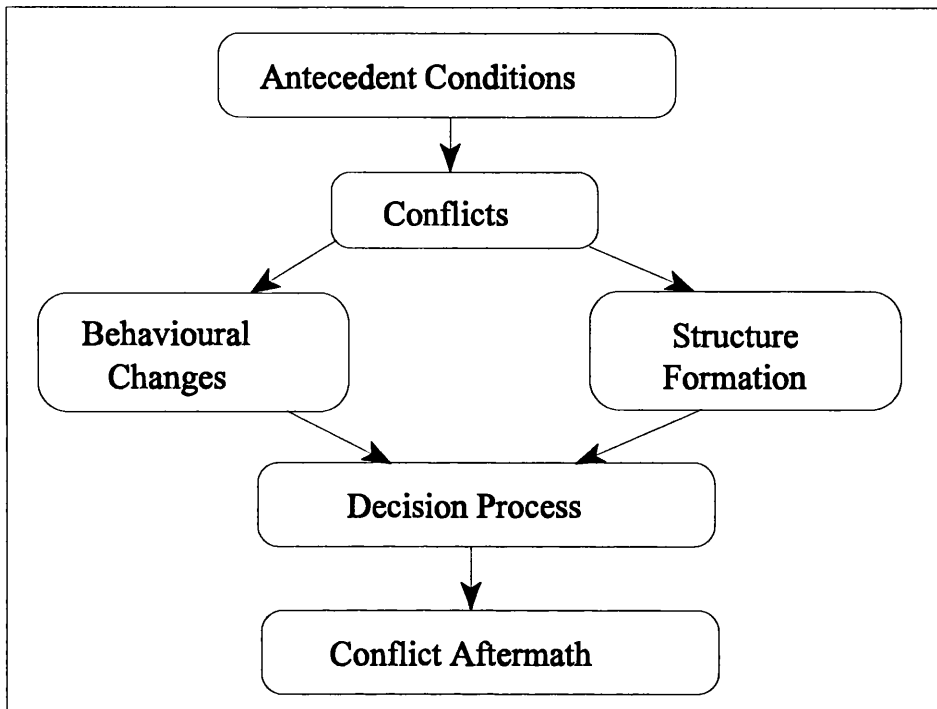
Nader and Todd (1978) proposed a three-stage model of conflict and referred to the behaviour involved in each stage. Conflict starts with the **grievance stage**, during which the person perceives him/herself to be wronged, but s/he does not communicate it to the other party. Next, during the **conflict stage**, both parties are aware of the conflict situation, since feelings of resentment are expressed. While the conflict episode has so far been at the level of a dyadic argument, in the **dispute stage**, the situation takes a more public form with the intervention of a third party, either due to the request of the parties concerned or on his/her own initiative. The stages proposed in this model are not linear, and a disagreement may bounce back and forth for a while in different directions between levels. For instance, a disagreement may rise directly from the grievance to the dispute level, without the disagreement ever being openly expressed to the other party. Similarly, one party may concede at any time and that may lead to de-escalation of the conflict situation. However, this does not necessarily imply that the conflict situation has come to an end. Rather, the conflict may re-

emerge under a different guise and may become entangled with other issues or disagreements. As opposed to research on conflict spirals, Nader and Todd's model accounts for the early stages of a conflict episode, where the parties have not yet entered the negotiation process. However, the model is only a general framework of conflict and does not specify either the effect of interaction between the parties, or of the social context within which the conflict situation is embedded.

Glasl (1982) discussed the process of a conflict episode in terms of different escalatory levels. He identified three major phases of escalation which, in turn, can be divided into minor stages. These phases are characterized by the disputant's changes of definition regarding the conflict situation at hand (Thomas, 1992). During the first phase ("Rationality and Control"), both parties are aware of the conflict situation and attempt to handle the tension in a controlled and rational manner. In the second phase ("Severing the Relationship"), the focus of the parties shifts from substantive issues to a personalized focus on the other party. In this phase, the relationship between the parties becomes the main source of tension; there is no longer any attempt to reach a mutually-agreed upon solution to the conflict. The last phase is regarded as one of 'surviving combat' ("Aggression and Destruction"): any attempt to achieve positive outcomes is blocked, and there are systematic destructive endeavours against the other party. It is suggested that the final stage of the model is rarely encountered in organizational contexts (Thomas, 1992).

In section 1.7., I presented Rahim's model of organizational conflict; in this model, Rahim (1986) incorporated three stages of conflict behaviour; these stages are escalatory in the sense that, as time passes, conflict intensifies; the model also accounts for the possibility of the involvement of third parties.

Figure 2.5. Rahim's Model of Organizational Conflict



As indicated earlier, the model begins with the antecedent conditions of conflict which affect the emergence of conflict. The experience of conflict may affect the behaviour, as well as the attitudes and perceptions, of the parties involved in the situation towards each other. For instance, in cases where conflict intensifies, there is the possibility that each party may consider the other an enemy, and thus take a destructive approach when dealing with the conflict (i.e. attempting to 'win' and outwit the other, rather than finding a solution to the problem) ('behavioural changes' part of the model). In the event of the conflict situation becoming even more intense, the parties may formulate a structure of interaction ('structure formation' part of the model), which restricts a free exchange of communication and information with each other; instead, they communicate through formal channels (e.g. writing). During the last stage ('decision process' part), the use of win/lose strategies is further intensified and controversy fails to be resolved. However, a decision still has to be made; how this decision will be made depends on the power conditions between the parties involved in the situation. For instance, in supervisor-subordinate conflicts, the decision is usually made by the

supervisor with the subordinate complying. In some organizations, subordinates are allowed to refer to higher level management and discuss the controversy. In the case of a conflict between employees at the same organizational level, the immediate supervisor of both parties is often called upon and makes a decision. As opposed to most research on conflict behaviour (see sections 2.3. & 2.4.), Rahim's model accounts for both dyadic and structural (e.g. referral to third parties) ways of handling conflict in organizational contexts.

Rahim's model has drawn on certain theoretical underpinnings and, for this reason, can provide only a general framework for organizational conflict; the purpose behind the generation of this model was that it was applied in different organizational settings and, consequently, served as an intervention tool for managing conflict effectively. In general, research on organizational conflict resolution has relied, so far, on the application of pre-structured models of conflict behaviour to social (business) settings which have little in common with the settings in which the models were initiated. However, when we take into account the complexity entailed in a work organization (in terms of the persons employed, the way that the system works, and the wider socio-economic context within which it is embedded), we begin to realize the difficulty with which a pre-structured model for conflict handling behaviour can be generalized to different work environments.

As pointed out in Chapter One (section 1.2.3.), a comprehensive understanding of conflict calls for a consideration of the contextual elements which determine how the problem is conceptualized; for this reason, a model of conflict behaviour has to account for the social situation within which it is going to be applied. This is particularly important for organizational conflict, due to the special nature of organizational conflicts and, especially, of conflict interfaces between employees working in the same group or department (see Chapter One, section 1.3.). Studies of the influence of *role* on the behaviour of individuals have illustrated that people manage their conflict situations differently in different contexts (Chusmir & Mills, 1989). Therefore, and as these studies suggest, people's behaviour in conflict situations adapts to the

particular context within which the situation is embedded. Next, I will briefly refer to some relevant research on behaviour in organizations in order to appreciate better the constraints put on employees' behaviour.

2.6. Conflict Behaviour in the Organizational Context

Organizational research has suggested that organizations abound in norms which regulate the behaviour of organizational members (Bettenhausen & Murnighan, 1985; Garbaugh, 1985). In any organization, there are plenty of formal and informal procedures, in terms of rules, expectations, norms and beliefs, which govern the daily activities of its members and serve to achieve organizational goals (Argyris & Schon, 1978). These sets of rules - which are first learnt when employees join the organization - structure social interactions in particular ways and inform employees about how they are expected to act in particular situations (Knight, 1992). In other words, they "represent relationships within that organization, and possibilities for action" (Hosking & Morley, 1991; p.100). Employees' adherence to organizational and group norms is ensured by the existence of powerful normative rewards (e.g. promotion) and sanctions (e.g. dismissal, reproachment of group members) imposed upon them in the event of noncompliance (Knight, 1992). Since the specific organization, as well as the particular group within which an employee works, is an important part of his/her social environment, both organizational and group norms and expectations have an impact on the behaviour of the employees (Latané, 1981).

Even though organizational beliefs and expectations produce norms which shape the behaviour of employees, the latter are not simply 'acted upon' by their work environment. According to DeCosta (1993), behaviour in organizations is a product of the interaction of the organizational role expectations and the personality of individuals working there. As Kofron (1986) postulated, although organizational roles provide the general framework for negotiations in the workplace, employees retain a degree of freedom in choosing their course of action during the conflict situations they

encounter. In this respect, conflict behaviour is *individual* - in the sense that it is based on the subjective meaning representation of the situation in which the individual is embedded - as well as *context-dependent*. Such dependency is better understood, when taking into consideration that employees' motivational and cognitive processes, in conceptualizing and acting upon a situation, necessarily operate in a social context (Condor & Brown, 1988).

I believe that the social psychological perspective which this study has adopted (in the sense of defining conflicts as 'perceived incompatibilities' which may remain in the realm of private grievances, and do not necessarily manifest themselves in overt hostilities) is particularly useful in the study of organizational conflict. This is due to the fact that many conflicts experienced take a private and informal form and may not even pass the level of personal grievance; instead, differences are embedded in the interactions between organizational members in the course of their daily activities and usually take the form of ongoing skirmishes or small 'vengeances' (Kolb & Putnam, 1992). Conflicts within organizations rarely take the form of overt hostilities, or necessitate official negotiation and third party intervention for their resolution; however, even though behavioural displays of aggression are rare, employees often feel that they are in conflict with their co-workers. This is due to the fact that the behaviour of employees is likely to be more contingent on organizational norms than on feelings and beliefs (Kabanoff, 1985), which makes organizational conflict and its resolution quite different from other forms of interpersonal interaction. However, even though conformity to organizational norms can explain the way in which employees behave during conflict situations in their workplace, it does not account for the way that employees feel about - and cope with - such stressful situations. There are various coping mechanisms or strategies that individuals may use. There are effective and defective coping strategies, depending on whether the stress entailed in the particular situation has been removed or is temporarily alleviated. According to Janis and Mann (1977)¹⁰, one defective coping strategy is defensive avoidance, which may take different

¹⁰Janis and Mann have incorporated these mechanisms into their conflict decision model (see Chapter Seven, section 7.8.).

forms. For instance, the individual may avoid discussion of the problem, or even social situations which may increase the likelihood of his/her having to discuss the problem. Or, s/he may shift responsibility for the situation to somebody else¹¹. The use of procrastination, bolstering and buck-passing as coping strategies have also been acknowledged by Taylor (1979-80), who also posited that they constitute common occurrences in modern bureaucratic organizations.

So far, in this chapter, I have revisited research on conflict behaviour with the aim of situating my own research in the wider realm of work on conflict behaviour. The ultimate purpose of Part I of the thesis is to model the evolution of conflict handling behaviour as it occurs within a conflict episode. Based on my critique of the conflict models discussed so far, the next section summarises the characteristics that are important to the development of the conflict handling model.

2.7. Developing a Process Model for Conflict Handling Behaviour - Main Characteristics

The above review has identified issues that have to be taken into account when modelling the process of conflict handling behaviour in a conflict episode. These issues are conditions which need to be addressed when modelling the process of conflict handling behaviour:

First, the model should account for cases where, even though conflict has not been communicated to the other party, nevertheless at least one of the parties has conceptualized the situation as a conflict¹².

Second, an integrative model of conflict behaviour should account for cases where negotiations fail to resolve the conflict situation. In such cases, the evolution of the conflict behaviour used may be traced in a subsequent episode of the same conflict

¹¹The diffusion of responsibility is also known as 'passing the buck'.

¹²This condition corresponds to the definition of conflict that the present study has adopted.

situation. The model should also include iterative loops in order to enable an understanding of how the end of a stage of a conflict episode may constitute the beginning of the next stage of the same conflict episode.

Third, a model of conflict handling behaviour should be a process model, in the sense that it should account for the evolution and possible changes of conflict behaviour within the same conflict episode. In this way, it will enable us to follow the internal logic of the evolution of a conflict situation until it is resolved.

Fourth, it should provide us with some rules of change which indicate how to make the transitions from one stage of the conflict episode to the next. Specifying the rules of change - even at an approximate level - will provide guidance on how to move within the model towards resolution of the conflict situation.

Fifth, a global understanding of conflict behaviour can only be achieved in relation to the real world within which the conflict situation is embedded. For this reason, the model has to be generated in the social context within which conflict situations are situated.

2.8. Summary and Overview of the Next Chapter

This chapter discussed research related to conflict behaviour. We saw that the bulk of research on negotiations and conflict resolution has approached conflict as a single-event occurrence and thus has studied conflict behaviour in a static way. It has mostly been studies of negotiation which have examined conflict behaviour in terms of subsequent stages of interaction in a conflict episode. The multiplicity of human behaviour, as well as the complexity of conflict situations in the workplace, call for an investigation of the evolution of conflict behaviour as employees handle their conflict interfaces. Emphasis should be placed on the entire conflict episode (e.g. from the stage where the grievance has not been communicated to the other party, right through to the resolution of the conflict, or else, to the failure of negotiation procedures), with a view to tracking the processes which people follow when handling a particular conflict.

Having reviewed existing research in the field of negotiation and conflict resolution, the next chapter discusses the methodological issues related to my choice of using employees' accounts of conflict episodes as a means of modelling the process of conflict resolution; these accounts are based on conflict situations in particular organizational setting within which the research phenomenon will be studied.

CHAPTER THREE

On the Methodology

"Scientific enquiry [...] begins as a story about a Possible World - a story which we invent and criticize and modify as we go along, so that it ends by being, as nearly as we can make it, a story about real life."

Medawar, 1969; p.59

3.1. Overview

As stated in Chapter One, the aim of this research is to model the way in which organizational members represent conflict situations in their workplace, as well as the way they handle such situations. In the same chapter, I argued (a) that conflict behaviour is based on the subjective meaning representation of the situation in which the individual is embedded, and (b) that the conceptualization and behaviour of employees during conflict encounters are *context-dependent*, in the sense that the organizational context shapes employees' representations of the conflict situation and their subsequent behaviour.

In this chapter, I discuss my choice of using employees' accounts of conflict episodes in their workplace as a means of modelling the process of conflict resolution. The research material (i.e. employees' accounts of conflict episodes) used to examine the phenomenon under investigation was collected in the course of interviews with employees working in two departments of a Greek organization. As my argument holds, the use of a single case design was necessary in order to allow the investigation of the conflict resolution phenomenon in the particular organizational context within which it occurs. The use of semi-structured interviewing is also justified in the context of the research design selected.

3.2. The Use of Accounts for the Investigation of Conflict Resolution

This study used employees' accounts of conflict situations as the basis for modelling the process of conflict resolution. Telling stories about past events seems to be a universal human activity (Riessman, 1993). Since they are stories about social relationships, accounts are most often developed in the context of interpersonal relations. There has been a great amount of research on 'accounts', which have been studied within the realm of sociology, organizational behaviour and communication arenas (McLaughlin et al., 1992). Research on accounts has often put this concept to different uses. On the one hand, some researchers have used accounts in the sense of people's attempts to affect the repair of a social failure. Following this stream of research, Schonbach (1980) developed a taxonomy of accounts as excuses, justifications, concessions and refusals¹. In general, there is a proliferation of work on excuses and justifications within the realm of social-psychological as well as communication studies. On the other hand, in other studies, accounts have been used to refer to the narratives or stories that people use to make sense of particular social interaction (Antaki, 1987).

In this study, I focused on the latter sense of the 'account' concept. To put it simply, and in the context of the present research, an account is an integrated story of a sequence of events; it includes a sequence of events, reasons for acts, as well as attributions about the causes of happening (Antaki, 1994); they typically include descriptions, emotions, explanations and predictions about similar events in the future (Weber et al., 1992). People give reports of what happened in the situation being explained. In this sense, in accounts, people work through assigning some kind of structure to a sequence of stages of events; this sequence can be causally - or temporally - organized (Bennett, 1992). In the context of the present study, employees give accounts of their experience of conflict situations in their workplace; when

¹These types of accounts were identified and incorporated into the account sequence ('failure event', 'reproach', 'account', 'evaluation of account'), as described in his model of account episodes (see Chapter Two, section 2.5.2.1.).

constructing accounts of conflict situations, they strive to construct a coherent narrative² in which everything 'fits together'. Accounts of conflict situations reflect the employees' ways of organizing their experiences of conflict encounters in their workplace; in this sense, accounts are meaning-making structures regarding the social world. Since accounts are seen as reconstructions of events in which the accounteer gives meaning to, and constructs, a story-like explanation of events and experiences, people may construct very different accounts of the same event. Some researchers have emphasized the persuasive aspects of accounts (Riessman, 1993). Apart from the existence of human limitations in cognitive processing, relevant research has highlighted the importance of the different motivations of individuals for the construction of an account (e.g. for enhancing their self-esteem; for 'understanding and control'; or they may use the account as a means of 'emotional release') (Antaki, 1987; Cody & Laughlin, 1988). Moreover, Antaki (1987) has argued that the context and the audience to which the account is given has an effect on the account itself³.

As Parker posits, the aspects of the social world which are reconstructed in an account reflect the imperfect, fragmentary knowledge the individual has of this world (Parker, 1988). Through the description of a sequence of events, as well as of the reasons underlying them, the individual assigns order to an ambiguous - and thus liable to interpretation - succession of events (Gergen, 1982). By selecting how to arrange and explain a sequence of events, the accounteer reveals his/her vision of the world (Antaki, 1994). As Riessman has put it:

"[i]nterpretation is inevitable because narratives are representations [...] Human agency and imagination determine what gets included and excluded in narrativization, how events are plotted, and what they are supposed to mean." (Riessman, 1993; p.2)

In the sense that accounts are representative of the way that individuals make sense of particular events, they have also been regarded as 'revealing truths' which, instead of

²In the context of the present study, the terms 'accounts', 'narratives' and 'stories' are treated interchangeably.

³In this study, employees give accounts of particular conflict situations in retrospect, away from the 'heat of the moment' and to a 'supportive' listener (i.e. the researcher).

revealing the past 'as it actually was', illustrate the 'truths of people's experiences' (the Personal Narratives Group, 1989). However, as the Personal Narrative Group (1989; p.262) posited, the 'truth of our experiences' differs from the 'truth' of the scientific standard:

"our academic disciplines have [...] elevat[ed] some kinds of truth (the ones that conform to established criteria of validity - over others [...]) Considered in these terms, the truths in personal narratives cannot stand the tests to which they are subjected; [...] while such a conception may be safe in its claim to meet any challenge to its scientific validity, it inevitably excludes certain experiences that require understanding."

As I argued earlier, when presenting an account, the person tells a 'story' about possible explanations of the particular situation or series of events recited by the accountee. Examining people's accounts as stories where people offer of what happened in a particular situation, we inevitably analyze their explanations of the situation; in such explanations, people use a series of claims and counter-claims in their attempts to justify why their story must be accepted - by the listener - as 'true'. As Antaki & Leudar (1992) suggested, the notion of explanation is associated to an explicit or implicit question regarding why a given story (and not some other) is an acceptable account of what happened. Following this line of thinking, the modelling of employees' accounts of conflict episodes encountered in their workplace involves examining the claims that organizational members make in support of their 'preferred' explanation of what happened during the particular conflict episode recited. Thus, an account can be seen as a story-like explanation which consists of a series of claims; if the 'listener' accepts these claims, s/he also gives legitimacy to this story⁴.

As Antaki & Leudar (1992) have suggested, explanations can have argumentative functions. The pervasiveness of explanations in people's argumentation can be understood when considering that, when reasoning and arguing, people strive to support their claims and make them acceptable to their audience. The perspective of

⁴The assessment of the whether the 'story' constructed by the accountee is acceptable will depend on the validity claims of what the latter said, as well as to the authority with which s/he said it (Antaki & Leudar, 1992).

this study on employees' accounts of conflict episodes is that they are series of explanations consisting of claims, counter-claims, as well as reasons supporting these claims; moreover, the various elements included in these explanations have an argumentative function, in the sense that, when offering these explanations, employees are concerned to justify their claims and thus, have their account accepted. In the respect, and since, according to my argument, employees make use of argumentative language when constructing their accounts of conflict episodes in their workplace, I find it relevant at this point to refer to relevant research on people's argumentation in order to examine how this realm of research has examined ordinary argumentative language. The focus of this review is to give a picture of the way in which the field of argumentation theory has developed over time, and, in this way, to establish the frame of reference within which Toulmin's framework of argumentative structure is situated; this framework will be used in the present study as an analytical framework for the examination of employees' claims regarding their conflict handling behaviour in particular conflict episodes, as well as the reasons they present in order to support these claims.

3.3. Argumentation Analysis

The term 'argumentation' alludes to a verbal activity consisting of a constellation of statements aiming to justify or refute a certain opinion and persuade an audience (van Eemeren et al., 1987). The manner in which these statements are ordered within the discursive text constitutes the argumentational structure of that text. Even though the field of argumentation research is characterized by the presence of different theories, a recurrent preoccupation of this field has been an attempt to draw a distinction between sound and unsound argumentation; this difficulty is associated with the fact that different theories have divergent conceptions regarding what 'argumentation soundness' is.

The study of argumentation has typically centred either on the interaction between two people having an argument (i.e. discussion, debate), or on written texts where a person makes a speech or produces an editorial (Van Eemeren et al., 1997). This alternative focus also reflects the different senses in which the term 'argument' has been used by researchers. On the one hand, argument has been approached as a *process*; in this case, research has focused on understanding the elements embedded in the process of persuasion between two participant roles (i.e. arguer - opponent). On the other hand, the perspective of argument as *product* entails looking at the set of elements (i.e. premises and conclusions) as a means of representing 'meanings' - abstracted from the process of communication and presented in form of written text -which are subjected to logical analysis and criticism (Wenzel, 1992); according to this perspective, argumentative texts are the finished 'products' of a deliberate process (of reasoning). Rather than limiting one's interest on how elements of a person's viewpoint hold together, current research on argumentation is increasingly concerned with examining how these elements respond to the questions, doubts and counterclaims raised by an interlocutor (van Eemeren et al., 1993). Thus, according to this perspective, we can understand properly the structure of an argument as product through considering the various challenges which may arise in basic dialectical situations (i.e. argument as process) (Freeman, 1991).

While nowadays, the study of argumentation is a research field in its own right, argumentation was originally treated as a part of the art of rhetoric, or persuasion. The sources of modern theoretical thinking on argumentation are considered to lie in ancient Greece, which, in the fifth century B.C., offered the opportunity to citizens to express their opinion and give arguments for it (Benoit, 1992). Within this context, where people had to defend their opinions by providing arguments for them, or had to compare argumentation for opposing viewpoints, questions regarding what constitutes a 'good' and 'effective' argumentation became very important. These questions were crystallized out in classical logic, dialectic and rhetoric which was developed as a means of assisting people to make speeches and develop persuasive arguments. Awareness of rhetoric and persuasion was increased even further through the Sophists,

who developed techniques of persuasion and argument for instructional purposes. However, the most significant contribution to argumentation, at the time, was the one made by Aristotle, who developed a theory of reasoning.

Aristotle's primary assumption was that existing knowledge and opinions constitute the material on the basis of which people arrive at new opinions during argumentation and reasoning (van Eemeren et al., 1987). He proposed that two types of reasoning may be used for this: inductive and deductive reasoning⁵. In attempting to draw a distinction between sound and unsound argumentation, he developed a theory of syllogism which would make possible the testing of the validity of deductive argumentation. According to Aristotle, the syllogism is an argument consisting of a *major premise*, a *minor premise* and a *conclusion*. For instance, the combination of the minor premise "Socrates is a man" and of the major premise "All men are mortal" gives the conclusion that "Socrates is mortal"; if the two premises are true, then the conclusion is also true. As a complement to his study of sound argumentation, Aristotle also provided a systematic catalogue of *fallacies*, which are forms of unsound argumentation.

During the mid nineteenth century, the study of argumentation, which was still following the classical tradition, oriented itself towards rendering the rhetorical and logical insights applicable to teaching (van Eemeren et al., 1987). Studies on argumentation pointed out the limitations of formal logic and challenged its appropriateness for the analysis of everyday argumentation practices, since assessment of ordinary arguments necessitated their 'translation' into logical standard forms (Benoit, 1992). Even though this paradigm on argumentation research did not separate itself completely from the classical tradition, it nevertheless brought to the fore a new approach to logic. This approach has often been referred to as *informal logic* and has focused on everyday argumentation. Its point of departure from formal logic is that,

⁵While in inductive syllogisms, the premises name specific cases and constitute the basis from which a general conclusion is drawn, in deductive syllogisms the conclusion necessarily follows from information asserted or assumed in the premises.

while the standard of validity is clear and relatively unequivocal, it is difficult to apply to real arguments (Antaki, 1994). On the contrary, in everyday life, formally 'invalid' arguments have often been found to be quite reasonable as bases for practical decisions.

The present state of affairs in argumentation theory is characterized by the presence of a variety of theories and models of argumentation, which often differ in scope and degree of refinement, as well as in the definition of the norms of rationality according to which the soundness of a given argument is assessed (van Eemeren, 1987). The most influential work in this realm of research has been Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca's *New Rhetoric* and Toulmin's *The Uses of Argument*. What is common in both works is their focus on an interactional view of argument and their challenge of formal logic as a serious attempt to describe human arguing.

Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1970) developed an argumentation theory which they termed '*New Rhetoric*' which pinpointed the limited applicability of formal logic as a model for value judgements in everyday argumentation. Their theory stresses the role of the audience in argumentation, by attributing the soundness of an argument to the audience for which it is intended. Since, in informal logic, neither absolute truth nor validity exists in rhetorical argumentation, appeals to reason are appeals to the adherence of the audience (Levine, 1991). The aim of argumentation is not considered to prove the truth of the conclusion from the premises, but to relate the premises and the claim of an argument in such a way that "the acceptance of the data can be transferred to the claim" (Benoit, 1992; p.63). *New Rhetoric* offers a distinction between different sorts of audiences (universal vs. particular), different classes of premises, as well as between different types of argument which may be successful in practice⁶. According to Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, there are two types of premises: (a) premises related to reality, which consist of facts, truths and presumptions on the basis of which a particular claim is asserted by a 'universal' audience, and (b) premises related to preferences, which comprise abstract values, hierarchies of values

⁶Existing research has indicated that it is operationally difficult to distinguish between the different sorts of argument (Antaki, 1994).

and what is preferable to a *specific* audience (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1958). Even though *The New Rhetoric* claimed to provide a systematic description of the discourse techniques enabling more effective argumentation, the systematicity and clarity of this description has been questioned (van Eemeren et al., 1987). Moreover, according to Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca (1970), the proposed techniques of argumentation are attuned to the audience to which the person's argument is addressed, and from which approval is sought. However, the authors fail to provide explanations regarding how a particular arguer, in his/her attempt to construct an effective (i.e. persuasive) argument becomes aware of the premises espoused by the audience (van Eemeren et al., 1987).

3.3.1. Toulmin's Layout of Argument Structure

Up to the present time, Toulmin's model for reproducing the structure of an argument, which was proposed in his book *Uses of Argument*, is the model which has received the most attention in the field of argument research, is cited in all serious handbooks of argumentation and has become the most influential framework for further research in this field as an aid in construing, analyzing and evaluating arguments. While *New Rhetoric* has adopted a descriptive perspective on argumentation, Toulmin's interest when generating a schematic illustration of the argumentational structure was to prepare the argument for a critical evaluation, as well as distinguishing between sound and unsound argumentation⁷ (Ball, 1994). As Toulmin himself claims, his focus is to discover

"how [...] to set out and analyze arguments in order that our assessments shall be logically candid [...] that is, to make clear the functions of different propositions invoked in the course of an argument" (Toulmin, 1958; p.8)

According to Toulmin, argumentation refers to an activity of making claims, challenging them, backing them by providing reasons, criticizing those reasons and

⁷As mentioned earlier, since argumentation's function is for the person to persuade others of the truth of his/her discourse, questions related to the evaluation of argumentation have always endured in this field of research.

rebutting those criticisms (Toulmin et al., 1979). Toulmin based his model on the discipline of jurisprudence as more representative of ordinary arguments than classical syllogistic structures. A central feature of his work is that the criteria upon which the soundness of an argument depends lie on the nature of the problem to which the argumentation relates, and that the criteria of formal validity and analyticity as employed by formal logic are of little value in the assessment of everyday argumentation.

Toulmin questioned the adequacy of the traditional layout of an argument (i.e. major premise, minor premise, conclusion), as proposed by Aristotle, and advocated a more elaborate layout which would permit a more 'candid' analysis of arguments. In specific, while argumentation research has traditionally distinguished two functional roles for argumentative statements (i.e. premises-conclusion), Toulmin advocated that an argument is structured in terms of six functional elements; data, claims, warrants, backings, qualifiers and rebuttals. Since, according to Toulmin (1958), there are no universal or absolute norms for assessing argumentation, the authority of the warrant is derived from the backing, the content of which depends on the subject of the argumentation. In this sense, the criteria for assessing a particular argument are *field-dependent* and need to be established by persons possessing expertise in the particular field. According to van Eemeren et al. (1987), the concept of 'field-dependent' backing in his model is supposed to bridge the chasm which separates the premises and the conclusion of arguments in the formal logic.

Toulmin centred his attention on the argumentative function⁸, rather than the argumentative form; following this line of reasoning, understanding the structure of arguments in texts necessitates an understanding of the functional roles of the statements included in the argument in the course of the argumentation process (Freeman, 1991). In this respect, he has incorporated into his model a number of

⁸In this sense, Toulmin's model focus on the functional relationships among parts of an argument offer an alternative to the traditional approach which had been concerned primarily with the formal relationships of these parts (van Eemeren et al., 1987).

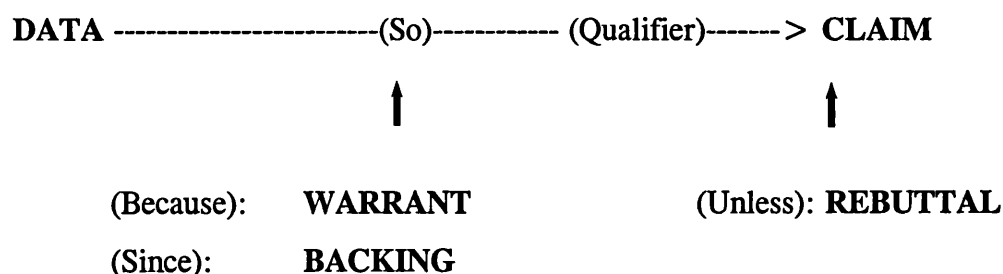
questions which are asked as a means of distinguishing between the different functions fulfilled by the statements entailed in the argument; in this sense, Toulmin's model provides a 'dialectical' analysis of an argument, since it places an argumentative text into the context of the arguer's effort to convince the listener (van Eemeren et al., 1993). In the meantime, the model allows a description of a particular argument as a product (i.e. a specific set of statements used in the employee's utterances), while taking into consideration that this argument evolves through an argumentative (i.e. question-response) process.

For Toulmin, argumentation is a movement from accepted **Data** through a **Warrant** (or **Backing**) to a **Claim**. The claim is the conclusive statement of the argument which the person attempts to establish⁹. Data are the evidence used in order to support the claim and serve as an answer to the question "what do you have to go on?". Depending on the kind of claim which is under discussion, data may come from different sources (e.g. scientific research, authority reports) and may comprise experimental observations, matters of common knowledge, statistical data, personal testimony, previously established claims, or other 'factual data' (Toulmin et al., 1979). In cases where one does not immediately concede the accuracy of the data adduced, or simply requests further support for the claim, the relation between data and claim need to be indicated. The warrant answers the question "how do you get from data to claim?" and thus serves as a 'bridge' which authorizes the data to be the support of the claim (Mitroff, 1983). Warrants represent the 'because' part of the argument and are principles or rules and thus usually take the form "if the Data are true, *then* this Claim follows..". In the event of the warrant not being accepted at its face value, then there is a set of deep-seated reasons, the backings, which are included in the structure of the argument and provide further support, and also certify the assumptions posited by the warrants already in use¹⁰. In this sense, a backing's function is to answer the question "what makes you think that warrant is valid?". According to Toulmin (1958), backings

⁹Claim is what standard analysis has called the *conclusion*.

¹⁰Data, warrants and backings may be counted as premises in the standard approach.

can refer to specific legal stipulations, and psychological or moral judgements, since the criteria for assessing the validity of an argument are field-dependent. However, in some arguments, there may be certain conditions under which the claim does not follow on, logically; in such cases, qualifiers and rebuttals are included in the framework. While the qualifier expresses the uncertainty in the argumentation ("is that always the case?"), rebuttals refer to the different possible objections or doubts regarding any part of the argument (Mitroff et al., 1982). As Toulmin claims, of the six elements included in his model, only claim, data and warrant are present in each argument. The layout of the structure of an argument could be described graphically, as follows:



The above structural layout of an argument refers to cases where individuals construct a complete argument, by making use of data, a warrant and a backing, in order to justify their claim. However, the structure of an argument may not be fully presented on each occasion. In ordinary language, it is possible that we find some elements of an argument missing, since arguers, not being able to state everything pertinent to the case, necessarily leave much unstated. The missing elements of any particular argument may even be the ones that Toulmin considered to be basic and necessarily present in each argument; that is, the claim of the argument may be missing even though the arguer presents data and warrants for this (missing) claim; or, the data, on the basis of which the main claim is stated, may not be reported explicitly; it may also be the case that the rule (i.e. warrant) which provides support to the claim and illustrates the link between the data and the claim is missing. These elements may be missing because the arguer considers them to be well-known - or assumed - by his interlocutor (or his/her audience) and, thus, s/he does not regard it necessary to refer to them explicitly in his/her attempt to persuade the other. Existing research has

indicated that it has mainly been the 'because' part of the argument (either the warrant or the backing) which is not stated explicitly (Marouda, 1995). As Govier (1987) claims, when presenting an argument, people do not always make references to their beliefs, which thus remain unstated, even though their truth is necessary for the components of the argument to hold together.

Acknowledging the particular (and often messy) nature of ordinary argumentative discourse, we need to approach Toulmin's framework of argument structure as a model for a complete argument, which refers to elements which may not be present in all cases, rather than attempting to find the various elements of the argument, as proposed by Toulmin, stated explicitly in any given argument. The fact that various elements of an argument may not be stated explicitly in any particular case calls for the researcher who is conducting the argumentational analysis, to infer the missing elements; this will make possible a clearer understanding of what the arguer actually meant when presenting his/her argument and, consequently, an evaluation of the merit of the particular argument. I believe that this task of inferring the missing parts of an argument, in the course of an argumentation analysis, is even more important in the case of warrants and backings, since they both serve as a support of the claim made (e.g. while the warrant directly supports the claim, the backing serves as a guarantee of the acceptability of the warrant employed). In this respect, and as van Eemeren has pointed out earlier, the use of Toulmin's model as a means of analyzing a particular argument necessitates interpretation on the behalf of the analyst, since "the scheme of justification employed will not be present in so many words in the argumentation" (van Eemeren, 1987; p.246). In her enterprise of inferring missing statements, rules and assumptions, the researcher needs to be cautious in balancing her own sense of logical direction with due respect for what the arguers actually meant by including some utterances in their discourse, as well as by omitting certain others.

3.3.1.1. The Problematic Related to the Application of Toulmin's Framework in Practice

As mentioned earlier, Toulmin's structural layout of argumentation (especially the basic three parts of the model: Data-Warrant-Claim) has been widely used in various contexts as a tool for construing, analyzing and evaluating arguments. On the one hand, there has been a great number of studies which examined how students decompose and understand an argument (e.g. Marttunen's (1994) study on students' argumentation skills; Chambliss' (1995) study on rhetorical schemata used during the comprehension of argument text). While the main interest of these studies has been to enhance the ability of students to be critical of arguments encountered, with respect to psychology and the speech communication discipline, there have also been studies which focused on understanding and describing argumentation practices in ordinary situations (e.g. de Young's study of discourse on satanic ritual abuse (1996); studies of argumentative logic in policy making and political discourse (Dunn, 1981; Ball, 1994). Vari et al. (1987) used Toulmin's model as a means of exploring the assumptions (as expressed in individuals' discourse) which underlie some statements and the roots of conflict between the various stakeholders of a problem. Finally, Ball (1994) has developed a computer application of the model which allows the representation of extensive policy arguments by linking a series of Toulmin's schematics¹¹, and which also incorporates evaluation criteria in this model.

In general, a review of studies on argumentation indicates that multiple schemes have been employed as a basis of analysis, most of which refer directly or indirectly to Toulmin's framework (de Bernardi & Antolini, 1996). However, this review also reveals that a great number of existing studies have challenged the applicability of Toulmin's model to real-life arguments, on the basis of the clarity as well as of the

¹¹According to Ball (1994), Toulmin's model can be used to analyze only simple arguments, while is inadequate for arguments of realistic complexity; for this reason, he proposes a series of linked schematics where, for instance, the claim of one argument serves as one of the grounds in the following argument.

differentiation between the various elements entailed in his model of argumentational structure. For instance, Ball (1994) concluded that Toulmin's model is useful in analyzing simple arguments, rather than arguments of realistic complexity, while van Eemeren et al. (1987) posited that it is only in Toulmin's (artificial) examples that the elements of the argumentative structure he proposed can be clearly distinguished from each other. In general, the most frequent criticisms concern the difficulty of differentiating in practice between (a) data and warrants and (b) warrants and backings. Hamble (1992) has pointed out failures in clearly distinguishing the main parts of Toulmin's model and, as a consequence, has challenged Toulmin's rationale in relation to the function of data, warrants and backings which have not been differentiated in the traditional approach. As a consequence of such a thorough criticism, certain researchers have challenged the extent to which Toulmin's model (which sees the conclusion is being supported by the data via the warrant) is preferable to the traditional approach (which advocates that the conclusion is supported by two premises) (Freeman, 1991). Next, I shall first refer to the issue of distinction between data and warrants, and then move on to the distinction between warrants and backings, in an attempt to shed light on some of the issues underlying, in my opinion, these criticisms.

Regarding the issue of distinguishing between the data and the warrant in a particular argument, even Toulmin (1958) himself acknowledged that, by using the proposed functional distinction (e.g. "what do you have to go on?" and "how do you get there"), it is often difficult in practice to differentiate which statements serve as data and which as warrant. I believe that the problematic differentiation between these elements is also illustrated when looking at the definition of warrants that Toulmin offers:

"rules, principles, inference-licenses, instead of additional items of information [...] general, hypothetical statements, which can act as bridges, and authorize the sort of step to which our particular argument commits us." (Toulmin 1958, p.98)

Making another attempt to differentiate in practice between data and warrant, Toulmin (1958) posits that data always have to be expressed explicitly, while they must also contain specific factual information. By contrast, the warrant may remain implicit, and

has a general, rule-like, justifying character, and fulfils a bridging function¹². However, regarding explicitness or implicitness as a criterion for differentiation between data and warrants is not particularly useful in ordinary argumentative discourse, since, as mentioned earlier, the data of an argument may be missing, especially when the arguer believes that his/her interlocutor is aware of such information.

In another attempt to differentiate between data and warrants, Toulmin (1958) advocated that data are facts (i.e. utterances containing factual information), while warrants are not. This differentiation, which appears to be taken up by further research using Toulmin's layout, also failed to provide a basis for a clear distinction between the two sorts of elements. For instance, even in the classical example used by Toulmin, where the claim of the argument is "Harry is a British subject", the utterances "A man born in Bermuda is a British subject" and "Harry was born in Bermuda" were ambiguous, regarding which one serves as the data and which as the warrant of the particular argument (van Eemeren et al., 1987). This has been the case because a warrant can be seen as information for somebody who does not already know it. In the case of the above example, Toulmin (1958) argues that, focusing on the form of an utterance, rather than its function in the argument does not facilitate the task of differentiation among utterances, since a particular statement may serve, in one case, as a means of conveying a piece of information, while, in another, as a means of authorizing an inference step in an argument.

As a consequence of the difficulties experienced when attempting to identify which utterances constitute the data of an argument and which constitute its warrant, some argumentation theorists have proposed that data and warrant should be treated as the minor premise of an argument (Hampe, 1992). On most occasions, the problematic nature of the different use of data and warrants when analyzing arguments has been associated with cases where the argument to be analyzed is a written argumentative text. As Freeman (1991) postulates, the identification of the warrant is particularly

¹²The implicit nature of the warrants is consistent with the view that warrants are inference rules (Freeman, 1991).

problematic in texts, where there is no indication regarding to which question this statement provides an answer.

The other frequent point of criticism regarding Toulmin's model has been the differentiation between the warrant and the backing of an argument. As Toulmin proposed, warrants are hypothetical and bridge-like statements, while backings are categorical statements of fact. Even though Toulmin's definitions appear to provide the basis of a clear distinction between these two elements of his structural framework, studies on argumentation have often reported difficulties in differentiating them, in the sense that they both constitute the 'because' part of the argument (Freeman, 1991). Following Toulmin's definitions, studies have often attempted to draw a distinction between these elements, by regarding statements like "All A have been found to be B" as backings, while statements like "An A can be taken to be B" are considered to be warrants. As becomes obvious, this differentiation (even though it may have proved to be practical along jurisprudential lines) is of little use in ordinary argumentation, since one rarely can make a categorical statement about a class, without a degree of inference being involved in this description. For this reason, studies which attempted to distinguish between warrants and backings on the basis of forms such as "An A is a B" and "Every A is a B", had to rely on a grammatical distinction between these two elements, rather than concentrating on the functional side of these elements, which actually made any attempts at differentiating between these elements more troublesome. I believe that, as a consequence of the difficulties encountered when distinguishing between these elements, the majority of studies employing Toulmin's framework adopted the three-part structure of this layout (where they use either the notion of the warrant or of the backing as representing the 'because' part of the argument).

Regarding the definition of the warrant and the backing in an argument, I believe that it would be more helpful, if we approached these elements in terms of a difference in their degree of generality. In other words, as Toulmin (1958) postulated, we can see the warrant is a principle or a rule which supports the claim made by revealing the relevance of the data presented to this claim; on the other hand, a backing refers to a

more deep-seated reason, a value in the person's belief system, which is alluded to as a means of providing further support to the warrant to which it refers. I believe that this difference in generality between these two elements is suggested in Toulmin's reasoning, when, attempting to account for cases where the warrant implies the backing, or where the latter may serve as the function of the former (in cases where the warrant is missing), he posits that,

"often enough, we make the single statement do both jobs at once and gloss over, for brevity's sake, the transition from backing to warrant - from the factual information we are presupposing to the inference-license which that information justifies us in employing." (Toulmin, 1958; pp.111-112)

As a result of the difficulties experienced when attempting to differentiate among the various elements of an argument, some studies have attempted to distinguish between them on the basis of their external form (Van Eemeren et al., 1987), even though, as Toulmin has pointed out, the difference between the elements of an argument must be functional, rather than grammatical. For instance, within this paradigm of research, Anscombre (1995) focused on the identification of words and expressions in talk which may lead towards a particular conclusion. Similarly, in her model of how speakers make their talk cohere, Schiffrin (1987) attempted to distinguish between the claims and backings of an argument through the use of expressions such as '*you know..*' (i.e. marking the claim), '*because..*' (i.e. marking the backing) and '*so..*' (marking the conclusion). Nevertheless, acknowledging the messiness of ordinary talk, Schiffrin soon admitted that each of these linguistic markers also may serve different functions in ordinary arguments. The outcome of this trend of research has suggested that the analysis of any particular argument should not rely on differences at a linguistic level (i.e. identification of expressions marking the different elements entailed in an argument). In general, the notion of words or expressions bearing argumentative implications for the assertions made has only proved successful when using artificial examples, and has limited usefulness in the facilitation of the analysis of ordinary arguments (Antaki, 1994).

So far, I have referred to the criticisms made by argumentation theorists and critics concerning the clarity of the way in which data-warrants and warrants-backings are defined in Toulmin's argumentative layout, and the subsequent identification of these elements in a particular argument. This overview indicated that researchers have very often experienced difficulties in applying Toulmin's definitions as a means of differentiation between these elements in everyday argumentation. I believe that these points of criticism (with regard to the identification and differentiation among the data, the warrant(s) and the backing(s) in an argument) can be better appreciated, only by taking the two following issues into consideration.

First, we need to take into account the fact that Toulmin's model was initiated as a result of an analogy with jurisprudence. Thinking in terms of the justification of legal argumentation, Toulmin (1958) has been mainly preoccupied with the different sorts of propositions uttered in the course of a law-case, and with the different ways in which such propositions can have an effect on the soundness of a legal claim. In this setting, we can also appreciate his opinion that:

"statements of claim, evidence of identification, testimony about events in dispute, interpretations of a statute or discussions of its validity, claims to exemption from the application of a law, pleas in extenuation, verdicts, sentences; all these different classes of proposition have their parts to play in the legal process, and the differences between them are in practice far from trifling." (Toulmin, 1958 p.96)

However, further research which has used Toulmin's model, together with the definitions he proposed for the various elements of an argument structure, applied it to contexts (i.e. ordinary everyday discourse) for which it was not originally designed (van Eemeren et al., 1987). Therefore, I believe that most of the criticisms cited earlier should be directed at the way in which the framework was used in further research, rather than to the framework itself. Within a legal context, it was appropriate for Toulmin to define the part of the argument which serves as the basis on which the claim is made as 'data'; that is, 'hard core' evidence and 'facts', stemming from statistical estimations, statements from authority and so on. In the same context, a backing could be an appeal to statutes, to taxonomic classifications, or enumerative

observations; in other words, backings were seen as categorical statements which were beyond question (in a particular field of research), in cases of sound argumentation. However, studies which focused on ordinary discourse, while adopting Toulmin's model in order to analyze the structure of an argument and identify its various elements, used as guidelines the definitions which Toulmin proposed. As a consequence, they found it difficult to understand which statements served as the grounds of the argument and which as its support (i.e. warrant), since the 'data' of the argument were often not 'facts', and they were not always made explicit (as opposed to the warrant which can be implicit). In a similar way, there was no clear distinction between the warrant and the backing of a particular argument, since the backing often would include some degree of inference. Since Toulmin's definitions (based on the different functions of the elements composing an argument) could no longer guide researchers who examined argumentation in ordinary contexts, these researchers often had to rely on the grammatical distinction between these elements for their analysis; this approach was not very fruitful either, given the 'messiness' of ordinary discourse. Thus, taking into account the special conditions within which Toulmin defined the elements of the argumentative structure he proposed, I agree with Levine's (1991) claim that it is due to the fact that the model has been used for purposes for which it was not originally intended, that problems of interpretation have often arisen.

Second, existing research on argumentation has been mainly preoccupied with the analysis of written argumentation¹³. Thus, the majority of the studies which have reported difficulties in the identification of the various elements of argumentative structure have used Toulmin's model as a means of analyzing written argumentation. Even Freeman (1991), who made a thorough critique of the problematic notion of the warrant (and the related problems of differentiating it from either the data or the backing of the argument), admits that his criticisms are only relevant to the analysis of arguments as *products* (i.e. argumentative written texts), and that "Toulmin's notion of warrant is straightforwardly applicable to arguments as process" (Freeman, 1991;

¹³According to Willard (1976), this focus is associated with the fact that written argumentative texts can be easily laid out and analyzed according to any analytic framework.

p.50). Since identification of the various elements of the argument depends on their different functions in the context of the particular argument (which are better revealed through Toulmin's questions), and since a written argument does not offer any unambiguous indications for the construction of such generating questions, researchers have often had doubts about the application of Toulmin's model for discerning the structure of argumentative texts (e.g. Freeman, 1991).

However, a review of the existing studies on written argumentation to which Toulmin's model for analyzing arguments has been applied, indicated that these studies appear to have focused on the description and the evaluation of arguments, as presented at the level of the given text. In other words, these studies have been preoccupied predominantly in understanding how the various parts of the argument, as manifestly stated, hang together. According to Freeman (1991), and with regard to the issue of inferring elements of the argument which are not stated explicitly, in cases of written argumentation, Toulmin's framework should be used as a means of representing what is manifestly included in the text; otherwise, what is described is the 'process' and not the 'product' structure.

In brief, the point I have tried to make at this stage, is that studies using argumentation analysis have often confined it to the level of the text, and to what has been explicitly presented in the context of a particular argument, which resulted in problems of identifying the various elements of the argumentative structure¹⁴. However, as Willard (1976) has postulated, the actual 'form' of an argument in a text may have little or no clear relationship to the propositional relationships intended by the arguer; for this reason, "the argumentation theorist or rhetorical critic who diagrams the contents of speech texts is doing nothing more significant than drawing pictures of lines on sheets of paper." (Willard, 1976; p.313). I believe that Willard's criticism of the failure of

¹⁴I believe that this orientation in argumentation research can be understood in those studies which focused on speech argumentation with a view to assessing the soundness of argumentative texts (as products) and thus, their subsequent persuasive value; these studies did not address the issue of understanding and describing people's reasoning processes.

Toulmin's model to provide a descriptive tool for the analysis of day-to-day argument, as well as of reducing human symbolizing to words and propositional forms, should not be seen as directed at the model's appropriateness for the analysis of arguments, but rather as directed at analysts who have confined the use of this framework to the level of what is actually included in a text. This is especially the case since Toulmin (1958) himself has acknowledged the need for the analysis of any particular argument to be placed within a broader discourse context (i.e. macro-argument); this context will guide the analysis and the restructuring of the argument structure, by defining what is at stake.

Going beyond the level of the text by taking into consideration the situational context within which a particular argument is situated (e.g. both in terms of the wider discourse, as well as the social situation which gives meaning to this discourse), I believe that the argumentation analyst will be in a better position to understand and analyze an argumentative text. Acknowledging the importance of this context for the analysis of arguments will enable the analyst to make more 'informed' choices when identifying the various structural elements of the argument (e.g. which elements constitute the points of departure, which are used in support of an argument), as well as when inferring those parts of the arguments which are left unsaid and not stated explicitly. This will also provide important clues about how specific information, statements, or assumptions are interpreted and utilized within this particular context.

As my argument stands, rather than treating the argument being analyzed as a self-contained 'event', the analyst needs to reflect on the broader circumstances which give rise to the way in which the particular argument under examination is fashioned. In this way, the analysis of the argument will rely on the understanding of the meaning of the discourse, rather than the reverse (Burelson, 1992). Toulmin's notion of the 'field-dependent' nature of the criteria against which the merits of an argument need to be evaluated is particularly useful in order to understand the importance of the context in the understanding and analysis of arguments. Rather than confining the notion of context to more 'surface' features of the immediate situation in which the

argument occurs (e.g. arguer's perception of his/her listener and attribution of motives to the latter; topic of discussion, commonality uniting the arguer with the listener), Toulmin's notion of 'field-dependence' has directed attention to the 'substantive' context of the argument (Burelson, 1992). The context is thus conceptualized as providing the meaning structure in which arguments are fashioned. In this sense, the context provides a sense-making nexus consisting of ideas and assumptions which are shared by members of this context; these assumptions inform the arguers about the claims which can be made legitimately; the kinds of warrants which are permissible; the statements which constitute acceptable (i.e. believable) and relevant data or backings in a particular situation.

Taking into consideration the importance of the social context within which the argumentative language used in accounts is fashioned, I discuss, in the following sections, my decision to model the conflict resolution process in one particular work organization. Due to the lack of clarity or precision often entailed in accounts, analysts still retain their responsibility as interpreters of these accounts, in order to grasp their meaning. These analytic interpretations have to be seen as partial, alternative interpretations which aim for an 'enlargement of understanding' of the research phenomenon (Riessman, 1993). As a means of enhancing one's interpretations as an analyst, it has been argued that one has to pay particular attention to the context which shapes the creation of these accounts, as well as to the world views which inform them (Personal Narratives Group, 1989).

3.4. Examining Accounts of Conflict Episodes from Employees of One Particular Organization - The Choice of a Case Study Approach

So far, organizational research has used different methodologies in order to investigate phenomena occurring in the workplace. Survey research has been, for a long time, the most common methodology in organizational environments. Administering questionnaires to a large number of employees would permit the possible generalization

of the results to a wider population of employees with characteristics similar to those who participated in the sample; such a generalization has been cited in the literature as "statistical generalization" (Yin, 1984). By trying to enumerate frequencies and to discover causal links between variables, the focus of the research conducted in this tradition was to predict - and hence to control - organizational phenomena (Buckley, 1967). This approach, which is common in organizational research, has also been demonstrated in the study of organizational conflict. For instance, conflict behaviour has been examined as an independent variable and associated with frequency of conflict, the importance of the issues at stake, and so on. Conflict behaviour has been viewed also as a dependent variable and tested in different power bases or in different sources of disagreement (Kofron, 1986)¹⁵.

More recently, there has been a developing interest in the use of the case study design in order to investigate organizational phenomena. This focus has to be seen in relation to the changing emphasis, in organizational research, on understanding organizational phenomena and processes, rather than predicting or controlling them¹⁶. There are certain characteristics inherent in this form of empirical inquiry which render it suitable for the investigation of particular research phenomena.

First, a case study design is appropriate for cases where the research phenomenon should be investigated within its real-life context (Yin, 1994). Coming back to the present research, the ways in which employees represent and handle conflict situations in their workplace are real-life events. In previous chapters, I have discussed my assumption that the process of conflict resolution can only be grasped when it is

¹⁵In both cases, where conflict behaviour was approached either as independent or dependent variable, employees would give responses to pre-structured questionnaires; the questions answered reflected areas of concern which the researcher has thought about *a priori*.

¹⁶This move parallels the surge of interest in qualitative research in the wider field of the social sciences.

examined within the context in which it occurs¹⁷. I have criticized experimental studies of conflict for failing to take into account the complexity of the phenomenon of conflict resolution. In the review of existing research on stage models of conflict, I also criticized the tendency of existing research to separate the conflict phenomenon from the context within which it occurs. Even though some survey research has attempted to account for the context, it provided only a partial account of the phenomenon under investigation, since it focused only on certain (pre-determined) characteristics of the conflict situation and of the organizational background. By stressing the holistic examination of a research phenomenon, case study research attempts to describe phenomena in a comprehensive way (Jorgensen, 1989). Such a holistic approach is particularly useful for investigating phenomena occurring in a real-life situation, since these phenomena - unlike the ones generated in experimental settings - are more complex situations and cannot be manipulated. In real-life situations, it is very difficult for the researcher to draw clear boundaries between phenomena and their context (Yin, 1984).

Second, a holistic examination of the phenomenon of conflict resolution provides an in-depth description and analysis of the research topic (Jorgensen, 1989), which permits a global appreciation of the process of conflict resolution. This point is related to the fulfilment of the second characteristic of the case study research, that is enabling the researcher to answer "how" and "why" questions (Yin, 1994). The focus of the present study is the investigation of how organizational members of a particular company handle conflict episodes within their work context, as well as how they represent such situations. In general, this characteristic of the case study approach makes it especially relevant to the study of organizational processes (Gummesson, 1991). Following this tradition, the purpose of this project is to understand the organizational process of

¹⁷We have already seen that there has been a strong tradition of experimental research on conflict; studies which followed this research paradigm examined parties' perceptions of conflict and their subsequent behaviours in artificially designed environments, where focus was placed only on the micro-analysis of the interaction of the parties during the experiment (Chapter Two, section 2.2.1.).

conflict resolution, rather than predicting conflict perception or controlling subsequent behaviour in conflict encounters.

Up to this point, I have explained the reasons for which focusing on one particular organization was considered more appropriate than any other methodological approach as a research strategy in order to collect research material for the modelling of the process of conflict resolution. My decision to investigate the conflict resolution process in one organization (i.e. a Greek manufacturing company) reflects my perspective on organizations; according to this perspective, an organizational setting consists of a set of conditions and circumstances which are particular to that work environment, and which can only be grasped by a close examination of that organization.

3.4.1. Focusing on One Organizational Setting - The Paradigm of Organizations as Cultures

In Chapter Two (section 2.6.), it was argued that employees' behaviour in their workplace is affected by the norms in use within the organization, as well as in the various work groups of that organization. It was also argued that organizations comprise formal and informal procedures, in terms of rules, expectations, norms and beliefs, which govern the daily activities of their members and serve to achieve organizational goals (Argyris & Schon, 1978). Accordingly, the way that employees view conflict, and their attempts to handle it, reflect a set of shared assumptions and practices in that particular organizational context which are communicated to, and negotiated amongst, the members of the organization. Such beliefs and behavioural norms may differ from one organizational setting to another, or from one work group of the same organization to another work group¹⁸. According to this perspective, organizations are approached as 'cultures' (Morgan, 1986).

¹⁸In the way it is used here, a 'work group' is a collection of employees who are grouped together in order to accomplish a particular task. Organizational groups are defined through the organizational chart and can be divisions, departments or smaller work-teams.

According to Barley (1983), organizational culture is a sense-making activity which brings predictability to the uncertain. Communicative interactions among organizational members are processes of "enactment of a shared reality" (Morgan, 1986). Organizational life consists of a set of assumptions and expectations about how employees relate to each other, which are reflected in both formal and informal interactions within the organizational setting (Humphreys et al., 1995). Such a shared 'reality' serves as a means of communication among organizational members. In this way, employees 'learn' to perceive, think and feel about a problem (Dixon, 1992). Issues such as organizational structure, job descriptions, policies and operating procedures have an interpretative function, since they enable organizational members to shape the ongoing organizational 'reality', and they make shared action possible (Morgan, 1986). However, organizational assumptions and norms are not fixed entities. Rather, they are continuously negotiated between organizational members in the course of their daily interaction and some of them may change. According to Giddens (1979), there is a reciprocal relationship between organizational structure and the way in which employees act within this particular organizational structure. Organizations are the medium and outcome of individuals' actions; they "[...] 'result' from human agency, but they are the outcome of action only in so far as they are also involved recursively as the medium of its production" (Giddens, 1979; p.95). In other words, while, on the one hand, organizations provide the rules and resources upon which individuals draw to act, on the other hand, these rules exist only through being applied and modified in action.

The idea of organizational culture as a shared reality, which is enacted and constantly negotiated by organizational members, renders employees active agents in the process of enactment. As Giddens (1979) postulated, the relationship between properties of the structure of the organization and the way that employees understand and act within the particular organizational context is reciprocal; each organization provides the rules and resources upon which employees draw to act, but the former exist only through being applied and modified in action. Using a similar reasoning, Bartunek (1984) argued that the structural features of an organization both legitimize and constrain the action of its

members. As a consequence, employees are no longer seen as being 'passive' or acted upon by the work environment, since this 'shared reality' (or social order) emerges as a result of organizational members' continuous negotiation and agreement on "a set of shared descriptions to be used to monitor, control, interpret, and justify their actions" (Hosking & Morley, 1991; p.32); these descriptions may change, as circumstances change. In this sense, the process that employees follow when dealing with conflict situations can be seen as a process of changing, or reproducing, a certain social order.

Even though the cultural norms are basically shared by organizational members, organizations are rarely characterized by cultural homogeneity. While there are certain assumptions which are broadly shared by employees and enacted in an array of cultural manifestations (e.g. work-practices, rituals, jargon) (Garcia & Humphreys, 1995), there are certain other sets of assumptions which are patterned according to conditions particular to different 'subcultures'. These subcultures - rather than having clear-cut boundaries - are nested within each other and often overlap¹⁹. Even though the relationships among subcultures are complex, and each employee can belong to more than one subculture at the same time, the fact that work groups form distinctive units in an enterprise helps towards the creation of a culture differing from that of other work groups. Possible divergence between sub-cultures of an organization may lead to the creation of different "meaning systems" (Martin, 1992). In this respect, even though employees of the same group have assumptions shared by employees of other work-groups, they also have

"[...] a somewhat different set of common understandings around which action is organized, and these differences will find expression in the language whose nuances are peculiar to that group and fully understood only by its members." (Becker & Geer, 1969; p.324)

Hence, the ways in which employees interpret their experiences make sense not only in terms of the wider organizational context, but also in terms of the specific work unit

¹⁹This happens because employees may identify themselves as members of different social categories at the same time (e.g. young people, women, white-collar workers etc.). Each of these categories may be a distinct subculture within the same organizational context.

of the organization to which they belong. The contextual features of negotiating in a particular work group are constructed through the messages and sense-making activities of the members of this group (Putnam, 1985).

Starting from the assumption that any given organization consists of a particular set of assumptions and expectations which are enacted by its employees, in this section I aim to illustrate the importance of studying the process of conflict resolution in one particular organizational context, since, according to this study's postulate, this process is bound to be shaped by the particular organizational, as well as departmental, context within which it is situated. Thus, modelling employees' process of conflict resolution in a particular organizational context which gives rise to conflict situations is crucial for a global understanding of the phenomenon under investigation, since it is this context which enables organizational members to make sense of such situations as well as providing them with behavioural norms which guide their actions. Taking this postulate as a point of departure, a question to be addressed when modelling both employees' representations and handling practices in conflict situations will be to illustrate how the different aspects of the organizational (as well as departmental) context are portrayed in the conflict resolution, and are consequently revealed through the modelling of this process.

As mentioned in section 3.4., organizational research has used a variety of methodological tools as means of data collection (e.g. interviewing, use of questionnaires, group discussions, participant observation and document analysis). For this particular project, I used open-ended interviews as the means of collecting information which offered me information regarding the conflict resolution process from the perspective of the actors (i.e. employees), as well as providing some contextual information; conducting open-ended interviews has been found to open up possibilities for encountering phenomena that could neither be expected nor foreseen (Whyte, 1984). The inclusion of some personal observations, gathered while I was present within the my interviewees' workplace, acted as a cross-check on the information collected from the interviews.

3.5. Conducting Open-ended Interviews

In section 3.2., I discussed my choice of using employees' accounts in order to model the process of conflict resolution in an organizational setting. In the same section, I referred to accounts as stories about social interactions. In fact, the study of conflict encounters in the workplace is - par excellence - a study of social interactions (see Chapter One, section 1.2.2.). In the context of the present research, accounts of conflict situations were collected in the course of open-ended interviews with employees of a particular company. The selection of open-ended interviews is consistent with the approach of the present study on conflict:

First, conflict situations are social constructs; in other words, the definition of a situation as a conflict situation is subject to the person/s directly involved (see Chapter One, section 1.2.1.). This definition also reflects my intention to approach conflict from the perspective of the actor rather than that of the observer, which, so far, has been the dominant paradigm in conflict research. This perspective is incompatible with the critical incident method, which has been used widely in conflict research as a means of investigating the resolution of conflict. Following Flanagan's (1954) proposal, critical incidents are incidents constructed by the researcher, who also decides on which 'critical' aspects of a situation should be included in the incident constructed. The critical incident method relies heavily on the perspective of the researcher, who superimposes her own framework on the individuals participating in the study²⁰.

Second, my reluctance to superimpose a pre-structured framework of conflict behaviour guided me towards giving employees the opportunity to talk about their conflict behaviour in their own words; in this way, I was able to identify (in employees' accounts of conflict situations) behavioural patterns that might otherwise have been overlooked. This has been the case for the various instruments of measuring conflict behaviour, which usually consisted of descriptive statements of conflict behaviours,

²⁰According to Ross and DeWine (1988), critical incident recall has been used widely in conflict research in an attempt to reach congruity between subjects' responses.

among which employees had to choose the behaviour they would use when in a conflict situation. This method offered a limited range of behavioural choices among which employees could choose; however, such a limited choice is at odds with the acknowledgement of the diversity of conflict situations in the workplace (Chapter One, section 1.3.). Similarly, the method of observation could not allow me to trace instances where employees chose to avoid conflict situations, in the sense that, in such cases, there is no manifest 'behaviour' to be observed (see Chapter Two, section 2.3.).

Third, open-ended interviewing enabled me to map the different stages of the process which employees follow when handling conflict situations. Conducting interviews in a conversational manner allowed informants to feel free to express themselves as they wished and thus to introduce materials that were not anticipated²¹. However, as is usually the case in empirical social research, the researcher already has a broad theoretical framework which directs her attention to certain events or discussion topics rather than others (Strauss et al., 1969; Jorgensen, 1989). To counter-balance the existence of any pre-conceptions, I used open-ended interviewing which permitted new issues to emerge.

The open-endedness of the interviews I conducted called for the researcher being more intellectually responsive towards these phenomena in comparison to other more structured techniques (McCall & Simmons, 1969). Even though the social scientist has certain 'hypotheses' and expectations - derived either from theory or from personal hunches - she opens herself to the complexity entailed in any real-life processes. This approach is crucial when studying organizations which are complex social systems, with manifold interrelationships among their parts, since it enables the gathering of information which is richer in comparison to other methods of data collection. The flexible structure of the interview enabled me to follow interesting leads raised in the course of the discussion, and thus to develop new understandings about the problem as

²¹This is especially necessary since - unlike most research on process models of conflict behaviour - there was not any pre-constructed model against which employees' responses could be tested (see Chapter Two, sections 2.6.1. & 2.6.2.).

data collection continued. Looking back on my experience when collection information during interviewing employees, I could say that there were times when the information gathered seemed out of focus in relation to my research topic (i.e. resolution of conflict). However, the significance of such information was revealed only much later when I came to realize that it provided essential contextual information for grasping the intricate nature of the conflict process.

However, since the 'events' studied could not be observed directly, the researcher had to come up with her own interpretations regarding the phenomena; this widely happens in social research, where "the observer is the instrument through which and by which the phenomena of the investigation are [...] interpreted and evaluated" (Swartz & Swartz, 1969). Moreover, listening to employees' accounts has made this researcher even more aware of the 'subjectivity' of her interpretations, in the sense that, as the Personal Narratives Group (1989; p.261) has put it

"the truths we see [in accounts] jar us from our complacent security as interpreters 'outside' the story and makes us aware that our own place in the world plays a part in our interpretation and shapes the meanings we derive from them."

Relying on my own interpretations of the information collected, may trigger questions regarding validity and reliability of the empirical research conducted. The next section recapitulates on the issues of validity and reliability in empirical research, and discusses problems which are often encountered in empirical social research; the focus of the discussion will be on how the present research attempted to address these issues.

3.6. Establishing the Quality of the Present Empirical Study

Even though, recently, there appears to have been a general realization that research techniques which have been used to treat orderly problems, are not appropriate for investigating problems of organized complexity (Mason & Mitroff, 1981), investigators have often criticized qualitative research for its lack of rigour. One common concern has been the likelihood of biases. As in any qualitative social research, the present

study relies on the researcher's interpretations of the phenomenon under investigation (see sections 3.2. & 3.5.). Since the phenomenon is often not directly observed, the researcher has to make inferences based on the evidence collected as part of the study. When choosing to conduct interviews with employees and rely on employees' accounts of conflict situations in order to investigate the conflict resolution process, I was aware of the likelihood of such biases, as well as of the fact that biases also occur in other research designs; for instance, it has been found that biases may also affect the conduct of experiments, as well as of survey designs (Rosenthal, 1966).

Apart from the likelihood of biases when making inferences from interview data, research has also indicated that misunderstandings and errors in interpreting what was said in the interviews may go unrecognized (Becker & Geer, 1969). These make the researcher's inferences even more questionable. As a means of reducing possible misunderstandings, I decided to cross-check information collected through interviews with my personal observations from the company. During my visits to the firm, I had the opportunity to develop my own observations and impressions from walking around the premises of the firm and of the two departments which comprised the focus of my study. This opportunity arose on a number of occasions (a) during some informal discussions with some of the informants prior to - or after - the interviews; (b) when participating in some of the employees' tea breaks and going to the same canteen for lunch daily; (c) when using the same transportation as them to and from work²². Moreover, I participated in informal discussions between the psychologist and the social worker who worked in the Human Relations Office. A good rapport was established with amongst us and they were often willing to discuss, in my presence, their own experiences of working in the firm, as well as their daily experiences with the rest of the employees and, in particular, with the employees working in the two departments on which this study focused²³. These discussions informed me about the

²²The firm used buses for the employees' daily transportation to and from the company, which was situated on the outskirts of the city.

²³The social worker and the psychologist interacted regularly with employees, who would go and discuss any personal grievances regarding personal and work-related issues.

general situation in the manufacturing company and constituted the background within which I could locate interviewees' references to conflict interfaces.

All these pieces of information proved very helpful when conducting interviews, since I was able to understand employees' discourse about the company in general. Moreover, at later stages of the research, I was able to check the inferences which derived from the interviews against this information, and thus, be in a position to interpret - more safely - employees' discourse during the interviews. In support to this claim, existing research has indicated that, while 'one-shot' interviews have often been criticized for failing to provide the necessary contextual basis for an adequate interpretation of the research phenomena (Mishler, 1986), familiarization with the contextual background enables the understanding of employees' discourse as used within the socially organized context of the specific organizational environment (Cicourel, 1982); in other words, the information gathered informally, during my visits to the firm provided me with the wider context against which I could check pieces of information and consequent inferences derived from the interviews. As a result, I was in a position to understand better what was said in the course of the interviews, since "[i]n interviewing members of groups other than our own [...], we are in somewhat the same position as the anthropologist who must learn a primitive language, with the importance difference that, as Ichheiser has put it, we often do not understand that we do not understand [...]" (Becker & Geer, 1969; p.324).

Moreover, my daily presence in the company during the period of conducting interviews, compensated for another methodological problem associated with interviews; the issue of 'artificiality' of interviews. According to Mishler (1986), this problem can arise from the special rapport between interviewee and interviewer. My presence in the interviewees' workplace, coupled with the fact that I had met some of them prior to interviewing them, contributed to the cooperativeness of the interviewees as well as to establishing a better rapport between us (Jorgensen, 1989).

Another issue of concern about this study can be related to the issue of external validity in the sense that it offers, according to critics, a poor basis for generalization (Yin, 1984). This criticism may originate from a possible implicit comparison of the present study with survey research, the findings of which can readily be generalized to a larger population. However, such a "statistical generalization" (Yin, 1984) is beyond the scope of this study. In addition, another point of criticism - which has been associated often with the quality of empirical research - concerns the issue of reliability (Yin, 1984). As Lunt and Livingstone (1996) posited, the notion of reliability was developed for quantitative methods (e.g. test-retest reliability) and is mainly relevant to qualitative research at the level of superficial interpretation (e.g. dual coding). In general, the issue of reliability is related to the high degree of subjectivity often entailed in qualitative research and especially when analyzing the complex information gathered as a result of this type of research.

I believe that concerns about validity and reliability are interrelated in the sense that they originate from implicit assumptions guided by criteria applicable to positivistic research. As Farr (1993) argues, positivism has been the dominant research tradition in anglo-saxon social sciences. One of the outcomes of this dominance is the tendency of researchers to assess the 'credibility' of qualitative research in terms of the criteria of reliability and validity as proposed, for example, by research on content analysis (Krippendorff, 1980). This tendency has been followed often by qualitative researchers in their own research.

Instead of evaluating qualitative research on the basis of positivistic criteria, I aimed to meet the 'scientific standard' in two different ways. First, I attempted to standardize and clarify the procedure I followed throughout the research; this practice has been increasingly used in qualitative research lately. According to this practice, each step of the research process should be described according to specific rules and procedures (Holsti, 1969). For this purpose, I have included in this thesis a detailed presentation of the general procedure I followed both during my data collection, as well as during the coding and the analysis of employees' accounts of conflict situations (see Chapters

Five & Eight). Attempts to ensure clarity of the procedure followed aim to enable the readers to follow the procedure used and, accordingly, to assess the nature of the research findings. Second, I conducted a series of inter-coder reliability tests regarding the way in which information was coded and analyzed in both parts of the thesis.

3.7. Using Accounts as a Means of Modelling Employees' Conflict Handling Behaviour and Conflict Management Process

In Chapter One, I referred to my decision to distinguish between the processes of conflict handling and conflict management, both of which are integral parts of the conflict resolution process. The modelling of both processes (i.e. conflict handling and conflict management) has been considered necessary for the investigation of the research phenomenon (i.e. conflict resolution) on which the present study centres. The notion of 'model' - as used here - refers to "some abstraction of certain elements in the reality of the system the model is meant to represent (the object system of modelling) and a representation of the relationships between them" (Berkeley et al., 1990; p.88). In our case, the "object system of modelling" is the process of conflict resolution. For this reason, in the context of this study, the analysis of employees' accounts of conflict episodes will be two-fold:

First, these accounts are examined in order to examine employees' conflict handling behaviour as it evolves in the course of particular conflict episodes reconstructed in employees' accounts. The elicitation of the behavioural practices used by employees will enable to model the various ways in which the latter deal with conflict situations in the context of their department. In this study, the modelling of the conflict handling process (i.e. the assemblance of the components of the conflict handling model) followed Net Modelling conventions.

A fundamental principle in Net Modelling is the idea that a net is generated by connecting two types of elements: active and passive (Berkeley et al., 1990). In this

way, a net is formed by the sequential interchange between transitions (i.e. active elements) and states or places (i.e. passive elements) of the model (Balke, 1992). A state is depicted as a circular symbol while a rectangular symbol is used to depict transitions. Agency only occurs at the transition points; the action taken at these points determines the possible states (i.e. circles). Since transitions indicate action, they are described in terms of verbs, while nouns are used for describing states. Each transition leaves a post-condition, which is a state, while the latter constitutes the pre-condition to the next transition. Within the net model, places are connected with transitions through links; these are shown as arrows. Like a board game, each state or place may carry tokens having their own individual properties. The set of tokens constitutes the marking of a place (Berkeley et al., 1990). There are also guards between the transitions, which monitor any movement from a state to a place and vice versa; transitions can be achieved only when the correct tokens are used. Figure 5.2. illustrates the basic conventions entailed in Net Modelling, which have been discussed briefly, at this point.

Figure 3.1. Conventions Used in Net Modelling



The modelling of employees' conflict handling behaviour is undertaken in the first part of this thesis. Chapters Five and Six illustrate in more detail how net symbolism has been put into effect in the context of the development of a process model of conflict handling behaviour. When modelling the behavioural patterns which employees use in their attempts to handle their conflict situations, my objective has been to shed light to the various aspects of the social context which have a bearing on the process of conflict handling.

Second, employees' accounts of conflict episodes are examined and modelled in the second part of this thesis with the aim of eliciting the conflict management process that

employees follow when they conceptualize a particular situation as conflict-ridden, explore and structure it in order to commit themselves to a particular course of action (i.e. particular behavioural practice). Looking at employees' conflict management problem as a decision making problem (see Chapter One, section 1.8.), the accounts will be modelled according to a decision analytical framework. The analytical framework selected for the investigation of the conflict management process (which is presented in detail in Chapters Seven and Eight) will enable the modelling of this process in terms of qualitatively different cognitive operations undertaken by employees at the various stages of the decision making process.

When modelling employees' accounts of conflict episodes in order to examine how employees represent, explore and structure a conflict situation in their attempts to decide on which behavioural practice to choose, particular attention is paid to the argumentative function of an account. In this respect, accounts are analyzed in terms of explanations which comprise a series of claims, data and reasons in support of the claims made; modelling accounts in terms of claims, data, warrants and backings will elicit employees' argumentation process as presented (explicitly or implicitly) in their accounts of conflict episodes encountered in their workplace. My objective when modelling employees' conflict management problem, at it evolves in the course of the various stages of the process has been to examine how - an the extent to which - the social context (i.e. cultural and organizational) is embedded in this process.

3.8. Summary

In this chapter, I discussed the assumptions underlying my choice of using employees' accounts of conflict episodes in order to model the way in which employees represent and handle conflict situations in their workplace. I also justified my decision to investigate the conflict resolution process in one particular organization by discussing my approach to organizations as systems consisting of assumptions and practices which are shared by their members, and are particular for different organizations, as well as

for different work groups within those organizations. A research question to be addressed in this study is how the various aspects of the organizational nexus are embedded in employees' process of conflict resolution, and how the methodology proposed here for the modelling of this process will enable me to capture how this context is portrayed in the way in which conflict situations are resolved in this particular company.

Issues related to the use of open-ended interviews, as well as to how the quality of this empirical study could be ensured, were also raised in this chapter. Having discussed the methodological issues related to the present empirical research, I shall continue with a presentation of the company which constituted the context within which I collected my research material.

CHAPTER FOUR

E.P.E.: The Organizational Context of the Study

"The best fact is one that is set in a context, that is, known in relation to other facts, that is, perceived in part in the context of its past, that comes into understanding as an event which acquires significance because it belongs in a continuous dynamic sequence [..]"

Boring, 1963; p.5

4.1. Overview

The present study is devoted to the presentation of the Greek manufacturing company, E.P.E.; this company constituted the organizational context from which I collected my research material in order to model the process of conflict resolution. The history, as well as the bureaucratic nature, of the organization are discussed, while the particular conditions of the two departments from which employees' accounts were gathered are also highlighted. Looking at the organization as an open system, the present study adopts a multi-level perspective and acknowledges the effect that the broader socio-economic environment has on the organization and, by implication, on the organizational members.

4.2. E.P.E. - Initial Contact

The first contact with the company was made in September 1993. Initially, I contacted the Human Relations Office of the enterprise by sending them a letter informing them about my research topic and requesting top management's permission to undertake the research on its premises and to talk to employees of the two departments. My request was granted on condition that the identity of the company would be kept confidential.

The research material was collected at different times during a period of one and a half years. Having been given the discretion to choose which departments to include in my study, I decided to use the Research/Design Department and the Supplies Department. The selection was determined in part by the enthusiasm shown by the heads of the two departments when I first approached them. Having obtained permission from the heads of both departments, I talked to employees, introducing myself and the topic of my research, and asking them whether they were interested in participating in my research.

Next, I present the firm, from which I collected research material for the present study, with a view to developing a better understanding of the organizational environment within which the conflict resolution process has been modelled. The following presentation has originated from interview information regarding E.P.E. in general, as well as from my personal impressions and informal discussions with various employees of the firm. This material forms the general background context within which the more specific conflict-related material in the discussion chapters (Chapters Six & Nine) must be located.

4.3. History of the Company

The firm was established in the late 1960s. Since then, it has undergone a series of changes in management. At the outset, the firm was run by the public sector; the institutions which were responsible for the functioning of the company varied throughout these years. Finally, due to economic misfortunes, the firm was sold to the private sector in 1992.

In an attempt to deal with the major financial problems that the company was facing, the new management had to take some drastic steps, such as firing a considerable number of employees. Since the rationale behind this firing was never explained to the employees, this massive dismissal aroused negative feelings in the vast majority of employees in regard to the new owners of the company. The anger experienced by the

employees was accompanied by a feeling of uncertainty about their future. This uncertainty was portrayed in their discourse both during the interviews, and when they were chatting while waiting for - or inside - the company buses¹. On the one hand, employees were uncertain about their own future in the company since there was no guarantee that the new management would continue employing them. On the other hand, employees were concerned about the future of the company. They had their doubts regarding whether the new management was taking the right steps to ensure the company's well-being. They made speculations as to whether the new management cared at all about the firm itself, or whether they had just bought it for their own benefit. The general feeling communicated by the majority of the interviewees was that the new management was perceived as something 'external' to the firm, with dubious intentions. Such insecurity and tension regarding the intentions of the new management contributed to the cohesion of the employees. The Employees' Union became even more powerful. Soon after the massive firing, employees went on strike, which disrupted the normal functioning of the enterprise for a while. Strikes came to a halt only after the management committed itself to stop the policy of firing.

Ever since, and as time passed by, relationships between employees and the new management gradually improved, even though employees were still highly dissatisfied with their pay. The financial problems that the company was facing remained; hence, insecurity about their own future as well as about the company's future was still apparent. This was due partly to a broader economic crisis in Greece in the field of heavy industry, and partly to a broader international crisis in the particular field in which the company specializes.

¹I was using one of these buses as a means of transport to and from the company.

4.4. E.P.E.: A Manufacturing Industry

E.P.E. is a company which manufactures large and complex machinery. Around 1,900 employees work in this enterprise. The firm is project-based; this means that the demand, the work load and the stress entailed in the course of work are variable, since everything depends on the project undertaken and on the specific stage of development at which the project is. The final product is on a one-off basis and the firm follows the demands of the person ordering it.

The organizational chart of the company is an indicative means of showing the way in which the company is structured (see Figure 4.1.). The two divisions within which the departments examined belong, are highlighted. This figure is a copy of the original organizational chart which was operational during the first of my visits to the company (i.e. September, 1993). This chart was provided by top management at my request.

The organizational chart of the enterprise, with the existence of many different levels in the hierarchy, reveals the highly bureaucratic structure of the organization. The bureaucratic functioning of E.P.E. came even further to the fore during informal discussions and interviews held which elicited the way that work is done in the firm. In Chapter One (section 1.3.1.), I briefly referred to the main principles of bureaucratic systems. Having these characteristics in mind, we are going to see how the company functions in the light of the bureaucratic nature of the organization.

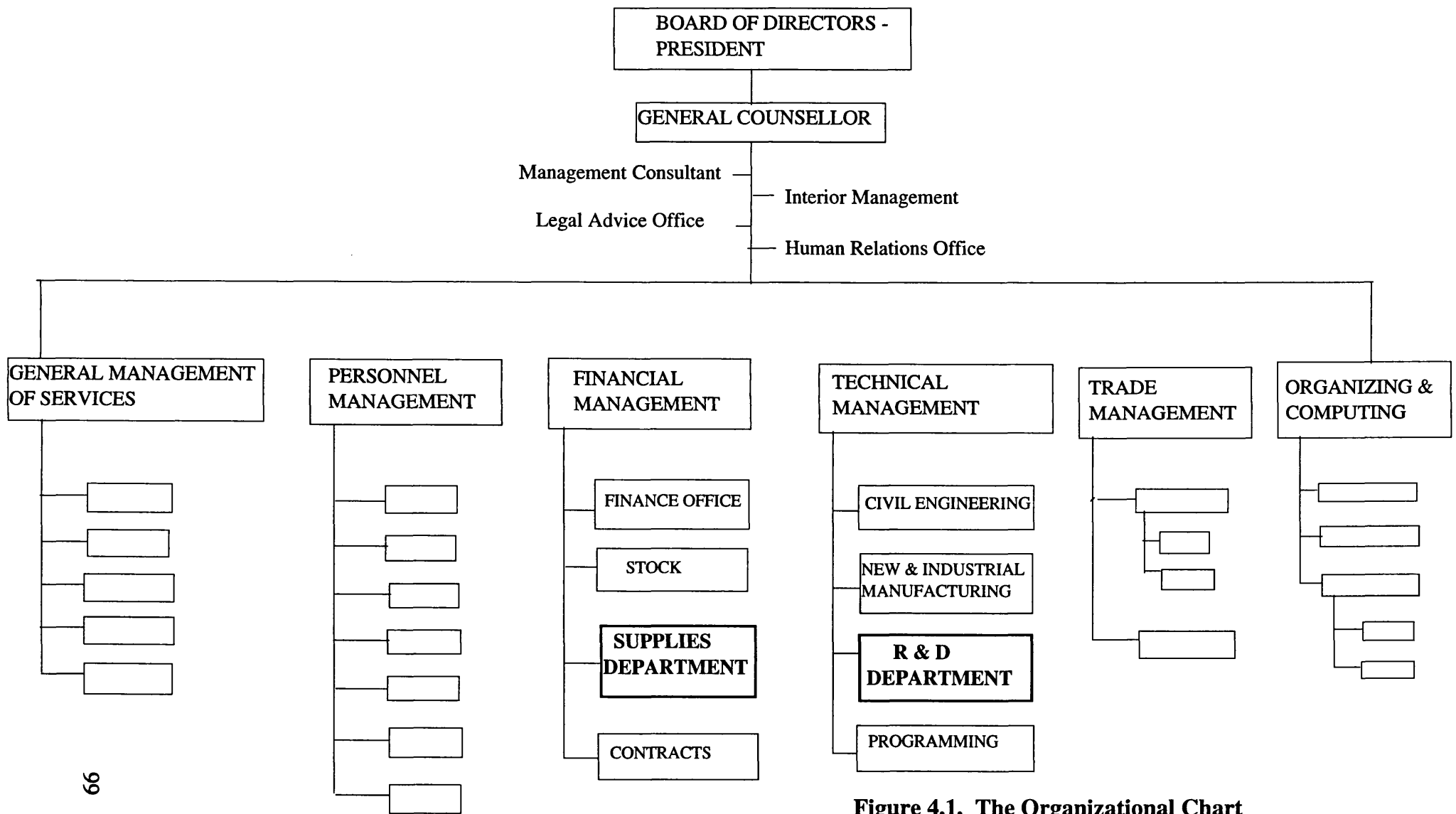


Figure 4.1. The Organizational Chart

4.4.1. E.P.E.: A Typical Bureaucratic Organization

The bureaucratic structure of the organization dates back to before privatization took place. The organizational chart shown in Figure 4.1, which was more or less in use under the old `regime', indicates that there are a lot of different levels of hierarchy. According to employees' experience, these levels were too many and therefore proved to be ineffective. Taking this into account, the new management originally made an attempt to reduce the layers of the hierarchy by abolishing one layer which corresponded to middle-ranking employees. However, in the meantime, new layers were created in the top of the hierarchical pyramid; a president was appointed, as well as a general supervisory post above the head of every department. Overall, according to employees' views, the hierarchical structure of the enterprise was, to a large extent, preserved by the new ownership.

In the meantime, the authority system became even more centralized; the new owners relied on the persons in high positions, most of them `inherited' from the previous, public status of the company and who were aware of all the nitty-gritty about the company. However, the owners decided to take over the general management of the company even though they lacked adequate knowledge to do so. Having to account to the new management, the high-ranking people - who used to take decisions under the old regime - now have to wait for authorization before making any kind of decision. According to the new policy, the top managers/owners, together with the president that they appointed, had to decide on issues ranging from those of vital importance to the company to quite trivial ones, since there were no guidelines set for somebody to evaluate these issues.

The large number of levels, as well as the centralized authority and decision making system, resulted in an incredible amount of work for the higher levels, since all documents needed the president's authorization. As a consequence, it took a long time before a request was authorized. This `red-tape' phenomenon proved particularly ineffective and even detrimental to the company, due to the nature of the task

performed. As mentioned earlier, E.P.E. is a project-based industry. The last big project assigned to E.P.E. dates from 1988 and, even though it was originally estimated to be completed by 1992, it was still not finished by the end of 1995. However, there is always a time condition on the contract for a project, according to which the product has to be delivered on the date originally agreed upon. If the company fails to deliver by the deadline set, then there is a fine (i.e. monetary consequences) that the company has to pay to the client. Moreover, there are further implications for the company in terms of its reputation both in the local, as well as in the international, market.

Delays in the completion of the project are not only due to the recent change in management, but also to the way the organization of work takes place in the firm. Both my observations, as well as interviewees' comments, indicate that the company is characterized by the lack of a cohesive planning policy and inadequate organization. This is partly due to the inadequacy of the technology available, as well as to mistakes on the part of upper management who, most of the time, were not well-acquainted with the manufacturing object. When reviewing the interviews conducted with the employees, it became apparent that there was an overall feeling of a chaotic situation throughout the entire firm. More specifically, employees referred to constant changes in personnel and working procedures (each time that a change in top management occurred), lack of job descriptions, as well as of coordination of efforts between departments. This situation often created tension in relationships between employees, since each department put the blame on another department for any work delays or mistakes made.

Research on bureaucracies has referred to the existence of an *accountability system* and *prescribed role responsibilities* as central features of bureaucratic organizations. As indicated in Chapter One (section 1.3.1.), unless these two are clearly defined, the system cannot function effectively. This seems to be the case for E.P.E.; according to interviews, as well as to informal discussions with employees, the latter often found themselves wondering whether their immediate supervisor, or the supervisor once-removed, was the person to whom they should account or who was responsible for

assigning them work². Such a situation has created problems both at the intra-departmental, and at the inter-departmental level where it was manifested in lack of coordination between departments. As a result, the project to be performed is further delayed.

4.4.2. Working in E.P.E.: Reciting my Personal Observations and Experiences in the Firm

The previous section was devoted to showing that E.P.E. is a highly-structured bureaucratic hierarchy. I shall now present how this bureaucratic structure is portrayed in employees' daily work and interactions with each other. This presentation is mainly based on the informal conversations I had with the psychologist and the social worker who worked in the Human Relations Office of the organization. This office was established when the company went private. The comments of the psychologist and the social worker stem not only from their daily contact with the employees (the nature of the work performed in the Human Relations Office entails some consultancy work), but also from their own experiences as employees of the firm. This account is also supported by interviewees' comments.

The bureaucratic functioning in E.P.E. has created a climate of impersonality characterising human interactions in the firm. Impersonality has already been found to be embodied in bureaucratic systems and is mainly manifested through employees' compliance to authority relationships (Crozier, 1964; Downs, 1967). In fact, *power conditions* are keenly looked at by employees in E.P.E.; moreover, organizational rules and behavioural norms are strictly followed. Irrespective of the level of hierarchy to which employees belong, employees avoid being personally involved in regard to their work; this tendency is manifested in terms of their being reluctant to go beyond the prescriptions of their job. In this way, they avoid any responsibility for the consequences of their actions, since they simply do as they were told. In the meantime,

²This confusion of role responsibilities seems to be much more the case for one of the departments (the Research/Design Department) being studied.

they minimize the likelihood of experiencing anxiety within the workplace and thus make the latter a more friendly environment in which to work. The tendency of employees to adhere to organizational norms as a means of escaping from being held responsible for possible misdeeds has already been indicated by existing research on bureaucracies, and has been associated mainly with retreatism (Crozier, 1964; Kofron, 1986).

This 'withdrawal' from their task (as illustrated by the strict adherence to organizational rules and role prescription) should also be seen in connection with the special conditions occurring in E.P.E. (e.g. recent privatization), which inevitably have an impact on employees and are thus reflected in the daily work of E.P.E. In section 4.3., I mentioned that the privatization of the company took place six months before this study was conducted. Shortly after the company's privatization, most employees felt threatened by losing their jobs and thus resisted the change that the new ownership was likely to bring. Such uncertainty came to the fore as soon as the new ownership developed a redundancy policy. Although the rationale behind making people redundant was to make the firm more profitable, employees disagreed that this policy would solve the problems (mainly financial) encountered under the previous public control. However, despite their doubts, it seems that employees put their hopes regarding the company's future in the new ownership who could provide solutions to the firm's difficulties. Nonetheless, it was not much later that employees started noticing that the way things worked under the new state of the company did not differ significantly from what had happened beforehand. This realization grossly disappointed people who then started losing hope about their future in the company, as well as about the future of the company itself. At a later stage - and since nothing seemed to change in the firm - employees psychologically 'resigned' from their work. They would avoid any form of personal involvement in the task performed and experienced a feeling of overall withdrawal. According to the social worker's experience, this 'withdrawal' regarding their commitment to their work applied without fail to almost all areas of the company, including the Human Relations Office.

Having referred in general to the work conditions in E.P.E., in the following sections, I shall focus separately on each of the two departments that I examined in more detail, by giving an outline of each department.

4.5. The Research/Design Department

The Research/Design Department³ is part of the Research/Design/Programming Division. At the top of the hierarchy is the Head of the Division and below him, there are two supervisors, one for each department (R & D and Programming). Each group has a supervisor who is accountable to the head of the department. Figure 4.2. is part of the organizational chart which illustrates the structure of the division.

As indicated by its name, the main function of the R & D Department is to carry out research on the machinery required for the construction of the end-product⁴ and then prepare the designs for this machinery, which will then be put into effect by the production line. The Programming Department is responsible for the division of the tasks to be assigned to the different divisions of the firm when the company undertakes a new project; it also makes estimates on the timing and the kind of coordination needed between the various divisions.

³From now onwards, I shall refer to the Research/Design Department as R & D Department.

⁴The machinery required varies depending on the particular project undertaken.

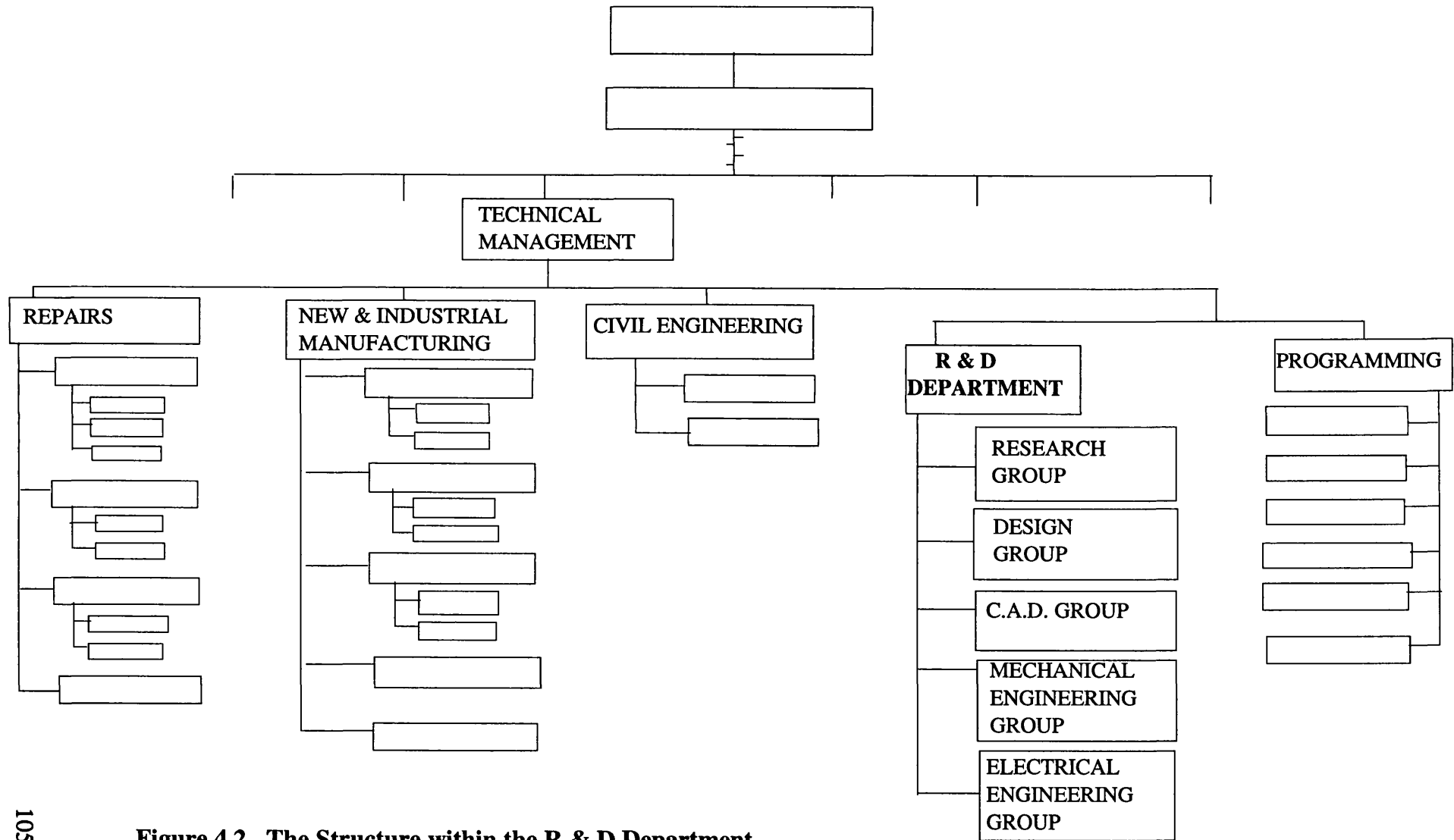


Figure 4.2. The Structure within the R & D Department

The groups of the R & D Department are highly interdependent. The work starts with the Research group whose task is to investigate specifications regarding various parts of the machinery required by the project. While the Research group is mainly responsible for this investigation, cooperation with the Mechanical Engineering and Electrical Engineering groups is necessary, since these groups conduct research and provide specialized information regarding the mechanical and electrical aspects of the different types of machinery which are being investigated. The interdependency between the two groups is reciprocal, since information provided by the two groups launches further research for the Research group, which may result in a focus on different machinery, about which the Electrical Engineering and Mechanical Engineering groups should make further investigation and so on. In general, all information gathered is directed to the Design group which takes this information into consideration during the preparation of designs. This group works closely with the CAD group which consists of a few people specialized in computer-assisted designing. During daily work, there is always more information that designers need in order to proceed with their task; sometimes, unexpected changes, when designs are materialized by employees in the production line, call for alterations in the designs and, consequently, for the search for new information undertaken by the Research group.

Even though research on the machinery precedes its design, in practice, when a new project is assigned to the firm, all groups start working at the same time; employees responsible for designing (Design and CAD groups) have certain set guidelines which are applicable to different sorts of machinery produced throughout the years; these guidelines provide an original orientation when designing, before additional and more precise information is provided by the other groups (Research, Electrical Engineering and Mechanical Engineering groups). In general, the designs of the actual end-product are produced as a result of close collaboration between the groups of the department; interdependency is more intense among members of the same group.

Since the R & D Department operates in a project-based firm, time pressure and work load vary. These can be very high at the beginning of the project or when changes are

required; in contrast, they are usually quite low during other periods. During periods when the work pressure of the current project is lower, employees in the department work on machinery which is under repair and which is not urgent; alternatively, they may start working on a product in which potential clients have developed an interest and on which they have asked the firm to perform initial research. During these periods, the work load is so low that the number of people working in the department diminishes; in such cases, employees are relocated to different posts within the firm. It is during such periods that employees feel most insecure about their future employment in the company. At the beginning of this study, the R & D Department (which was then a division in its own right) consisted of approximately 32 people; each time that I visited the company this number diminished even further; meanwhile, employees were making assumptions about a further reduction of personnel. This fear was reinforced by the fact that spatial re-arrangements were made in the division in order to accommodate the needs of fewer people⁵. In addition, the absence of any new projects was particularly worrying for employees in the R & D Department, since repairs needed only a smaller number of people working on research and design. Finally, since privatisation, the department had undergone major changes, especially in terms of employees working for the Mechanical Engineering group, most of whom were made redundant.

Overall, work in the R & D Department is highly demanding and stressful. Since mistakes are quite costly, and communicate a negative image of the department to other areas of the firm, employees avoid taking initiative (and, consequently, responsibility); rather, they usually refer to their supervisor in order to take the final decision. The department (mainly through the people working on the designs) is in constant cooperation and coordination of efforts with the production line, which causes even more work stress to the department. This interdependence is sequential, in the sense

⁵The entire division works on the same premises which is a huge space divided into two parts; the Programming Department and a substantial part of the R & D Department work in the first section, while the other one basically accommodates those employees working on designs.

that the work of the production line depends upon the provision of the machinery designs. At the outset, personnel working in production need at least the original drafts of what is going to be manufactured in order to start working. Having said that there is a deadline set in regard to any project undertaken, the entire department experiences more tension; they are aware of the fact that the speed and the quality of their work directly affects the firm since the vast majority of personnel works on the production line and are literally 'waiting for' the drafts to be sent. Another source of stress originates from the fact that mistakes made in the designs are very costly, since they are only noticed when they have been materialized. The likelihood of mistakes not being noticed is accentuated by the fact that the control policy in regard to the drafts of the designs is rather superficial. Moreover, the kind of interdependence with the production line puts the latter in a position to blame the department for practically everything that goes wrong. Thus, from time to time, tension occurs in the relationships of the R & D Department and people working in production, where the former often reports feelings of resentment towards the latter; they also feel that the Department's contribution to the entire firm is underestimated, since nobody seems to appreciate the difficulties their task entails.

The educational level of employees in the department is beyond the secondary, or even technical school. In general, there are good working relationships among employees in the department as reported by the employees of the department who were interviewed. Mutual help and support are readily provided to one another when needs be. Even though no 'personal' friendships outside the work context were reported, employees from the different groups get together from time to time and go to a local restaurant after work. The relationships are stronger among people who work in the same group. However, despite the seemingly harmonious environment, the department did not seem to be cohesive; nevertheless, keeping the image of harmony within their work context seems to be essential to the R & D people. Taking into consideration the problems they face (e.g. insecurity about their future), maintaining good working relationships seems to be the only way for them to survive in their work environment.

4.6. The Supplies Department

The Supplies Department, together with the Stock Department belongs to the Supplies Division (see Figure 4.3.). There are 16 people working in this department; their main task is to provide the entire firm with all sorts of material needed; from material required for manufacturing purposes (e.g. production of and repairs to machinery), to paper and the office materials which are necessary for the maintenance and functioning of a large enterprise. The purpose of the work undertaken is to bring into the firm the material requested as quickly as possible, at the cheapest price, while taking into account the quality of the material.

The department consists of four groups; the Local Market group is responsible for material requested which can be purchased within the country; the Foreign Market group is held accountable for material which can only be ordered from abroad; the Contract group is responsible for contacting and employing people on a freelance basis; these people are called in to perform a specific task in which nobody from the firm specializes. Finally, there are also two drivers who work for the department and bring into the firm the material ordered; due to the nature of their work, the drivers are only on the premises at the beginning (when they are given directions regarding which places to go and which material to collect) and at the end of the working day (when they deliver the material collected and discuss the next day's itinerary). Within each group, tasks are divided among employees and each employee is responsible for certain pieces of material for a given order. The material to which each one is assigned periodically rotates so that everybody gradually becomes familiar with the wide range of issues in which the division is involved. In this way, the work flow is not disrupted because of an employee's absence.

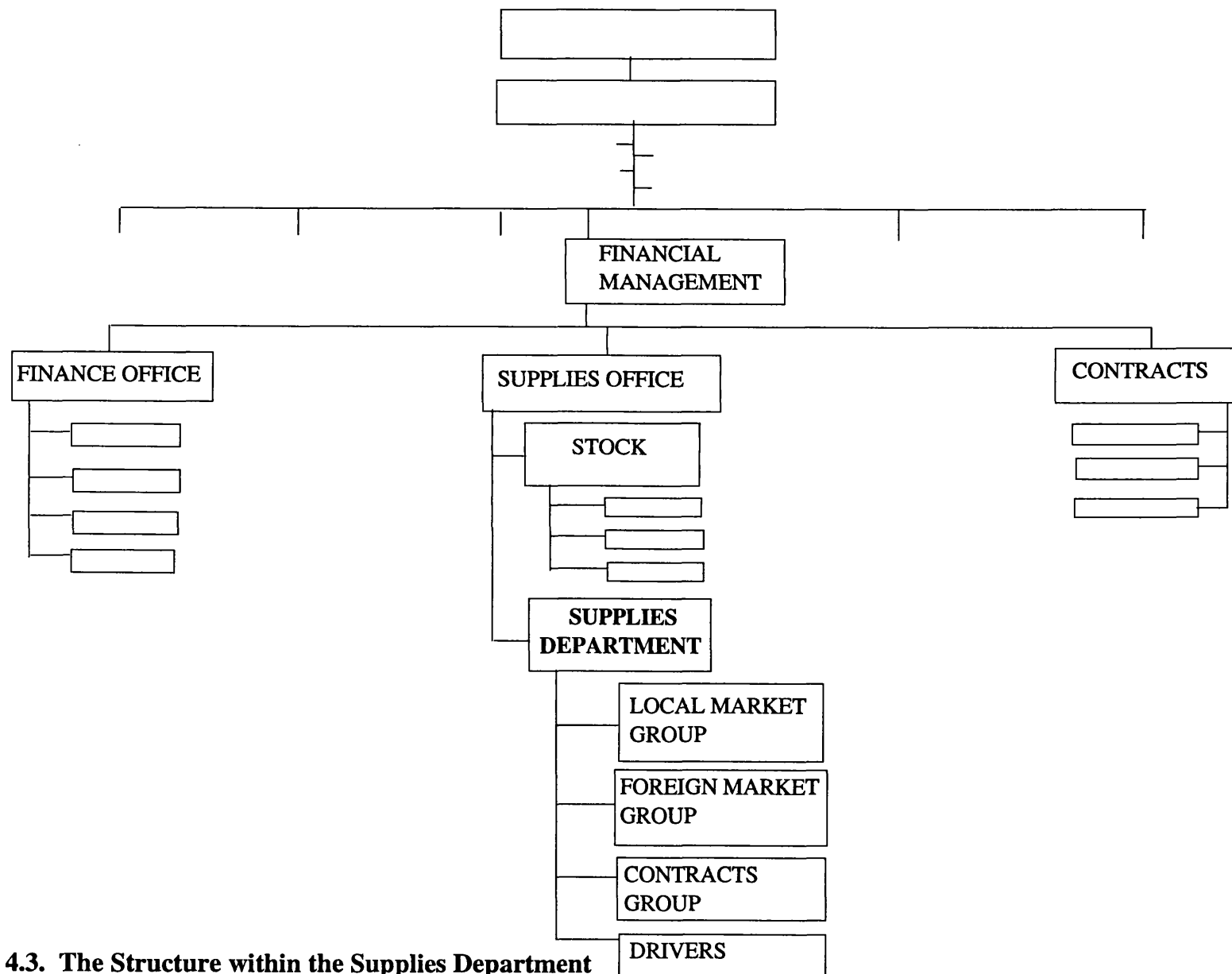


Figure 4.3. The Structure within the Supplies Department

In the Supplies Department, the working day starts in a rush, especially for the Local Market group. Employees in this group have to coordinate their efforts and decide which kind of goods are going to be brought into the firm on this particular day; they then give directions to the drivers regarding their itinerary for the day. The work load returns to normal during the middle of the day when they usually receive requests for goods to be ordered and set priorities on these requests. The work rhythm accelerates again towards the end of the working day, when the group has received new orders, and makes provisional plans for the next day and contacts possible suppliers outside the firm. Things are more relaxed for the Foreign Market group since this group deals with tasks that take more time (i.e. contacting people from abroad); nevertheless, all three groups are pressed for time.

Since the need for supplies is constant in a large manufacturing concern like E.P.E., the work load and time pressure in this department are always high. Moreover, there is a continuous communication and interdependency with all branches of the firm which press for quick service in the provision of goods. Without being provided with the material required, no area of the firm can function. However, due to financial problems, it is often the case that the company fails to pay suppliers or people contracted (from outside the firm) at the time originally agreed upon. As a consequence, the latter are reluctant to continue supplying the firm under such conditions.

Overall, working in the Supplies Department entails a high level of initiative and responsibility-taking. For instance, deals are made on the telephone and it all happens so quickly that there is no room for hesitation or 'second thoughts' about something; not being able to spare the time to ask for the supervisor's advice or permission, employees have to decide at short notice, which makes their job even more stressful. Due to the nature of the work performed, initiative is not only a vital aspect of performing the task, but is also encouraged by the supervisor, as both he and his subordinates report. This is mainly due to time pressure and is indicated by the fact that problems arising in the course of work are solved on the spot and in collaboration

with colleagues. This practice is further fostered by the good relationships among employees.

The department itself is very cohesive; most of the employees are experienced in the field and have worked in the department for many years. The Head of the Department is well-respected by the employees of the group. Apart from the social outings organized after work, people often invite their colleagues and their families to their houses. In my personal view, the extent of their cohesiveness is also indicated by an incident to which the social worker referred. Some time ago, three employees working in the Local Market group went together to the top management to ask for a rise in salary. According to them, either all or none of them should be given this rise, since they were all of an equal status.

4.7. Overview of the Next Chapter

Having presented a detailed portrayal of the company which constituted the contextual background within which the conflict resolution process will be modelled, I shall next proceed to develop a model of conflict handling behaviour which is anchored in the context of the specific departments under investigation (i.e. Research/Design & Programming). The modelling of the way in which employees handle conflict situations in E.P.E. will draw on employees' accounts of conflict situations experienced in the context of their department. The research question to be addressed at this stage is to illustrate how the broader organizational context - together with the particularities of each of the two departments - is reflected in the modelling of the conflict handling practices used by employees working in this context.

CHAPTER FIVE

Developing a Process Model of Conflict Handling Behaviour - General Procedure

5.1. Overview

This chapter is devoted to the presentation of the procedure followed from data collection to analysis of the accounts of conflict episodes reported by interviewees. The sample of the employees interviewed is introduced, while the general pathway followed in the course of the interviews is also sketched. Discussion regarding the units of analysis included in the present research is enriched with extracts taken from the interviews conducted. The focus of the chapter is centred on the provision of precise definitions of the units of analysis and coding; the emphasis put on these definitions is justified in the context of enhancing the credibility of the present research.

5.2. Subjects

In Chapter Three (section 3.5.), I discussed in detail my decision to use interviews as a means of collecting information for the modelling of the process of conflict resolution. In total, I interviewed twenty-six employees. Thirteen of my informants worked in the R & D Department, one in the Programming Department¹ and twelve in the Supplies Department. Four employees from the first group were re-interviewed, since more information was needed.

¹This employee had been working previously for many years in the Research group (R & D Department). Our discussion centred on conflict situations which referred to the time that he was working in the R & D Department.

Figure 5.1.a Map of the Employees interviewed within the R & D Department

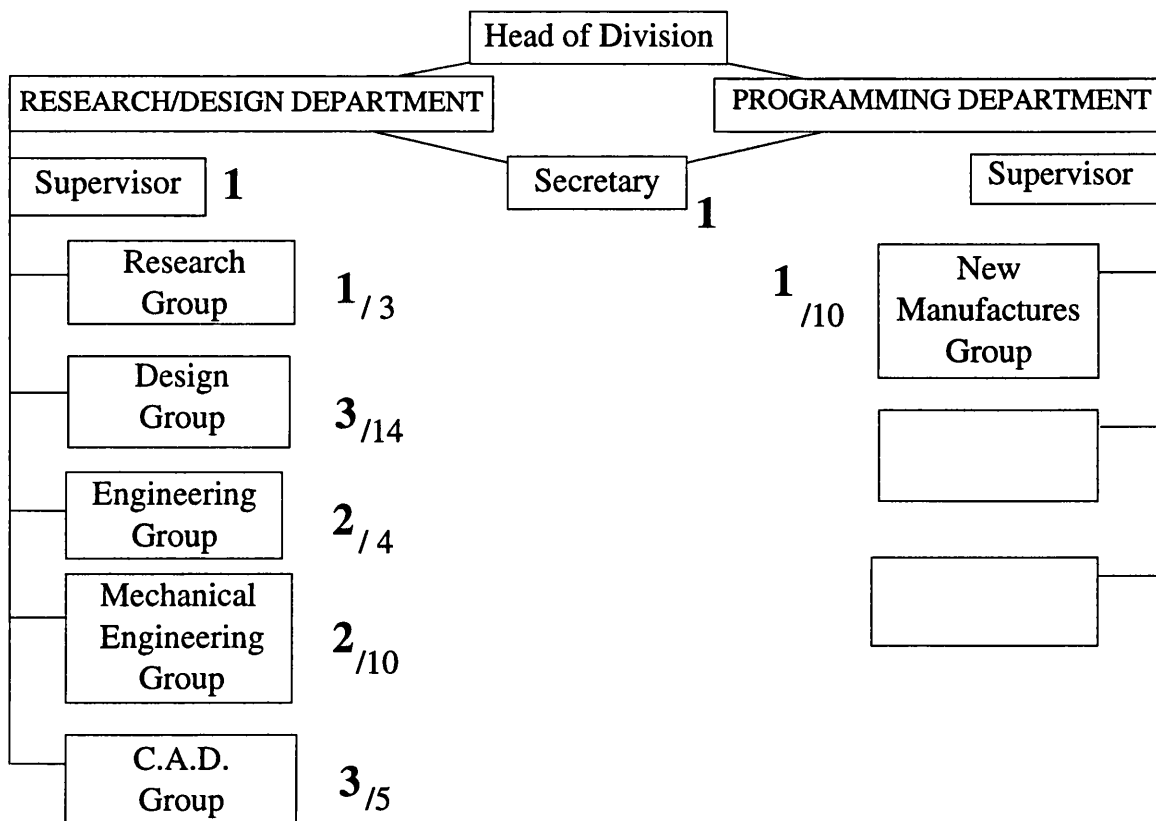
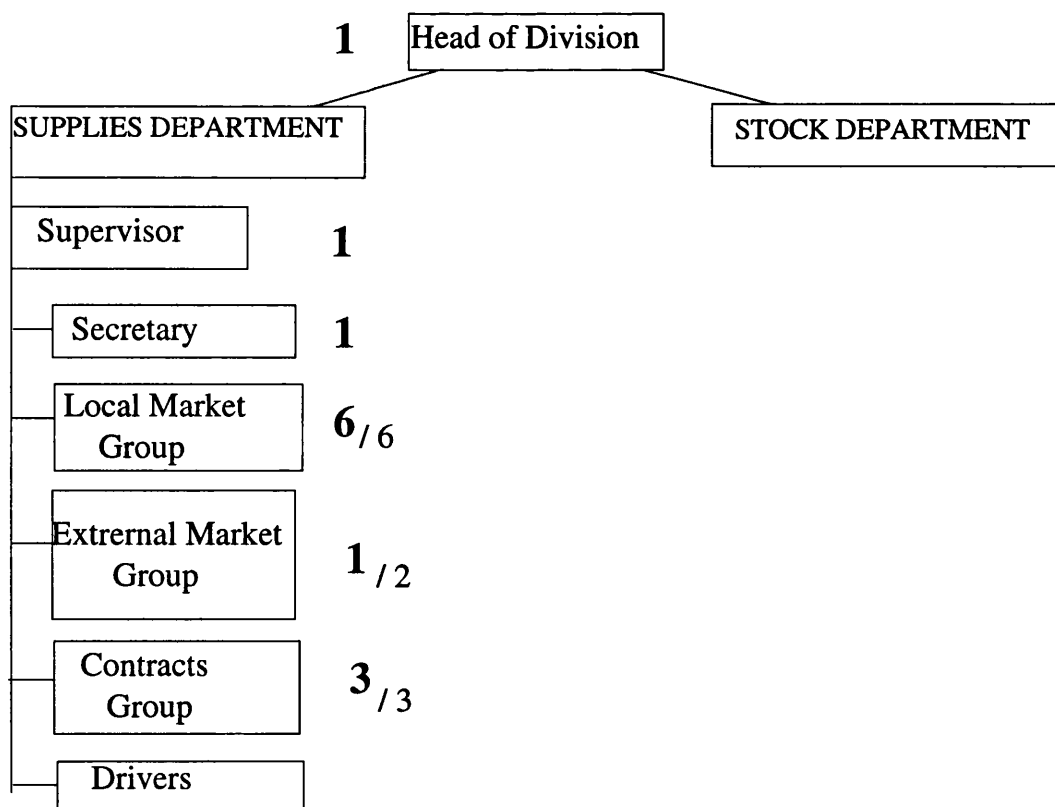


Figure 5.1.b Map of the Employees interviewed within the Supplies Department



Figures 5.1.a & b illustrate in detail the group in which the employees interviewed from each department worked. The number of interviewees is indicated in bold, adjacent to the total number of employees working in each group. The age of the interviewees ranged from 27 to 56 years. Twenty-four of these people were men and only two women, who both had a secretarial job². The educational levels of the interviewees varied from secondary education up to a master's degree. Their length of tenure in the company ranged from six months to 35 years. Even though the sample selected is not a quota sample in the strict sense of the term, the selected interviewees were chosen to be representative of all the different ranks in the departmental hierarchical structure.

I collected my interviews on three occasions within a period of a year and a half. Overall, I spent a period of three weeks in the company. The interviews generally lasted from between 30 minutes to one and half hours, and were taped with the permission of the employees. Most of the interviews took place in the actual work environment of the employees, with the exception of a few occasions where the circumstances would not allow for interviewing (e.g. either noisy environment due to construction works being undertaken, or where no privacy could be ensured); in these cases, interviews were conducted in an empty office space located on the premises³.

5.3. The Interview Schedule

As already discussed, open-ended interviewing was used in order to investigate and model the process that employees follow throughout a conflict episode (see Chapter Three, section 3.5.). Following this technique, the interviews were conducted in a conversational manner, while each discussion allowed for adjustments depending on the

²On the whole, E.P.E. is a male-dominated industry.

³Brief interruptions were sometimes inevitable and were related to the work pressure (e.g. the supervisor would ask the employee interviewed for clarification regarding an issue).

particular employee with whom the interview was held. Nevertheless, prior to interviewing, I had selected certain issues which I aimed to cover in the course of each interview; this initial topic guide served as a baseline when interviewing employees. This guideline was especially useful in situations in which I needed to prime interviewees in order to get more information⁴; when priming my informants, the questions asked were open-ended in order to allow for more flexibility in the answers reported (Oppenheim, 1986).

The discussion focused on conflict incidents in which the informant had been engaged in the past; the employee was asked to talk about those instances, focusing on the interaction that took place between the parties involved. My purpose was to cover the diversity of the conflict phenomenon in the workplace; for this reason, when an interviewee was referring only to conflicts with his/her colleagues, I would specifically ask him/her to talk also about conflict encounters with employees in different hierarchical positions (e.g. supervisor and/or subordinates). In general, whenever I felt that I needed more information in order to fully understand what had happened, I would prime the interviewee to recall a conflict situation s/he had encountered and talk about how it all started, what the conflict was about, as well as asking him/her about the communication exchanged by both parties during the episode.

In general, my main focus during the interviews was to gather information with reference to conflict episodes experienced personally by the informant in the context of his/her department. References to specific conflict situations and events - rather than generalizations - have proved to minimize possible distortion (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986). Moreover, being aware of the limitations entailed in self-report methods, in terms of poor recollection of events (Yin, 1984), I attempted to eliminate such problems by means of asking the interviewees about specific situations and further priming them on these situations.

⁴The Interview Guide used is presented in Appendix I.

However, interviewees often preferred to talk about hypothetical conflict situations in the workplace that could have happened - or may have already happened some time in the past - rather than referring to actual ones. In their study on argumentation in bargaining situations, Putnam and Geist (1985) also found that negotiators made frequent use of hypothetical examples; in these cases, instead of constructing an account of specific facts or incidents, they presented the event in hypothetical terms (i.e. as if it could hypothetically occur under the given circumstances). Such an overt preference to talk about hypothetical conflict encounters on the behalf of the majority of my informants - which sometimes persisted despite my priming towards specific conflict situations - led me to the decision to include these episodes in my analysis⁵. Nonetheless, I decided to treat these hypothetical conflict episodes - and the behaviours enacted in such episodes - separately from the main analysis. The rationale behind my decision to distinguish between hypothetical conflict episodes reported by employees, and conflict episodes which referred to their actual experiences of conflict situations in the context of their department, lies in the assumption that conflict behaviour in hypothetical episodes is more likely to reflect employees' behavioural intentions towards conflict situations rather than their actual behaviour in such cases.

5.4. Distinguishing between Behavioural Intentions and Actual Conflict Behaviours

Since 1931, Thurstone has questioned the assumption of a strong relation between a person's attitude towards an object and his/her consequent pattern of behaviour with respect to that object (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). The best-known study which tested the assumption that attitudes can serve as behavioural predispositions - and raised serious doubts about it - was LaPiere's study on racial prejudice. Soon, more evidence was accumulated regarding the failure of attitudes to predict behaviour, and thus a series of possible explanations was considered in order to account for such findings.

⁵This decision was in agreement with the broader perspective of the present research which has stressed the importance of an interactive nature of fieldwork research.

For instance, in their theory of reasoned action, Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) differentiated between behavioural intention and actual behaviour, and saw the former as a result of two "determinants"; the personal factor refers to the individual's evaluation of performing the behaviour, while the social factor reflects the perceived social pressure put on the person to perform or not perform this behaviour. In general, existing research on attitudes has indicated that there is not a strong correlation between a person's attitudes and his/her actual behaviour; even though somebody's attitudes may be related "to the totality of his behaviours with respect to [a particular] object, [they are] not necessarily related to any given behaviour" (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; p.335).

When reviewing existing research on conflict (see Chapter Two, section 2.3.), we saw that various instruments were designed in order to measure conflict behaviour. These instruments consisted of statements descriptive of a few behavioural responses, among which employees were asked to choose the one they often used in conflict situations (Womack, 1988a). In this respect, most of the instruments measured behavioural intentions and general tendencies in handling conflict, rather than actual behaviour in conflict situations (Womack, 1988b). This research approach parallels the wider tendency in social sciences to fall short of studying overt behaviour as such (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975).

Since the present study aimed to investigate the process that employees actually follow when dealing with conflict situations, rather than the process that employees would follow in such situations, I decided to code conflict behaviours anchored in a particular conflict episode, which had been experienced in the past by employees, separately from the ones to which they referred, only in a hypothetical manner. However, even when employees talked about hypothetical episodes, they would report in some detail a specific situation (that could have happened or might already have happened in the past); for this reason, one could argue that, rather than reflecting on their attitudes on conflict behaviour in the workplace, employees referred to their (behavioural) intentions in such situations which would lead them to a specific behaviour. A person's

action tendencies (i.e. behavioural intentions) towards an object were seen as more closely related to the actual performance of the given behaviour, especially when intention and behaviour correspond to the same degree of specificity (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975)⁶.

Including the accounts of hypothetical episodes in my analysis, I would be in a position to compare the extent to which the hypothetical conflict behaviour corresponded to the actual behaviour in conflict situations. Existing research on conflict has indicated that individuals' general (action) tendencies when dealing with conflict situations may invite responses which are rooted in social norms in use in the particular context (Knapp et al., 1988). Since the context is assumed to have an impact on employees' conflict behaviour, then such responses would also be worth studying in the sense that they would raise issues related to the organizational context.

Following the same line of thinking, I decided to differentiate between the behaviour entailed in accounts of hypothetical conflict situations and generalized references to conflict behaviour which were not anchored in any specific conflict episode (see section 5.6.4.); the latter were treated as an indication of the 'organizational myth' which depicts what employees would do, rather than what they actually do⁷. Like any other myth, the myth about conflict handling behaviour has many points of contact with reality; however, one cannot be sure about what measure of truth - or distortion - it contains. Even though such generalized references were not included in the analysis, I found it particularly interesting to examine them as a whole, and to see what employees of the two departments say they would do when encountering a conflict situation compared with the way they actually handle conflicts in their workplace.

⁶However, this research issue still remains controversial.

⁷The concept of 'organizational myth', as used here, corresponds to Leach's view, according to which "a myth is a sacred tale [...] [T]he special quality of myth is not that it is false but that it is divinely true for those who believe, but fairy-tale for those who do not" (Leach, 1970; p.54).

Having explained the rationale underlying the distinction between actual behaviour and behavioural intentions, I shall now move on to defining the main components of my analysis. According to Krippendorff (1980), the analyst has to account not only for the description of the conditions under which data were gathered, and of the analytical steps taken, but also for the precise definition of the different components of the analysis. The purpose of this presentation is to ensure clarity in the process followed when analyzing the information collected.

5.5. Distinguishing between Units of Analysis and Units of Recording

In Chapter Three (section 3.6.), I argued for the necessity for the qualitative researcher to ensure the clarity of the path she followed from data collection to data analysis. For this reason, I attempted to be 'objective' and 'systematic' when coding and analyzing accounts of conflict episodes, as a means of enhancing the 'credibility' of my research project. In order to ensure objectivity, I gave precise definitions of the units of analysis and the units of coding so that, if any other researcher set out to analyze the same material, s/he would obtain the same results. I was also 'systematic' in terms of following consistent rules which enabled me to analyze all accounts of conflict episodes according to the same categories of analysis. Having consistent and content-specific rules when selecting my units of analysis (i.e. conflict episodes) from the rest of information included in the interview transcripts, as well as when identifying and coding the conflict behaviour described in these units, led to the standardization of the procedure followed throughout the present research.

Content analysis was used as a means of analyzing the interview transcripts. This research technique has been used widely in the social sciences; it constitutes a systematic and objective way of identifying specified characteristics within a text (Holsti, 1969). Hence, any content analysis calls for a distinction between the unit of analysis and the unit of recording, as defined and used in the context of the particular research. The unit of analysis is a unit of text; for this part of the thesis, the units of

analysis were those interview extracts in which informants were referring to a conflict episode (i.e. accounts of conflict episodes).

Within the units of analysis which were included in this analysis, more text units could be identified and further analyzed; I have referred to these units as units of recording. Units of recording are also text units which represent specific parts of the content, and which are placed only in one given category; in other words, they are separately analyzable segments of a unit of analysis (Krippendorff, 1980). For this part of the analysis, units of recording were action statements which reflected the handling tactics used by employees in the conflict situations reported. The following sections are devoted to a detailed description of the units of analysis and units of recording, as defined for the purpose of the present analysis.

5.6. Definition and Identification of the Units of Analysis

The units of analysis for this study were accounts of conflict episodes, as reported by the employees interviewed; these episodes were stories which had a beginning and an end⁸. As in other types of accounts, an account of a conflict episode usually started with an initial statement regarding what it was all about, how the conflict started, how the interaction evolved as time passed and how the situation was eventually sorted out. These stories could be either very long or short, depending on the willingness of the interviewee to reconstruct the situation in a detailed way.

In order to identify the accounts of conflict episodes and extract them from the rest of the information included in the interviews, I had to read carefully the interview transcripts; in these transcripts, I would find a variety of information (e.g. personal information, details about the kind of work they performed in the department, reference to conflict incidents, general information about the company as well as reference to the

⁸An exception to this are some conflict episodes which were coded as partial (see section 5.6.3.).

company's recent privatization, and so on). Even though all this information emerging out of the interview transcripts was valuable in order to gain a better understanding of the research phenomenon, for the purpose of my analysis, I was particularly interested in identifying those instances in the interview transcripts where employees would give a story of a conflict situation (actual or hypothetical), in reference to the department they were working in.

The accounts of conflict episodes were usually easily identifiable from the rest of the rest of the interview information surrounding them; the reason was that these accounts most often came as an answer to my priming question "could you recall a conflict which has arisen between you and another person working in this department?" After having given a (rich, or, less detailed) account of such a situation, interviewees would often stray away from this topic of conversation and refer to other issues (e.g. general comments about the situation in the company, or generalized comments about conflict situations and the way they handle them, which were not included in this analysis (see section 5.6.4.). In other occasions, interviewees would refrain themselves from any further comment, until I would prime them either to give more information regarding the particular episode, or refer to another conflict situation which they could recall. In Appendix II, I have included two complete interview transcripts in order to illustrate the variety of the information collected during the interviews. In each of these transcripts, I have marked all the accounts of conflict episodes identified in the course of the interview with *italics*, in order to demonstrate how the units of analysis (i.e. conflict episodes) were identified in the wider context of the information included in each interview.

Coming back to the units of analysis, the present analysis included only conflict situations where two people were in conflict over a particular issue (i.e. 'dyadic' conflict situations). Moreover, only incidents where both parties in conflict worked in the same department were analyzed. Even though the analysis focused on conflict incidents where the interviewee was one of the parties directly involved in the conflict situation, I also included situations where the informant had observed a conflict incident

between two other employees working in the same department as him/herself. My decision to treat interchangeably both conflict behaviours enacted by the interviewee, as well as his/her reports of others' conflict behaviour, rested on the fact that, at this stage of my analysis, I was interested in conflict behaviour, which is easily observable by other people and which does not entail any inferences on the behalf of the observer. In one sense, an interviewee's report on his/her own behaviour in a conflict situation can be seen in terms of his/her taking the role of observer of his/her own behaviour⁹. Only one episode was reported by two different employees; one of these employees was one of the parties involved in the situation, while the other was an observer of the situation.

Having tape-recorded and transcribed the interviews, I went through the transcripts and identified my units of analysis. In total, 124 distinct units of analysis were identified and further analyzed with the aim of modelling employees' conflict handling process. These episodes were divided into two main categories:

- (a) actual conflict episodes within which the conflict behaviour described was anchored in a specific situation in the past, and
- (b) hypothetical conflict situations where the conflict behaviour used and the story were reported in a hypothetical way.

Table 5.1. illustrates the distribution of the conflict episodes included in this part of the analysis across the two departments. Tables 5.2.a & 5.2.b illustrate the distribution of the conflict episodes included in the analysis across the employees interviewed in each of the two departments.

⁹In Part II of the thesis, observed conflict incidents will not be included in the analysis conducted since, in this phase of analysis, focus will be placed on employees' representation of the particular conflict situation reported.

Table 5.1. The Distribution of the Conflict Episodes Included in the Analysis

	Actual Episodes	Hypothetical Episodes	Total
R & D Dept.	30 (3 observed) (1 partial)	41 (3 observed) (5 partial)	71
Supplies Dept.	17 (1 observed)	36 (3 observed) (3 partial)	53
Total Number of Episodes	47	77	124

Table 5.2.a The Distribution of the Conflict Episodes Included in the Analysis across the Employees Interviewed in the R & D Department

R & D Department			
Episodes Employees	Actual	Hypothetical	Total
Empl. 1	1	3	4
Empl. 2	2	5	7
Empl. 3	4	8	12
Empl. 4	2	1	3
Empl. 5	1	3	4
Empl. 6	2	3	5
Empl. 7	3	--	3
Empl. 8	--	2	2
Empl. 9	4	4	8
Empl. 10	2	1	3
Empl. 11	4	3	7
Empl. 12	1	2	3
Empl. 13	3	5	8
Empl. 14	1	1	2
	30	41	71

Table 5.2.b The Distribution of the Conflict Episodes Included in the Analysis across the Employees Interviewed in the Supplies Department

Supplies Department			
Episodes Employees	Actual	Hypothetical	Total
Empl. 1	--	4	4
Empl. 2	3	2	5
Empl. 3	--	3	3
Empl. 4	1	--	1
Empl. 5	--	2	2
Empl. 6	1	1	2
Empl. 7	1	2	3
Empl. 8	1	3	4
Empl. 9	3	11	14
Empl. 10	5	4	9
Empl. 11	2	2	4
Empl. 12	--	2	2
	17	36	53

The following sections are devoted to providing further explanations of the notions of actual-hypothetical and complete-partial episodes, as defined in the present study. The presentation of examples taken from the interviews will illustrate further these definitions.

5.6.1. Actual Conflict Episodes

As I argued in section 5.3., actual conflict episodes constituted the main part of the analysis. Actual episodes indicate specific conflict situations which have been experienced by the informant in the past. For an episode to be coded as an actual episode, there should be indications, from the reconstruction of the story, that the

situation reported is anchored at a certain point in time, as well as specific references to the other person engaged in the conflict situation. Consequently, in actual episodes, the conflict behaviour reported is anchored to a particular conflict situation. I also coded as actual episodes cases where employees were constructing an account of a particular incident, even though they failed to relate it to an exact time. The following extract taken from an interviewee working in the Design group is an example of an actual episode:

"Once we had this meeting with another firm. Lots of people were involved in the meeting [...] the work pressure and the problems we had to face [throughout the meeting] were substantial [...] It was a point when we [the supervisor and I] did not talk very nicely to each other; it was all about the way he asked me to bring him a specific design [...] I responded to him in an equally sinister way. He got my 'message' and then he explained to me what it was all about in the sense that the pressure experienced during that day was really high [...]. He made a comment that both of us were to blame as far as that particular behaviour was concerned [...]"

5.6.2. Hypothetical Conflict Episodes

Conflict episodes were coded as hypothetical when there was no reference - in the reconstruction of the episode by the employee - to either a specific person or a particular point in time. Usually, these incidents entailed hypothetical language such as "what-if" or "in case that" statements (e.g. "if a person does that, I would do that"). The following interview extract is one of the hypothetical incidents reported by an employee from the Design group:

"It all depends on the colleague that you have the dispute with..some of them just leave the whole issue like that and forget all about it [...] some others are not persuaded and keep on insisting [...] they may even take the opinion of a third person but they still are not persuaded.."

We can notice that this employee has created an example of a conflict situation which is hypothetical, even though this situation appears to be drawn from his personal experience of the way he has handled conflict situations in the past.

5.6.3. Complete versus Partial Episodes

In section 5.6., I argued that conflict episodes (both actual and hypothetical) are reported stories which have a beginning and an end. However, employees would sometimes give a detailed report only for a part of the entire conflict episode, without providing adequate information about earlier, or later, parts of the episode. Therefore, the notion of 'partial episodes' alludes to conflict episodes reported where the account of the whole episode, as provided by the informant, was incomplete¹⁰.

Even though, in these cases, I usually primed employees to give me a more detailed account of the specific incident, there were times when they failed to produce a complete episode. In such cases, the conflict episode has been included in my analysis; however, conflict behaviour was coded only for that part of the episode on which enough information was provided to enable me to trace the pathway followed by the interviewee when handling the particular conflict situation. For instance, the supervisor of the Electrical Engineering group in the R & D Department referred to a hypothetical conflict situation with another colleague in the following way:

"[...] I really become furious when another detects a mistake (I made) and reports it to his supervisor rather than coming directly to me [...]; since I believe that the main purpose is to get the work done; nobody is infallible [...] This is often an issue in dispute (between both of us); when one notices a mistake, one has to give it back to the other person in order to fix it [...]. There is always a fight in such cases [...] even though we always remain on speaking terms."

In his discourse, this employee has not given enough information about how this situation was eventually handled (e.g. whether it was successfully resolved or not). His report has focused only on the initial stage of the exchange of arguments. In this case, I only coded his behaviour when he was expressing his disagreement and initiating discussion with the other. On the other hand, the Head of the Supplies Department refers to the following conflict episode without providing enough information about how both parties behaved at the beginning of the episode:

¹⁰Partial episodes could either be actual or hypothetical episodes.

"[...] there can be various reasons. For instance, in order to finish the job quickly, there is not enough time for us to reach an agreement about how things should be done in the future. For the time being, the job continues and, later on, I explain to him (my subordinate) the reasoning behind this decision. [...] At that moment (of disagreement), there is no time to discuss the issue at length [...]"

The information provided in this extract is not enough for me to assess whether there was a stage of initial discussion between the supervisor and the subordinate, before the former forced his position on the latter. For this reason, I coded only the last part of the episode, where there is clear indication that the supervisor enforced his opinion on the other party. In summary, in cases where no adequate information was provided as to what had happened before or after the behaviour reported, I decided to exclude these accounts from the analysis, rather than guessing what had really happened.

5.6.4. Generalized Action Statements

In the previous section, I referred to partial episodes and explained that, in such cases, the conflict situation is reported in an incomplete manner which restrained me from examining the conflict behaviour used in those parts of the episode which were not fully described. However, even though the information provided was partial, employees reported at least half of the story. On the contrary, there have been plenty of instances where employees would make generalized comments on conflict behaviour, while failing to incorporate such comments into any kind of detailed report about a conflict incident (actual or hypothetical). For instance, an employee from the Design group makes the following comments when reflecting in general about conflict situations in his workplace:

"Such problems are finally sorted out.. a mutually agreed solution is found [...]"

The employee's discourse in this brief extract does not actually allude to any particular episode; rather, he talks about conflict situations and the conflict behaviour employed in such situations in a generalized way, and outside the context of any sort of structured conflict situation. Rather than forming part of a conflict episode, these comments are

illustrative of the way that employees generally reason about conflict situations in their workplace; for this reason, generalized comments on conflict behaviour were not included in the analysis¹¹.

5.7. Definition and Identification of the Units of Recording

Having identified the accounts of conflict episodes (which constituted the units of my analysis) from the rest of the information provided in the interviews (see section 5.6.), I proceeded with the analysis of these episodes. The primary concern when conducting this analysis was to ensure a consistency regarding the way in which each conflict episode was coded. In this way, any conflict episode included in my analysis could be coded in the same way by another coder; this would contribute to the reliability of the present research.

The procedure for identifying the units of recording was as follows: each account of conflict episode was carefully checked in order to identify all action statements included in that particular extract; by action statements, I mean references to the 'action(s)' taken (either by the person him/herself or by the other party involved in the conflict situation reported) in their attempts to handle the situation in hand¹². For instance, action statements could be references to the nature of discussions exchanged between the two parties in order to sort the situation out; or, action statements may refer to what the employee did when s/he decided to ask the intervention of the supervisor in order for the situation to be resolved.

¹¹As argued in section 5.4., brief reference to employees' generalized statements on conflict behaviour will be made in the discussion of the analysis (see Chapter Six, section 6.6.3.).

¹²These statements referred to various 'events': from initial awareness of the conflict and definition of the situation as conflict-ridden, actions communicating (or avoiding the communication of) grievance to the other person, assessments of the situation as the conflict continues, till actions which lead to resolution of the conflict episode or its further escalation.

Focusing in one particular conflict episode at the time, I identified all the action statements included in the interviewee's account of this episode. Then I grouped these statements together in the sequential order, according to which they were described in the employee's account. As discussed in Chapter Three (section 3.2.), when giving an account, the individual makes an effort to construct an integrated story of a sequence of events; in these attempts, s/he usually structures the events in a chronological sequence. A close examination of the action statements collected for each unit of analysis illustrated that the statements which were quoted closely together in any particular stage of the interviewee's account, denoted one particular tactic which the interviewee used at this stage of the episode in order to handle the conflict situation. For this reason, once I identified those statements and grouped them together, I then coded them in terms of one of the conflict strategies identified in the conflict resolution research and discussed earlier in this study (see Chapter Two, section 2.3.).

Having completed this procedure and coded all units of analysis, each episode analyzed was examined once more in order to establish that action statements, which had been grouped together and assigned to a particular behavioural pattern of conflict handling, corresponded to the working definition of that category (see definitions of various patterns of conflict handling behaviour, section 2.3.). Below, I present two units of analysis (i.e. conflict episodes) and illustrate how I identified the units of recording (i.e. action statements) in each of these episodes; the action statements identified are presented in italics.

- 1: "Since I don't have any immediate subordinate, I work with people working in different groups within this department. There was a time in the past when certain projects had to be put into a computer programme. *The former supervisor of one of the other groups didn't want to let his subordinates do this work; instead, he preferred to delegate them some other work. So, even though in front of our supervisor [Head of the Department] he seemed to agree with such delegation and would say "definitely, this person will work with Gregory on this project", yet, in private, he would tell his subordinate to do something else instead. (Awareness of the problem) On this occasion, there were a couple of clashes between us; (Disagreement expressed) I asked him why he was behaving like that and he told*

me "there are other work priorities [within my group]". (Interaction between the parties-Conflict situation is not resolved) The supervisor of the department eventually intervened and there were lots of discussions going on.. in the end, a 'middle' solution' [compromise] was reached; that is, during a certain period of time, the subordinate would carry out the work delegated by his immediate supervisor and, afterwards, he would deal with the task which we were supposed to have agreed upon in the first place. (Supervisor's intervention) In general, when there is a problem between two colleagues, it is sorted out through the intervention of their common supervisor. Of course, most of the time, people express their opinions freely. However, as I said previously, it all depends on the kind of relationship between these colleagues; if they have a friendly relationship, you don't need to go.. [to the supervisor]..; actually, in most cases, problems are [successfully] sorted out between them. If they have a 'working' relationship', and a clash occurs [between them], the problem is sorted out with the intervention of the supervisor."

As discussed in Chapter Three (section 3.2.), an account usually started with a reference to what happened and how it all started. Similarly, in the account presented above, the employee starts with a description of what happened in the beginning of the episode and how he originally became aware of the conflict situation. In this regard, the first set of action statements was grouped together under the (technical) heading "awareness of the problem". The phrase "[..] there were a couple of clashes between us" implies that the situation which - so far - was only felt as conflict by the interviewee (i.e. private grievance), has already been expressed; for this reason, the employee has already passed at a later stage of the process of handling conflict, that is, he has communicated his disagreement to the other person (i.e. "disagreement expressed"). An even further stage in the development of the conflict is also indicated by the phrase "I asked him why he was behaving like that and he told me "there are other work priorities [..]"¹³; this stage indicates that an interaction has taken place

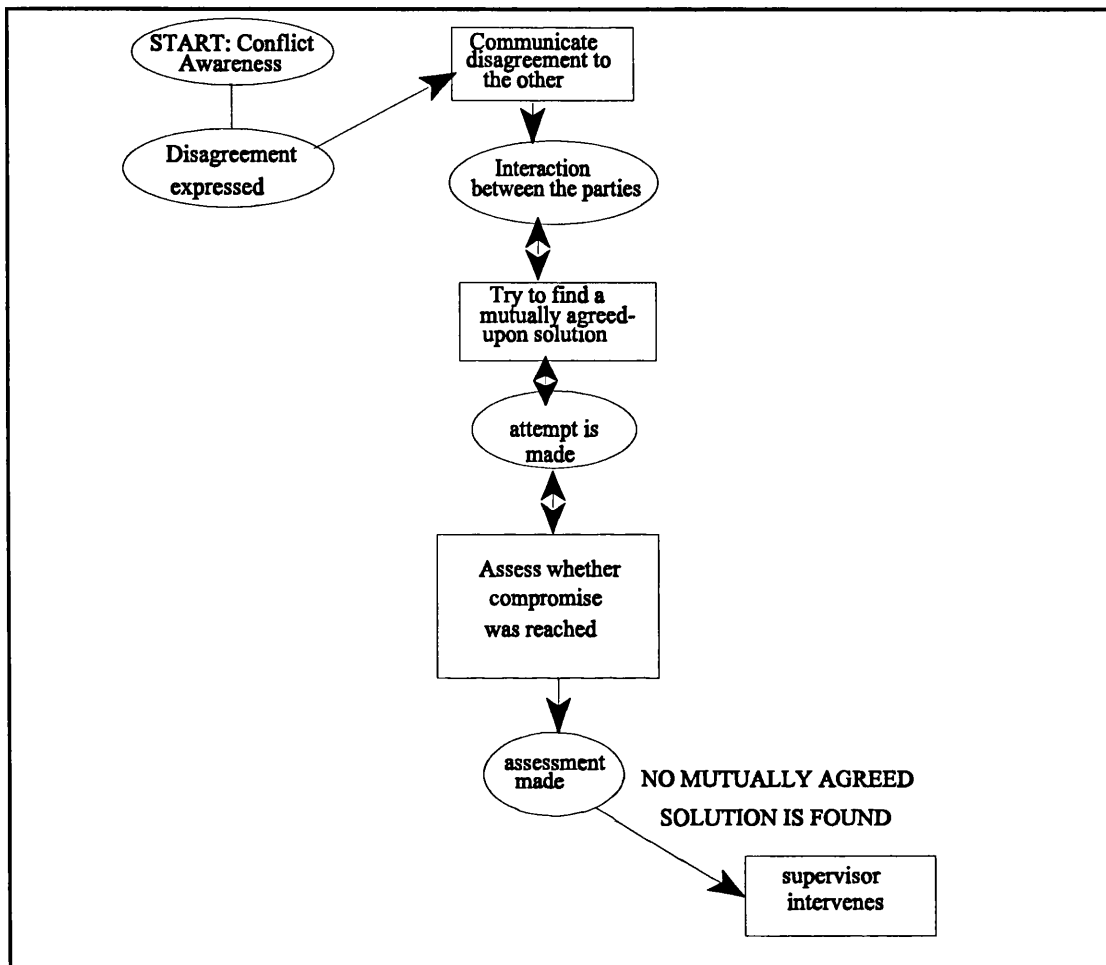
¹³The interaction between the two parties in conflict was also implied in the previous phrase, when the interviewee referred to 'clashes'. For this reason, the differentiation among action statements, regarding to which stage of the conflict process (as presented in Figure 6.1.) they refer to, is sometimes subtle. However, what is more important for this exercise of modelling conflict episodes is not which statements denote a particular stage of the process, but how the process modelled, as a result of the analysis of the episode, reflects what has been reported in the given account.

between the two parties, which means - in this account - that more explanations regarding what was going on were exchanged; during this exchange of information ("interaction between the parties"), an attempt was made to sort the situation out. In this incident, the situation was not resolved as a result of these conversations; the failure of resolving conflict at this stage becomes apparent from the information presented from this part of the account onwards. Finally, statements like "the supervisor of the department eventually intervened and there were lots of discussions going on.. in the end, a 'middle' solution' [compromise] was reached [..]" clearly indicate the final stage of this episode ("supervisor's intervention"), as reported in this account.

Having explained thoroughly my rationale when identifying and making sense of the information presented in the employee's account in regard to how conflict behaviour evolved in the course of the episode presented above, I also present what I have, so far, explained in written text, in terms of a graphical representation (see Chapter Three, section 3.7.). Figure 5.2. illustrates graphically how employee's conflict handling behaviour in the above account has been modelled¹⁴.

¹⁴The assemblance of the behavioural patterns in a sequential order was performed according to Net Modelling conventions (see Chapter Three, section 3.7.).

Figure 5.2. Graphical Representation of the Above Conflict Episode (Example: 1)



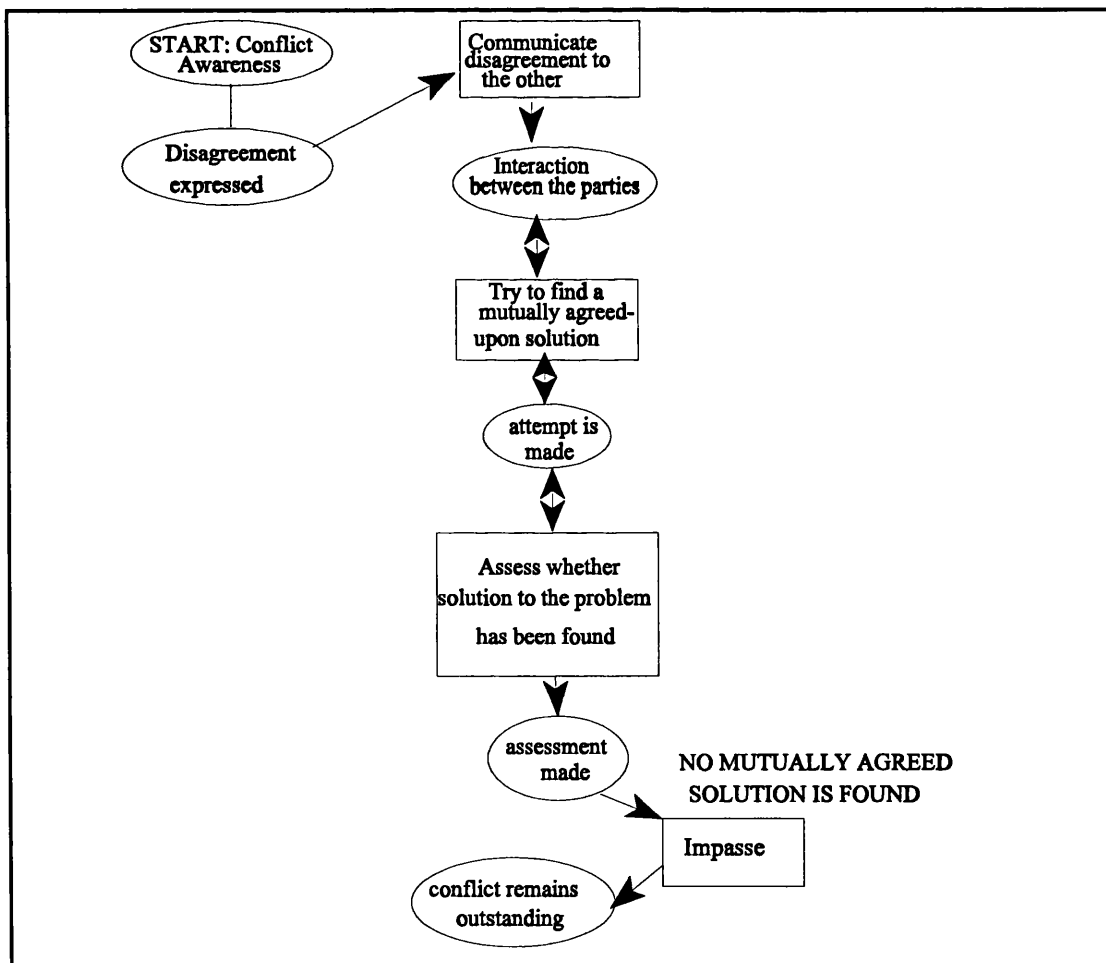
- 2: "This colleague is not working here any longer. *He made an attempt to impose his opinion on me.. He was working in another group within the department. I remember that I needed the help of his department, since the issue in question was within their specialty. This person wanted to pass me the message that I should be aware of these issues, even though they may be outside my specialization. (Awareness of the problem)* In a general sense, he was doing this for the sake of an overall better quality in the work I produced.. *He told me this opinion in a very nice way; on my behalf, I replied to him, also in a friendly manner, that even though I may be interested in learning these things, I would never use such knowledge in the work context. Because we are working in this environment, this is a serious business.. There are departments specializing in different things and I was not prepared to 'step over' him, since he is the one responsible for such issues. I would always ask his advice on this issue. I kept on insisting that I was always going to come to*

him and ask for his opinion... (Disagreement expressed - Interaction between the parties - Disagreement is not resolved) Eventually, each of us kept his original position. Nothing else happened: each of us went on doing other things and the issue was over.. (Impasse) He made an attempt to impose his opinion on me, but this couldn't possibly happen, since this was a clear-cut issue: this is department X's responsibility and this is department Z's responsibility... Therefore, even though the issue was not resolved, the situation was over.. (Conflict remains outstanding) Because that was my opinion.. The entire thing started as a conversation between friends and it evolved into a disagreement.. which, in any case, did not create any problem.. I believe that we both tried to see each other's perspective. On my behalf, I explained my position: 'I see that what you say has to do with my improving the quality of my work but, with information which is beyond my job description, I only keep it for myself, or I just express it reluctantly, since I am not really aware of such areas. Or, I may express it to a person who is an expert in that field, if I feel that this person may have made a mistake; so, I'll express my opinion in order to help him out. It's always good to have general knowledge about things related to work. But, I'll never take the initiative to use this knowledge in the context of my work; it's like messing in somebody else's 'field'. On his behalf, he would still insist that I should use this knowledge.. I believe that he tried to see things from my own perspective, but he just couldn't; he couldn't understand what I was telling him.. (Interaction between the two parties - Disagreement is not resolved) I don't think that this was a serious problem; it didn't affect either our work or our relationship.. But, it might have affected my opinion about him as a person.. the way he thinks.. However, it didn't play any role in our future relationship; our relationship was equally good as before this event."

Example 2 also refers to a conflict situation between colleagues. In this example, the parties' behaviour in the beginning of the episode, evolves in a similar way as in the previous example. For instance, the person (i.e. interviewee) expressed his disagreement to the other person ("I replied to him [...] that even though I may be interested in learning these things, I would never use such knowledge in the work context [...]"). The discussion stage of the episode becomes apparent in the interviewee's comments towards the end of his account, when referring to explanations offered by each party in reference to his own point of view "On my behalf, I explained

my position [..]" and "On his behalf, he would still insist that I should use this knowledge [..]". So, in this account, the interviewee presents some more information about what happened during the discussions exchanged between the two parties, after having made references to the way in which the particular episode ended (e.g. "Eventually, each of us kept his original position [..] the issue was over"). Even though, so far, the way that the conflict situation has been unfold bears similarities with the situation described in the previous episode (example: 1), the final stage of the process differs: this time, the situation reached an impasse, since each of the parties kept on insisting in his own opinion.

Figure 5.3. Graphical Representation of the Above Conflict Episode (Example: 2)



In Appendix III, I included few more conflict episodes and indicated the action statements identified in these episodes; adjacent to the accounts of the conflict episodes, I also presented the way in which I modelled conflict handling practices, as revealed through the action statements identified in each particular episode.

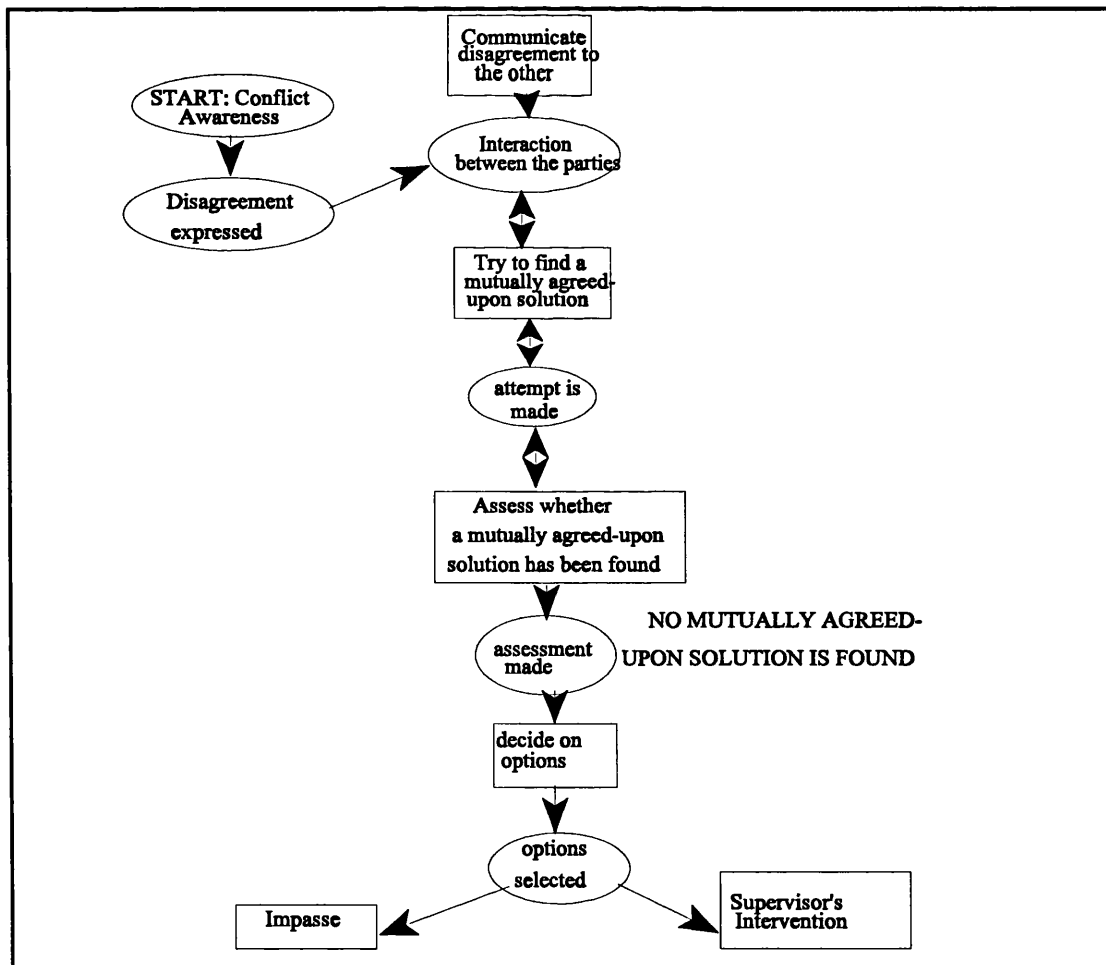
5.8. Developing the Process Model in Practice - A Cyclical Process

Empirical social research often takes the form of an ongoing process, during which the researcher clarifies, refines and elaborates precisely the object of her study (Jorgensen, 1989). I believe that this open-ended nature of the fieldwork study better describes my own experience when generating the conflict handling model from the interviews collected. Specifically, during the initial phases of analysis, I would often go through the interview transcripts again and again in an attempt to understand the meaning of what was said; in this way, I would be able to trace possible relationships and common patterns in the data, and thus arrange the material into some sort of 'meaningful' order. At this stage, I was basically guided by my general appreciation of the nature of the problem.

Once I had identified the units of recording according to the procedure described in section 5.7., I then reassembled the action statements in such a way that the process followed in the course of a given episode was graphically illustrated. In this way, I devised a graphical representation of the process followed by the interviewee when handling the particular conflict episode analyzed (see Figures 5.2. & 5.3.). Having devised 124 graphical representations of the conflict handling process, as reported by employees in my 124 units of analysis, I closely examined these representations in order to see whether there were any sort of similarities in the elements included in each of these mini-models. A thorough examination of these graphical representations (produced for each conflict episode analyzed), indicated the existence, to a great degree, of common patterns in the way in which different conflict episodes were handled. The next step was to find out whether these 'mini-models' could be

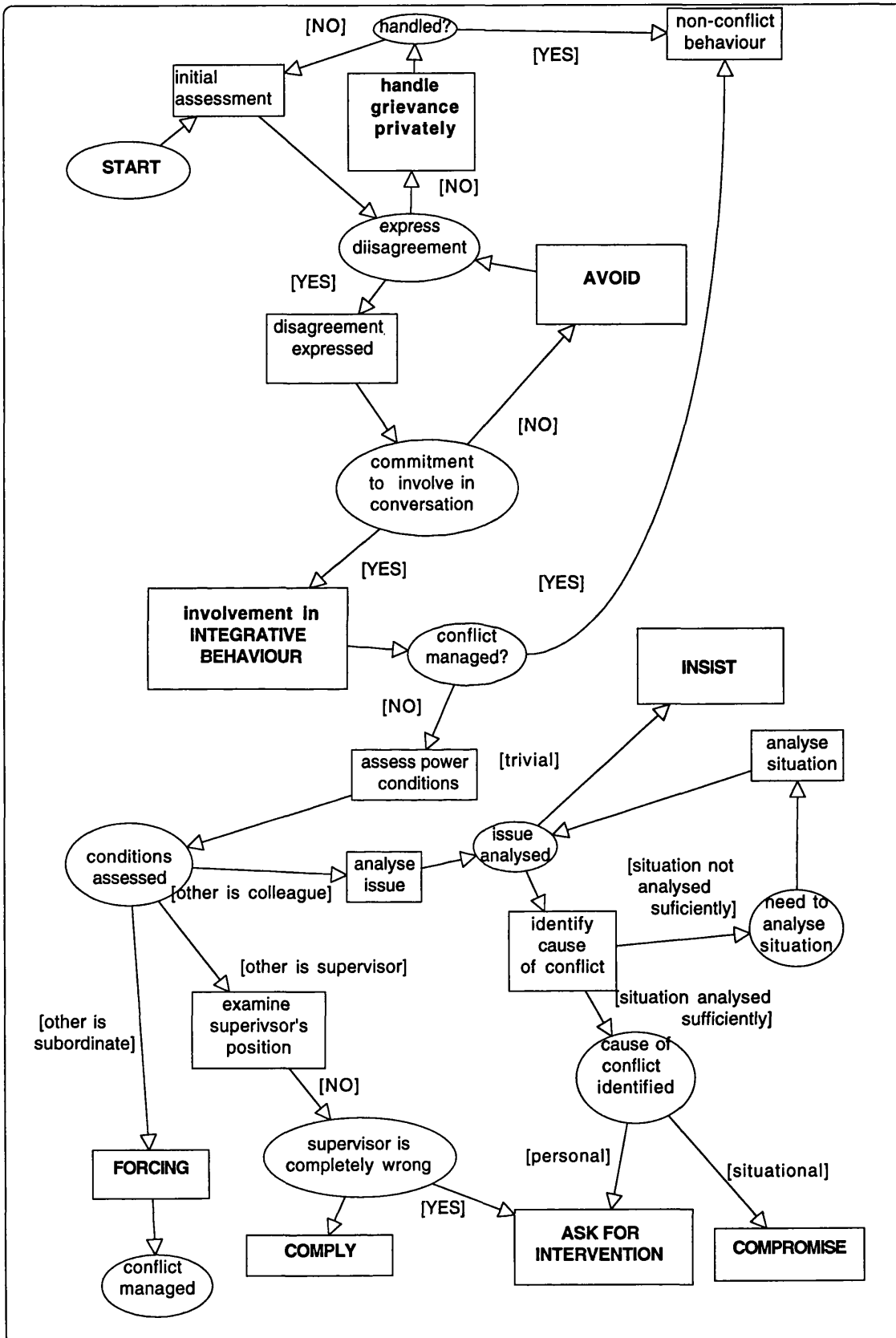
incorporated into a more global process model, which could illustrate the process of conflict handling behaviour for each of the departments examined in the present study. For instance, using the episodes presented above (i.e. examples 1 & 2) as an illustration case, the two graphical representations could be incorporated in the following model. The graphical representation presented in Figure 5.4. is slightly modified in order to provide a more accurate representation for both conflict episodes presented in the previous section. The nodes 'decide on options' and 'options selected', which did not appear in any of the earlier graphical representations was added in Figure 5.4. in order to account for the fact that the parties involved in each of two conflict situations presented already handled each of these situations differently at the final stage of the episode, despite the fact that, in the previous stages, the episode (and their subsequent behaviour) evolved in a similar way.

Figure 5.4.A 'Meta-Model' of Two Graphical Representations as Merged Together



Merging together all various episodes reported by employees, I aimed to generate a net model which would incorporate all the various behavioural patterns that employees used in the wide variety of the conflict episodes they reported in the course of the interviews (i.e. actual and hypothetical episodes; conflict situations with either the supervisor, or the subordinate, or with another colleague; conflict episodes which were resolved effectively, as well as episodes which escalated). The development of the model followed a circular process of model constructions. At the outset, the analysis of the 124 conflict episodes led me to generate a model illustrating the conflict handling process as described in interviewees' accounts. Figure 5.5.a illustrates one of the first versions of the series of model constructions. This model of conflict handling behaviour seemed to correspond - at that time of the evolution of the present research - as closely to employees' accounts of conflict episodes as possible. As the first analyses of these episodes had illustrated, employees would initially assess the conflict situation and decide whether to express their grievance or not. In cases that the grievance was expressed, employees reported either using an integrative behaviour or avoiding getting involved in a conversation with the other party in conflict. At a latter stage of a conflict episode which failed to be resolved in an integrative way, employees seemed to assess the power conditions of the other party. In cases where the other person was a subordinate, the supervisor would always use forcing behaviour. In cases where the other person was the supervisor, employees's behaviour seemed - at the time - to depend on their assessment of the rightness or wrongness of the supervisor's viewpoint in regard to the situation at hand. Finally, when the other person was a colleague, employees' behavioural patterns depended predominantly on their attribution of the cause of the particular conflict situation examined.

Figure 5.5.a The Process of Model Constructions - The First Version of the Conflict Handling Model

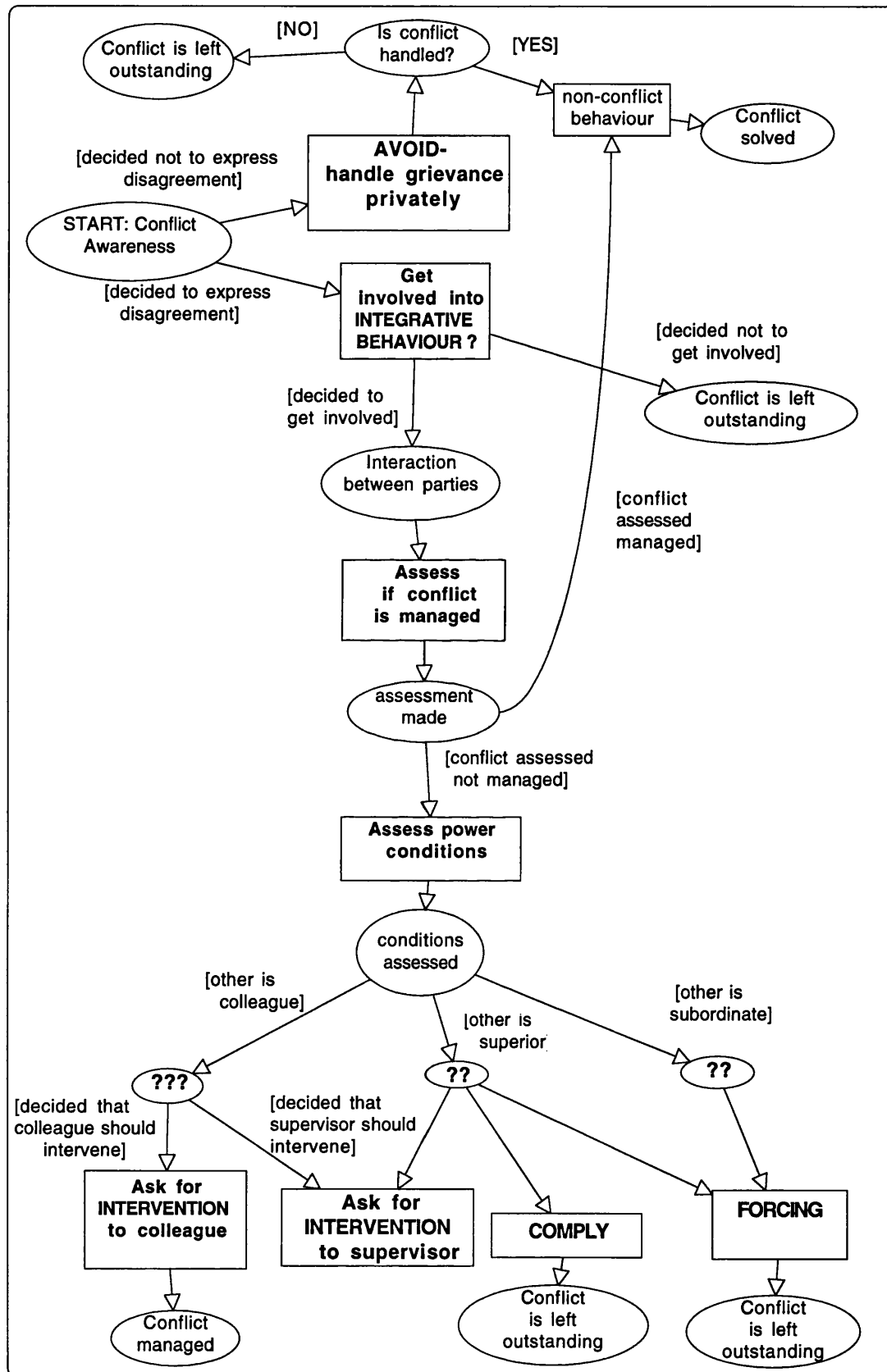


Having generated the net model of conflict behaviour presented above, I went back to the interviews once again and critically examined whether the model was an 'accurate' synthesis of the information collected. Revisiting the data once more revealed new insights and called for modifications of the model; the revised conflict handling model, which was developed at this stage of the analysis of the present study, is presented in Figure 5.5.b. As it is also illustrated in this latter version of the model, the most recent analysis of the 124 conflict episodes revealed that, as opposed to the previous version of the model, when employees decided to express their disagreement to the other party, they would always get involved into integrative behaviour. As indicated by the previous version of the model, after a conflict episode had failed to be resolved at an early stage of the process, employees were still found to assess the power conditions of the other person engaged in the conflict; however, this time, a closer analysis of the conflict episodes suggested that employees were involved in a kind of assessment of the situation at hand before committing themselves to a course of action. Even though this finding appeared - at the time - to apply to all episodes examined, nevertheless, at that stage of the study, the researcher could not understand what this sort of assessment entailed, and whether there were common patterns underlying employees' assessment of the situation, at this part of the process of a conflict episode¹⁵.

As a result of a continuous re-assessment of the net model of conflict handling behaviour originated through the revisiting of employees' accounts of conflict episodes, the revised conflict handling model reflected, at that time of the evolution of the study, a more accurate representation of the way in which employees reported handling conflict situations in their accounts. This process (i.e. of revisiting information from the units of analysis, and, as a result, modifying appropriately the model constructed - was repeated many times, until the model was considered to be a satisfactory synthesis and interpretation of interviewees' accounts of way they handle conflict situations in the context of their department.

¹⁵This inability to grasp what was entailed in employees' assessment is illustrated in this version of the net model by the inclusion of the question marks.

Figure 5.5.b The Process of Model Constructions - The Second Version of the Conflict Handling Model



The inclusion of the two versions of the net model presented above aimed to illustrate some of the different phases which the construction of the net model presented in the present study went through. Looking back to my experience of a series of the model's re-constructions and modifications in a period of time which lasted for months, I could say that such a dialectical process of data analysis was an arduous task, as is commonly the case in qualitative research (Jorgensen, 1989). In this respect, I could not agree more with Strauss et al., who refer to such a process in terms of the researcher's struggle "[...] to ascertain the meaning of events and to place them in some initial order" (Strauss et al., 1969; p.25).

Generating a model of conflict handling behaviour, through a content-analysis of the conflict episodes reported by the employees of a company, has been based on my theoretical approach to my research topic. For instance, in Chapter Two, I criticized existing models of conflict behaviour, on the grounds that they used pre-structured frameworks which had mostly relied on theoretical underpinnings (section 2.5.2.2.). Even though the review of the existing research on conflict resolution has inevitably guided me through the investigation of the conflict phenomenon, modelling the process that employees of the two departments follow when handling conflict situations relied solely on the information collected through the interviews. The discussion of my choice of using employees' accounts of conflict episodes as a means of modelling the conflict resolution process (see Chapter Three, section 3.2.), reflected my willingness to rely on the orientations of the employees' themselves in order to inform me about the phenomenon under study¹⁶. Thus, even though the accounts analyzed were subject to my interpretation¹⁷, when analyzing them, the process model proposed by the present study is a 'grounded' model in the sense that its generation was mainly based on the information presented in interviewees' accounts of conflict situations.

¹⁶Such a move from the analyst's to the participants' perspective seems to challenge the assumption that the researcher is 'an informed reader of the common mind' (Antaki, 1994).

¹⁷This interpretation came as a result of an interface between personal hunches and my theoretical orientations.

5.9. Enhancing the Reliability of the Coding Scheme - An Inter-Coder Test

This chapter has been devoted to the detailed description of the way I content-analyzed employees' accounts of the conflict episodes, as reported during the interviews. This description was necessary for the appreciation of the way in which this analysis resulted in modelling the process which employees follow when handling conflict situations in the context of their department. Since the beginning of this presentation, I have stated my attempt to be as 'objective' and 'systematic' as possible throughout the entire analysis. Scientific standards call for the analyst to minimize such subjectivity and obtain an objective description of the content of the analysis (Berelson, 1971).

One way to overcome the subjectivity entailed in the coding procedure has often been the use of more than one coder for coding the same units of analysis. There is also a requirement for the second coder to be 'trained' in order to follow the same rules that have been used by the former coder. Improving the quality of the content analysis by using two or more coders for the same context is called an inter-coder reliability test, and has been widely used as a method of assessing the reliability of a research project. The rationale behind this method is to measure the agreement of the different coders on the same units of analysis.

For the purpose of this study, one more coder - apart from the researcher - has coded all the units of analysis. Prior to the second researcher's coding of these units, the two researchers had a series of discussions about the way in which a conflict episode was defined in the present study, as well as about the broader approach of the study to conflict resolution; the purpose of this discussion was for the second coder to become familiar with the definition of the units of analysis and recording, which have been extensively presented in earlier sections of the present chapter. Then, I gave him all the accounts of conflict episodes which were identified from the interview transcripts and which constituted the units of my analysis. At the next stage, he was presented with the model of conflict handling behaviour (which I had generated, based on the content-analysis of employees' accounts of conflict episodes), and was asked to code

each episode in the various nodes indicated in the net model (see Chapter Six, Figure 6.1.).

Table 5.3. Reliability Analysis of the Conflict Episodes
(indicating the degree of agreement at the final node of the net model)

NODES OF THE NET MODEL									
Coder a Coder b	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Total
1. Avoid	21	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	21
2. Conflict solved	0	27	3	0	1	3	0	2	36
3. Forcing	0	1	10	0	0	0	0	0	11
4. Ask for Intervent.	0	0	0	21	0	0	0	0	21
5. Comply	0	0	0	0	19	0	0	0	19
6. Withdraw	0	0	0	0	0	4	1	0	5
7. Impasse	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	3
8. Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	8
Total	21	28	13	21	20	7	4	10	124
MPA = 91.12%									
KAPPA = 0.89									

Above, I presented the reliability estimate for all conflict episodes which were coded by both coders. The two coders independently coded all the conflict episodes identified in the interviews (124 episodes). To evaluate consistency between the two coders, I used two measures. First, I estimated the mean pair agreement (MPA), which indicated the proportion of agreement between the two coders in coding the units of analysis (i.e. conflict episodes). Second, I estimated the Cohen's Kappa coefficient which is a chance-corrected measure of agreement between two independent coders; in other words, it illustrates the extent to which the agreement obtained was not attributed to chance (i.e. in case of complete agreement, $k=1$; if agreement is greater

than chance: $k > 0$; if agreement is due to chance: $k < 0$). Overall, 113 out of 124 episodes were coded to the same (final) node of the model by both coders, which gives a proportion of 91%¹⁸. The level of agreement between the two coders is high, which suggests that the coding scheme developed was clearly defined, minimizing any possibilities of misunderstandings.

¹⁸The second coder was also asked to code each episode in terms of actual/hypothetical and complete/partial categories. Out of the 124 episodes, there were three episodes about which the coders disagreed whether it was an actual or a hypothetical conflict episode.

CHAPTER SIX

Conflict Handling Practices in E.P.E. - Presentation of the Net Model

6.1. Overview

This chapter is devoted to the discussion of the analysis of the accounts of conflict episodes as reported by employees working in two departments in E.P.E. The analysis of the accounts of conflict episodes, as well as the construction of the model, were conducted according to the way prescribed in Chapter Five. The process that employees reported following when handling conflict situations in the two departments is presented, whilst the discussion is enriched with interview extracts in order to show how the model describes all possible courses of actions employees have reported taking when engaged in a conflict situation.

Frequencies are estimated for each of the handling practices illustrated in the net model of conflict handling behaviour. The discussion of these reported frequencies aims to highlight common patterns of conflict behavioural practices across employees interviewed, as well as across employees of the two different departments. Drawing on the present study's premise that the particular organizational context bears implications on the way in which employees handle their conflict encounters in the context of their work, the net model of conflict handling behaviour developed in this study enabled me to detect how, and the extent to which, the organizational context is portrayed in the way in which employees of two departments handle the conflict situations they encounter. The impact of the context is discussed in terms of certain common patterns, as well as discrepancies, found in the way that conflict situations are handled in each of the two departments. While the discrepant behavioural patterns revealed by the analysis of the conflict accounts reported by employees are discussed in the light of the conditions particular to each of these two departments, references to

the bureaucratic structure of E.P.E. were mainly considered to account for the common structure of the model in both departments.

6.2. Characteristics of the Model

The concept of "model" is used here in the sense of an abstraction of certain elements - and the relationships between them - of a system that the model is designed to represent. According to Berkeley et al. (1990), different models can be generated in an attempt to address the same phenomenon; this is due to the different purposes for which each of these models are built. In the context of the present study, the conflict handling model is generated with a view to providing a means of understanding the phenomenon of the conflict resolution process. The model has the following characteristics:

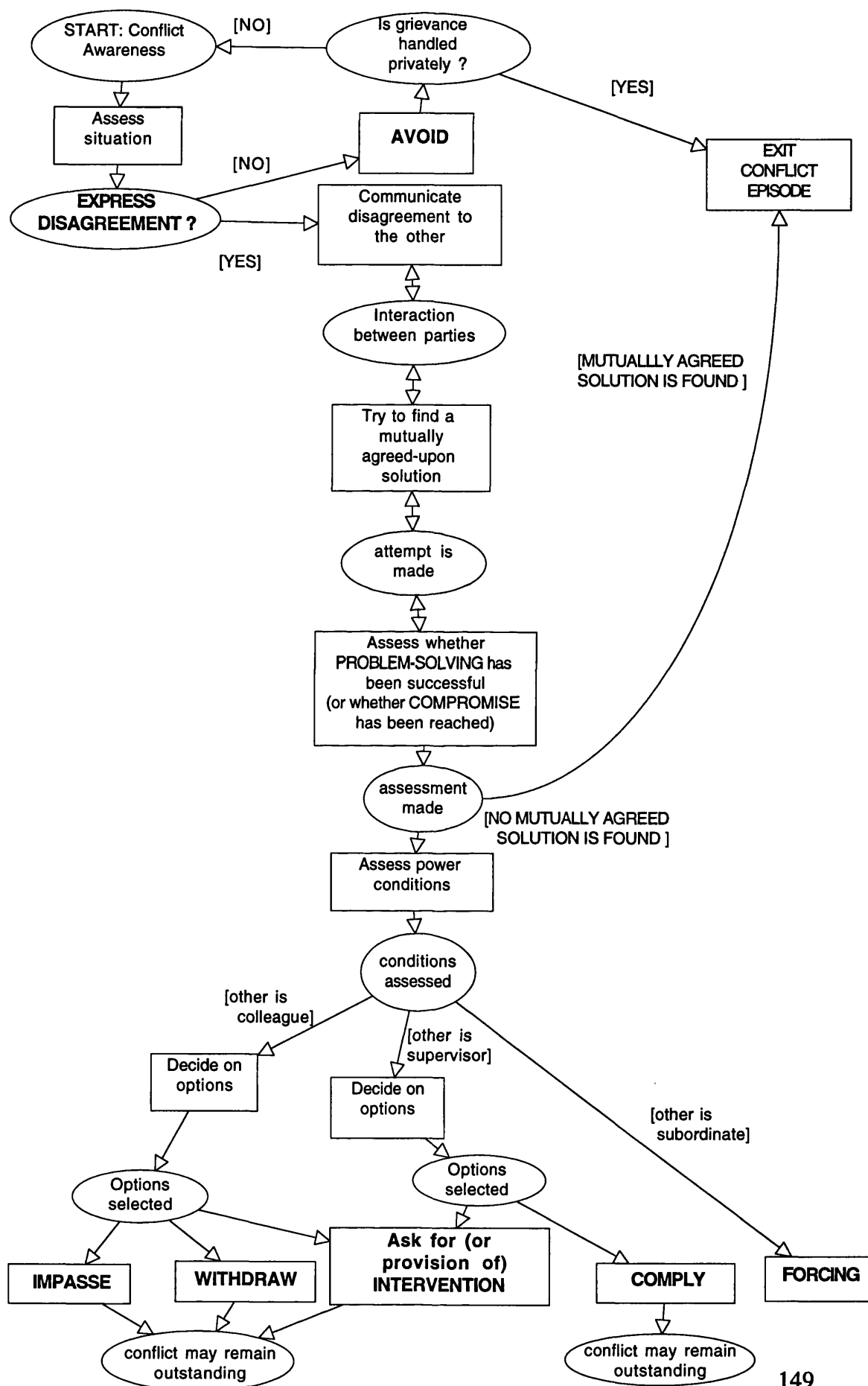
- (a) It is conceptual, since it aims to capture the way that employees intuitively proceed in dealing with a conflict situation.
- (b) It is structural, since it implies the existence of a structure in the process followed by individuals.
- (c) It is dynamic, in the sense that it represents a process.
- (d) It is approximate, in the sense that, even though it provides the rules of change from a state to a transition, these rules are not fully defined; rather, the model serves as a guide through the process of conflict resolution. Therefore, it needs refinement, as far as the degree to which the links between transitions are modelled is concerned (Balke, 1992).
- (e) The model is contextualized since it informs its user about the modelling context (Humphreys & Berkeley, 1992).

In Chapter Three (section 3.7.), I explained how I generated graphical representations for each account of conflict episode included in my analysis. Having done so, I noticed the existence of common patterns in the structure of the process my informants reported following when handling conflict situations. Originally, I had planned to generate two

net models of conflict handling behaviour, one for each department studied. However, when comparing the way interviewees reported having handled conflict situations in their departments, I noticed that the generic structure of each of the two maps (i.e. models) was the same. For this reason, I decided to integrate the conflict behaviour of employees of both departments in one net model which would illustrate all pathways that employees followed when handling conflict situations. This Model is presented in Figure 6.1.

As already pointed out in Chapter Three (section 3.7.), a net model entails passive elements (i.e. places or states), as well as active elements, the latter affecting transitions between the passive ones. Any state is the pre-condition of the next transition and the aftermath of the previous one. For instance, looking at the model, the state "attempt is made (to find a mutually agreed-upon solution)" comes as an outcome of the action (i.e. decision) to try to find such a solution (e.g. get involved in integrative behaviour). In the meantime, this is a pre-requisite state before the person can assess whether or not the conflict has been successfully managed. Agency is only accorded to the transitions (represented by squares), while the action taken at these points affects the possible states (represented by circles). With reference to the model, the employee's decision to "express his/her disagreement" will affect the states to be followed. The movements from a state to a place are accomplished via links and are monitored by the guards (presented in brackets); for instance, the guard "[conflict assessed not managed]" is a necessary condition for the employee to move on to further assessing the conditions entailed in the particular conflict situation in which s/he is engaged.

Figure 6.1. The Approximate Net Model of Conflict Handling Behaviour

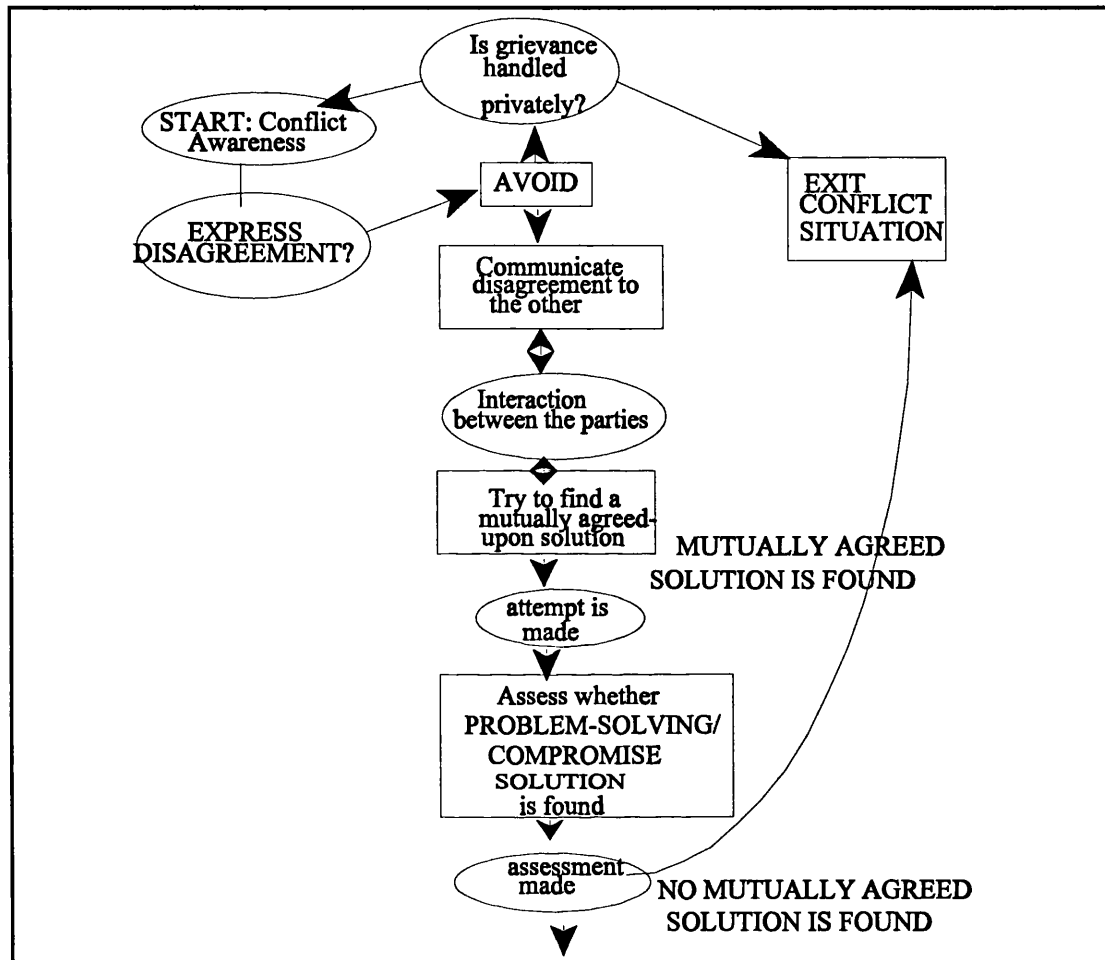


Coming back to the idea of the net model being seen as a board game, one can look at states in terms of carrying tokens; transitions can only be realized when the correct tokens are carried. This is also the rationale for having guards between the transitions. The board game begins when the player (the organizational member) becomes aware of the conflict problem; s/he then moves through the different places by carrying the right tokens. Figure 6.1. shows the evolution of conflict handling behaviour in terms of transitions, and the links of these transitions between the different phases of the conflict episode. This model can be seen as a board game with one player. The game starts when the player becomes aware of the conflict situation.

Having explained how I modelled the information reported by employees regarding the way in which they handle their conflicts, I shall now discuss the net model of conflict handling behaviour in terms of the actual behavioural practices as enacted by the participants in conflict. The inclusion of interview extracts in the discussion further explains the 'technical language' used in the various nodes of the model.

6.3. Discussion

6.3.1. The Upper Part of the Model: Keeping Conflict behind the Scenes or The 'Dialectic' Paradigm?



As indicated in Figure 6.1., the conflict episode starts when the person perceives a situation as conflict ridden¹. At this point, there are two different pathways between which employees choose²; disagreements are sometimes expressed to the other party, while at other times they remain unexpressed.

¹The definition of a conflict situation was discussed in Chapter One (section 1.2.).

²In general, the pathway followed may vary not only across the different interviewees, but also across different conflict situations encountered by the same interviewee.

As shown in the model, employees may choose not to communicate the conflict experienced to the other party; in this case, a conflict situation has been labelled by conflict research as a "private grievance" (Bartunek et al., 1992), and is characterised by avoiding behaviour on the behalf of the employee (see Chapter Two, section 2.3.). The secretary of the Supplies Department talks about her choice not to express her disagreement in the following way:

6:1 "I don't express [my disagreement] only when I know that the other person's character is such that..I mean..when I know that my words are going to be wasted.. So, I become indifferent."

An employee from the Research group refers to how he ended up choosing not to voice his disagreement towards his supervisor:

6:2 "Up to a point, we had lost hope, so I told myself that even if we had a discussion, we were going to end up at the same point, that is to have a fight..Therefore, there was no point in discussing it."

Even though a large number of employees reported having avoided expressing their disagreement at some time, all employees reported at some stage of the interview that they preferred to express their disagreement to the other person (and to attempt to reach a common ground with him/her). Existing research has found that such an integrative approach to conflict is more satisfying to all the concerned parties, while it also sets the basis for future positive interaction (Bisno, 1988). In cases where the grievance is not expressed, the situation remains unresolved (within the employee) who still has to cope with the stressful situation. Indeed, respondents have often reported feelings of frustration and anger in instances where the conflict experienced has not been communicated to the other party; in these situations, employees' discourse contains instances of what Janis and Mann have called 'coping mechanisms'³ (Chapter Two, section 2.6.). For instance, employees often reported their need to express such feelings, even outside their work context; in this way, they would find an 'outlet' for their emotions towards significant others (e.g. family, friends). The secretary of the

³The reasons for the emergence of such mechanisms lie in the 'psychological discomfort' experienced by the employee, due to an inconsistency between his/her beliefs and the course of action taken (see section on cognitive dissonance in Chapter Seven, section 7.8.).

R & D Department shared with me her experience of expressing - and sometimes displacing - her anger onto a significant 'other':

6:3 "..when I go back home, I stand in front of my mother and start yelling at her."

This way of dealing with conflict is not an 'effective' way of dealing with a conflict situation, in the sense that the conflict is not communicated to the person who is also directly involved in the situation. Since no satisfactory solution has been found for the conflict experienced within the work context, the conflict episode has not really come to an end; this is apparent from the fact that the person still experiences conflict and subsequent 'hot' emotions; the secretary of the R & D Department comments on situations in which she chooses to avoid expressing her disagreement:

6:4 "I get angry and that becomes obvious; I put on a long face."

An employee from the Supplies Department reports:

6:5 "I was putting up with it..I was keeping my anger deep inside [...] the effects of which resulted in health problems [...] I had either stomachaches or headaches."

In most cases where employees do not express their disagreement, they do not exit the conflict situation; instead, they are likely to be locked - at least for a while - into a circle of wondering whether to express their grievance or not; this circle usually remains until something changes; either the conflict situation itself changes (e.g. by the removal of the other person, see extract 6:17), or the person finally decides to express his/her grievance. For instance:

6:6 "[...] I had been withholding my anger for a while.. After a point, I decided to speak up."

Within the conflict model presented in Figure 6.1., the alternative pathway that employees may choose is to communicate their disagreement to the other person⁴. In such cases, the parties get involved in a conversation about the conflict issue, during which they express their viewpoints in an attempt to resolve the controversy. Research

⁴This pathway was the most commonly used among the informants (see section 6.4.).

on negotiation and conflict management has referred to the behaviour entailed on such occasions in terms of 'problem solving' or 'integrative behaviour'. In Chapter Two (section 2.3.), I discussed the variety of communicative patterns of behaviour during conflict situations. The analysis of employees' discourse indicated an intermix of compromising and problem-solving behavioural patterns. The tactics used in the various episodes reported included concession-making, information seeking and sending, disclosure, definition of issues and argumentation. For instance, an employee refers to conflict situations with his supervisor:

6:7 "Either my opinion was accepted or he (the supervisor) would go on (explaining) his line of thinking.. In a very friendly atmosphere, we would end up somewhere. We would finally agree to do something and compromise on that."

Another employee from the Design group gives an example of concession-making (e.g. compromising behaviour) as enacted in a conflict situation with his colleagues;

6:8 "Both of us would agree for the work to be done in the right way..whether it was at my expense or at his."

At other times, employees seem to centre their efforts on convincing the other about the 'superiority' of the solution they propose, thereby persuading the other that their own viewpoint is the right one. According to Greenhalgh (1987), such interactive behaviour in conflict situations reveals a competitive approach to conflict resolution. This is revealed by employees' comments:

6:9 "[...] what it all boils down to..is persuading the other person that your opinion is the best."

6:10 "Each of us says what he believes..and the best will win."

As indicated in Figure 6.1., the arrows in this part of the model are double-edged, in order to illustrate the possibility of continuous interaction between the two participants; in these cases, a mutual exchange of information and of arguments takes place between the two parties in search of a mutually agreed-upon solution for the situation in hand. In such attempts, employees often report turn-taking in the argumentation process, where participants would advocate their proposal, as well as their attempt to expand the

argument in order to persuade the other party. Schonbach (1990), in his model of accounts, has also found a series of continuous exchanges of account giving and account evaluation, until an account is considered to be satisfactory and thus the situation is assessed as being resolved (see Chapter Two, section 2.5.2.1.). The successful use of explanations has been reported as minimizing continued conflicts, as well as reducing retaliatory behaviour on behalf of both the participants in conflict (Sitkin & Bies, 1993).

The phase of the exchange of arguments in the present process model is important, since the assessment made at this point of the process, regarding the messages exchanged, will determine whether the conflict episode will come to an end or will further escalate. In Schonbach's accounts, a satisfactory solution of the conflict situation means that the other party's reasoning (i.e. account) has convinced the other person (see Chapter Two, section 2.5.2.1.). The 'argumentation' phase of a conflict situation has also received prominent attention in negotiation research. This is due to the fact that "bargaining is accomplished through the use of arguments, reasoning, and persuasive appeals" (Putnam & Geist, 1985; p.226). However, this phase should not be seen as a mere exchange of information, and of proposals and counter-proposals between the two participants; instead, it also involves an examination, and a consequent assessment, of the messages communicated (Putnam & Geist, 1985).

The interaction and the discussion in which the two employees have been engaged at this stage of the model is very important for the employee's assessment of whether the conflict incident has been handled successfully or not. During this interaction, the employee coordinates his/her behaviour to that of the other party in conflict, and thus 'leads' and 'follows' the interaction pattern. His/her assessment of whether a successful solution to the particular conflict situation has been reached is not necessarily rational; it may just be a reflection of how the person feels about the situation. In general, a conflict situation is considered to be resolved when a mutually agreed-upon solution is reached.

6.3.2. The Bureaucratic Model - The Bottom Part of the Model

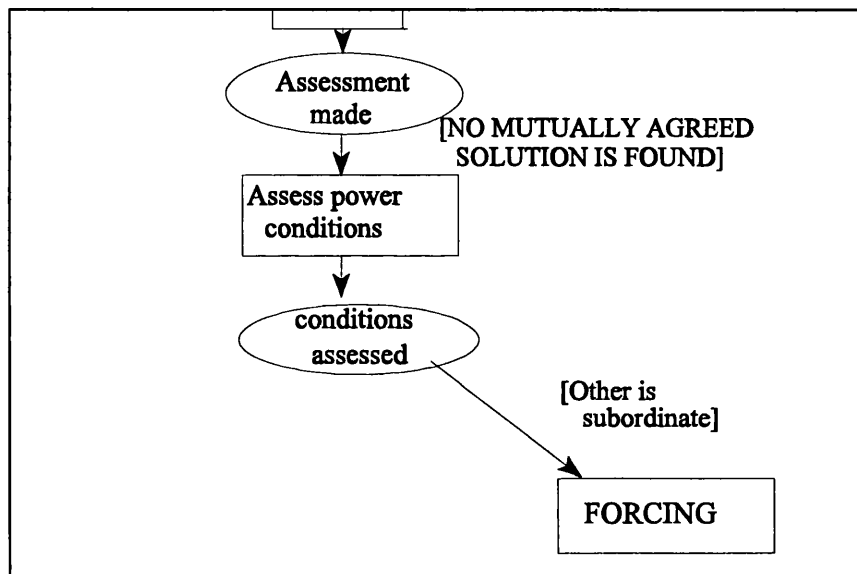
What happens when attempts at reaching an agreement are not successful? How do employees deal with such conflict situations? Unlike other interpersonal situations, there is a pressure for conflict instances in the workplace to be solved in one way or another, for the work has to proceed. Whilst the situation remains unresolved, employees still experience the stress originated by the conflict situation. In their attempts to handle the outstanding conflict, interviewees reported using a variety of handling behaviours.

Even though, at early stages of the analysis, it seemed to me that the behavioural patterns chosen by employees were at random, a closer examination of the conflict episodes analyzed illustrated that the pathway employees followed at this stage of the model (i.e. when there had been an initial failure to resolve conflict) was determined by the power conditions of the two participants in the conflict situation. Research on conflict management has already suggested the existence of a relationship between the power position of the two parties and the handling behaviour used (Carlin, 1991; Deutsch, 1982). In Chapter One (section 1.3.1.), I referred to organizational bureaucracies and highlighted the prominence of the power issue within bureaucratic organizational structures. Despite the fact that power conditions is a determining factor for the pathways employees follow in the bottom part of the model in all of the episodes analyzed (see Figure 6.1.), in most of the cases reported, there was no explicit reference to the power position of the other party as a criterion for following a certain pathway⁵. For this reason, I decided to incorporate into my model the "assessment of power conditions" part. This assessment is a technical concept, in the sense that it was rarely stated explicitly; however, all the episodes analyzed provide evidence that employees are engaged in such assessments, even though in most cases this is more an automatic, rather than a conscious, assessment.

⁵This observation will be recapitulated and even further substantiated by the analysis conducted in Part II of the thesis (see Chapter Nine).

Within the model, there are three distinct cases regarding the power conditions of the two parties. First, there are conflict incidents between the supervisor and the subordinate (as seen from the perspective of the supervisor); second, there are conflicts between the subordinate and the supervisor (from the perspective of the subordinate); finally, there conflict situations which involve colleagues.

6.3.2.1. The Bottom Part of the Model - The Other Party is a Subordinate



When the conflict situation involves a supervisor and a subordinate - and the conflict has not been resolved at an earlier stage of the model - then the supervisor enforces his opinion on the other person. This conflict behaviour is not surprising when we take into account the fact that employees working in higher positions in the hierarchy of an organization are given the power to enforce their opinions on their subordinates. In my brief review of bureaucratic organizations, I referred to the importance of the role of the supervisor for the accomplishment of the tasks delegated (see Chapter One, section 1.3.1.). Since the supervisor is held responsible for the work delegated to his subordinates, the organization provides him with the power to enforce his line of thinking and action to the employees working under his/her supervision. This tactic is demonstrated in the way that the supervisors typically handle their conflicts with their subordinates. In fact, the reasoning used by supervisors when referring to ways

of dealing with conflict is revealing of the bureaucratic rules in use⁶. For instance, the Head of the R & D Department argues:

6:11 "After a while, I had to take more drastic steps and requested (top management) that she leave the department. Things had to be sorted out. Having been patient (with her) for a long time, the only thing I could possibly do was to ask for her removal."

As indicated in the model, forcing behaviour is used only by supervisors⁷. This finding is in agreement with existing research on conflict resolution, which has demonstrated that supervisors rely on forcing as their most characteristic way of handling conflicts (Putnam & Poole, 1987; Roloff, 1987). Rahim (1986) also found that managers prefer forcing strategies with subordinates. Studies on Greek managers have found that they tend to behave in a power-oriented manner, despite the fact that collectivism and group well-being are highly valued in Greek culture (Bourantas et al., 1990). This finding matches prior research undertaken by Cummings and Schmidt (1972), according to which Greek managers tend towards using more authoritative modes of leadership and management, even though they appear to favour participatory forms of management.

Even though organizational studies have indicated that supervisors sometimes request their subordinates to comply while at other times, they just demand it (Greenhalgh, 1987), interviewees' reports suggest that supervisors, either at the level of the work groups or the at departmental level, always request compliance at initial stages of the disagreement. The idea of 'requesting' compliance suggests that they provide explanations of the situation to the subordinate, as a means of justifying the rationale underlying their decision. In cases where subordinates do not find this explanation adequate (and thus do not agree with the proposed course of action), then the supervisor demands employees' compliance, by enforcing his demands. When they set forth such a 'demand', supervisors rely on their power status to ensure compliance on the behalf of their subordinates.

⁶This issue will be treated in more detail in Chapter Nine.

⁷There is the exception of one employee who has used forcing behaviour towards his supervisor and colleagues. The case of this employee will be treated separately later on in this chapter (section 6.8.).

It is also worth noticing that, having used what has been labelled by conflict literature as 'forcing' or 'controlling' behaviour, managers considered the conflict situation to be satisfactorily sorted out (for both parties). Even though there were cases in which the supervisors admitted that the subordinate had just complied with the decision without having agreed with the supervisor's view, supervisors usually thought that they succeeded in convincing the subordinate, and thus reached a solution satisfactory to both parties. However, the supervisor's view is not necessarily shared by the subordinate who is the other party in conflict; as we shall see next, in cases of conflict situations with the supervisor (as seen from the perspective of the subordinate), subordinates often demonstrate compliance towards the supervisor whilst the grievance remains and the conflict may keep recurring:

6:12 "In such cases, I don't express my disagreement any longer right then.. not even at the next time [the disagreement arises].. But, [sooner or later] a moment is going to arrive when I shall not be able to control it.."

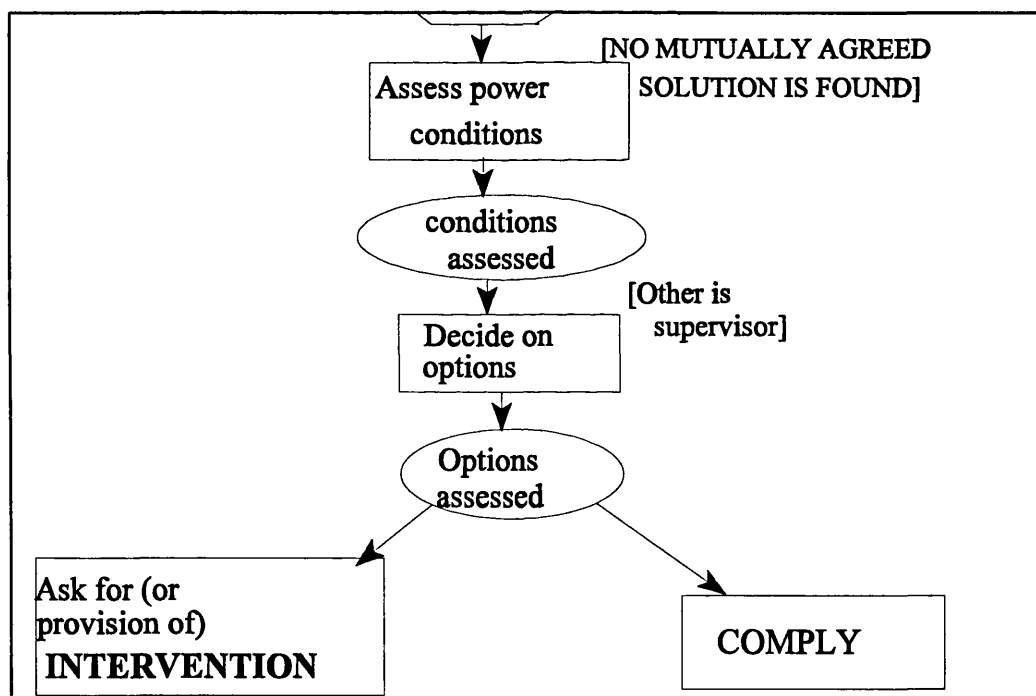
This incompatibility between supervisor's and subordinate's viewpoints, with reference to the resolution of a particular conflict situation, has already been reported by existing research on conflict; there is evidence for possible divergence between supervisors and subordinates in respect of their assessment of the desirability and satisfaction of the handling behaviour used (Putnam & Poole, 1987). Therefore, it is possible that the reliance on power conditions as a means of resolving conflict may propagate a new conflict for the other person. Such a conflict may not affect the supervisor, since it is the subordinate who has to handle it, as indicated in the extract presented above. This situation is more clearly reflected in the next case (see "the other is the supervisor").

The only time that a subordinate may consider a conflict to have been resolved successfully is when the supervisor provides him/her with an explanation for insisting on his/her viewpoint (e.g. see the upper part of the model). The importance of such explanation lies in the fact that it 'legitimizes' the manager's decision. Bies et al. (1988) have found that the provision of a causal account on the behalf of the supervisor reduces the subordinate's possible feelings of unfairness about the decision process, and

anger regarding the manager. Further research has also provided evidence that the legitimization of the boss's decision is a crucial feature of managerial authority; it also contributes to the maintenance of the organizational social order, by preventing conflict from escalating (Scott & Lyman, 1968). I believe that a comment coming from a supervisor captures the essence of the matter:

6:13 "In the course of a disagreement, the supervisor may attempt to enforce his opinion since he has the power to do so.. But this may have negative consequences. For the employee may do what he is told to, but he will procrastinate and present various excuses.. Instead, if the supervisor discusses the issue and explains himself with arguments..the issue is sorted out better and more quickly, and the supervisor achieves the optimum results.."

6.3.2.2. The Bottom Part of the Model - The Other Party is the Supervisor



As indicated in the model, there are two conflict behavioural patterns that subordinates have reported following when in conflict with their supervisor; assessment of the conflict situation at hand sometimes directs them towards complying with the supervisor while, at other times, guides them towards referring to the supervisor-once-removed. This divergence in the choice of pathway followed indicates some

assessment of the situation, during which the employee decides on the options related to the particular situation in which s/he is engaged⁸.

A. In some cases, subordinates comply with the supervisor. For instance, two employees of the R & D Department report:

6:14 "Personally, I make sure not to make a big deal out of it.. most of the time, by giving in.. I express my opinion; if it is accepted, that's fine, otherwise, I give in."

6:15 "I try to pass on the message about the way that things should be done. I continue up to a certain point; after that, you are the boss, you take the final decision. You want it like that? I do it, and the issue is over."

As noted in the previous section, even though subordinates sometimes talk about the conflict issue as being "over" (see extract 6:15), complying with the supervisor - without agreeing with him - does not necessarily 'remove' the conflict situation, at least as far as the subordinate is concerned. As demonstrated in employees' discourse, the outstanding conflict episode may lead to a 'new' conflict episode (loop with the first part of the model); for instance, the employee may once again face the dilemma of whether to express their disagreement or not. S/he may become 'trapped' in such a conflict cycle for a while, until s/he decides to change his/her previous way of dealing with the situation and thus choose an alternative behaviour. For instance, the supervisor of the Design group talks about a conflict with the Head of the Department; having complied with the supervisor on several occasions, next time he chose not to voice his disagreement at all:

6:16 "[...] I knew from the very beginning that when we had a meeting, we were going to have a fight and not a discussion. [...] Every time I tried to explain to him why things should not be done in the way he wanted, he would interrupt me in the middle of the discussion and insist on his line of thinking.. After a point, I became disappointed..I was thinking that it was pointless to have a discussion, since we would again end up having an argument."

⁸I shall come back to the idea of "deciding on options" later on in this chapter and discuss to what extent interviewees actually reflected on the options available to them in such situations (section 6.4.).

This interview extract provides an indication that the employee was locked into the same cycle for a while; he kept on expressing his disagreement to the supervisor for some length of time, even though, in the end, he had to comply with the latter. However, at a certain point in time, he decided to quit expressing his disagreement to the other person any longer (e.g. as return to the upper part of the model indicates). As already discussed, in these cases, employees have to handle the situation privately (e.g. by taking out their 'hot' emotions in their family context, as already seen in extract 6:3). In such situations, the conflict is never really resolved; instead, it often recurs under different guises. The only case in which the conflict is over is when the situation itself changes (e.g. removal of one of the parties involved). This is the case in a conflict with the supervisor reported by the secretary of the Supplies Department; the conflict started when the secretary felt that her supervisor gave an unfair rise in salary to another colleague:

6:17 "He would just give me excuses in order to cover for the mistake in his judgment.. He even told me that he would soon give me a rise as well..The whole situation made me sad.. However, he soon left the department and there was nothing I could do.. If he had still been around, I might have raised the issue again."

B. There is another pathway that subordinates have reported following in a few instances. They referred to the supervisor one-level-up in order to resolve the conflict. Both employees are from the R & D Department and are well-experienced; they talk about the conflict situations experienced in the following way:

6:18 "We had ordered some materials that we urgently needed..and the supervisor would sign that paper.. He was not really interested in his work.. he was going to retire, soon.. I made a written report which was sent to the manager.. Eventually, the issue was taken care of and the materials ordered were bought."

6:19 "I went to the manager one level-up and told him that I refuse to work with that supervisor.. For, what he was telling me, was wrong.."

In both of the cases mentioned above, subordinates reported being satisfied with the way that conflict was resolved. Unlike cases in which subordinates chose to comply with the supervisor (and then handled the grievance privately), these employees took

an 'active' step, in the sense that they referred to somebody higher up in the hierarchy, and thus found a way to deal with the conflict within their work context; for this reason, they report being more satisfied with the way they handled the conflict, compared to cases of compliance with the manager. Even though this way of dealing with the conflict situation can be seen as a means of responsibility diffusion ('upward buck-passing'), it is a more effective way of dealing with conflict - as compared to the alternative pathway usually followed - in the sense that, in these cases, subordinates have found a way to avoid the stress experienced in cases of compliance with their boss.

Earlier on in this section, we have seen that power affects employees' conflict resolution behaviour. However, the issue of power does not only arise from role relationships, which is referred to by organizational research as 'legitimate power'. French and Raven (1959) have also referred to the power which arises from the control of information (i.e. 'expert power'); in other words, organizational members who have expertise in a particular area are liable to have an influential position towards the other members of the organization; moreover, there have been indications that such influence is often generalized and thus goes beyond their domain of expertise (Greenhalgh, 1987). This can also explain both cases where employees chose to refer to the manager once-removed in order to intervene and sort out the situation; as already indicated, both employees were more experienced and expert in the field than the supervisor. In this respect, Meyer (1972) has found that specialists may deny a request coming from their (non-experts) supervisors by asserting the authority of their expertness.

As discussed in Chapter Two (section 2.6.), individuals' behaviour in the workplace is a reflection of the organizational rules. In this respect, the choice of asking for the manager's intervention when in a conflict with your supervisor suggests that this alternative is within the bounds of the organization's norms. However, even though the request for intervention from the supervisor-once-removed is within the bounds of the organization's norms, not complying with one's supervisor - without taking any other 'action' - is against the organizational norms in E.P.E.; these norms safeguard

the social order of the organization which ensures that such actions are penalized, even by firing the employee. Indeed, that was the case with that employee who got fired from the Supplies Department the day before I conducted the third set of interviews in the firm. One of his colleagues describes how things happened:

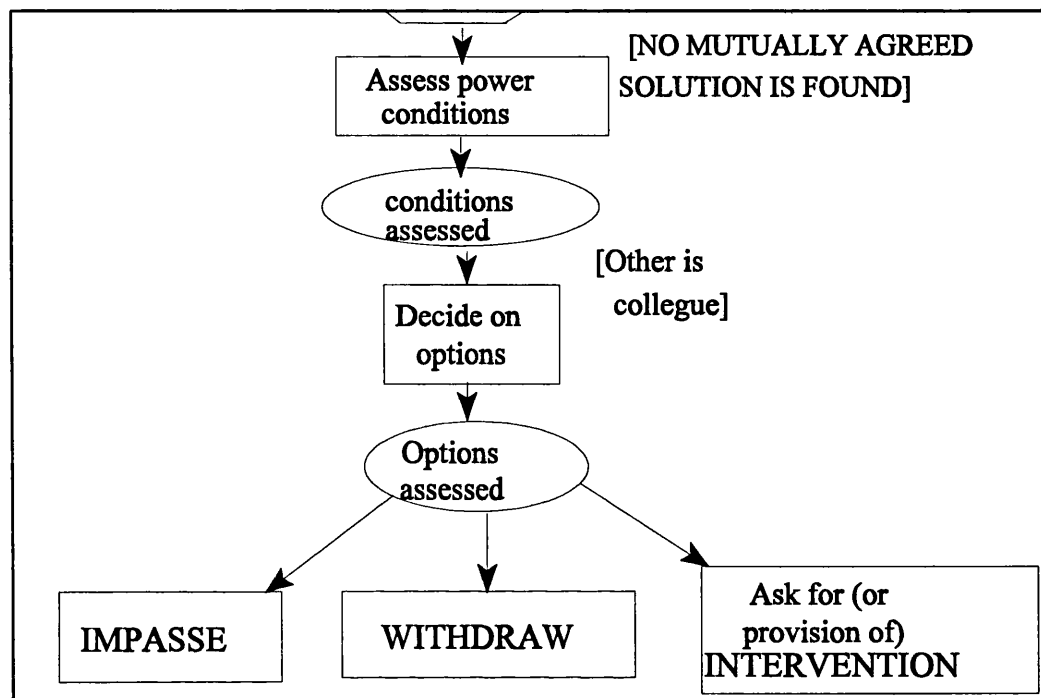
6:20 "When your supervisor comes and tells you to do something, you can only comply and do so. Even though you may still disagree, he has the responsibility for it [...] It has happened that a colleague has refused to do what his supervisor told him. The reaction was such that this employee was fired..even though he was probably right."

I believe that the comments of the Head of the Department - the one who fired the employee in question - better disclose the heart of the matter; when he was asked about conflict incidents in the department, he said:

6:21 "In general, [I would say that] my opinion is well-received by my subordinates, at least by those who still work here."

There was also another case of an employee working in the Supplies Department who behaved against the organizational norms; not only did he not comply with his supervisor, but he also used a form of 'illegal forcing', since he threatened killing him if he continued to behave in the same way. However, since this employee's way of dealing with conflict differs considerably from the rest of the employees interviewed, I am going to discuss his case as a case study in its own right (section 6.8.).

6.3.2.3. The Bottom Part of the Model - Conflict between Colleagues



There are three different pathways that employees report choosing when in conflict with their colleagues.

A. They may choose to withdraw from the conflict situation - even by pretending it no longer exists - and consequently leave the conflict unresolved. This mode of conflict behaviour has also been referred to in the conflict resolution literature as 'smoothing' or 'yielding' behaviour⁹.

6:22 "During a disagreement, I try to find arguments to support my claims. In cases in which I cannot persuade the other person and he keeps to his own perspective, there is nothing more I can do. I simply stop there; I quit from the entire thing."

⁹The difference between avoiding behaviour (as appearing in the upper part of the model) and withdrawing behaviour (as enacted at this stage of the conflict process) is that the latter presupposes an initial expression of disagreement.

B. Alternatively, employees may choose to insist on their points of view (i.e. impasse); in such cases, the situation comes to a deadlock and thus the conflict remains outstanding (at least, within the given conflict episode). Instances of stalemate in negotiations have been studied widely in conflict escalation research. The following employee reports a disagreement about the smoking situation in the Design group:

6:23 "Each insisted on his own point of view. Nothing happened in the end
[..] We went on with other things..no problem."

The secretary of the Supplies Department refers to a disagreement with a colleague regarding his habit of interrupting her all the time and asking for her help:

6:24 "I would express my point of view and the other person would do the same; it may be that the argument wouldn't lead anywhere, but we were fine. A moment later, everything was fine."

In instances where employees either withdrew from the conflict situation or chose to reach an impasse, they considered the issue in conflict to be trivial. For this reason, they assessed that there was not going to be any serious consequence - in terms of the workflow - if the disagreement was left outstanding; thus, they chose not to take an active step regarding the situation and thus to consider the issue over and done with. Due to the perceived triviality of the issue, the level of stress that employees experience is relatively low; for this reason, employees 'exit' the conflict situation by 'abandoning' the conflict situation unresolved. However, despite employees' comments about the conflict being over, it often proves to be the case that the same conflict recurs under the same or a different guise. For instance, an employee from the Local Market group (Supplies Department) refers to a continuous disagreement with his colleagues regarding smoking in the office:

6:25 "It's a situation that keeps recurring..but, one has to love one's friends with all their drawbacks, isn't it so? When it happens again, we deal with it..we overcome it.."

C. An alternative way of dealing with conflict between colleagues, is to ask for intervention from somebody else who will take responsibility for solving the conflict between the two colleagues. An employee from the Research group comments on a conflict situation where intervention was sought:

6:26 "[...] I'll prevent him, even by going to the immediate supervisor. At the outset, we have a discussion about it..if case he understands that I am right, that's fine. Otherwise, I will make a report to the immediate supervisor [...]"

Literature on conflict resolution has often associated the notion of conflict escalation with cases where the controversy becomes public and necessitates the intervention of third parties (Nader & Todd, 1978). The role that the third party takes in such situations may differ considerably depending on the particular situation. S/he may take the role of an arbitrator, in the sense of issuing judgments to the interested parties; instead, s/he may take a mediatory role and facilitate communication between the parties. Organizational research has often illustrated instances where managers are involved in the resolution process in conflict situations between subordinates (Greenhalgh, 1987); in these situations, the role that the third party assumes, as well as his/her interests in the outcome, vary. Such variation was also found in the present study; the supervisor would sometimes offer his expertise regarding how things should be done; at other times, he would judge whether an outcome was fair while, in other cases, he would take the initiative to intervene and re-establish 'order' between the two parties involved in the conflict situation.

The frequent role of a supervisor acting as 'third party' in conflict situations stems from his position in the organization's hierarchy, which offers him the authority and legitimate power to deal with conflicts where his subordinates are involved. Moreover, since it is often the subordinates who ask for his involvement in their conflict situations, his position of authority is reaffirmed by his subordinates. Referral to the supervisor as a means of dealing with problems in general alludes to the issue of diffusion of responsibility discussed in Chapter Two (section 2.6.) and is a normal occurrence in bureaucratic organizations. In a way, bureaucratic structures, by the procedures they propose, further 'reinforce' this practice; in fact, employees' discourse in such situations abounds with references to bureaucratic procedures. For instance, employees ask for their supervisor's intervention when they regard the issue in dispute as being beyond the scope of their responsibility; in this case, one has to refer to the supervisor who will be held responsible for the decision taken. Hence,

asking the supervisor to intervene seems to be within the organizational norms, but only in cases in which the issue in dispute is an important one for the organization; an employee from the Research group reports:

6:27 "When the issue is important and is not within our responsibilities, we have to refer to the upper level [...] In order to do so, it has to be something serious..one doesn't turn to him for trivial things.."

As indicated in the interviews held, employees would sometimes invite another colleague to mediate in their dispute. Studies in organizational negotiation have accounted for cases where another colleague acts as a mediator in a dispute. Nadler et al. (1985) referred to this handling practice as the "go-between" system and regarded it as a conflict preventative strategy; in such cases, a neutral party is asked to act as an intermediate and to hear both sides of the story. An employee from the Supplies Department talks about his 'habit' of acting as go-between in conflict situations with his colleagues:

6:28 "I just happened to be present when a colleague behaved very badly towards a fellow worker [...] [As soon as the situation was over] I called the second person and advised him on how to behave to that colleague from then onwards. Two days later, I had a discussion with the other person..we smoked a cigarette and talked about irrelevant things..and then I referred to that particular incident.. I told him why he shouldn't have behaved the way he did [...]"

The colleague who is asked to serve as a mediator is usually more experienced than the parties in conflict, and his/her opinion is highly valued by them. As noted earlier, expert power is one source of power in organizational settings. Another source of power - which is applicable to this case - is 'referent power' (French & Raven, 1959); in other words, the persuasive appeals, which the third colleague (who in this case acts as a mediator-advisor) offers to the parties in conflict, lie on the interpersonal dynamics and existing personal relationships between the three colleagues.

In general, the effectiveness of third party intervention has been controversial. Negotiation research has suggested that third parties usually enhance the process of conflict resolution by "raising the visibility of interaction between the negotiators"

(Greenhalgh, 1987; p.236). For instance, organizational studies have indicated that, in cases where a neutral colleague acts as a mediator, differences are usually resolved, while the negotiation process takes the role of "face-saving" (Nadler et al., 1985). As the same employee reports:

6:29 "Conflicts can also be solved with the help of a third person..another colleague whose opinion will be valued [...] This person may want to avoid creating a bad image outside the department..or he may just have an influence on one of the parties involved in the situation [...]"

In his research on negotiation and third-party intervention, Pruitt (1981; p.220) postulated that "the availability of third-party services is a mixed blessing"; on the one hand, intervention often contributes towards reaching an agreement and consequently prevents a breakdown in negotiation; however, on the other hand, people get used to relying on these services and thus become unwilling to attempt to resolve their discord on their own. Other studies have suggested that third-party decision making may contribute to a constructive 'solution' to the controversy, but it often fails to address the underlying sources of the problem (Ross, 1993). Similarly, Kolb (1987) found that asking the supervisor to supply assistance in conflict between subordinates can create the conditions for disagreements to recur.

The aim of this section has been to review and discuss in detail the various parts of the models while using employees' own discourse, as revealed in their accounts of conflict episodes. The next section will discuss the frequencies reported by informants for each conflict handling behaviour described in the net model; the aim of this presentation is to illustrate the extent of the impact of the organizational and departmental context on employees' conflict handling practices.

6.4. Assigning Reported Frequencies to the Net Model

In Chapter Five (section 5.8.), I explained the way I generated the conflict handling model, from the interviews conducted with employees. Having generated the model, I went back to my transcripts and focused on the frequencies with which interviewees referred to the various parts of the model. Frequencies were counted on the transition points (i.e. the process branches in the model). In summary, the frequencies presented adjacent to the various branches of the model indicate the number of times that employees:

- (a) clearly reported taking this particular pathway of action;
- (b) reported having observed somebody else in the department following this pathway¹⁰;
- (c) had not made any direct reference to this pathway, although however, the latter was followed logically by the sequence of events reported.

In Figures 6.2.a & b, the frequencies reported in the course of the interviews are presented adjacent to each transition point of the net model. The numbers presented are computed on the basis of both complete as well as partial conflict episodes. For this reason, the frequencies of transitions located further down in the model may not always be an accurate reflection of the numbers indicated in the branches of the upper part of the model since, on some occasions, episodes were coded only at the bottom part of the model. The frequencies presented below refer only to the actual conflict episodes reported by interviewees which constitute the main part of the analysis (see Chapter Five, section 5.6.1.)¹¹.

¹⁰In Chapter Five (section 5.6.), I discussed the issue of observed conflict episodes.

¹¹The analysis of the hypothetical episodes is discussed in section 6.5. and will serve as a basis for comparison with the findings of the analysis of the actual episodes.

Figure 6.2.a Conflict Handling Practices in the R & D Department - Actual Episodes
(out of 30 episodes)

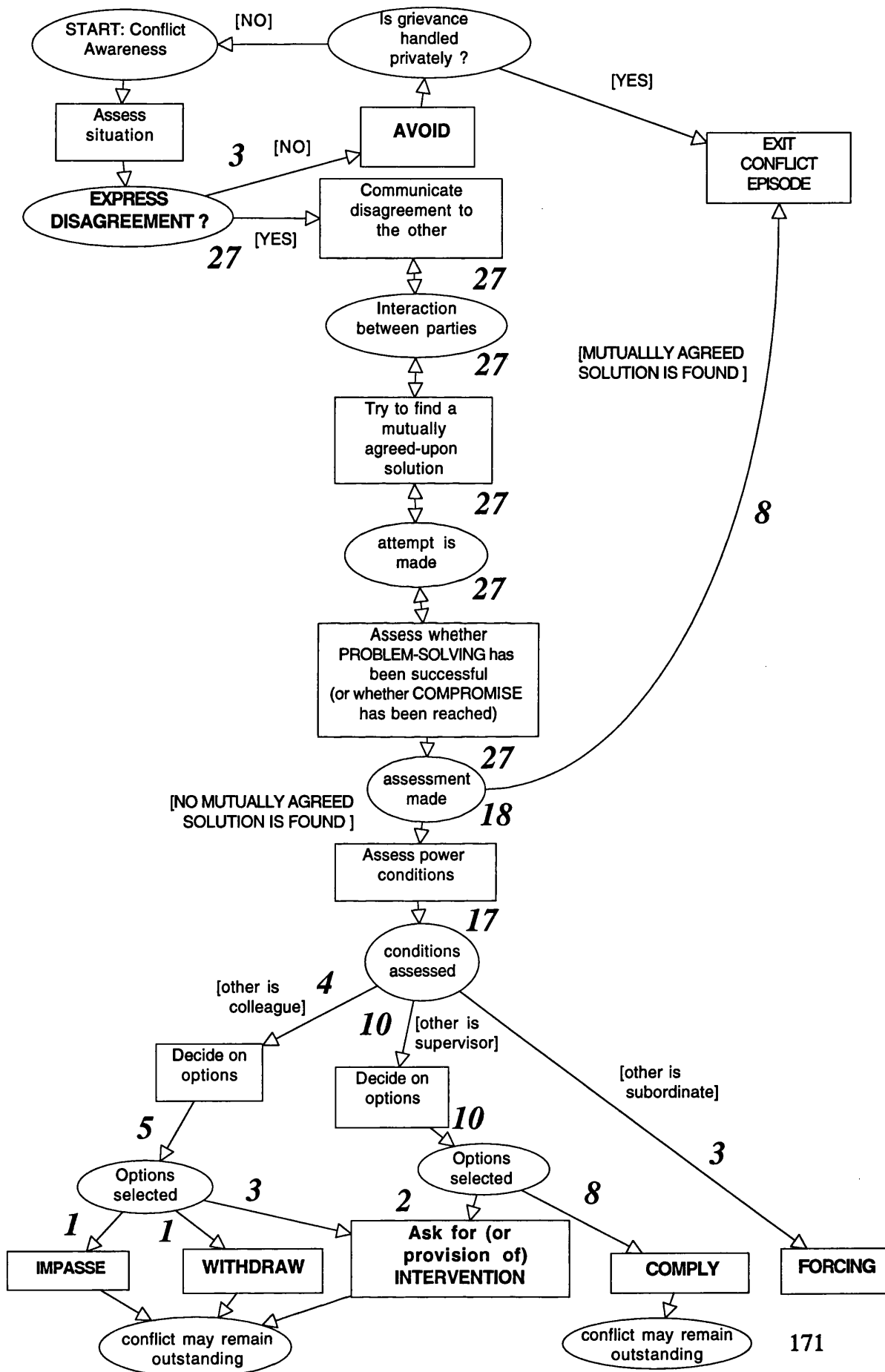
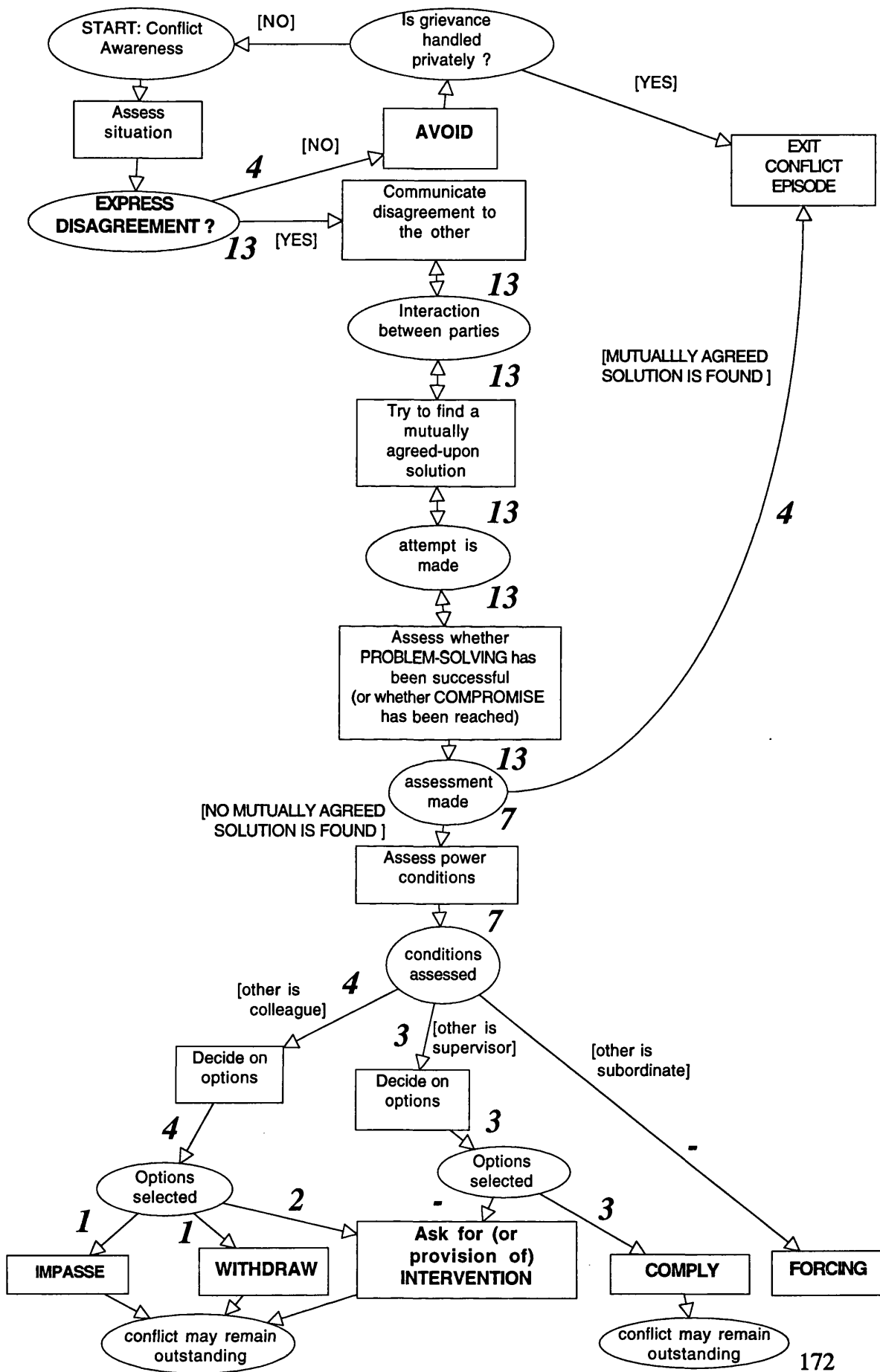


Figure 6.2.b Conflict Handling Practices in the Supplies Department - Actual Episodes
(out of 17 episodes)



As has been seen, these frequencies were originated by the conflict incidents, as reported in the course of the interviews held; consequently, they only illustrate what employees reported during their discussions with me. This report is not necessarily an accurate account of the frequency with which employees use a specific conflict behaviour in their everyday work. For this reason, the frequencies presented below are not treated as absolute frequencies; rather, they are treated as indicative of the patterns of conflict handling behaviour likely to be used by employees of the two departments. Hence, the discussion following the presentation of frequencies should be seen in this light.

Next, I shall discuss some issues that the frequencies reported in Figures 6.2.a & 6.2.b raise, which I believe are worth mentioning. For this purpose, Tables 6.1.a & b recapitulate some pairs of frequencies as reported in different nodes of the net model.

Table 6.1.a Frequencies and Percentages of Conflict Handling Behaviours for 'Avoid' and 'Communicate disagreement' Nodes in Each Department

	R & D	Supplies	Total
Avoid	3 (10%)	4 (23.5%)	7
Communicate Disagreement	27 (90%)	13 (76.5%)	40
Total number of Actual Episodes	30	17	47

As indicated in both departments, employees most often express the conflict experienced to the other party (40 out of the 47 incidents reported in both departments). The ratio regarding 'communicate disagreement' and 'avoid' behaviour calculated for both departments is 5.7 and indicates that, when in disagreement, employees (in both departments) tend to express their disagreement to the other person, and attempt to sort out the issue by means of an initial discussion with him/her. This finding can be seen as an indication of the organizational norms in use in E.P.E. (at least as portrayed in the two departments studied), which encourage the expression of grievances

experienced by employees. Moreover, it may be indicative of the good relationships among employees in these departments, especially as a result of a shared feeling of uncertainty which originated during privatization (Chapter Four, section 4.3.). The tendency of employees to voice their disagreement to the other person and thus 'run the risk of discord' has already been suggested by organizational research (Bartunek et al., 1992).

Table 6.1.b Frequencies and Percentages for Resolved and Non-Resolved Conflict Episodes in Each Department

	R & D	Supplies	Total
Resolved Episodes	8 (30.7%)	4 (30.7%)	12
Non-Resolved Episodes	18 (69.2%)	9 (69.2%)	27
Total Number of Actual Episodes	26	13	39

As Table 6.1.b indicates, among the episodes where the two participants in conflict were involved in a discussion with each other, most of the time, there was a failure to reach a commonly agreed-upon solution to the controversy at this stage (the calculated ratio is 2.2 for both departments). In the previous section, we saw that the discussion taking place at this stage of the model may vary from actively listening to what the other person says, and information seeking and sending, to competitive efforts to state one's own position. For instance, extracts 6:9 & 6:10 provided examples of a debating method of settling the disagreement with the other person, in the sense that the conversation is oriented towards stating positions and attempting to persuade each other of the superiority of their own position; we also saw that such behavioural tactics represent a competitive approach towards dispute resolution, in the sense that each party is primarily concerned with putting his/her position across to the other, instead of being actively involved in an information exchange, in order to reach a solution which satisfies both parties. Therefore, the frequent failure of reaching an agreement

between the two employees involved in a conflict situation can be attributed to the particular tactics used during the interactive conversation with the other person; these tactics often appeared to be of a debating nature, which presupposes some degree of position-taking and attempts to prevail upon the other's arguments. Nevertheless, the fact that employees mostly choose to get involved in a conversation and attempt to solve the conflict directly with the other person, rather than immediately resorting to more indirect practices of conflict resolution (e.g. bottom part of the model), is an interesting finding in its own right¹².

In most of the cases where conflict was 'non-resolved', the conflict was with the supervisor; for instance, only 4 out of 16 episodes reported in R & D and none out of 7 episodes in Supplies, where the other person was the supervisor, were regarded as being successfully resolved at this stage of the model (i.e. reaching a common agreement). Earlier on, we saw that subordinates consider a conflict situation successfully resolved when the supervisor presents a 'proper' explanation of his decision. Even though the frequencies are quite small for any conclusion, we can see this finding as an indication of failure - or reluctance - on the part of supervisors to provide their subordinates with adequate explanations about the course of action to be followed and which is the subject of disagreement; under such conditions, supervisors may often engage themselves in position-taking tactics rather than explanation of the situation. Not explaining the situation to the other does not foster cooperative ways of conflict resolution and thus discourages participative decision making (Greenhalgh, 1987). Regarding this issue, Greek managers have been found to advocate participative forms of management in words only, while they show disregard for employees as valuable collaborators in decision making (Bourantas et al., 1990).

During the discussion of the model, we saw that, when a conflict has failed to lead to an integrative solution, employees assess the power conditions entailed in the conflict situation. I have already argued that, despite the absence of immediate references

¹²Section 6.6.1. recapitulates and further elaborates on this issue.

regarding the assessment of power conditions in the discourse of the employees, their involvement in such assessments is suggested by the consistency of the behaviour employed by employees depending on the power of the other party. In conflict situations with the supervisor, compliance is the most common case reported in the interviews conducted; this applies to 11 out of 13 instances reported in both departments even though, in all of these cases, the subordinate still disagrees with the supervisor (see Figures 6.2.a & b). Organizational research on conflict has often pinpointed the tendency of subordinates to smooth over or to compromise in conflict situations with their superiors (Rahim, 1986; Putnam & Poole, 1987). According to Musser (1982), the fear that the conflict could lead to reprisal by the supervisor may make the subordinate unduly compliant. In his research on organizational bureaucracies, Diamond (1993) viewed employees' compliance in terms of their making use of bureaucratic rules and regulations in order to protect themselves from personal responsibility for the consequences of the actions taken. Complying with the supervisor can thus be seen as the subordinate's attempt to avoid anxiety about the possibility of the supervisor's disapproval.

Even though the model indicates that there is alternative to compliance (i.e. ask for assistance from the manager once-removed), this alternative is rarely chosen (2 out of 14 instances for both departments); in both situations, employees were experienced and had been working in the company for many years. Their expertise enabled them to consider another option rather than complying with the supervisor's demands, serving as a source of power (i.e. expert power) distinct from the power which is rooted in the hierarchical position of the person. Drawing on this expertise, both employees questioned their supervisors' competence regarding the responsibilities undertaken, which also had an effect on the image of the supervisor to - at least - these subordinates. For instance, one of these employees talks about his supervisor in the following way:

6:30 "[...] he was telling me how to do things but I knew he was wrong [...] This may happen when the supervisor is less knowledgeable than his subordinates [...] That is why it is wise for the supervisor to be well acquainted with his area [of responsibility] so that the subordinate could

not possibly question him. Otherwise, it's probable that problems like that arise."

I believe that these two incidents should be treated as exceptions, and are not the rule in E.P.E. For this reason, even though the model indicates that employees assess the situation at this phase of their conflict resolution process, before choosing which pathway to follow, in everyday practice, they appear to comply with the supervisor without deliberating about whether there is any other option available to them.

With reference to the way that employees solve their disagreements with their colleagues ('withdraw', 'impasse' or 'ask for intervention' nodes), the number of incidents reported was too small to draw any kind of conclusions (9 episodes reported in both departments).

6.5. Analysis of Hypothetical Episodes - Comparing Actual and Hypothetical Patterns

In the course of the interviews, it was noticed that employees - with the exception of some individual differences¹³ - generally preferred to talk about hypothetical conflicts, rather than actual situations already experienced; in other words, almost all of the interviewees were more keen to talk about what they would do than what they do. Figures 6.3.a & b present the frequencies originated from the analysis of the hypothetical conflict situations reported.

¹³Three interviewees presented only hypothetical conflict situations, while only one did not make references to any hypothetical situation.

Figure 6.3.a Conflict Handling Practices in the R & D Department - Hypothetical Episodes
(out of 41 episodes)

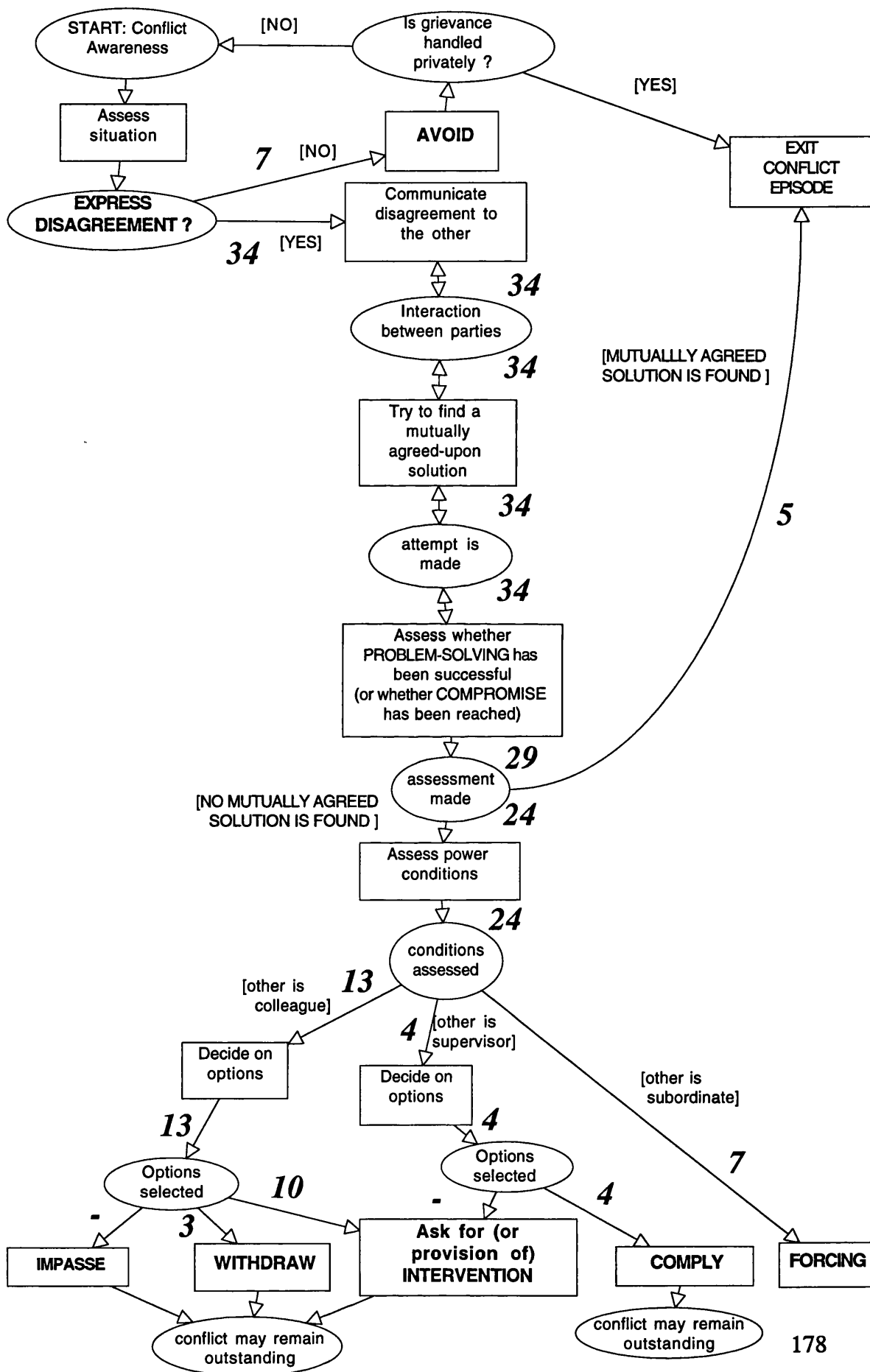
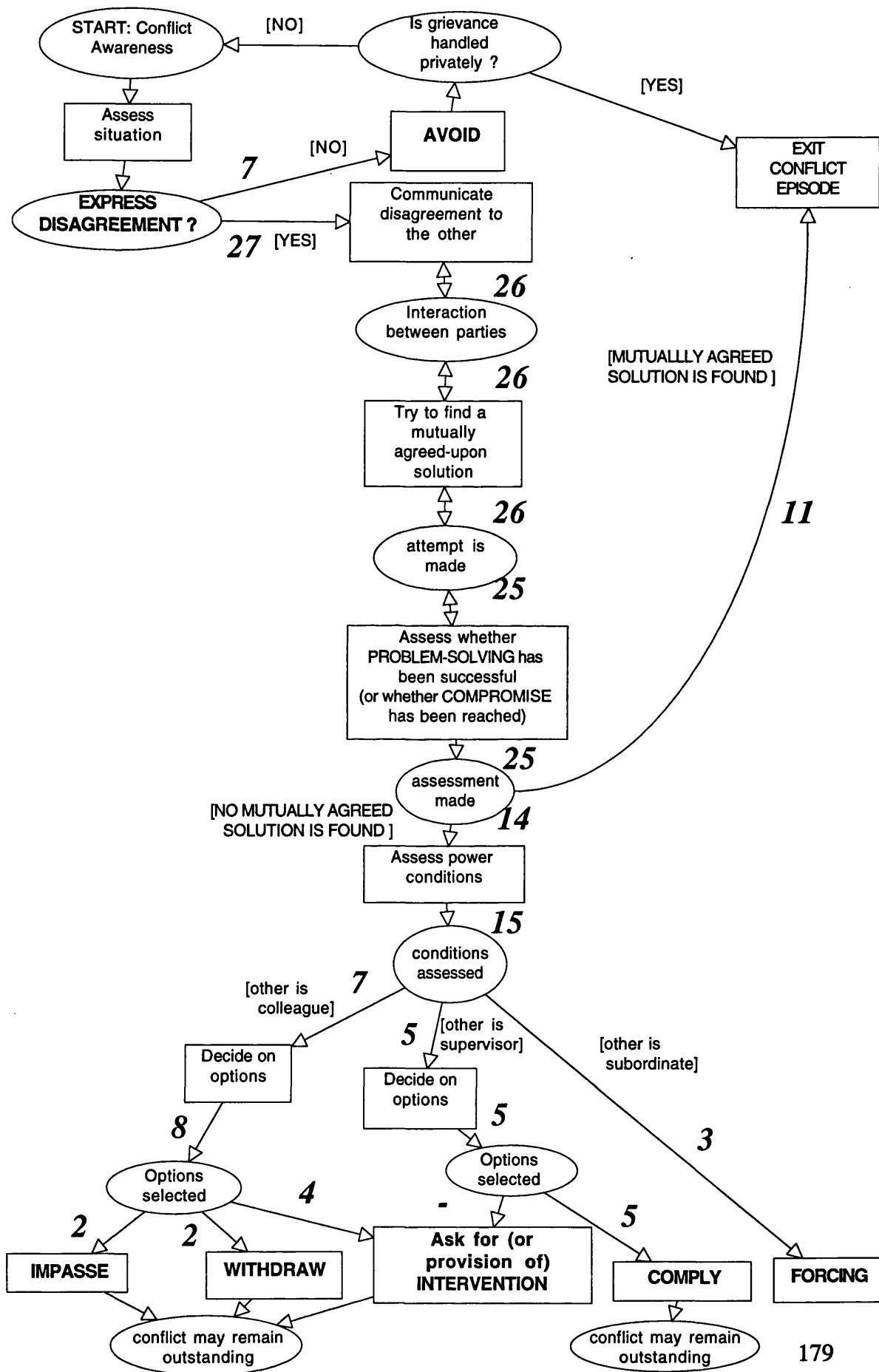


Figure 6.3.b Conflict Handling Practices in the Supplies Department - Hypothetical Episodes
(out of 36 episodes)



The most interesting finding in the analysis of hypothetical episodes is that the structure of the conflict handling model, originated by the analysis of the actual episodes (see Figure 6.1.), also applies to the hypothetical conflict incidents reported¹⁴. The common structure of the model in both cases indicates that, even though hypothetical episodes are not anchored to a specific point in time and do not refer to a particular person, they nevertheless reflect employees' experiences from their daily interactions in conflict situations. When constructing a hypothetical situation, employees draw on their experiences of conflict situations in their workplace, as well as on the wider cultural background within which they live.

Taking a closer look at the conflicts with colleagues, the analysis of hypothetical episodes across both departments indicated a preference by employees to ask for intervention as a means of solving the conflict (rather than withdrawing or reaching an impasse). This point is important, even if we treat the behaviour reported in hypothetical episodes as an indication of behavioural intentions regarding conflict situations; even if the latter is the case, then asking for intervention (i.e. diffusing responsibility to somebody else) is reflective of the intentions of employees when dealing with disagreements with their colleagues.

A general comment related to the analysis of both actual and hypothetical episodes concerns the issue of non-resolved conflicts. Despite an overall preference for the use of more direct and 'democratic' procedures when dealing with conflict, these procedures were usually found to fail to result in an effective outcome; as a consequence, employees end up using more 'indirect' ways in order to handle their controversies. This phenomenon raises certain questions: "Why do employees clearly prefer more direct and 'dialectic' modes of conflict resolution?" and "Why do they

¹⁴The only difference found in the structure of the model is that there were no references in hypothetical episodes with regard to "asking for intervention from the supervisor once-removed". However, this absence can be attributed to the modest number of conflict episodes (both actual and hypothetical) which were reported regarding this particular node.

eventually have to rely on more 'bureaucratized' procedures as a means of handling their disagreements?" The following sections address these questions.

6.6. Accounting for Consistencies in the Structure of the Conflict Handling Model

So far, the analysis of the conflict episodes reported has indicated a high degree of consistency in the structure of the model in both departments, as well as in the actual and hypothetical episodes reported. The consistency in the patterns of conflict handling behaviour, as used by interviewees, reflects the existence of an underlying framework which is shared by them and which, to a great extent, determines the way in which they make sense of conflict situations in their workplace, and subsequently handle such situations. As my argument implies, the framework shared among employees interviewed is two-fold. First, there is the wider socio-cultural environment (i.e. Greece) within which E.P.E. functions; this context serves as a point of reference for employees outside - as well as inside - the work context. Second, the particular organizational context (i.e. E.P.E.) also provides a framework, according to which employees make sense of the work environment and relate to each other. Both of these contexts account for the uniformity in the conflict handling practices used by employees in conflict situations. The next two sections illustrate how the paradigm of Greek culture is more apparent in the structure of the upper part of the conflict handling model, while the bureaucratic nature of the organization mostly informs the emergent structure of the bottom part of the model.

6.6.1. The Paradigm of the Greek Democracy and of the Socratic Dialogue in the Upper Part of the Model

A substantial part of Chapter Three was devoted to the discussion of the assumption of this study that employees' behaviour in conflict situations is shaped by the organizational context within which they work. However, one should not forget that, apart from their organizational roles, employees live in - and are influenced by - a

wider socio-cultural system¹⁵. In the process of being socialized in a society, individuals develop certain orientations which are rooted in their value systems and cultural beliefs (Gudykunst et al., 1988). This cultural perspective 'escorts' organizational members in their work environment and is enacted within it. For the present study, Greek culture as a whole provides the wider cultural background for the organizational actors.

Greek culture is mainly portrayed in the structure of the upper part of the model, where employees prefer expressing their disagreements to the other and reasoning about them, rather than getting involved in other modes of conflict behaviour (e.g. avoiding confrontation altogether, or asking for intervention without first confronting the other person). This way of dealing with conflict alludes to dialectic practices, as exemplified in early forms of democracy in Ancient Greece. Rhetoric in Ancient Greece received prominent attention; rhetoric techniques were exemplified by Socrates and his famous 'dialogues', as well as by the Sophists. In fact, the latter devoted so much attention to the examination of argumentative practices while seeking persuasion of the public, that they have been criticized for attempting to manipulate the public. The rationale behind Socratic dialogue had been for the two disputants to cooperate and attempt to examine the issues under debate. The Socratic dialectic paradigm, as presented in the Platonic dialogues, advocates for the disputants jointly to approach the issue in dispute (Billig, 1987); the main aim of such conversation is the 'search of the truth'. It becomes apparent that such a paradigm excludes 'debating' - and thus competing - modes of conversations. Moreover, the idea of democracy, as first developed and put into practice in Ancient Greece, presupposed - and relied upon - an open communication and exchange of ideas among the citizens. In Athenian Agora, citizens used to get involved in rigorous reasoning in their attempts to be convincing and build up their case; it was during such conversations that the democratic ideal was put into effect. This shared cultural background - which, since antiquity, has been a point of reference worldwide - has especially served as an anchoring point in Greek tradition,

¹⁵The societal-cultural context within which organizations are embedded has often been neglected by organizational studies (Martin, 1992).

the latter being enacted in employees' experiences within, as well as outside, the particular work context. In a review of existing comparative studies among cultures, Triandis and Vassiliou (1972) placed emphasis on how the love of modern Greeks to discuss and argue with other debaters had reached the (extreme, for the authors) point of enjoying 'a good rousing argument'.

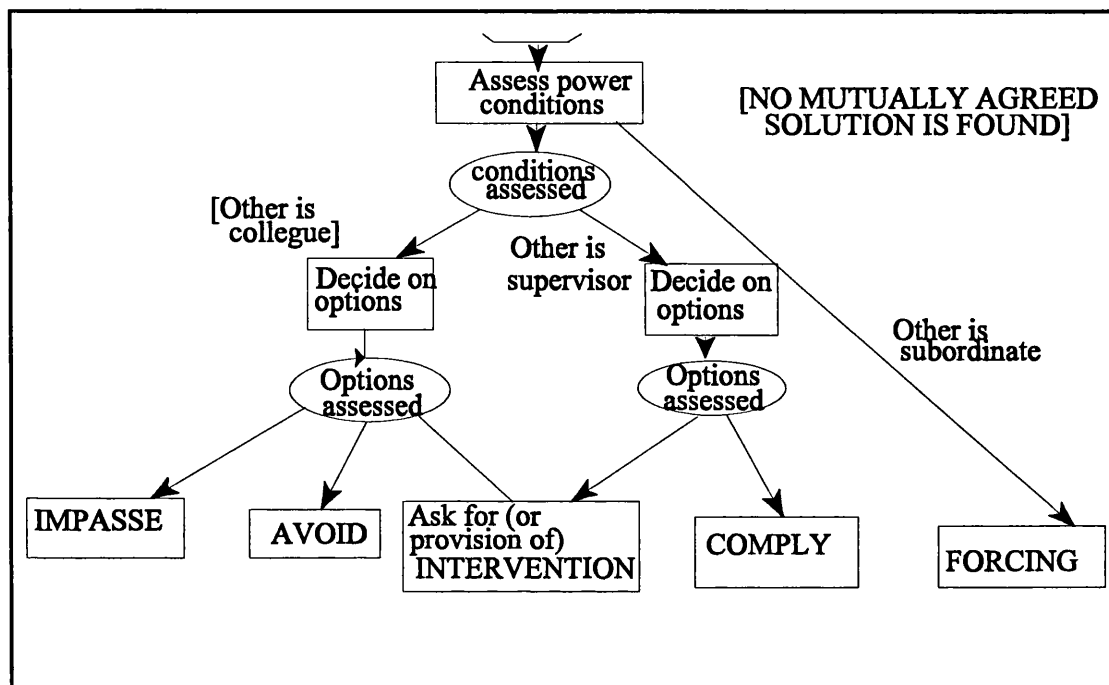
The conversational stage of the present model should also be seen in reference to the organizational context within which it occurs. Existing research on intra-organizational interactions has suggested that cooperation is usually valued over competition, due to the prevalence of norms which encourage teamwork as a means of accomplishing the purpose of the organization (Greenhalgh, 1987). However, in different bureaucratic organizational settings, employees could go straight to the 'ask for intervention' part of the model instead of getting involved in a discussion; similarly, they could prefer 'keeping their grievances behind the scenes' or communicating disagreement only with non-verbal cues, a practice which has been reported by other organizational studies (Bartunek et al., 1992). In contrast, as the analysis of interviews in both departments indicated, it is only after failing to resolve the controversy through discussions that employees resort to bureaucratic modes of solving conflict, which is a culturally-interesting finding.

Another indication of the effect of the cultural background on employees' references to conflict situations is the fact that the idea of people openly expressing their disagreement, and attempting to sort out the disagreement with the other person in a one-to-one conversation, seemed commonplace to me (as the researcher who collected and analyzed the data) at the beginning. It was only later that I realized that the underlying reason was that, being Greek myself, I shared the same cultural heritage as my interviewees. In this respect, there were a lot of common assumptions between us that remained unchallenged in the course of the interviews. For instance, at times, I would come across comments like the following, which passed unnoticed and without further priming:

6:31 "In the course of a conflict, voices are often raised. Sometimes, the arguments get fervent. It's just me being Greek.. you know what I mean."

So far, the aim of this section has been to illustrate how the upper part of the model - which is mostly characterized by direct and argumentative resolution practices, and indicates organizational members' preferences for direct modes of conflict resolution - has drawn on ideas of Greek democracy and methods of argumentation practised in Ancient Greece. With regard to the bottom part of the model (i.e. cases in which disagreements failed to be resolved at the upper part of the model), the analysis suggested that the behavioural options, from among which employees chose their handling patterns, are very limited and determined by the power conditions of the participants in the conflict situation. This standardization in the process of conflict resolution portrays the extensive reliance on bureaucratic rules and power status, which is a particularly interesting cultural phenomenon; as already suggested in Hofstede's studies (1980), Greek people tend to show high regard and submission to authority figures.

6.6.2. The Use of the Bureaucratic Model in Everyday Practice - The Bottom Part of the Model



As in the case of the Greek culture, which is common to all employees, the organizational context also provides a shared framework, according to which organizational members make sense of the work environment, as well as relate to each other. The organizational context is mostly reflected in the structure of the bottom part of the model, which is characterized by more indirect and 'bureaucratized' resolution procedures; as the analysis indicated, employees interviewed made frequent use of these bureaucratic procedures as a means of handling conflict situations. I called the bottom part of the model 'the bureaucratic part' in the sense that pathways reported in this part of the resolution process illustrate the bureaucratic structure of the organization, as well as of the departments on which the study focused. Recapitulating on the core characteristics of a bureaucratic structure, bureaucracies are characterized by a hierarchy of authority relationships, as well as prescribed rules and procedures, which inform organizational tasks and relationships within the workplace. For instance, as the bottom part of the model indicates, subordinates comply with their supervisor and the legitimate power he represents, while the latter uses this power to enforce his

position to the subordinates; moreover, employees often rely on the supervisor in order to handle their disagreements with other colleagues.

As Dubinskas suggested (1992; p.192), organizational members "are fully immersed in the practical culture of doing things at work for nearly half of their waking lives". For this reason, the way that employees look at - and act in - their workplace has become 'naturalized'; in other words, for organizational actors, everyday practices are seen as 'common sense' practices, which thus comprise tacit assumptions as well as 'automatic' actions. In this light, we can understand the lack of explicit references to the assessment of power conditions when conflicts escalate to the bottom part of the model (section 6.3.). In a similar way, the 'naturalized' nature of everyday practices explains the more or less 'automatic' ways of handling conflict situations, as portrayed in most parts of the model. For instance, in the entire model, there are only three points where employees reported choosing between different alternatives (see section 6.10.).

In Chapter Three (section 3.4.1.), I discussed my assumption about the dynamic relationship between the organizational context and the way employees interact with each other. I also discussed how conflict handling behaviour - as other forms of interaction in organizations - forms part of the social fabric of the organization; it influences - and is shaped by - the organization within which it occurs. Employees' reliance on bureaucratic procedures as a means of dealing with conflict situations in their workplace should also be seen as a mechanism which organizational actors employ in order to cope with the bureaucratic environment. In this respect, bureaucratic characteristics have been found to have psychological effects on organizational members. According to Diamond (1993), bureaucracies 'neutralize' an employee's behaviour, which would otherwise be personal and emotional. A bureaucratic system offers a high degree of predictability and certainty in regard to expectations about role responsibilities, performance and behaviour in the work setting. In return, people renounce their independency and autonomy of action, due to highly controlled and centralized administration. Compliance with hierarchical authority and adherence to

fixed regulations and impersonal norms of behaviour satisfy - and often reinforce - the human need for structure, order and certainty (Diamond, 1993); complying with, or even appealing to, higher authority as a means of resolving an ongoing controversy can thus be seen as a manifestation for keeping the order and structure of the firm¹⁶. Such compliance on the behalf of the employees functions as an 'interpersonal defence structure'. For instance, bureaucrats may avoid taking responsibility for the consequences of their actions, or experiencing anxiety, by strictly adhering to organizational norms. This tendency is reflected in the various nodes presented at the bottom part of the model:

- (a) employees' tendency to comply with the supervisor usually without assessing any other possible alternatives;
- (b) supervisors' over-reliance on their legitimate power as a means of resolving conflicts with subordinates;
- (c) employees' preference to delegate responsibility for conflict resolution to authority figures.

Strict adherence to organizational rules has been seen as a lack of involvement and commitment on the part of the employees. In *The Bureaucratic Phenomenon*, Crozier (1964), posits that retreatism is a commonly found behaviour in bureaucratic systems. Within bureaucracies, employees are confronted with an over-demanding situation with no expectation of significant reward, while, in the meantime, they have to come to terms with the patterns of impersonality and centralization existing in these organizations. As a means of coping with this pressure, employees reduce their involvement and commitment to the organization; in other words, they do not get personally involved in their work, or go beyond their job descriptions. In the present study, the unwillingness of employees to carry on their discord with the supervisor, or to take the responsibility in a disagreement with a colleague, has to be seen not only as a sign of adhering to bureaucratic rules, but also as an indication of their concern with not losing their jobs. Such anxiety is explained in the context of the financial misfortunes that the company is currently facing; this should also be seen in

¹⁶Chapter Nine focuses on employees' arguments regarding these nodes of the model and shows how these arguments abound with references to organizational policies which have to be followed for the sake of organizational functioning.

combination with the pessimistic prospects of finding a new job in a similar manufacturing company, due to the financial depression in Greece, and in the international market, affecting this industry (see Chapter Four, section 4.3.).

6.6.3. Generalized Action Statements - A Reflection of the Organizational Myth

In sections 5.4. & 5.6.4., I referred to employees' general comments on conflict resolution. Even though these comments were not analyzed, they still offer an interesting point of comparison with the results of the analysis of both actual and hypothetical episodes. In general, employees comment on the success of efforts - theirs or others' working in the department - to find the optimum solution to the disagreement. Such comments were unanimous in the discourse of employees in both departments; comments like "conflicts are always expressed in here" or "conflicts are most often solved during initial discussions" abound in almost all the interviews held. For instance, an employee reports:

6:32 "I have the patience to discuss it, till we find the 'best solution'. So far, we have always reached an agreement [..]"

However, despite employees' agreement on the way in which they reason when talking about conflict handling practices in a generalized way, the analysis indicated that these comments do not correspond to what employees mostly experience. In section 6.4., we saw that everyday experiences reflect a general failure to resolve conflicts at an early stage, invoking the processes at the bottom part of the model (i.e. the use of more indirect and 'bureaucratic' practices of conflict resolution). Therefore, while daily practices suggest that conflict situations are not solved in an integrative way - and often keep recurring - employees' generalized discourse on conflict resolution practices ignores these occurrences. In this respect, a question inevitably arises: 'Why, in their generalized discourse about conflict resolution practices, do employees reason that most conflict incidents are resolved during the conversational stage of the model?' I believe that this very nature of generalized comments - as well as the unanimity of employees regarding these comments - reveals the existence of the shared framework which, in this case, draws on the organizational culture. These comments form part of the

`organizational myth' (see section 5.4.), which serves as a means of enhancing the survival of the organization (Schwartz, 1985). This myth appears to be particularly useful in the case of E.P.E., whose unfortunate financial situation has put the future of the company seriously at risk; under such circumstances, employees perceive their workplace as a friendly and harmonious environment, and this offsets feelings of anxiety which would have been raised otherwise. In this light, we can appreciate employees' comments about conflicts being resolved at an early stage, as well as a general tendency to minimize the importance of conflicts experienced¹⁷.

6.7. Accounting for Discrepancies in the Frequencies Reported - Particularities across the Two Departments

In section 6.6., I focused on the existence of common patterns in conflict behaviour in both departments; these common patterns were discussed in the light of the underlying social and organizational culture which is shared by employees of both departments. However, despite the common structure of the model, the analysis indicated some discrepancies in terms of the frequencies, according to which the various handling behavioural patterns were reported by employees of the two departments. This section discusses these discrepancies in the light of the conditions particular to each of these departments.

As shown in Figures 6.2.a-b & 6.3.a-b, in conflict situations between colleagues which have not been resolved during initial discussions, employees in R & D were found to appeal to an authority figure as a third party more often than employees in Supplies, the latter appearing to prefer referring to another colleague for the same purpose. For

¹⁷For instance, in the course of the interviews, employees usually had great difficulty remembering conflict situations in the context of their work group, or department. Even when they did recall such events, they would reason that this incident was really minor and was not even worth mentioning. This can be seen in terms of the concept of `simplification', which is a form of denial wherein problems are minimized, or even ignored (Watzlawick et al., 1974).

instance, out of the 12 occasions (in both actual and hypothetical situations) where intervention was sought in R & D, 11 concerned referral to the supervisor; on the other hand, only in 2 out of 6 similar instances in Supplies, did employees choose to refer to the supervisor. Calculation of the odds ratio¹⁸ indicated that employees in R & D are three times more likely to ask for intervention from their supervisor in order to assist in the resolution of their conflict with another colleague, in comparison to the Supplies Department. During the presentation of the R & D Department in Chapter Four (section 4.5.), I referred to the nature of the task performed in this department which entails a high degree of specialization, thus calling for the intervention of a supervisor to sort out any work-related disagreements. A former employee of the R & D Department, who is currently working in the Supplies Department, comments on his former department:

6:33 "[...] working in that [R & D] Department.. is a rather awkward job.. it entails a high degree of specialization..and if one is not willing to enlarge his work horizon and get involved to other issues as well [less related to his job].. well, this may create a lot of conflicts.."

On the other hand, employees in the Supplies Department rarely delegate responsibility to the supervisor to sort out a disagreement. I believe that this is related to the work structure in the department which enables employees to sort out work-related disagreements amongst themselves; an employee from Supplies talks about the structure of the work in the following way:

6:34 "Suppose there are 100 different types of material which the department has to bring into the firm. There's a work delegation: let's say that each of us is in charge of 15 types of material. We take turns so as each is in charge for different materials each time. In this way, we all become aware of all the materials in the market. By doing so, when somebody is absent, the rest of us don't have problems accomplishing their job."

Even in cases where no commonly accepted solution has been found, employees refer to another colleague - who is usually more experienced and well-respected by both participants. Referral to another colleague takes the form of asking for advice, since the other person does not have the power to enforce his/her position to the two

¹⁸This ratio was calculated as follows: (11:12 / 2:6) (see Figures 6.2.a-b & 6.3.a-b).

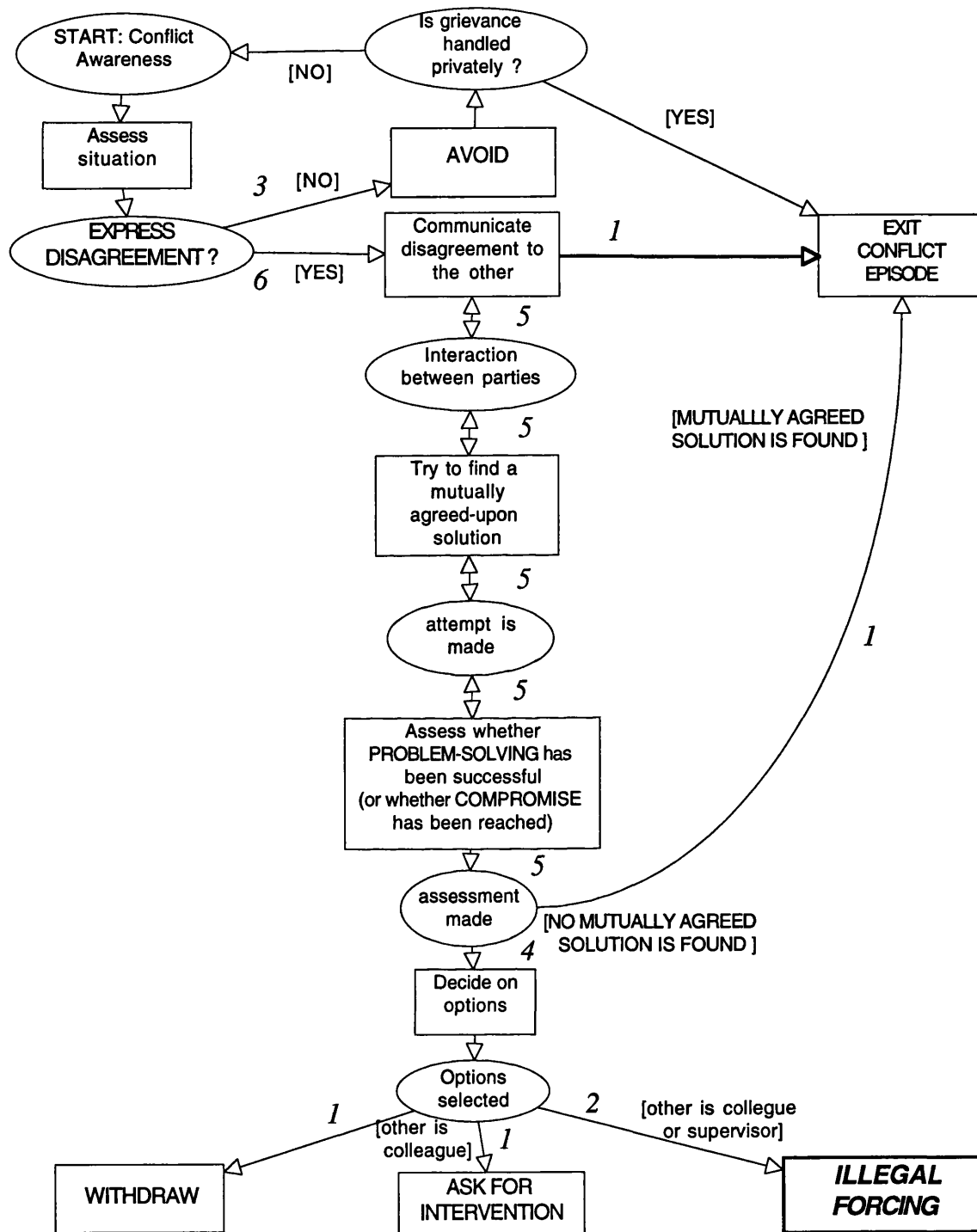
participants in the conflict. As extract 6:28 suggests, sometimes it is the other person who takes the initiative to assist his/her colleagues in resolving an ongoing disagreement. Moreover, referral to a colleague illustrates the existence of cohesiveness and close relationships among members of the Supplies Department.

With reference to appeals to the supervisor once-removed as a means of resolving a conflict with the immediate supervisor, there are no such incidents reported by employees from the Supplies Department (see Figures 6.2.a-b & 6.3.a-b). Even though the frequencies reported for this node of the model are too low to enable any definitive interpretation of the phenomenon, the absence of such reported events in the Supplies Department could be seen as a reflection of the employees' high respect for their supervisor; this person is very experienced and has been working in the company almost since its foundation; everybody in the department talks very highly of him. Reflecting on the cases of intervention from the manager one-level-up as reported in the R & D Department, in both situations, the employee who decided to ask for assistance questioned whether the decision of the supervisor was right (see section 6.3.2.2.).

6.8. The Case of Mr. X: An Exception to the Conflict Handling Model

When discussing the conflict handling model, I mentioned the case of an employee from the Supplies Department, whose accounts of the way he handles conflict situations do not follow the structure of the net model. For this reason, I drew a model of conflict handling behaviour which illustrates his behavioural patterns in the conflict situations he reported. This model is presented in Figure 6.4. and is based on the nine conflict episodes reported by Mr. X.

Figure 6.4. The Net Model of Conflict Handling Behaviour for Mr. X



As shown in the model, the divergence of this employee from the structure of the model, which is shared by the rest of the employees interviewed, is mostly manifest in the bottom part of the model, that is, after failure to reach a solution as a result of a

face-to-face discussion with the other party. Even though he sometimes reports following the pathways described earlier (e.g. withdraw from a conflict situation with a colleague), his behavioural practices in other conflict situations do not conform to the bureaucratic rules; instead, he takes 'active' steps in order to resolve the outstanding conflict. For instance, when attempts to sort out his disagreement with one colleague failed - after having being locked in the cycle of withdrawing from the situation and starting all over again - he used violence as a means of 'resolving' the controversy instead of asking for the supervisor's intervention. In regard to this situation, he reports:

6:35 "I had been patient for eight months. I was polite to him, in order to keep my 'nerves' under control. I behaved like that because I wanted to re-establish co-operation between us [...] [One time] I grabbed him and swept him off his feet; that moment, I was putting my job at risk.. I could lose my job or get a fine. I beat him up [...] Later on, someone called me and asked why I did it.. They told me to settle things with him.. That was all that happened. I didn't pay attention to him, ever again."

The incident of his disagreement with his supervisor is not much different; an ongoing disagreement with one supervisor resulted in his using 'illegal forcing' in the sense that he threatens to kill the supervisor:

6:36 "I had serious problems with a supervisor a long time ago [...] He was really powerful; he was a personal acquaintance of the boss. However, he was a fake.. all he wanted to do was to make profit at the expense of the firm..he also wanted to eliminate me.. I reached a point that I warned him 'if you hurt me, I'll kill you.. At your next move, I'll kill you with my knife.'"

This employee seems to be an exception, not only to the way that the rest of the employees interviewed behave during conflict situations, but also to the more general behaviour of employees in their workplace. When reviewing research on conflict escalation, we saw that the use of physical violence is characteristic of higher levels of conflict escalation (e.g. the third level of Glasl's model on conflict escalation which rarely appears in organizations) (see Chapter Two, section 2.5.2.2.). Therefore, it appears that Mr. X's behaviour lies outside the departmental, organizational, and wider social norms; this is also indicated by the fact that the rest of the employees in the

department recognized his behaviour as deviant since, immediately after the event, they intervened in the situation and, with the help of the supervisor, re-established 'order'. In the end, the situation has completely changed; a new kind of relationship had emerged both between Mr. X and the other colleague, and probably with the rest of the people working in the department; his action has undoubtedly set a precedent and thus affected any future interaction with the other person, and maybe with the rest of his colleagues.

Earlier on in this chapter, I referred to the case of an employee in Supplies who was fired as a consequence of refusing to comply with his supervisor. The fact that this kind of behaviour is beyond the organizational rules is also illustrated by the comments of the Head of the Department (see extract 6:21). In this respect, Mr.X's behaviour raises a question: 'Is Mr. X not aware that he risks his position everytime he does not comply with the organizational rules?' The answer to this question lies in his comments; in the interview extract 6:35, he stated that he was aware that he was putting his position at risk. So, even though he is aware of the fact that failing to comply with the norms may cost him his job, for some reason, he does not seem to care; instead, he keeps on using his own way of dealing with conflict. As he confesses at a later stage of the interview:

6:37 "I have two daughters who are old enough to take care of themselves; they are both working. So, I don't mind if I will be fired."

Even though Mr. X knows that he breaks away from the organizational norms, he does not appear to experience any feelings of regret about his behaviour, since he feels that he did the right thing. The most interesting aspect - for the context of the present study - about Mr. X's case and his refusal to follow the same patterns of handling conflict situations as his colleagues, is that his exceptional case further substantiates the conflict model presented in Figure 6.1. A proof of this argument is that Mr. X is treated by his colleagues - and, by generalization, the organization - as an exception. In the course of the conversations held between the psychologist and the social worker - while in my presence - they both referred to Supplies as a very cohesive department; however, despite the general cohesiveness, Mr. X did not appear to be treated as a member of

the in-group. According to the experiences of both employees in the Human Relations Office, the rest of the Supplies Department regards him as 'paranoid' (i.e. not a normal person); Mr.X is thus in a sense 'rejected' by the rest of the employees in the department. In *The Birth of the Clinic*, Foucault (1973) refers to the power of disciplinary discourses of normality and health to relegate the voice of 'the other' (i.e. 'the deviant') to mental institutions, where the outcast may be safely silenced and effectively vanished. In a similar way, Mr. X is regarded as constituting a 'threat' to the structure of the organizational system; for this reason, the system itself - through the organizational members who reproduce it - takes steps towards its maintenance. Viewing the same phenomenon through a different lens, Giddens (1979) referred to people who question institutional rules as being less 'imprisoned' within the 'dominant perspective' than others are; he went on to make a parallelism with Laing's thesis about schizophrenia in the sense that "the schizophrenic person 'sees through' features of day-to-day existence which the majority accept without demur" (Giddens, 1979; p.72).

6.9. Results of the Analysis of the Conflict Episodes Reported in Both Departments - A Summary

In Chapter Two, my criticism of existing research on conflict resolution focused on two points: (a) the majority of these studies have offered a static examination of the conflict behaviour since they disregarded examination of any possible behavioural changes in the course of the conflict episode, and (b) research on conflict resolution has often studied conflict behaviour separately from the context within which such conflict behaviour was embedded. Taking these criticisms as points of departure, I have set out to model conflict handling behaviour, as the latter evolves in the course of a conflict episode. Based on accounts of conflict episodes which were reported during interviews conducted with employees of two departments of a Greek manufacturing company, I generated an approximate net model of conflict handling behaviour. In this respect, this model should be seen as a result of an exercise undertaken by the present study, in modelling the accounts of conflict episodes, as reported by the employees

interviewed. The main aim of the first part of this thesis has been to develop a methodology for modelling the way in which conflict handling behaviour evolves in the course of a given episode. The way of modelling employees' behavioural practices which the present study proposed, also enabled the elicitation of the various ways in which the context within which the conflict episodes reported are anchored (i.e. social, organizational and departmental), bears implications on the various stages of the conflict handling process.

In regard to the modelling process followed, a detailed report was offered regarding both the analytical procedure followed when analyzing the information included in the accounts (see Chapter Five), as well as illustrating what the different parts of the model actually mean (see sections 6.1.- 6.3.). Due to the way in which conflict practices were modelled in this study, the net model presented in Figure 6.1. is a 'grounded' model of conflict handling behaviour, in the sense that it was developed as a result of an interface between empirical data and theoretical orientations (Jorgensen, 1989). On the one hand, the various nodes which are indicated in the model and refer to handling practices (i.e. 'express disagreement', 'avoid', 'get involved in discussions with the other party and attempt to find a mutually agreed-upon solution', 'ask for intervention', 'impasse', 'comply' or 'use forcing behaviour') were 'reported' in employees' constructions about conflict situations in their workplace. On the other hand, nodes such as 'assess whether conflict situation has been resolved', 'assess power conditions' and 'decide on options' did not come directly from employees' accounts, in the sense such statements were rarely stated explicitly; however, their inclusion in the modelling process was 'suggested' by the overall analysis of the conflict episodes examined. In general, I could argue that the modelling of the way in which these employees handle their conflicts drew on their own orientation and perspective of what happened, as this was revealed through their accounts of conflict situations. Thus, the exercise of modelling employees' conflict handling behaviour which the present study proposed, challenges existing practices in organizational research which exclude the participants' personal experiences and stories regarding the phenomena under investigation.

The estimation of the frequencies with which behavioural patterns were used in the 124 accounts of conflict episodes included in the analysis enabled the identification of common patterns of conflict behaviour between employees belonging to the same department, as well as between the two departments. The findings of the analysis of the conflict episodes illustrated consistencies found in both departments were discussed in terms of the common social and organizational background shared by all informants. While the upper part of the model mainly reflects a 'dialectic' approach to conflict resolution which originates from Greek tradition, the second part of the model illustrates that the way in which the majority of everyday conflict situations are handled in the context of both departments draws on the bureaucratic structure of the firm. Finally, the different frequencies, according to which the various behavioural patterns were exhibited in each department, were discussed in terms of conditions particular to that department.

6.10. Limitations of the Conflict Handling Model

As argued in the previous section, the way in which the present study has modelled employees' accounts of conflict episodes in E.P.E. has enabled us to understand the behaviours employees use when handling conflict situations in the light of the influence of the cultural and organizational framework, which is shared by these employees. In the main, and as the discussion of the present analysis illustrated, cultural and organizational prescriptions for action have been indicated through the consistencies found in the structure of the conflict handling model presented in Figure 6.1. The limited number of conflict handling behaviours (as portrayed in the net model), together with the great extent of consistencies found in the behavioural patterns enacted by employees in conflict situations, reflect - to a great extent - more or less 'automatic' forms of behaviour, in the sense that employees often do not reflect on the way they deal with conflict situations in their everyday work. In all these cases, there is only one pathway that employees reported using. This is illustrated, for instance, in conflict episodes between the supervisor and a subordinate which have failed to be resolved in

the upper part of the model; in these situations, supervisors invariably enforce their position to subordinates, which suggests that this behavioural pattern seems to be 'automatic' and 'commonsense'.

However, the discussion of the net model also reveals instances where employees appear to have the discretion to choose between alternative courses of action. For instance, in the upper part of the model (see Figure 6.1.), employees sometimes choose to keep their grievance private while, on other occasions, they communicate it to the other person. Similarly, in the bottom part of the model, employees may either comply with the supervisor or, instead, ask for intervention from another person higher up in the hierarchy. When the controversy involves another colleague, employees may choose either to refer to a third person (i.e. the supervisor or another colleague) to sort out the issue, or to withdraw from the disagreement, or, on the contrary, to reach an impasse.

Therefore, even though the analysis indicated that conflict behaviour has been context-dependent, in the sense that there was a limited choice of conflict behaviour from which different employees can choose during conflict situations in their workplace, there are cases where employees were found to differ in the way they handle their conflict situations. Even though one can use personality characteristics in order to explain conflict behaviour in conflict situations (e.g. some employees tend to express their grievances more than others), personality characteristics only provide a partial understanding of the phenomenon of conflict resolution (see critique of dispositional approach to conflict resolution). Moreover, as the analysis indicated, the same employee may use different behavioural patterns in similar situations; for instance, when in conflict with a colleague, s/he may choose to withdraw in one case, make an impasse in another case, and ask for the supervisor's intervention in a third, and so on. This finding illustrates that, when at a decision node, employees engage themselves in

a kind of 'assessment' of the situation and thus make a decision regarding what course of action to choose¹⁹.

In all of these instances, the net model of conflict handling behaviour falls short in accounting for what led employees towards a particular course of action rather than another one. In other words, explaining conflict behaviour in terms of context-determined prescriptions for action only cannot provide an adequate understanding of the process of conflict resolution either, since employees still have to decide on their behaviour and this decision is taken individually. Examining conflict resolution only at the level of handling behaviour indicated the different pathways used by employees in both departments in this organization; however, it did not enable us to understand how the choice of any particular behaviour was made. In this respect, attention will now focus on the way in which employees conceptualize a particular conflict situation, and how this conceptualization determines their subsequent choice of handling behaviour. Therefore, understanding of the process of conflict resolution involves not only examining the various behavioural patterns that employees follow when handling conflict situations, but also investigating the way in which they represent the particular conflict situation. In this way, the conflict handling behaviour used at the decision nodes of the net model will be understood in terms of the operations taking place in the process of this representation. Going beyond employees' behaviour implies going beyond the perspective of the 'observer', since conflict handling behaviour can, to a great extent, be observed by people 'external' to the conflict situation. Rather, by investigating the way that employees represent a conflict situation, and deliberate on how to handle this situation, the perspective of the actor is introduced into the present study. As discussed in Chapter One (section 1.7.), this perspective has been little studied by existing research on conflict resolution (Gray & Purdy, 1990).

Being aware of this limitation of the conflict handling behaviour model, Part II of this research sets out to address it, by examining the way that employees perceive and

¹⁹Since in these parts of the model employees were engaged in a decision making process, these nodes were called 'decision nodes'.

represent their conflict management problems. This examination will draw on the same accounts of conflict episodes which have, so far, been used for the modelling of employees' conflict handling behaviour. So far, and for the purpose of modelling the process of conflict handling behaviour, the analysis focused on those parts of the accounts which referred to what the person did in his/her attempt to handle the situation s/he was then reporting; in this sense, the focus of the analysis has been to map what happened in any particular episode, in terms of a chronological sequence of events; this chronological sequence is portrayed in the subsequent nodes presented in the net model. As discussed in Chapter Three (section 3.2.), when constructing accounts, people also make attributions regarding what caused the event, as well as giving reasons for their accounts. This information, which was also included in employees' accounts, reflects the way in which employees represent and make sense of the particular situation and is equally important in order to gain a global understanding of what is involved when an employee attempts to resolve a particular conflict situation.

The analysis of conflict episodes in Part II of the thesis takes into consideration all information reported by employees when constructing their accounts of conflict situations, since this information reveals their representation of the particular situation. The examination of employees' representations of their conflict management problems will increase our understanding of what guided employees in the behaviour they reported using in conflict situations, and, consequently, enable us better to appreciate what is involved in the process of conflict resolution.

Drawing on the same assumptions as in the first part of the thesis (i.e. the phenomenological and contextual nature of conflict resolution), my aim when modelling the ways in which employees represent their conflict problems is to further elicit how the social and bureaucratic frameworks - which are shared by employees - are portrayed, not only in the way the latter handle conflict incidents in their workplace, but also in their representations of conflict situations, as revealed in their accounts of such situations.

PART II

THE PROCESS OF CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

CHAPTER SEVEN

Investigating the Process of Conflict Management - Selection of a Methodology

7.1. Overview

Drawing on the fact that the discussion of the Net Model of Conflict Handling Behaviour identified certain nodes which cannot be satisfactorily explained at a behavioural level ('Avoid', 'Comply', 'Ask for intervention', 'Withdraw', 'Impasse'), the present chapter sets out to investigate the way in which employees represent their conflict management problem in these decision nodes. The main objective of this examination is to model the way in which employees represent their conflict management process in these decision nodes, by eliciting the various operations which take place within employees from the initial conceptualization of a particular problem situation till their commitment to a particular course of action. Modelling the different stages of the process of conflict management will also enable us to examine how this process, as well as the subsequent decision made, appertain to the social and organizational context within which employees act and perceive the world.

At the outset, I discuss the assumption that the process of conflict management should be seen as a decision making process. These decision nodes are examined in terms of a real-life personal decision making problem, based on the individual's subjective meaning representation of the conflict situation s/he encounters. For this purpose, I review developments within decision making theory, in order to illustrate how existing decision models have approached the decision making problem, and the extent to which these frameworks can be useful in organizing the conceptual, methodological and analytical needs of the present research. The review indicated that the bulk of this research has (a) drawn on experimental designs, thus accounting only for well-defined problem situations, and (b) focused on prescribing a specific way that individuals ought to follow when choosing among alternatives. Further developments in the field of

decision theory (a) offered a more psychological dimension to decision making, by introducing the notion of subjective meaning representation in decision situations; (b) allowed for a degree of initial problem structuring prior to making a decision, and (c) accounted for the importance of the context in understanding decision problems. Within this tradition, Humphreys and Berkeley's (1983) five level framework of problem representation will be discussed, with a view to illustrating its appropriateness as a decision analytic tool for the investigation and modelling of the way in which employees represent their conflict problems.

7.2. Conflict Management as a Decision Problem

As my argument in the second part of this thesis suggests, the process of conflict management in the nodes of the net model, as identified in the discussion chapter, resembles a decision making problem. The rationale behind this parallelism lies in the fact that decision making is conceptualized as the moment when individuals who face a problem are required to choose among alternative courses of action (Janis & Mann, 1977). The bulk of research on decision making has focused on the actual moment of decision making, that is, the decision that has been taken and its appropriateness to the particular situation. By adopting this approach to decision making, great emphasis was placed on the outcome of decision making (i.e. the decision itself), while the process followed in order to choose between the alternative courses of action was disregarded. However, this approach is problematic, since it fails to account for how the decision is made, and thus leaves unanswered the question of what leads the individual to choose one particular course of action rather than another. According to Simon (1978), an adequate account of situations characterized by a great amount of uncertainty necessitates an account of the procedures used for the choice among the various alternatives. Simon's argument is particularly relevant to real-world situations, in which the most salient characteristic is the uncertainty they entail. As Edwards (1983) advocates, all real decisions are made under uncertainty. In almost all decision

theoretic text books, the notion of uncertainty is linked with the nature of decision making itself. In this regard, Humphreys and Berkeley characteristically argue:

"Decision problems encountered in everyday life are invested with uncertainty; if this were not the case, they would not have been conceptualized as problems in the first place." (Humphreys & Berkeley, 1985; p.257)

Not only is uncertainty embedded in all real-life decision problems, but also the uncertainty that the decision maker faces, when dealing with a problem, is manifold. Berkeley and Humphreys (1982) have differentiated between the various types of uncertainty which an individual is likely to face when dealing with real-world decision problems; the various types of uncertainty are directly applicable to conflict situations in the workplace. To begin with, the employee is uncertain regarding what is involved in the conflict situation and how this situation can be represented, and how s/he can proceed with the representation and structuring of the problem (e.g. what information to seek and from whom)¹; this type of uncertainty is particularly difficult to handle, given the time constraints within which the conflict situation has to be resolved. The conflict management problem is also invested with uncertainty, in the sense that the employee may not be aware of the various possibilities of action alternatives that s/he has at his/her disposal under the given circumstances; or, s/he may not be sure about how to choose among the various conflict strategies the one that s/he most prefers. Moreover, the employee is uncertain about how to assess the possible consequences of his/her actions. When deciding on how to deal with a conflict situation, the organizational member is aware that his/her actions will not only affect him/herself, but also another person, that is the other participant in conflict. However, sometimes the two participants in conflict are not the only ones who are affected by the conflict situation; for instance, extract 6:35 illustrated how the decision of this employee to become violent towards his colleague had an impact on his relationships with the rest of the group. Therefore, such a decision is also invested with uncertainty regarding possible personal or even organizational outcomes. The employee is uncertain about

¹This type of uncertainty is also known as 'procedural uncertainty' and has been mostly neglected by decision research (Humphreys, 1984).

the probability of a series of events, which s/he employee assesses will follow his/her conflict behaviour, as well as about the extent to which s/he possesses agency to alter or interfere with the events that are likely to follow his/her decision. Finally, conflict management entails uncertainty about the way s/he feels after having taken a particular course of action. All this experience of uncertainty, faced by employees when dealing with conflict situations, is made even more perplexing by the fact that the way in which employees conceptualize and deal with conflict situations within their work context, is affected not only by their own personal goals and desires, but also by the rules set within the specific context of the organization (Chapter Two, section 2.6.).

7.3. Conflict Management: A Personal or an Organizational Decision Problem?

Jungermann (1980) based his distinction between personal and organizational decision making on who is primarily affected by the consequences of the decision to be made. According to his argument, in personal decisions, the outcomes of the action taken mainly affect the decision maker himself/herself; on the contrary, the consequences of decisions made within an organizational setting predominantly affect other people. However, he admits that "most self-directed decisions also have consequences for other people [...] and most other-directed decisions also have consequences for the decision maker him- or her-self" (Jungermann, 1980; p.8). Thus, the boundaries between personal and organizational decision making cannot be defined in a clear-cut manner.

The present study argues that conflict management is a personal decision problem. Even though the conflict situation emerges within the organizational context, it is the employee who faces the conflict incident and has to find a way to deal with it. The situation calls for personal involvement which raises feelings on the behalf of the participants. Moreover, as any personal decision problem, the conflict management process is likely to be affected by the characteristics of the individuals who are involved in this process, and which may vary depending on the individual. Such characteristics entail cognitive and motivational aspects, the coping patterns people use, as well as the

degree and type of uncertainty they can handle (Jungermann, 1980; Hogarth et al., 1980; Berkeley & Humphreys, 1982). However, examining the way that organizational members deal with conflict situations only in the light of the characteristics of the employee directly involved in it, fails to capture the complexity of the phenomenon. This is certainly the case, since the way that conflict is managed bears organizational consequences, and may also have organizational solutions. As the argument of this thesis holds, the way in which employees conceptualize and deal with conflict situations within their work context is framed by the work environment itself. In support of this argument, Humphreys and Berkeley (1985) postulate, personal decision problems, as well as organizational ones, are situated within the social world from which they draw their definitions; moreover, the implementation of any solution has consequences for this situation.

As the argument stands, conflict management can be treated within the mechanisms of personal decision making, in terms of what actually happens and how people experience it. When facing a conflict situation, employees experience it as a personal issue; they may personalize it, keep it for themselves and so on. However, in the meantime, the way in which employees handle conflict falls into the realm of organizational decision making, since the consequences entailed in conflict resolution have a bearing on the organization itself.

So far, my intention has been to illustrate how the conflict management problem is a real-life decision making problem, in the sense that conflict situations - as investigated in the first part of this thesis - are ill-defined situations, which are characterized by a great uncertainty regarding how to proceed to the choice of a particular course of action. Under the above considerations, the following question becomes one of crucial importance for the present study: "Is there an adequate way of modelling how employees represent their conflict management problem?". The following brief review of the relevant developments within the realm of decision making aims to address this issue.

7.4. Review of the History of Decision Theory

7.4.1. Normative and Relativistic Paradigms in Intuitive Decision Making

Decision theorists have often differentiated between two research paradigms as portrayed in the various decision models: the descriptive and the normative paradigm. On the one hand, the main concern of the descriptive paradigm is to investigate what people actually do; on the other hand, the normative tradition focuses on what people should do (Janis & Mann, 1977). The boundaries between the two approaches were never clearly defined, and it has often been the case that descriptive models would lend themselves to normative prescriptions.

From the outset, research on decision analysis has predominantly approached decision making from a normative perspective, and has attempted to establish certain standards which all individuals follow - or should follow - when making decisions. Early research on individuals' intuitive decision making has relied on comparisons between people's performance in decision making tasks and the outputs of a normative model. Hence, people's responses were cross-checked against certain standards prescribed by choice models. Due to the reliance on a set of norms, this approach is also known as the 'normative' paradigm². Since behaviour was seen as purposive and goal-directed, individuals were considered to choose the best of a given set of alternatives. The models within this tradition explained any deviation from the prescription made in terms of biases, and thus indicated that the decision maker's way of going about the problem was wrong. The underlying assumption of this approach has been that the decision making task can be represented only in one way (Berkeley & Humphreys, 1982).

²There is a slight difference between normative and prescriptive models. In general, while normative models focus on how people should act, prescriptive models go a step further and propose particular paths which individuals should follow in order to arrive at the 'ideal' decision. The distinction between the two types of models is, at times, very subtle.

A common characteristic in early descriptive and prescriptive models is that the representation of the decision problem was treated as given or structured in advance; this approach - which is appreciated in the light of experimental studies conducted during early research - did not allow for different (subjective) problem representations by different individuals. Winterfeldt (1980) has criticized the tendency of most research in decision analysis to try and fit the problem to the model instead of the other way round.

7.4.2. Early Value and Utility Models

Early research on the province of decision making excluded any possibility for subjectivity, by seeing values or expected values as objectively defined entities (Berkeley & Humphreys, 1982). The correct choice coincided with the highest value or expected value. Expected values refer to cases of uncertainty, and can be identified by multiplying the probability of a course of action by the value of its consequence. Following this tradition of research, probabilities were seen as objectively defined quantities.

Subjectivity first entered into decision analysis with Bernouilli (1738; reprinted in 1954) who introduced the notion of utility. He used the example of money in order to show that there is no exact relationship between the objective and the psychological value of items. For example, he argued that an increase in wealth of two thousand pounds does not have the same value for a wealthy man as for a poor man. With this example, he wanted to point out that it is the psychological value (utility), and not the objective value, which determines the worth of consequences; while the value of items is equal for everybody and determined by their price, the utility of the value of an item (i.e. the worth of the consequences) can be different depending on the person who makes the estimate (Balke, 1992).

7.4.3. Subjective Expected Utility

Despite the incorporation of subjectivity into choice behaviour in the early theories of individual choice, the utilities of consequences were still mapped as a function of their objective (monetary) value (Berkeley & Humphreys, 1982). Soon, decision theory acknowledged the subjective nature of probabilities, which allowed people to bring their own estimates of probabilities into a situation when there were no objective probabilities available³. As Subjective Expected Utility (SEU) theory postulates, the decision maker assigns a certain degree of belief to the likelihood of the possible consequences of an event; consequently, his/her choice is determined by the desire to maximise subjective expected utility. Decision makers may have different beliefs about the likelihood of possible consequences of events. Multi Attribute Utility Theory (MAUT) is a further development of SEU and maps the different possible options in terms of the individual's preferences on specific sets of attributes related to each of the options (Keeney & Raiffa, 1976).

The importance of the SEU approach for the scope of the present review is that, even though it follows the normative and rational paradigm in decision theory, the 'rational' decision maker is no longer expected to be consistent with objective criteria; rather, s/he is anticipated to be coherent within the bounds of his/her own 'small world' (Savage, 1972).

7.4.4. Behavioural Decision Theories

SEU has relied on the assumption that there is a well-defined set of alternatives and utility functions during the decision making process; people can therefore assign probabilities to these alternatives in a consistent manner and finally choose the one with the highest level of benefit (Simon, 1967). Soon, investigations centred on whether the

³The subjective nature of probabilities was established on the grounds that objective probabilities require a large number of repeated observations of the same situation, which is practically nonexistent (Savage, 1972).

decision making process was successfully described by SEU and, more generally, whether people followed the axioms of normative decision models (Fischhoff et al., 1983). All these models prescribed normative decision rules and specified a certain structure within which the problem would be represented (Humphreys, 1984). The underlying principle was that, when individuals are engaged in intuitive decision making (that is, when no aid was provided to them), decision making is inferior to the normative prescriptions offered by the decision models (Marouda, 1995).

During the mid 1960s, research in SEU led to the growth of a set of decision theoretic models, which, according to Balke (1992), can be encompassed under the name of Behavioural Decision Theory; these models are: Multi-Attribute Utility Theory (see previous section), Prospect Theory (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979), Social Judgment Theory (Hammond et al., 1986), Dominance Search Theory (Montgomery, 1983) and Image Theory (Beach & Mitchell, 1987); they attempted to address the limitations found in the principles of already established decision models. The main contribution of Behavioural Decision Theory to the development of the field can be summarized in two points:

First, it added a more psychological dimension to decision theory, by acknowledging human limitations and biases on information-processing, as well as the use of different strategies for different decision tasks (Einhorn, 1971; Kahneman et al., 1982). Experimental research, such as studies on cognitive heuristics, brought to light the existence of individual differences (Kahneman et al., 1982). For the first time, research shed light on the strategies (heuristics) that people use in the course of the decision making process. Concepts such as 'relative reality' and 'subjective views' oriented research focus on the different ways in which people capture and represent the problem situation. The evaluation of people's performance was gradually seen in terms of individuals' own perspectives (Berkeley & Humphreys, 1982).

Second, it was the first time that decision models approached decision-making as a process which could be represented in stages. For instance, Prospect Theory proposes

an initial phase of editing (during which the prospects are simplified), and an evaluation phase that leads to the choice of the prospect with the highest value (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979; 1986). Social Judgment Theory outlines such stages in terms of the individual's cognitive system: from identification of the judgment problem, to the exercise and analysis of it, ending with the display of results (Hammond et al., 1975). Image Theory (Beach & Mitchell, 1987) and Dominance Search Theory (Montgomery, 1987) make use of the same stages in the decision process; at the outset, the individual identifies alternatives and rejects those that are not assessed as acceptable. S/he then identifies the most plausible alternative and tests whether it can be chosen definitely. If s/he deliberates against that alternative, s/he then restructures the operations (Montgomery, 1983; Beach & Mitchell, 1987). While Image Theory is still in its early development and does not clearly specify the operations involved, Dominance Search Theory assumes that the individual uses cognitive dominance structures in order to evaluate his/her options; it also suggests changes in the representation of the decision situation, in the event of the absence of any dominant alternative. Finally, according to Phillips (1979), there are also certain stages for a typical Multi-Attribute Utility Theory analysis; it starts with an initial recognition of the problem prior to structuring it. Then, the criteria are specified (their consequences are evaluated and their weights are assessed) and utilities and probabilities are assessed, before applying the expected utility principle. The decision process comes to an end after a sensitivity analysis is made.

However, since these models lie within the normative tradition, they consider the individual to be at fault when s/he fails to follow the decision rules (as prescribed by SEU principles). According to the assumptions of these theories for such cases, the individual employs some cognitive heuristic, which leads to biases in the decision made. Instead of questioning the SEU principles or the pre-specified structure of the problem that those models prescribed, the decision maker was judged to be incoherent each time s/he deviated from the model's normative prescriptions (Balke, 1992; Marouda, 1995). Such an approach is based on the assumption that there is only one

`correct' way of thinking about the problem situation, the latter being assumed to be well-defined (and explicitly known to - if not constructed by - the experimenter).

7.4.5. Problem Representation in Real-World Problems

So far, in the course of my review on decision making research, I have attempted to illustrate that great emphasis has been placed on what constitutes a good decision. In this respect, the bulk of research in this field has focused on the evaluation of the decision taken on the basis of its consequences. Such a research focus has reduced the conceptualization of decision making to the outcome of the process (i.e. the decision itself) rather than to the entire process.

In the previous section, we saw that later developments in the decision analysis arena acknowledged the processual nature of decision making, in the sense that different models proposed various stages which individuals follow in the process of deciding. However, most decision models have been generated through experimental work (Kahneman et al., 1982); thus, the decision rules they propose can be applied to the structuring and resolution of well-defined decision problems which are artificial situations, created in the laboratory. Moreover, despite the various stages they propose, these models presuppose that a full understanding of the problem has taken place before the individual goes on to identify and evaluate alternative solutions; this also implies a well-defined decision problem.

Investigation of real-life situations led to the realization that these situations are often mixed-motive situations, as well as being ill-defined (e.g. regarding what the situation is all about)⁴. There is a great deal of uncertainty involved concerning the information to be sought, the sources of such information, the alternatives available, and the evaluation of their consequences (see section 7.2). With such uncertainty characterising the means of processing a decision, there was no room left for normative

⁴See relevant critique on the experimental research on negotiations in Chapter Two, section 2.2.1.

decision rules that would support the structuring and the resolution of the decision problems (Edwards, 1983; Marouda, 1995). As a consequence, structuring the decision problem - prior to solving it - was considered a crucial step in decision analysis. In the course of structuring, the ill-defined problem is turned into a well-defined set of elements, relations and operations that represent both the environmental parts of the decision problem, as well as the subjective views of the decision maker (Von Winterfeldt, 1980). In this way, the structuring activities are incorporated in the decision making process.

Moreover, the high degree of complexity and uncertainty involved in real-world problem situations called for the need to look at the subjective way that different individuals represent and deal with the situation in hand, while studying the problem solving process as an integrative whole. Looking at the representation and structuring of real-life decision problems differs considerably from the decision theories described earlier, since it allows for subjectivity to enter into research on decision making; that is, different people may have different representations of the same situation and thus proceed with resolving the situation differently. This led to a more psychological approach to decision theory.

Having acknowledged that individuals represent and structure their decision problem, before proceeding with their solving, called for an integrative way of looking at the processes by which such problems are eventually solved. Later research on the field focused on the investigation of the problem solving process as an integrated whole, rather than looking only at the decision part of it. The systems thinking approach belongs to this tradition of research.

7.4.6. A Systems Perspective on the Process of Problem Solving

As suggested by its name, the core idea of the systems thinking approach is the concept of "system"; this concept suggests that a set of elements can be connected together in a whole; the properties of the system are properties of the whole rather than of its

component parts (Checkland, 1981). According to systems thinking, such "holism" is reflected in our world which consists of 'wholes' or 'systems' (Marouda, 1995). A system also allows for connections between its elements in such a way that a change in one will have an effect on another. Building on the premise that one should approach the world as an integrative whole in order to understand it, systems thinking followers approached the problem solving process in an integrative way. Systems thinking - and the methodologies derived from it - looked at the process that people follow when dealing with a problem as a human 'cognitive system', in the sense that, during this process, people organize their knowledge in the form of structured frameworks which link various elements of one's knowledge into cohesive wholes.

Earlier methodologies within the realm of systems thinking focused on well-defined problems. According to Hard Systems Thinking - which represents an early approach to systems thinking - there is a 'known and defined end' in any problem process (Checkland, 1981). The main criticism of this approach is its failure to deal with subjectivity, by assuming the existence of well-defined objectives (Marouda, 1995). Soft systems thinking broadened the scope of systems thinking, in the sense that it explored problems in terms of different perceptions existing in people's minds (Jackson, 1991). It also put emphasis on the representation of the 'reality' within which the problem exists and must be solved. Soft systems methodologies focused on real-life problem situations which are ill-structured, in the sense that their objectives are difficult to define; these problems were often viewed as 'messy' (Ackoff, 1974). In their attempt to deal with these problems, people follow a number of stages in order to reduce the uncertainty of the problem, increase its structure, and finally turn it into a well-defined one. Moreover, methodologies within this tradition approach problems at a strategic level, in the sense that they do not turn ill-defined problems into well-structured ones, since such an attempt would end up with a new problem situation with different parameters. Instead, an ultimate representation of a problem requires consideration of the issues that determine how the problem has originally been conceptualized (Berkeley et al., 1989).

Having reviewed the major developments within the area of decision analysis and problem solving, I shall now briefly review research on conflict resolution and see how it approached the process of conflict management. The ultimate aim of this review is to situate my own research within existing research on conflict management.

7.5. The Normative Paradigm in Conflict Management Research

A review of research on conflict resolution reveals the predominance of the rational and normative paradigm in this field of study. This approach to conflict resolution can be appreciated through the researchers' preoccupation with predicting and - afterwards - controlling such behaviour through behavioural or structural interventions (Rahim, 1986). The normative approach to conflict behaviour has been represented mainly in bargaining research. According to Binmore (1987), most research on game theory has focused on what players ought to do rather than on how they actually decide. In order better to appreciate the prescriptive nature of bargaining research, we have to keep in mind that this research has built largely on Games Theory (see Chapter Two, section 2.2.1.). One of the tenets of this theory is the assumption that people are 'rational' thinkers. This assumption has guided bargaining research in accounting for negotiations that end up in an agreement, while disregarding cases in which negotiations break down. In general, when players deviate from the norms of the theory, such deviation is explained in terms of errors of judgment; as Billig (1976) suggests, the gaming approach aims to locate 'faulty' decision-making and correct such 'errors'.

The normative tradition of conflict resolution has been followed also by organization studies; one important study in this area of research is Walton and McKersie's theory of negotiation (1965). Even though this theory was developed for labour negotiations, it incorporates a theory of individual choice behaviour in integrative and distributive bargaining. This framework places attention on the measurement of the subjective expected utility (SEU) of the demand, and assumes that the aim of each negotiator is

to maximize this utility. In general, Walton and McKersie's model lies within the normative tradition of decision making research under risk, and has been criticized widely by social psychologists (Morley, 1979).

In general, research on conflict resolution as an individual choice abounds in studies which attempted to account for factors affecting the individual; these studies were later used as frameworks for predicting people's conflict behaviour. Both dispositional and situational models of conflict resolution (see Chapter Two, sections 2.5.1.1 & 2.5.1.2.) have focused on the relationship between conflict behaviour and a wide array of variables. Following the dispositional approach, Blake and Mouton (1964) examined the importance of high management achievement for the use of confrontational style. Drawing on the tradition established by Blake and Mouton, further research on the field focused on different aspects of human personality. A recent review by Womack (1988a) of studies regarding conflict behaviour indicated that these studies have usually focused on the effect that sex, need for control and personality dimensions (such as thinking versus feeling, introversion versus extraversion, Machiavellianism, communication apprehension) have on the way in which people handle conflict situations. In his eclectic model of intergroup conflict, Fisher (1990) highlights the importance of authoritarianism, self-esteem, and motives of personality (e.g. need for achievement, affiliation and power) for the subject being studied.

With reference to research on organizational conflict resolution, existing studies showed interest in the effects of various organizational characteristics on conflict behaviour; these studies have drawn on models of conflict behaviour and their relation to variables such as the degree of power possessed by parties, their referent role, time pressure, organizational climate and the organizational structure (Rahim, 1986; Wilson & Waltman, 1988). Further research focused on the relationship between the parties, their interests, and their desire to remain in the organization and their perception of attitude congruence with their counterpart (Rahim & Bonoma, 1979; Musser, 1982; Rahim, 1986; Kofron, 1986). Finally, there have been studies which focused on the effect that certain characteristics of the conflict situation itself (e.g. the type of conflict,

the amount of conflict, the importance of the issues and interests involved) have on conflict behaviour (Putnam & Wilson, 1982; Womack, 1988a). The main aim of these studies was to propose models which would show, in a systematic way, how the factors investigated affected the conflict behaviour used. In this respect, these models are descriptive, in the sense that their main aim is to represent how people generally decide how to behave in conflict situations. However, as indicated in the review of existing research on personal decision making (section 7.4.1.), descriptive models of conflict resolution are not devoid of making prescriptions for action (Lewicki et al., 1988).

7.6. Modelling the Process of Conflict Management - Conclusions drawn from the Review

The review of the literature on decision making has helped me draw certain conclusions about the process of decision making which are important for this piece of research, in the sense that they correspond to the approach to the conflict management problem which the present study has adopted. These conclusions will serve as guidelines in my choice of a suitable methodology for investigating and modelling the process of conflict management:

First, the investigation of the conflict management problem as a decision making problem should not focus only on the outcome of the decision making process (that is the nature of the decision itself); equal attention should be paid to the process followed by the individual in order to arrive at the particular decision, since the majority of the issues involved occur during this process. Focusing on the process, a suitable methodology for the modelling of the conflict management process will enable an understanding of what controls such a choice (i.e. how the choice is made).

Second, this process should be seen in a holistic way; for instance, employees' attempts to manage a conflict situation in a particular way need to be seen as an integrative part of the way in which they perceive and represent the specific conflict problem.

Therefore, a methodology for the modelling of the conflict management problem needs to account for the overall representation of the conflict problem. It should also take into account all forms of procedural uncertainty, rather than assuming that decision problems 'arrive on the scene' pre-structured.

Third, different people may represent and structure differently their conflict management problems; there is no 'right' or 'wrong' way of representing a problem.

Fourth, the idea of subjective problem representations, which depend on the individual's own perception of the problem situation, relates the decision process to the social situation within which it is embedded. In this respect, the importance of the social context in decision making is acknowledged; this is particularly important for real-life decision problems, such as conflict management, which do not occur in a vacuum (see Chapter One, section 1.2.3.). For instance, employees' conceptualization and structuring of a given conflict management problem is anchored - and becomes meaningful - in the context within which the conflict situation is embedded. Therefore, an appropriate methodology for the investigation of conflict management needs to account for the social context.

The issues identified above have to be taken into consideration when deliberating on the kind of methodology to use for the modelling of the conflict management problem.

7.7. The Five Levels Framework of Knowledge Representation

The five levels framework of knowledge representation was developed by Humphreys and Berkeley (1985) with the aim of facilitating decision making and decision analysis. It describes the operations and the elements necessary for representing and solving decision problems. Its core idea is that people conceptualize decision problems on five qualitatively different levels of abstraction; each of these levels entail a series of cognitive operations which need to be carried out in order for the problem inquiry to

proceed; these operations are not structures in themselves; rather, they are functional aspects of the structure formation (Berkeley & Humphreys, 1982). An assumption underlying the framework is that there is no 'right' or 'wrong' way of dealing with a decision problem (Humphreys, 1986). Rather, this framework allows individuals to represent and structure their decision problems within the bounds of their own perception of the problem situation. The basic principles which underlie the multilevel schema of decision structuring are (Humphreys & Berkeley, 1987):

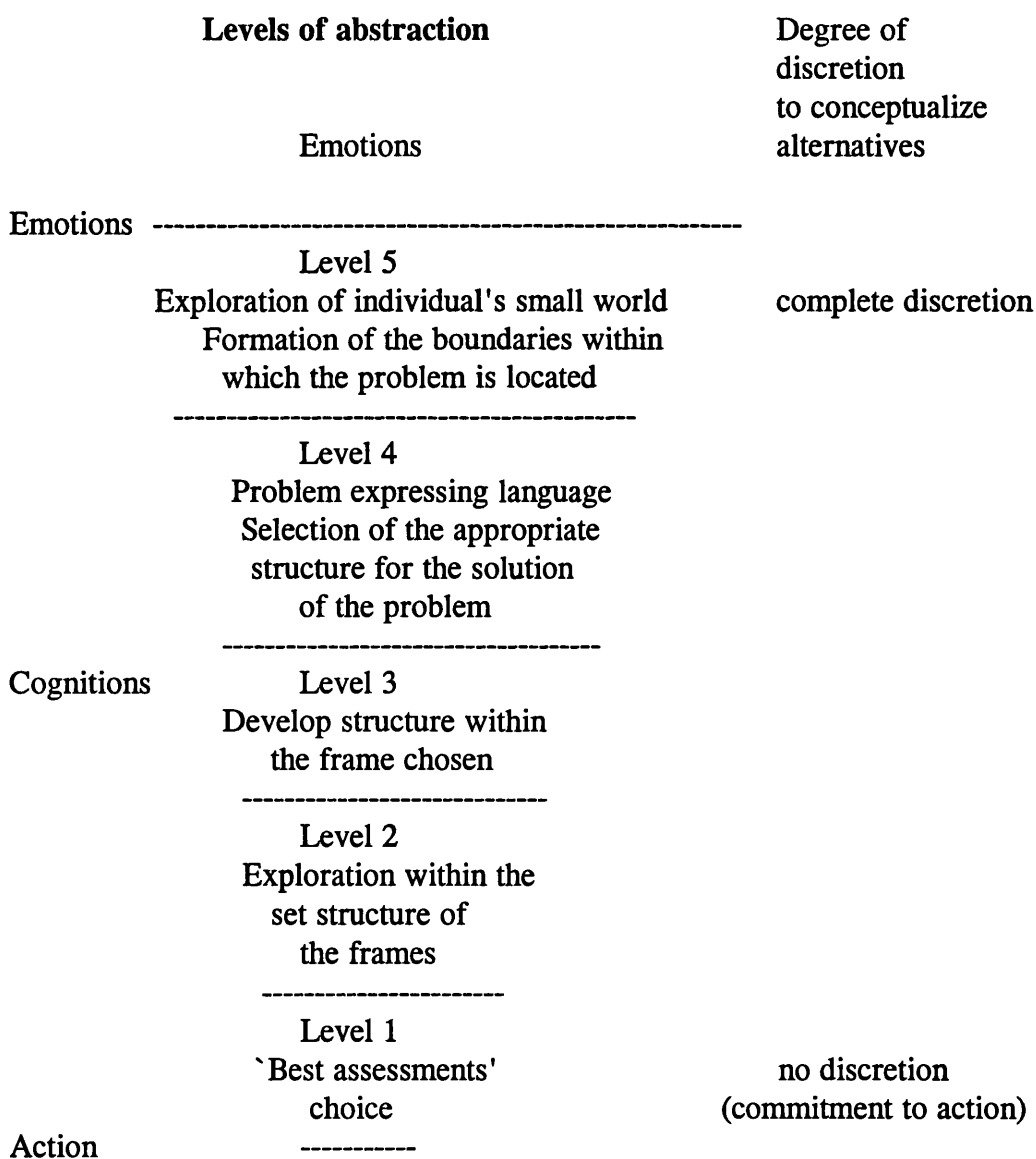
1. The cognitive operations which people follow when forming judgments are qualitatively different at each level of this process.
2. The outcomes of the operations which take place at any particular level put constraints on the way in which cognitive operations are carried out at all lower levels. For this reason, the examination of the decision problem should follow a top-down analysis⁵.
3. Any decision problem is potentially represented 'in the real world' at all levels; problems cannot be classified as 'Level 1' problem, or 'Level 2' problem and so on. Rather, any decision problem has to be examined in relation to how it is handled at each level. In this respect, the levels of the framework need to be seen as an integrated system within which the problem owner can move, rather than as logical stages, classified as a taxonomy (Humphreys, 1984).
4. The investigation of the individual's small world, within which the decision problem is represented, necessitates reconstruction of the paths that the individual uses in the course of his/her language discourse.

The activities entailed in each level of the multilevel framework are illustrated in Figure 7.1. This figure illustrates how an individual involved in the decision making process moves from the higher levels of the framework towards the solution of his/her decision problem; in the context of the present study, the figure describes the employee's

⁵In this respect, the five-level framework follows the systems thinking approach since the concepts of hierarchy and of organized complexity are fundamental in systems thinking. According to the systems thinking approach (as presented in section 7.4.6.), the world is organized into hierarchical levels and each level is more complex than the one below (Checkland, 1981).

decision making process when dealing with his/her conflict management problem. As the shape of the diagram indicates, there is a progressive reduction of uncertainty, as well as an increase in the structure concerning the nature of the problem; in the meantime, this continuous increase in structure of the problem situation is associated with a decrease in the decision maker's discretion.

Figure 7.1. Humphreys and Berkeley's Five Levels of Knowledge Representation
(adapted from Humphreys et al., 1987)



As the figure indicates, at the beginning of the process, the decision maker has only 'desires', emotions and goals that lack any kind of structure (Marouda, 1995). As the individual proceeds to the solution of the problem, the structure of the action becomes further developed until it becomes completely defined; this is needed for the attainment of the goals set at the beginning. At this point, the individual has no discretion but to commit himself to the course of action which he has already assessed as being the best one.

Even though this analytical framework describes the operations carried out in the representation of the problem, and thus indicates what is involved in the decision process, it only gives insights about how the individual can move through the different levels; it does not provide any specific rules regarding different possible transitions through the levels that different individuals may follow in the course of the decision process⁶. The fact that the model lacks such precise rules gives the decision maker the discretion to choose his/her own way of proceeding with the inquiry of the representation problem. In doing so, the model takes into consideration the individual's personal needs and subjective ways of representing the problem. Hence, since the process of representing and solving the conflict problem is situated within the person, and different people may approach the problem in different ways, the purpose of the multi-level framework is to outline the general framework that people follow when dealing with a conflict situation, without specifying the rules of transition.

Sections 7.7.1. to 7.7.5. discuss in detail each of the five levels of the framework of knowledge representation with a view to explaining the nature of the qualitatively different cognitive operations associated with each level. This is essential for the investigation of the conflict management problem, since, according to the framework, the analysis of the decision process is feasible through the identification of the different levels, as well as the operations involved at each level. The description which follows will be made in reference to the conflict management problem.

⁶In this sense, the multi-level framework is not a process model.

7.7.1. Level Five: Exploration of the Employee's Small World

The operations at Level Five are initiated when the employee starts expressing his/her feelings and concerns with regard to the conflict situation in which s/he is engaged. The decision process starts when s/he assesses that s/he is in a problematic situation and feels that something should be done about it. Since the operations involved at higher levels constrain the way that the conflict management problem is explored at lower levels, the activities carried out at this level are particularly important to the decision process, since any further exploration of the problem will be based on the aspects of the problem expressed at Level Five.

At this level, the employee perceives and represents his/her decision problem intuitively. S/he has complete discretion over his/her feelings and actions, even though the decision problem (i.e. conflict management problem) is not yet structured. However, his/her discretion lies within the bounds of his/her 'small world' within which the representation of his/her problem is located. The concepts discovered within the employee's 'small world' indicate the information s/he is willing - or able - to retrieve when representing his/her conflict management problem. The employee's 'small world' consists of mental constraints (e.g. abilities, motivations and goals related to the task), past experiences and learning, as well as of constraints imposed upon him/her by the context within which the problem situation lies. According to Savage (1972), an individual's 'small world' is formed within the bounds set by the 'grand world', which is structured at a social level; in the case of conflict management, an employee's representation of the conflict management problem is guided at Level Five by traditions and values in use in the particular social and organizational context within which the person perceives the problem. These experiences serve as a kind of 'wisdom' which is shared largely by employees and 'received' by the 'grand world'. However, even though 'received wisdom' defines the boundaries within which any particular representation of the conflict management problem is located, each employee further elaborates on the issues s/he considers relevant to his/her particular problem

and, according to his/her own past experiences, goals and motivations, defines his/her 'small world'.

The concepts which an employee uses in order to conceptualize and explore his/her conflict problem lie within his/her own 'small world'; these concepts may refer to various aspects of the problem which s/he thinks are relevant to the particular problem situation. For instance, the employee mentions issues related to the structure of the organization or of the work unit, the nature of the task, personality characteristics and so on. The following interview extracts present some issues which were taken into consideration by various interviewees when representing their conflict management.

"The way I behave during conflict situations reflects the way I really am; that's my character."

"I was new in the company then [...] When you are new in a job, people do not appreciate your opinion."

"It's true; people do not behave in their work context in the same way; the kind of intimacy is different when I am with my friends"

All these issues have an effect on the employee's (i.e. decision maker's) operations, and thus shape the boundaries of his/her perception of the problem situation. The comment of a supervisor in the Research group, when referring to conflict situations in the workplace, summarizes some of the issues raised in a short phrase:

"It's a combination; it's the career..your personality..your family background .. And, apart from your character, it all depends on the 'field' in which you have to play (*he talks about conflict in terms of a football match*)..whether it is grass or just dry soil..the company has an effect..on whether you show your 'good' self."

Even though, in the course of their discourse about their conflict management problem, employees refer to different issues, they are not consciously aware of the constraints put on them by these issues. However, the issues explored at this level define the boundaries of the employee's perception of the problem situation; in other words, these issues form the boundaries of one's own small world, within which one feels safe to proceed with one's scenario exploration. According to Berkeley and Humphreys (1982), when exploring the problem, the individual takes certain paths, makes

contingency plans and follows a scenario within this representation. All these constitute his/her 'background of safety' and demarcate the 'area' which the employee feels safe to explore. In cases where the latter finds a 'gap' in his/her scenario exploration (i.e. there are no contingency plans for handling the situation), s/he feels unsafe and experiences fear, since s/he does not know any alternative solutions or scenarios by which s/he can proceed in the exploration of the problem. For instance, when talking about his choice to comply with his supervisor, an employee of the R & D Department reports:

"In conflicts with your supervisor, it's always a fear lurking in the back of your mind [of losing your job]."

According to this employee, thinking about the possibility of losing his job induces feelings of fear and insecurity; this (unfortunate) possibility is a determinant of the way in which he represents and further structures the conflict situation. He refuses to make any contingency plans or to reflect on what may happen if he expresses his disagreement or even fails to comply with the supervisor's opinion, since that would mean going beyond his 'background of safety', which his present job offers. On the other hand, Mr. X from the Supplies Department, who used violence against his colleague (see Chapter Six, section 6.8.), goes beyond his background of safety, at least as far as the fear of losing his job is concerned;

"I beat him up [...] I was aware of the fact that I was putting my job at risk; I could even get fired."

Looking at the employee's small world, within which the decision problem is represented, involves the reconstruction of the paths that the person uses in the course of his/her language discourse. However, approaching and analyzing the individual's knowledge representation at Level Five is an arduous task for the researcher, since the cognitive operations involved at this level are in themselves beyond language (Humphreys, 1986). As Jameson (1977) argues, even the individual is not able to represent the decision problem structures of this level in his/her own language; in other words, s/he cannot use "his/her own language to describe his or her small worlds 'from the outside'" (Humphreys and Berkeley, 1985; p.272). For these reasons, in

order to investigate how the individual operates at Level Five, the researcher needs 'internal exploratory techniques', rather than external models (Humphreys, 1986). For instance, in her empirical analysis of career decision making through the use of Humphreys and Berkeley's five levels of knowledge representation, Marouda (1995) established a number of domains that adolescents used when facing deciding on what career to pursue. Within these domains, the exploration of adolescents' small worlds at Level Five was represented. However, each decision problem requires a different model, and there is no model which is applicable to all decision problems (Toda, 1976).

7.7.2. Level Four

Since the boundaries of the employee's small world have already been set at Level Five, the way that s/he proceeds in the decision process is considerably constrained. These constraints will determine the way in which the problem will be structured and represented from now onwards. At Level Four, employees express in language the way in which they have conceptualized the problem at Level Five. At this level, they are mainly concerned with identifying the structure of the conflict management problem which will facilitate the further analysis of the particular conflict situation. Not having total discretion over the problem any longer, the employee can only choose among different ways of structuring and framing the problem. The structure chosen consists of all the issues which are regarded as relevant to the structuring process. The choice of structure is determined by what s/he thinks is the most appropriate way of handling the problem which, as already argued, is idiosyncratic; different people may use different structures and different kinds of language for the 'same' problem. The operations carried out at Level Four involve linking different alternative solutions to the contingencies of the problem in a coherent way. Only the structure of the frame to be used is selected at this level; the contents of the frame chosen are given by the operations in Level Three. The structures and frames chosen for the problem representation indicate what the person is prepared to explore when considering the problem. Such a 'search space' is quite large.

A substantial amount of research has been devoted to understanding and analyzing the knowledge representation of a decision problem. Fox (1985) proposed the use of semantics as a means of representing and understanding the knowledge of a problem, through the analysis of the individual's linguistic expressions. Further research has also argued for the use of language as a vehicle to investigate the problem solving process (Minsky, 1975). So far, different concepts have been used in order to identify the formulae which individuals use in representing their knowledge about a problem situation. For instance, the concept of "schema" alludes to the cognitive structure which represents knowledge about a problem, and which consists of attributes and the relations among the attributes of this problem situation (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). Going beyond the concept of schema, which takes the form of a generalized context of knowledge about conflict, research has used the notion of frame, which refers to more specific structures that people use to make sense of their conflict situations (Stefanakis, 1992). Like schemas, frames have been conceptualized as semantic representatives; they are organizing principles consisting of elementary and identifiable units of meaning, which are represented and expressed in the individual's language discourse (Vari et al., 1987; Marouda, 1995). Within a frame, the relations among the elements of the conflict situation are described. By linking all the relevant elements together, the person builds up a coherent frame which s/he uses in the process of decision making in order to move towards the solution of a particular problem. Hence, frames can be used as a means of structuring and analysing the decision problem. In fact, they have been used widely in the province of decision theory under different guises - e.g. trees, maps, flow charts, vein diagrams - (Von Winterfieldt, 1980); or in different forms such as Multi Attribute Utility frame, Future Scenarios (Ducot & Lubben, 1980; Jungermann, 1985; Von Winterfieldt & Edwards, 1986). Going beyond the concept of frames, Schank and Abelson (1977) developed the notion of "scripts", which provided more information about actions which are not explicit from the beginning.

Following a similar line of theorising, Toulmin (1958) proposed a framework in order to capture "the over-all structure of the process of reasoning" (Mitroff et al., 1982; p.1392). According to his argumentation theory, (which was extensively presented in

Chapter Three, section 3.3.1.), a thorough examination of the entire chain of reasoning (i.e. the individual's 'argument') will elicit the person's effort to give reasons for why s/he acts the way s/he does, and will shed light on both explicit and implicit statements (Mason & Mitroff, 1981). By showing how and why a particular alternative has been assessed as predominant over the others, people justify their decisions and become further committed to a course of action (Montgomery, 1987). In this respect, argumentation theory appears to offer a methodological framework for the investigation of Level Four of the multilevel framework. Following the thorough presentation of Toulmin's structural layout of argument in Chapter Three, next section illustrates how Toulmin's framework will be used for the analysis of employees' accounts in the context of the present study, as a means of eliciting the activities taking place at this level of the conflict management process (according to the multilevel framework).

7.7.2.1. Argumentation Analysis - Using Toulmin's Layout of Argument Structure as a Means of Eliciting the Operations Carried out at Level Four

According to the five level framework, at Level Four, the employee 'puts into words' the problem exploration in his/her own language discourse. His/her process of reasoning is now presented in a structured way; within this structure, the employee can make claims regarding which issues are important for the conceptualization of the problem. As mentioned in Chapter Three, Toulmin has proposed a structural framework in order to examine individual's structure of argument. For Toulmin, argumentation refers to an activity of making claims, challenging them, backing them by providing reasons, criticizing those reasons and rebutting those criticisms. An important characteristic of Toulmin's model is its a focus on the functional roles of the various elements entailed in an argument, rather than the argumentative form. According to Toulmin's argumentation theory, argumentation is a movement from accepted **Data** through a **Warrant** (or **Backing**) to a **Claim**. Below, I discuss an example of a conflict management problem, following Toulmin's framework of argumentational structure, which was presented in Chapter Three (see section 3.3.1.). In this example, which is an extract from an interview with an employee, I discuss the

function of the elements of the argument as a defence of an opinion against an (imaginary or real) interlocutor who challenges it.

"I just wanted to take in some information since I was new in the job (Data). He was very ironic as a person (Data) [...] I complied with him [the supervisor] (main Claim). I was new to the company and he was my immediate supervisor (Warrant). Even if I had kept on disagreeing with him (*not comply*), he would not have paid any attention to me (claim). When you are new in a company, you cannot really say much (Backing)."

In the above interview extract of a particular conflict management problem, the employee's main claim "I complied with my supervisor" follows from the information (i.e. data) that "I just wanted to take in some information.." and "He was very ironic as a person". At this stage, the relationship between the data used and the claim to be supported is not yet apparent, in the sense that we cannot tell why the specific information of being a new employee in the company, as well as of considering the other person to be ironic, is relevant to the person's decision (i.e. claim) to comply with his supervisor. This relation is revealed through the use of the warrant "I was new in the company and he was my immediate supervisor" which illustrates how the data supports the particular claim. However, at this stage, we still need further justification for the warrant presented; in other words, the person needs to explain what makes him/her think that the warrant adduced is valid. For this reason, the person refers to his/her belief that "when you are new in a company, you cannot really say much [*especially to your supervisor: my addition*]". With this argument, the employee attempts to justify the way he dealt with the specific conflict situation. For this reason, he framed his claim and structured different aspects of the conflict situation in such a way that the conflict behaviour chosen was regarded as the 'best' alternative available.

The previous example constituted a case of a complete argument, where the employee made use of data, a warrant and a backing, in order to justify his decision to comply with his supervisor. However, as already argued, the structure of an argument may not be fully presented on each occasion, especially in ordinary argumentation (see Chapter Three, section 3.3.1.). For this reason, and in order to ensure an understanding of real-life argumentation the analyst needs to identify the missing elements of the

argument examined. The elements which the arguer may leave unstated may be the claim of the argument, or the data, on the basis of which this claim is stated, or the reasons (either in form of warrants or backings) in support of the claim of the argument. The elements missing in an argument have usually been found to be those argumentative components which the arguer considers to be well-known - or assumed - by his/her interlocutor; argumentation research has indicated that these elements often represent the 'because' part of the argument (i.e. the warrant or the backing) (Marouda, 1995); this is due to the fact that individuals do not always make explicit references to their beliefs and value systems, when presenting an argument. The importance of inferring the 'because part' of people's argumentation (when missing) lies on the fact that the existence of these beliefs - which often remain unstated - is necessary for the components of the argument to hold together, while their acceptability - to the listener - is a necessary condition for the argument to be persuasive. For this reason, the argumentation analysis undertaken in the present study will centre on the elicitation of the reasons underlying employees' argumentation on their conflict management problems, and which may be either presented explicitly or remain implicit.

In Chapter Three (section 3.3.1.1.), I also referred to the criticisms made by argumentation researchers in regard to the application of Toulmin's framework in real-life argumentative texts. The overview of these various points of criticism indicated that suggested that the difficulties in differentiating between the argumentative elements of everyday argumentation, as presented in this framework, were predominantly related to the researchers' focus on the description and the evaluation of arguments examined, in terms of the elements which the arguer has manifestly stated; in other words, the predominance of argumentation analysis has centred on the examination of what is presented at the level of the particular argumentative text examined. However, as argued earlier, the argumentation analyst needs to go beyond the level of the text by taking into consideration the situational context within which a particular argument is situated (e.g. both in terms of the wider discourse, as well as the social situation which gives meaning to this discourse); this approach on argumentation analysis will allow

to the analyst to make more 'informed' interpretations of what the arguer intended to communicate when presenting his/her argument.

As mentioned at the outset of this section, at Level Four, employees express, in language discourse, the way in which they conceptualized the conflict management problem at Level Five. Since, at this level, employees are mainly concerned with identifying the structure of the problem, I decided to use Toulmin's layout of argument structure as a descriptive tool which will enable me to (a) model the way in which employees represent their conflict management process at this level of the multilevel framework, and (b) examine - via the elicitation of the argumentational structure - how the various aspects of the contextual background (i.e. social, organizational and departmental) are portrayed in the elements employees used when arguing about any particular conflict management situation. As my argument holds, by approaching Toulmin's framework as a descriptive layout of argumentative structure containing elements which may not have been stated explicitly, and which thus need to be inferred from the context within which the particular argument occurs, as well by providing definitions for its elements according to the context within which the framework will be used (i.e. argumentative discourse within an organizational setting), the application of Toulmin's model as a means of analyzing people's discourse will be facilitated.

7.7.3. Level Three

At Levels Five and Four, the employee had been working only on the 'content' of the problem; what s/he was prepared to explore. At Level Three, this content is given a form since the problem is now represented in terms of relationships, and the worth of the elements of the overall frame; this leads to a progressive reduction of the complexity and ambiguity of the problem representation. At Level Four, the person works within the particular frame chosen at the previous level. The employee is now involved in developing a strategy in order to assign more structure to the problem, and further define the relations of the structures identified previously. Even though the

structure of the frame was selected at the previous level, the contents of the chosen frame are given by the operations carried out at this level.

The concept of frames - as used here - alludes to coherent structures within which the different attributes of the problem situation are linked together; they are semantic representatives which are expressed in the employees' language discourse and can serve as a means of structuring and analysing the conflict problem. Thus, the choice of a particular frame on the behalf of the decision maker leads to different ways of analysing a given problem. The following principles are important to the study of frames:

(a) there is no 'right' or 'wrong' frame, since they are semantic primitives which represent the knowledge of a particular problem as actually structured by the problem owners. Since the entire process of the conflict management problem is subjective, different employees who are involved in the same conflict situation may well use different structures for the representation of their conflict management problem (Pinkley, 1990).

(b) since different analyses can be employed for the analysis of the same problem, the frames to be used when investigating a problem have to be agreed upon in advance (Marouda, 1995).

In section 7.7.2., I presented a variety of frames which have been used in decision theory. In the present study, I have used three frames as a means of representing the way in which employees structure their knowledge of their conflict management problem. These frames have been widely used in intuitive personal decision making as a tool for the investigation of the way individuals structure their decision problems (Humphreys et al., 1987; Marouda, 1995) and are:

- (a) Future Scenario Frame;
- (b) Multi Attribute Utility Frame (MAU);
- (c) Rule-based Frame.

Future Scenario Frame

Research on decision making has shown that individuals often frame their thoughts in terms of future plans; in other words, people usually structure a particular problem they face in a probabilistic way, regarding what may happen in the future in terms of consequences and outcomes. Structuring a problem in terms of a scenario entails representing a perspective of the future; in this sense, a scenario offers the framework within which potential futures can be represented as sequences of events, actions and consequences, which are likely to happen under certain conditions (Jungermann, 1985). For example, in a conflict management problem, an employee structured his conflict management problem in a Future Scenario frame as follows:

"This issue caused an ongoing problem with my supervisor which continued for a long time. I hadn't discussed the issue with him (*Node: Avoid*). I wanted to believe that things were going to change, since I knew the reason underlying his behaviour."

This employee has structured his conflict management problem in the form of a potential future plan: "Right now, I have a problem with my supervisor. I choose not to express my grievance to him. By doing so and by being patient for a little while, I believe that this problem will cease to exist." This scenario is probabilistic and represents one of many possible perspectives of the future; for instance, it does not account for the possibility of the person not expressing his grievance and the problem still not going away.

Scenario formulation includes goal setting and planning. Even though many studies on decision analysis have focused on goal setting and planning (Beach, 1990), there have been few studies which have used future scenarios as a tool for the investigation of problem structuring in personal decision making (Marouda, 1995).

MAU Frame

The theoretical underpinning of this frame resides in the Multi Attribute Utility Theory as developed by Raiffa (1968). This theory addresses decision situations in which there are more than one alternatives to choose from; in these situations, the individual has

to evaluate the alternatives available to him/her by using a set of criteria (Wishuda, 1985). These criteria are different attributes related to each of the alternative solutions to the problem in hand; in this sense, the individual may have to choose between various multi-attributed alternatives to his/her decision problem. Taking into consideration the fact that people have 'bounded rationality' (Beach, 1987) and limited capacities for information processing, the identification of all possible solutions, as well as of the criteria for the different solutions, cannot be complete.

Drawing on this theory, the Multi Attribute Utility Frame (MAU) is used in order to represent the way that individuals structure their decision problems when attempting to decide which of the alternative solutions to choose. In this frame, the employee assesses the trades-off between the benefits and drawbacks of the alternatives which s/he considered relevant to explore in the particular conflict management problem. The structure of this frame enables him/her to express his/her problem in terms of which attributes are important to him/her for distinguishing between alternative consequences. By listing the attributes which s/he assesses as being important for the selection of a particular course of action, the employee makes explicit what actually controls his/her choice between the courses of action. The following interview extract illustrates how the conflict management problem has been structured in a MAU Frame:

"[I decided not to express my grievance to my colleague] (first alternative, implicit). I could have expressed my complaint to my colleague (second alternative), but I thought that it was much better if I didn't, with regard to good working relationships between colleagues (first attribute). Because I didn't know how my colleague would take my comment, I didn't want him to think that I was giving him a serious warning. I didn't want to put extra pressure on him, since I knew that he was stressed out (second attribute)."

In this example, the employee evaluates two alternative courses of action: express his grievance - avoid expressing his grievance. Two attributes were important in his evaluation of these two alternatives; these attributes are interrelated. First, it was important for him not to 'jeopardize' his good relationship with his colleague; second, he did not want to stress his colleague, since they had a friendly relationship. These

attributes support the employee's choice of the first alternative (i.e. not expressing his grievance)⁷.

Rule-based Frame

When a person uses a Rule-based Frame in order to represent his/her problem, the alternative solution is chosen on the basis of certain rules; these rules may derive from various principles and beliefs (Svenson, 1976) and stem either from his/her own experience or from the experience of others. The rule/s used by the individual restrict his/her freedom of choice and lead him/her towards choosing one solution rather than another. In this case, there is no trade-off between various alternatives, since the rule used prescribes to the individual what course of action to take. Moreover, the employee is not able to assign values nor make best assessments regarding what is the best solution. For instance, the use of the decision rule "when you disagree with your supervisor, you lose your job" can lead the employee to avoid expressing his disagreement to his supervisor:

"I don't express my disagreement [to the supervisor] (*Node: Avoid*) because I may be afraid of my supervisor. I am afraid of the supervisor.. of losing my job (Decision Rule). That is what usually happens when somebody has a low position in the hierarchy; one starts liking his position too much [in order to jeopardize it].

The use of this rule constrains the employee to a single course of action (i.e. avoid expressing his disagreement); it removes any discretion over choosing among different alternatives, in the sense that it does not allow the problem owner to explore the problem beyond the constraints set by the rule espoused. In a way, this case is an artificial situation of 'automatic decision making'. As Schoenfeld (1983) has postulated, these rules can only be appreciated within the specific context upon which they are based.

⁷The fact that the conflict management problem reported here has occurred and been resolved in the past, is related to the way that the employee reconstructs the particular problem; as we shall see in more detail in Chapter Nine, section 9.5.1., in the course of past reconstruction, employees represent and structure their conflict management problem in a way that justifies their choice of alternative.

7.7.4. Level Two : What-if Questions

Since the structure of the problem representation has been developed at Level Three, the operations carried out at Level Two entail generating hypotheses based on "what if" questions; these questions refer to what will happen if there is a change in the values of the existing structure. In other words, the employee proceeds towards solving his/her conflict management problem through changing the values of aspects of the problem at each node of the structure s/he has chosen in order to represent this problem. The exploration is made within the structure already established, and only one value may be changed at any one time (Humphreys & Berkeley, 1985). In decision analysis, "what if" questions have been referred to as "sensitivity analysis" (Humphreys, 1984). For instance, the employee may wish to explore what could have happened if s/he had expressed his/her grievance to the supervisor:

"If I hadn't behaved the way I did (that is, if I had expressed my grievance), this would have had a bad effect on me; I could have even been fired."

As indicated in this example, the employee makes a hypothesis about what could have happened if he had chosen to communicate his grievance to his boss. This hypothesis is expressed as a proposition and it refers to a hypothetical event, rather than a fact. Moreover, as becomes apparent in this extract, the exploration of the "what if I had expressed my grievance.." question is made in terms of the worst case scenario; in this particular case, the 'worst case scenario' for the employee is the possibility of losing his job, which inevitably induces feelings of fear and insecurity. As discussed in section 7.7.1., any 'worst case scenario' is defined as such under the influence of the social context within which the employee lives.

7.7.5. Level One : Best Assessments

At this level, the structure is completely fixed. The employee has discretion only in the extent to which s/he subjectively assesses elements of the structure which has already been developed in order to handle the problem. At this point, the employee

focuses on ordering his/her preferences regarding the various alternatives that have already been identified in earlier stages. S/he determines the trades-off between these alternatives and deliberates on which is the best alternative for the solution of the problem. In order to do so, s/he aims to make 'the best assessment' of the probability of the occurrence of a particular event, or of the degree of preference order for the alternative solutions (Humphreys & Berkeley, 1983). Such an assessment is based on evaluations performed at higher levels, about which alternative weighs more in different attributes. Operations involved when making best assessments are necessary for the problem owner to determine the trades-off between the alternatives identified in the course of the decision analysis. In conflict management problems, employees may choose to express their grievances, rather than keeping them private (Node: Avoid), by making a series of judgments, such as:

"I believe that expressing your disagreement to the other is the best thing to do."

"When you have a discussion with the other person, you always realize that there is no real conflict between the two of you."

7.7.6. Usefulness of the Five Levels Framework in the Context of This Study

In section 7.6., I highlighted some issues which need to be considered when choosing a suitable methodology for the investigation and the modelling of the process of conflict management. Humphreys and Berkeley's multilevel framework fulfils these requirements in the following way:

First, the framework sheds light on the process that the individual follows in order to reach a particular decision; its processual approach is illustrated in the description of the five levels and the qualitatively different activities involved at each level of the decision making process. The individual needs to carry out the cognitive operations associated with each of the levels in order to be able to proceed with his/her decision problem. Moreover, the five qualitatively different levels, as well as the activities

involved at each level, are general enough to leave room for the various forms of uncertainty encountered in real-life decision problems (see section 7.2.).

Second, the five levels framework treats the decision process as an integrative system with interrelated components. The levels it describes are not logical stages or a taxonomy; rather they are seen as an integrated system. Such an approach provides a holistic representation of the process of deciding, the various components of which are reflected in the individual's language discourse.

Third, the framework allows for different (subjective) meaning representations of the problem situation; different people may conceptualize and structure differently the 'same' decision problem.

Fourth, the framework views both the decision problem and the process of deciding as parts of the social situation within which the problem owner works. The social context is embedded in the process of deciding through the notion of the 'small world'. Since an individual's 'small world' is set within the bounds of the social world, the way in which any decision problem is represented and structured at all five levels is affected by the social world. For instance, at Level Five, the decision maker's operations are culturally defined, since the social context provides the possibility of different 'small worlds' within which the problem can be located. The issues which the individual assesses as relevant for the description of the problem are expressed at Level Four, through the means of language which is provided - and thus constrained - by the social world. At Level Three, the social world offers different possibilities for structuring the problem. At Levels Two and One, it provides the grounds on which the decision maker explores alternative conditions and then states his/her preferences. Therefore, the multi-level framework allows for the context to be acknowledged at all levels of the process⁸. In this way, it allows for integrating processes and contextual issues through

⁸Despite the acknowledgement of the impact of the social context on the decision making process, the multilevel framework explicitly holds that different people, who live and act in the same social context, may come up with different representations of the same problem.

the interpretations that employees make of their experiences; such integration is important for the investigation of the conflict phenomenon (Putnam, 1985).

7.8. Coping within the Process of Managing Conflict

Sections 7.7. to 7.7.6. focused on the discussion of the multilevel framework which will serve as a conceptual and analytical tool in order to investigate the process of conflict management. Even though the model describes the process which the employee follows when attempting to solve his/her conflict management problem, it does not provide any insight into how the employee copes with the conflict management problem and the choice of alternatives which s/he has to make at the end of this process. Nonetheless, the way in which individuals cope with the requirements of a decision problem is an important process which elicits the effects of stressful decision situations on individuals (Janis & Mann, 1977). Understanding how employees cope with the stress encountered when making a choice among the alternative conflict handling behavioural patterns will enable us better to appreciate what is involved in the conflict management process.

Janis and Mann (1977) have proposed a model of choice and conflict which combines decision-making with patterns of coping behaviour that people use when dealing with decisional conflict. A core idea of the model is that the psychological stress aroused in situations of decisional conflict affects the individual's cognitive functioning and, consequently, the mode of decision processing s/he will adopt; the stress engendered by decisional conflict at each stage may either facilitate or interfere with the way that individuals attempt to resolve their decision situations. Janis and Mann proposed five different behavioural patterns which enable individuals to cope with the stress likely to be experienced in each stage of a decision process.

One way of coping with stressful situations is vigilance which involves a thorough search for relevant information and available alternatives. This is the only effective

mode of coping, as opposed to the other four patterns which are viewed as 'defective'⁹ but, nevertheless, they are widely used for routine situations or incidents which only have minor consequences. One such pattern of coping behaviour is defective avoidance, where the person attempts to evade the situation without taking any action; for instance, s/he may use 'buck passing' in the sense of relying on somebody else to make a decision, under the pretence that the other knows better how to handle the situation, or that the problem is somebody else's responsibility. In this way, the individual avoids the responsibility of the decision and not the actual process of decision making. The individual may also use hypervigilance in cases where s/he feels that a quick decision should be taken, while there is not sufficient time to evaluate the situation; then, there is high emotional arousal and the person fails to make use of the available information and choose an effective course of action. In the case of unconflicted inertia, the individual ignores the warnings of the situation and keeps on with his/her previous course of action, without taking any protective steps. Finally, the individual may choose a certain course of action - without generating other alternatives - since s/he feels satisfied with the alternative generated; this is the case of unconflicted change which involves a low state of stress.

According to Janis and Mann (1977), when facing a stressful situation, people focus too much on it and are emotionally stressed; as a consequence, they tend to engage in defective coping patterns. In general, engaging in defective coping alleviates the stress the decision maker experiences in the face of a decision situation. In this respect, and in cases of decisions with minor consequences, these mechanisms may also prove 'adaptive' in the sense of saving time, effort and emotional upheaval (Taylor, 1979-80). Finally, the use of defective coping may result in minimizing the regret the individual may feel after the decision being taken (Marouda, 1995).

Existing research has shown interest regarding the factors which are related to the individual's choice of coping patterns in the decision processing. According to

⁹In Chapter Two, section 2.6., I referred briefly to these coping patterns.

Marouda (1995), cognitive qualities, motivational aspects and personal characteristics are interrelated with the choice of particular coping patterns in decisional conflict. In regard to decision situations in organizational settings, Taylor (1979-80) emphasized the effect of environmental and individual factors on the mode of decision processing. Finally, in his research on bureaucracies, Downs (1967) identified five types of 'bureaucratic officials' who differ in their ways of coping with uncertainty, depending on the individual's motivation and general goals: (a) the 'conservator' diffuses responsibility, under the fear of risking security and convenience; (b) the 'climber' seeks to maximize his/her own income, power and prestige; (c) the 'zealot' focuses his/her energy solely on policies to which s/he is loyal; (d) the 'advocate' seeks to maximize his/her power in order to acquire significant influence upon policies, and (e) the 'statesman' seeks power in order to be influential upon national policies.

7.9. Summary

In this chapter, I discussed the assumption that conflict management should be seen as a real-life personal decision problem and thus examined from the individual's subjective representation of the particular conflict situation. My review of existing research in the field of decision analysis was intended to illustrate how the developments in this area of research gradually went beyond the rational and normative paradigm, and accounted for the possibility of different (subjective) representations of the problem, as well as for the importance of the context for understanding decision problems. Humphreys and Berkeley's five level framework of knowledge representation was selected as the most suitable methodology for the investigation of the process of conflict management. Modelling employees' conflict management process according to each of the five levels of the multilevel framework will also enable the elicitation of how the various aspects of the social and organizational nexus, within which this process is embedded, are portrayed in the way in which employees conceptualize, structure and deliberate on their conflict management problems.

Chapter Eight describes in more detail the application of the procedure which was used in this study for the investigation of the conflict management problem. It focuses on more specific issues related to how this methodological procedure was followed when coding and analyzing the interviews according to the five level framework.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Investigating the Process of Conflict Management - General Procedure

8.1. Overview

Drawing on the multilevel framework described in Chapter Seven, this chapter describes the application of the procedure which the present research used for the investigation of the conflict management problem. The way in which the analysis was carried out is described for each level of the framework. Focus is placed on the way in which the transcripts were coded, as well as on the definition of the terminology used during the analysis.

In this chapter, the techniques used as analytical tools applied to the five levels of the framework are also presented extensively. With regard to argumentation analysis, reference is also made to my decision to identify both explicit and implicit use of the components of the arguments examined; decisions regarding the identification of the implicit components of these arguments, as well as the functional use of these statements which were stated explicitly, were made in the context of the particular organizational setting (E.P.E.), within which employees' discourse was situated.

8.2. Interviews

The analysis drew on the accounts of conflict episodes reported during interviews conducted with the 26 employees of E.N.E.; the same accounts of conflict episodes also served as the basis for the generation of the Net Model of Conflict Handling Behaviour. Interviewees were specifically asked to refer to specific conflict situations experienced in the context of their own department. The interviews had a conversational character which allowed employees to refer to the conflict situations in their own way. This is

in accord with the assumption discussed in Chapter Seven that a proper investigation of the conflict management problem should focus on the way in which the employee represents the conflict problem within the bounds of his/her own perception.

In Chapter Three (section 3.5.), I referred to limitations inherent in the use of interviews as a means of data collection. This criticism is entailed in any self-report method and is especially relevant to cases of subjective data referring to the past, since research has suggested people's tendency to modify recollections of the past in a selective way (Dean & Whyte, 1969). In order to counterbalance for this deficiency, I probed interviewees to refer to specific conflict episodes. Zey (1992), in her review of research on decision making, has argued that asking decision makers about specific situations, rather than generalizations, constitutes an improved way of collecting information about how people 'make up their minds'.

8.3. Analytic Techniques Incorporated in the Methodology Used

In Chapter Seven, I discussed the five levels framework of knowledge representation and how it would be used as the methodological framework for the modelling of the accounts of conflict episodes reported by interviewees. I also identified the various operations entailed in each level of the framework. This framework constitutes the wider methodology within which the implementation of more specific analytic techniques is required; the latter will serve as a means of analyzing the operations that employees carry out at each level. The techniques which I intend to use in the present study have already been incorporated into the five level framework for the investigation of genetic decision making (Humphreys & Berkeley, 1987) as well as in career decision making (Marouda, 1995) and are:

- Propositional analysis;
- Argumentation analysis.

8.3.1. Propositional Analysis

The technique of Propositional analysis was developed by Gerbner (1964) and was originally used for the analysis of the content of language used in news reporting. The procedure consisted of identifying the propositions entailed in a sample from the press; the notion of proposition was used in a similar way to that of a statement (Gerbner, 1964). The propositions found were then divided into various groups which referred to different aspects of the events described.

Following the same procedure in the present research, I coded employees' accounts of conflict episodes in terms of the different propositions they used in their discourse about conflict management problems. Subsequently, I classified these propositions in terms of the operations identified at each level of the multilevel framework. For instance, for the purpose of Level 5 analysis, the propositions identified were sorted into different groups which I called domains, and which reflected the different areas of concern that employees cover when representing their conflict management problem:

"That supervisor had always been very arrogant."

Domain: Other's Attributes

Or, for Level 2 analysis:

"Had it not been for the seriousness of the issue at stake [...]"

Domain: Conflict Characteristics

8.3.2. Argumentation Analysis

As a means of analyzing employees' arguments regarding their conflict management problem, I used the technique of Argumentation analysis, as introduced by Toulmin in 1958 in order to investigate the process of reasoning. This technique has already been used in the area of personal decision making and problem solving (Mason & Mitroff, 1981; Humphreys & Berkeley, 1987; Marouda, 1995), as well as in the area of communication research on ordinary discourse (see Chapter Three, section 3.3.1.). As indicated in the same section, this analytic framework breaks down an individual's

argument into different components (i.e. Claim, Data, Warrant, Backing and Rebuttal). Following Toulmin's layout of argument structure, I coded the units of analysis (i.e. the conflict episodes included in the analysis) in terms of their basic component parts (i.e. Data, Claim, Warrant, Backing).

In Chapter Three, I referred extensively to certain points of concern which were raised by argumentation theorists and critics who have used Toulmin's structural framework in the context of ordinary discourse. As a means of surpassing the difficulties often encountered in argumentation research, I proposed to use Toulmin's framework in the two following ways (which were also outlined in Chapter Three, section 3.3.3.1).

First, I decided to define the various structural elements included in an argument, as proposed by Toulmin, according to the particular discourse context (i.e. discourse on conflict management in an organization) for which the use of this framework is intended. These revised definitions will provide me with a comprehensible orientation when analyzing employees' arguments; they will also move the attention of the analyst away from attempting to identify 'hypothetical' or 'bridge-like' statements, or categorical statements relying on observational records, or from making choices regarding the function of an element by focusing on whether it is stated explicitly or is left understood, which have not proved to be particularly helpful to argumentation analysts. My main aim, when developing these definitions for the elements of the argument (serving as units of recording for my analysis), is to come up with clearer definitions which will enable me to identify these argumentative elements on the basis of their different functions in the context of the particular argument, rather than on the basis of grammatical differentiation. A clearer distinction among the elements included in an argumentative structure will also enhance consistency when analyzing and coding employees' arguments.

Second, in order to analyze employees' argumentation and describe the various elements of the argumentative structure, I decided to go beyond the level of the text which referred to the particular argument under examination. This decision was in line

with the focus of the present study on examining - at this level of the multilevel framework - employees' process of conflict management, as revealed in the way they reason about their conflict management problem. Therefore, employees' arguments, as presented in their accounts of conflict episodes, were examined and analyzed in various parts, with a view to eliciting the employees' reasoning process. For this reason, I also decided to look for those elements of the arguments which were left unsaid during their construction of the particular episode, and which thus were stated explicitly at the level of the text. Identifying the missing parts of the arguments (i.e. claims, data, warrants and backings), as well as deliberating about which function each utterance reported played in the context of the particular argument, involved making inferences regarding what employees actually meant when constructing their arguments. In order to get more indications regarding the structure of the employees' argumentation on a particular conflict management problem (both in terms of elements stated explicitly and those which remained implicit), I drew on the information reported by employees when they were interviewed; more particularly, I drew on the information these employees included when constructing an account of a particular conflict episode, within which the specific argument analyzed was located. This information, as well as information about the company and the two departments (i.e. the R & D and Supplies Departments), which I collected when talking informally with employees from various departments, constituted a rich bank of contextual information, which 'guided' me during my analysis of employees' arguments. This background information served as a basis which familiarised me with what constituted acceptable backings in that organizational setting. This information was particularly helpful in cases where the warrant and/or the backing of the argument analyzed were missing and enabled me to make 'informed' guesses when inferring the backing used by employees in each particular case.

For the purpose of the present analysis, I focused on the identification of the backings in employees' arguments. The reason underlying my decision was that these elements of the structure of an argument (presented implicitly or explicitly in employees' discourse) provide the deep-seated reasons, which justify the claims they made (i.e. the

particular ways in which they behaved during the conflict episode reported). Since, in many cases, backings were found to be missing from people's arguments¹, these missing backings were inferred during the analysis of the employees' processes of reasoning; therefore, in my argumentation analysis, I focused on the identification of backings, stated both explicitly and implicitly. Due to the fact that backings are the more general rules (often left implicit) which are used as further support for the warrants of the argument (which are more frequently stated explicitly), the identification of warrants in employees' arguments was also important, as *a means of* eliciting the underlying backings the arguments analyzed. The importance of backings in employees' arguments is related to their characteristic of being 'field-dependent', in the sense that they constitute principles, rules and assumptions which are indicative of the social context, which is shared among organizational members and within which the latter act and assign meaning to their conflict encounters.

Identifying the Main Argument Analyzed in the Context of the Present Study

When I set out to analyze employees' discourse and describe its structure according to Toulmin's framework, I noticed that employees made a lot of claims about any particular conflict management problem. For instance, employees usually made claims about what was important to them in regard to a particular conflict management problem they encountered, and what they should do in order to handle the controversy; or, they would go to great lengths to justify their point of view and prove its superiority over the other's viewpoint. In most cases, they also provided evidence and justification for their claims in the form of data and warrants; for instance, they would claim that the origin of the problem situation was the other person's character, and they would further elaborate on this by justifying their claims, or even by giving more claims.

Employees' entire discourse when constructing their conflict accounts had an argumentative structure (e.g. they made claims about different issues; they offered

¹This finding is in accordance with many studies on argumentation which have indicated that it is usually the 'because' part of the argument which is left implicit.

information on the basis of which these claims were made; they provided support for the acceptability of these claims); this is related to the fact that, when producing accounts, employees were also interested in persuading their listener (i.e. the interviewer) about what they were saying, by constructing a story-like explanation of their experiences (see Chapter Three, section 3.2.). The importance of these issues has been recognized in the investigation and modelling of the process of managing conflict (e.g. they define the boundaries of the employee's 'small world'), and have been accounted for in the Propositional analysis (e.g. they have been classified into domains, and identified as conditional/unconditional judgments). However, for the purpose of the argumentation analysis conducted in the present study, I decided to focus on and describe the structure of that argument, presented in employees' accounts of their conflict episodes, where employees reasoned about their choice of conflict handling behaviour. In other words, only the data, warrants and backings, which were used in support of their claim regarding the conflict handling behaviour they used in the particular episode, were considered - for the purpose of the present analysis - to constitute the main argument in employees' discourse, and was thus analyzed in its component parts. The conclusive statement, where employees referred to the conflict behaviour used (or which would have been used, in the case of a hypothetical episode) in the particular episode described, was regarded as the main claim of the argument; it was also this claim which was further elaborated within a frame. As I have mentioned earlier, the rest of the information included in the employee's account would, at times, provide clues which enabled me to infer some of the missing components of the argument being analyzed, as well as offering me insights when I set out to analyze the structure of the particular argument, the claim of which was the conflict handling behaviour used in this particular conflict episode.

Below, I present the entire argumentation chain used by an employee, when constructing his account of a particular conflict episode. Within this extract, I illustrate, in italics, the part of the argument on which the analysis focused. Figure 8.1. illustrates the basic structure of the argument, by giving the relationship between the data, claim, warrant and rebuttal in schematic form. As discussed in Chapter Seven

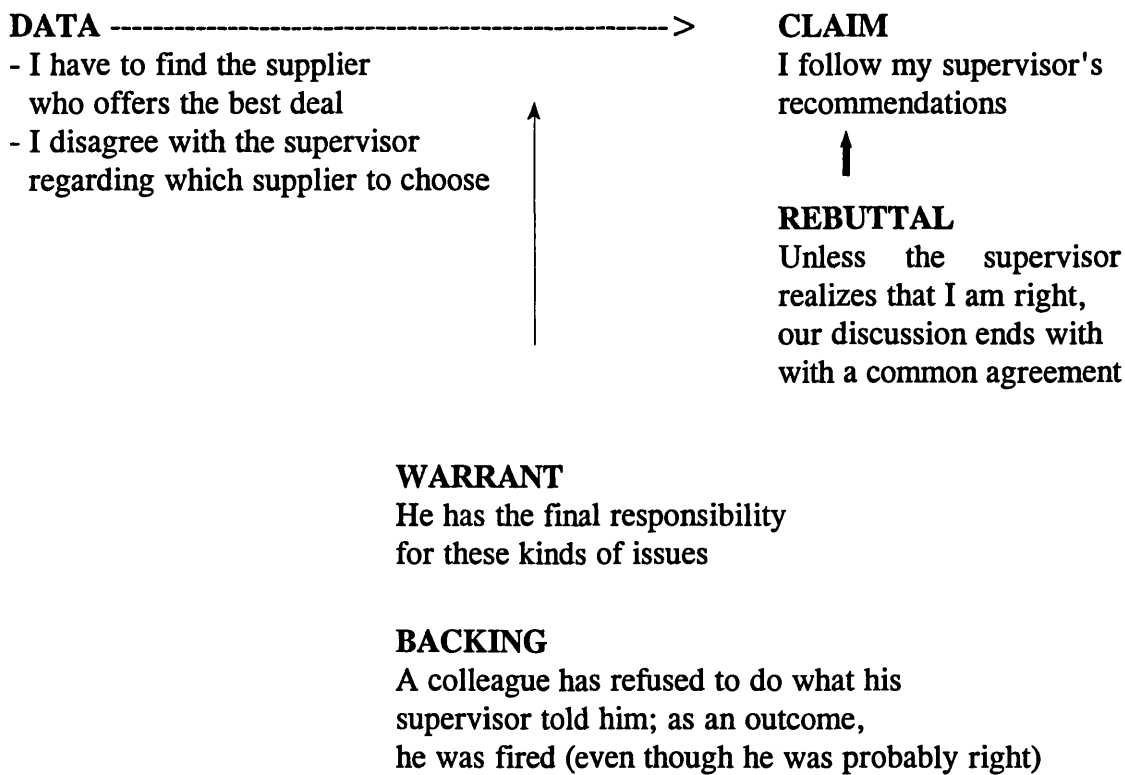
(section 7.7.2.1.), data constitute the information part of the argument. Data are used as a means of arriving at a claim which is a conclusive statement of the argument made. In order for the employee to move from the data offered to the claim, s/he needs to provide some kind of justification; for this reason, s/he uses warrants and backings; while warrants serve as immediate sources of justification, backings are used as a further confirmation of the rules given by warrants.

8:1 "I believe that, what I call a 'difficult' person deals with a conflict situation in the same way that he does outside the work context. However, I believe that bad behaviour causes more problems in the workplace, since you have to deal with that problem 'on the spot'. Actually, it may be the case that such time pressure doesn't allow you to behave in a different way. Throughout the years that I've been working here, I have experienced quite a lot of problems which sometimes had to do with the actual course of work while, at certain other times, with somebody else who would interfere with the way I worked. What do I mean by that ? *According to our job description [in Supplies], we have to find which supplier meets certain requirements [offers the best deal]: they are cheap and, at the same time, good at what they do. Therefore, you have a choice among various suppliers with whom you've already worked in the past. On some occasions, it may be the case that, for various reasons, somebody higher than you in the hierarchy 'propose' or order a certain choice of people to you. Certainly, this creates a problem. Because these people may not be the right choice. If this situation occurs, I will do what he tells me that I'll let him know my opinion, that 'I don't think we should work with these people; however, I'll do whatever you say'. If the other person is able - or willing - to understand what I'm telling him, we may start a conversation and reach a solution.* Otherwise, it may be that, for some 'apparent' reasons, such as him being selfish, or because he personally knows the supplier, or because he was also 'asked' by one higher up in the hierarchy, he tries to persuade me [that he is right]. This is quite a usual thing to happen. Your supervisor may come and tell you to do something, even though he is aware of the problems related to it. In such case, you just say *'All right, I'll do so. I have my objections, but since you have the final responsibility for it..' and, the issue is over.* However, I believe that the way you present your different viewpoint to him has a bearing on [the way the situation evolves].. it is important how you put it into words."

Putting the selected argument together into my own words would read:

"According to our job prescription, I have to find the supplier who offers the best deal (**Data**). It may be the case that my boss (i.e. 'somebody higher than you in the hierarchy') 'propose' or order a certain choice of people to you (**Data**). This creates a problem [...] (**Data**). In cases where I disagree with the supervisor regarding which supplier to choose, I just follow my supervisor's recommendations (**Claim**). Unless he realizes that I am right, our discussion ends with a common agreement (**Rebuttal**). He has the final responsibility for these kinds of issues (**Warrant**). It has happened that a colleague has refused to do what his supervisor told him; the outcome of that situation was that this employee was fired, even though he was probably right (**Backing**)."

Figure 8.1. An Illustration of the Argumentation Scheme



8.4. Units of Analysis

In this part of the thesis, information was analyzed by means of content analysis. In Chapter Five (section 5.5.), I referred to the distinction between the notion of unit of analysis and unit of recording. In this part of the thesis, the units of analysis are the same conflict episodes which were reported by employees of the two departments, and which constituted the basis of the generation of the Net Model of Conflict Handling Behaviour. However, this time, only the episodes which related to the decision nodes of the model ('Avoid', 'Comply', 'Ask for intervention', 'Withdraw', 'Impasse') were included in the analysis. Moreover, the analysis did not include conflict episodes which were observed by the interviewee (see Chapter Five, section 5.6.) since, in these episodes, the interviewee was not involved in the process of conflict management him/herself; instead, s/he was in a position only to make inferences about the conflict incident s/he observed by drawing upon his/her own experiences from similar situations. Finally, the analysis did not include the partial episodes since, in these instances, the employee did not provide enough information regarding the way s/he proceeded with the representation of the conflict management problem in the particular situation reported.

With regard to the argumentation analysis which was used in order to elicit employees' operations at Level Four of the multilevel framework, the analysis centred on this part of their argumentation, where employees referred to their behaviour when handling a particular conflict episode, as well as presenting information which was used as a basis and support for this claim; in the context of this study, this part of the argumentation chain was regarded as their main argument (see previous section).

Table 8.1. presents the distribution of the conflict episodes included in the analysis across the two departments and the decision nodes as identified in the net model.

Table 8.1. The Distribution of the Conflict Episodes Included in the Analysis

Decision Node	R & D	Supplies	Total
AVOID	10	11	21
COMPLY	12	7	19
ASK INTERV. ¹²	2	-	2
ASK INTERV	9	2	12
WITHDRAW	3	3	5
IMPASSE	1	3	4
OTHER ³	-	3	3
TOTAL	37	29	66

8.5. Units of Recording - Definitions

Within each unit of analysis, the following units of recording have been identified: (a) propositions which were categorized in terms of domains, claims or judgments, and (b) frames which had the form of paragraphs but were treated as units of analysis. A detailed definition of the units of recording is necessary, since the latter provided the basis of the coding of interview transcripts. This detailed description proved essential when conducting the inter-coder reliability test, where these definitions constituted the point of reference for both coders, especially in cases of problematic units.

Proposition: A statement about the conflict problem.

"I was new in this job."

"We were under a great deal of work pressure."

²This node refers to situations where employees asked for the intervention of the supervisor once-removed.

³This node refers to three conflict episodes reported by Mr. X which do not correspond to the decision nodes indicated by the Net Model (see Chapter Six, section 6.8.).

For each unit of analysis, all propositions were identified. They were coded into the following categories⁴: Domains, Claims, Data, Warrants, Backings and Judgments.

Domain: An area of concern as proposed by employees in reference to their conflict management problem. Domains constitute wide categories in which the propositions identified were grouped together. These categories were formed in terms of the content of the propositions identified. They are mutually exclusive (i.e. each proposition can be coded only into one domain) and exhaustive (i.e. all propositions were coded into one or another domain).

"I was really hurt." Domain: Emotions

"He has always been very arrogant." Domain: Other's Attributes

Claim: A statement which contains structure and is presented as the outcome of the argument. Claims were identified by using the technique of Argumentation analysis. Each unit of analysis (i.e. conflict episode) may contain many claims in regard to the conflict management problem. However, for the purpose of this analysis, I was interested in the main claim of the argument, which referred to the course of action taken (i.e. the conflict handling behaviour the employee used in that particular episode). This claim is central to the part of the argument analyzed, in the sense that it is further elaborated within one of the three frames (Level Three analysis).

"Work in our department cannot proceed if disagreements are not freely expressed." (Claim)

"There was nothing else I could do but comply, since he was my immediate supervisor." (main Claim)

Data: An utterance which constitutes the evidence at the employee's disposal. It may refer to past events; information about the situation at hand (i.e. the specific issue in disagreement); information about the communication exchanged between the two parties, as well as their specific behaviour; information regarding the nature (or the

⁴A proposition can be coded at the same time to more than one of these categories.

requirements) of their job; any other general information which was related to the main claim of the argument.

"He asked me to work on a computer program, which was not our responsibility."

"According to our job description, we have to find the supplier who meets certain requirements."

"The company faces financial difficulties."

"The disagreement had continued for a long time."

In many occasions, employees made claims which they then used as data for further substantiating their choice of course of action (main claim). For instance, in the following example, the only (factual) information that we have for this argument is not stated explicitly; rather, it is included in the first utterance of the argument. In this utterance, we find out that, on that occasion, the arguer had a lot of work pressure. So, given the fact that his colleague was not 'sympathetic' towards her, triggered a situation where the arguer experienced (i.e. felt) being in conflict with that colleague.

8:2 "It may be the case that one of my colleagues is not sympathetic with the fact that I have a lot of work pressure at that moment (*claim used as Data*). In such a case, I usually don't say anything (main Claim).. because I know that he is so frustrated due to the work pressure he is facing (Warrant). I know how he reacts when he is under pressure (Backing). When there is no pressure, the other person will be more relaxed as well when addressing you (Backing)."

Looking closer at this example (extracted from an interview), the utterance "this colleague was not sympathetic towards me, on that occasion" is actually a claim that the employee is making at this point, the acceptability of which is questionable, unless the employee provides some further information for its support. However, in the above argument, the employee uses this utterance as an information on the basis of which she makes her claim for deciding not to voice her grievance; in other words, and in the context of the particular argument examined, this utterance plays the role of 'data' which is used as a point of departure for this employee in her conceptualization of the particular conflict situation. According to Toulmin (1958), in arguments data can be claims which have been validated in previous arguments. Following this line of thinking in the context of this study, I also coded as data, employees' claims which

have been (or could have been) verified in another arguments. More specifically, I coded as data any utterance which was used by the employee as a point of departure in the particular argument, on the basis of which the main claim was made.

"He had always been a difficult person [to work with]."

"He just wanted to show off to the management."

"He tried to impose on me his opinion."

As indicated in extract 8:2, in some occasions, a single utterance contained more than one piece of information ("my colleague was not sympathetic with that fact that I have a lot of work pressure at that moment" and "I had a lot of work pressure at that moment"). Very frequently, it was the case that employees would present their claims and data within the same statement:

"In the case that I disagree with my supervisor over the priorities to be followed, I then do what he says."

This statement, which is the main claim of an argument includes in it the data of the argument, which would look like "In some cases, I disagree with my supervisor over the priorities to be followed". In such cases, even though I regarded the statement as the claim of the argument, in the schematic presentation of the argument, I also included the data, which was included in this claim⁵.

Warrant: An utterance which is used as a guarantee, a rule or a reason and serves as a support to the main claim of the argument; this rule is often presented in the form of a self-evident truth. Since the present study is only interested in data, warrants and backings in reference to the main claim (i.e. conflict behaviour used), a warrant is a rule which gives us the reason of employees' behaviour in the particular episode. The use of such a rule in an argument enables us to understand the relevance of the data offered to the main claim made. These rules may refer to different levels of generality; for instance, a specific warrant may allude to a concrete reason, which refers to information relevant to that particular case;

⁵Other studies on argumentation have also found claims and data to be presented in the same utterance and, as a consequence, analysts decided to separate these argumentative elements when describing the structure of the argument (e.g. Knudson's (1992) study on students' argumentative writing).

"The issue [at stake] was serious."

"Because he is an idiosyncratic person and he is quite old."

"I had something urgent to do."

On other occasions, a warrant may express reasons which more directly allude to the person's beliefs (stemming from social and/or organizational values).

"I was afraid of my supervisor."

"In the workplace, you cannot have a pleasant conversation."

Usually, there was no external criterion for differentiating between data and warrants in employees' arguments; in general, a warrant can be any utterance which the subject has recognized as a reason supporting his main claim. The distinction between data and warrants of a particular argument can only be achieved by examining how the particular employee has chosen to use the information which s/he has included in his/her argument. If a statement is used as part of the definition of the situation in hand, then this statement was considered to be part of the data of this particular argument; on the contrary, if the employee has used the (same, or similar) statement in order to support his/her main claim (i.e. conflict behaviour), then this statement has taken the role of a warrant in the particular argument. Let us look at the following argument presented in an interview, and compare it with the extract 8:2, presented earlier:

8:3 "There were times when I didn't express my disagreement to a colleague, even though I would have liked to (main Claim). Let's say that I was not in the right mood to discuss the issue at that very moment, or that I had something to do that was urgent and I didn't want to waste 10 minutes of my time (Warrants). For these reasons, I thought that I was much better not to discuss it (Claim). In any case, the other person is entitled to have his own opinion (Claim)."

In the argument 8:3, the utterance "[...] I had something urgent to do" is very clearly used as a reason supporting the employees' decision not to voice his disagreement⁶. Coming back to the extract 8:1, we notice that a similar utterance "[...] I had a lot of work pressure at that moment", which alludes to the same sort of information (i.e. time pressure), is used as 'data'. The point I wish to make here is that the various pieces of information which the subject gives us during the argument process could often be

⁶This also becomes apparent by his following claim "for these reasons, I thought that I was much better not to discuss it."

used either as the data of the argument, or as a reason which supports the action taken (i.e. main claim of the argument examined). In such cases, when analyzing and describing the structure of the specific argument, I focused on how the arguer intended to use this information in the context of the argument constructed⁷.

Backing: An utterance which refers to an additional assumption used as a means of further supporting the warrant stated (explicitly or implicitly) in the argument; for the purpose of this study, the backing is an assumption which provides support to the warrant; in this sense, a backing serves as a source which guarantees the acceptability and truthfulness of the rule it refers to. The backing of an argument may take the form of a factual information (i.e. observations made in the past), or a principle, value or belief which is enacted in employee's belief system from the social context, the organizational environment, or his/her past experiences as an individual.

"Prior examples have made me think so."

"We know each other for years."

"For important issues, the supervisor needs to take the responsibility for taking a decision."

"When another department interferes [on a decision to perform a task], you cannot refuse."

In most of the arguments analyzed, employees would leave implicit the backing which served as a support of the warrant of their argument; in such situations, I was guided from the warrant that employees used in that particular argument, as a means of inferring the backing, which alludes to principles of a more general nature.

8:4 "In the past, I sometimes didn't express my disagreement to the supervisor (main Claim). I even began to blush as I went to knock on his door (claim). It had to do with my age; I was only 25 years old and

lacked work experience (Warrant). Then, I was the most polite person in Greece (Claim). Now, I feel powerful; I believe in myself (Claim)."

⁷As stated earlier, my decisions were guided by my general understanding of the organizational context, as well as my appreciation of the situation in hand, not only when analyzing employees' accounts of conflict episodes, but also when interacting with them, in the course of the interviews held.

Since the previous argument does not contain a backing, my attempt to infer it was guided by the existing warrant "I was only 25 years old and lacked work experience". A more general principle which contains the specific rule which directly alludes to the particular situation, would read "in a workplace, when you are young and unexperienced, you often don't voice your grievances".

Judgment: An evaluation statement about the conflict management problem. In this case, employees' propositions are judgmental about how their conflict problems should be resolved. Employees' judgments were coded as either conditional or unconditional (see operations involved in Levels Two and One of the multilevel framework, Chapter Seven, sections 7.7.4. & 7.7.5.).

"When I am angry, it is good for me to express my anger."

Conditional Judgment

"It's important to maintain good relationships with each other."

Unconditional Judgment

Frame: A text unit which is treated as a whole. This wider unit of discourse comprises the main claim (as defined earlier) and the propositions referring to it; these components are structured in a coherent whole in such a way that they illustrate an employee's reasoning process towards a course of action, in regard to the conflict problem; in other words, frames indicate the way in which employees structure their knowledge about the conflict management problem. In Chapter Seven (section 7.7.3.), I put forward a definition of these frames. The following examples give an illustration of each of the three frames which were examined in the present research:

In a Rule-based Frame, one or more rules prescribe the alternative solution to be chosen by the employee.

"I don't express my disagreement because I may be afraid of my supervisor. I am afraid of losing my job. That is what usually happens when somebody has a low position in the hierarchy."

In a MAU Frame, two or more alternative solutions are presented by the employee and are assessed according to certain criteria.

"There are times when I want to say something (express my disagreement) [to a colleague] but you just leave it for another time. Because I see that the other person is stressed out and I know that, if I discuss it with him then, I'll make him even more stressed. Since people from another department have pressed him, I guess I shouldn't do the same, since I'm his colleague. This is a not the right thing to do."

In a Future Scenario Frame, the employee presents possible contingency plans and sets goals over a period of time; these future plans are presented as a sequence of events and consequences.

"I just forgot about the issue (*withdrew*). I told myself that I shouldn't make a big deal out of it, even though I was right. I believe that, in this way, he will soon realize that he did not behave in the right way. So far, I have seen that this method has been proved effective."

8.6. Reliability of the Coding Frame

As discussed in Chapter Five (section 5.9.), the issue of objectivity is crucial when conducting content analysis. Qualitative research has used certain methods in order to counterbalance the subjective nature of data analysis. According to Berelson (1952), an objective account of the content of analysis would mean that the same results are obtained when the content is analyzed by two independent analysts. Building on this argument, I decided to incorporate an inter-coder reliability measurement as a means of enhancing the quality of the way in which data were coded in this part of the thesis. Taking into consideration the difficulty which I encountered when coding employees' accounts of conflict episodes according the five levels of the framework (e.g. identifying propositions and classifying them into domains, distinguishing among the various elements of employees' arguments, identifying the frames used in the accounts), I decided to use a researcher who has had experience in using the same analytic tools, as a second coder for my research material. Indeed, the second coder had already used Humphreys' and Berkeley's multilevel framework, as well as the same analytic tools (i.e. propositional and argumentation analysis) as the present research did; in this sense, she had already confronted and reflected on the same

problems which I encountered when analyzing my interviews. Nevertheless, a series of discussions were held between the two coders, regarding the rationale followed in the investigation of the conflict management problem; during these conversations, the second coder also became familiar with the way I defined the units of analysis and the units of counting in the present study. *For the purpose of the argumentation analysis, I presented to the second coder the coding scheme that I have included in Appendix IX.*

Following the coding frame described in section 8.5., the calculation of inter-coder reliability was based on the following units of counting: (a) classification of propositions into the domains already formulated; (b) identification of warrants and backings; (c) classification of arguments into frames. To evaluate consistency, I used the same two measures, which were used in Part I of the analysis (see Chapter Five, section 5.9.); (a) the mean pair agreement (MPA), and (b) the Cohen's Kappa coefficient. Below, the reliability estimates for these units of counting are presented.

Regarding the inter-coder reliability tests for the argumentation analysis, the proportion of agreement (MPA) in the identification of the warrants reported explicitly in employees' discourse on their conflict management was estimated to be 72.3%⁸, while the proportion of agreement in the identification of the stated backings was estimated to be 75%. The level of agreement for each of the cases (i.e. identification of warrants, as well as backings) was calculated in the following way; number of utterances coded by both coders as warrants (or backings) : number of utterances identified by both coders as warrants, plus number of utterances identified uniquely by the first coder as warrants (or backings), plus number of utterances identified uniquely by the second coder as warrants (or backings)⁹. The level of agreement was increased

⁸Only the warrants and backings which were used as a support to the main claim of employees' argumentation (i.e. the claim regarding the particular conflict behaviour used in the specific conflict episode reported) were identified and coded by both coders (see section 8.3.).

⁹As far as the identification of warrants in employees' arguments is concerned, the first coder identified 62 warrants while the second coder identified only 50; out of the utterances identified by both coders as warrants, 47 utterances were coded by both coders as warrants. Similarly, in the case of the identification of backings, the first coder identified 24 backings, while the second coder identified only 18, all of which had already been identified by the first

to 81.5% and 87.5% respectively, as a result of further discussions after the initial coding. The level of agreement, both in regard to the identification of the warrants and the backings stated explicitly in employees's arguments, constitutes an acceptable level of agreement (Krippendorff, 1980). I believe that the high degree of agreement between the coders (especially when taking into account the difficulties reported by existing studies to differentiate between data/warrants or warrants/backings of an argument) reflects the focus of both analysts - when identifying the warrants and the backings in employees' arguments - on the function that the various utterances had in the context of particular arguments, rather than on the content of these utterances (i.e. kind of information presented).

The level of coders' agreement in this study is also satisfactory when compared with other studies on argumentation. For instance, Canary and Sillars (1992), who devised a coding scheme which was based on various models of argument (including Toulmin's), obtained a very low degree of inter-rater reliability agreement (k ranging from 0.41 to 0.60, for categories for what they called 'reason-using' and 'reason-giving' arguables, which refer to structural categories similar to data, warrants and backings of Toulmin's framework)¹⁰; however, given the abstract nature of the categories included in this coding scheme, the authors of this study considered this level to be satisfactory. In general, a review of studies conducted in the field of argumentation analysis reveals that inter-coder reliability tests are rarely included in their report; or, when they are, they refer to the classification of data/warrants/claims, already identified by the first researcher, into categories such as clarity, accuracy, consistency to which each structural elements corresponds at different degree (Marttunen's study; 1994). However, judging from the thorough critique made by argumentation researchers regarding the difficulty of differentiating among the various elements of the argument structure when using Toulmin's framework, we would expect

coder.

¹⁰ K for the same structural categories of an argument was slightly higher in the study of Canary et al. (1987), which used the same coding scheme.

low scores in inter-coder reliability tests, especially as far as the distinction among data, warrants and backings are concerned. As Freeman (1991) posited, argumentation analysts who have worked with diagramming arguments have often found instructions offered in argumentation textbooks unclear, and, consequently, expressed the need for the development of revised instructions. He also went on to postulate that in cases of analysis of ordinary argumentation, these instructions should account for the 'messiness' of natural discourse.

Nevertheless, the level of agreement in some argumentation studies has been high; for instance, in Chambliss' study (1995) where student's recalls of a written argument were diagrammed according to Toulmin's three-part layout, the level of agreement was as high as 91%. I believe that, apart from the fact that the analysis of Chambliss' study was based on the generation of clear-cut definitions of the elements of Toulmin's framework, this high degree of agreement achieved between the coders needs also to be seen in association with the nature of the arguments which were examined; the coders analyzed students' arguments which were generated as a summary of an argumentative written text; therefore, taking as a point of departure that written text, the analysts examined the kinds of argumentative elements students used in their summary, and whether these corresponded with the initial structure of the written text. As it becomes apparent, students' summaries which served as the text units analyzed, were examples of a quite straightforward argumentation, especially in comparison to employees' argumentation on their conflict management problem which are examined in the present study.

As the reliability analysis regarding the two other types of units of recording suggest (i.e. classification of propositions into domains, identification of frames used, see Tables 8.2. & 8.3.), the proportion of agreement between the two coders in all three cases was satisfactory. This is suggestive of the fact that the coding frame which was used for the analysis of the material collected in this research was clearly-defined; this enabled a good understanding of the content of the various categories of the units of recording. The lower level of agreement between the two coders regarding the

identification of warrants and backings used in employees' discourse (when compared with the level of agreement in the identification of data and claims) can be explained when taking into consideration that warrants and backings relate to the individuals' principles and belief systems, which are bound to differ across individuals (i.e. coders).

Table 8.2. Reliability Analysis of the Classification into Domains of the Propositions Identified in Employees' Discourse

DOMAINS											
Coder a Coder b	1*	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total
Dom.1*	53	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	55
Dom.2	1	46	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	47
Dom.3	0	0	57	2	0	0	0	1	0	0	60
Dom.4	1	0	1	108	0	0	0	0	0	0	110
Dom.5	1	0	0	4	49	0	0	0	0	0	54
Dom.6	0	0	0	0	0	58	0	1	0	1	60
Dom.7	0	0	0	0	0	0	19	0	0	0	19
Dom.8	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	55	0	0	58
Dom.9	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	2	21	0	25
Dom.10	2	3	0	3	1	6	1	2	1	53	72
Total	58	49	58	117	51	66	22	62	22	55	560
MPA= 0.92%											
KAPPA= 0.91											

*Numbers 1 to 10 allude to the ten domains in which the propositions identified in the analysis were coded; these domains represent the areas of concern appearing in interviewees' discourse. As presented in details in the next chapter (see section 9.2.), these domains refer to:

Domain 1: Conflict Issue

Domain 2: Conflict Characteristics

Domain 3: Own Attributes

Domain 4: Other's Attributes

Domain 5: Other's Behaviour

Domain6:Possible Consequences

Domain 7: Power

Domain 8: Relation to Other

Domain 9: Role Expectations

Domain10:Situational Cues

Table 8.3. Reliability Analysis of the Frames Identified in Employees' Discourse

FRAMES					
Coder a Coder b	MAU	F.Scenario	Rule-based	No Framing	Total
MAU	7	0	2	0	9
F.Scenario	0	6	2	0	8
Rule-based	0	0	21	0	21
No fram.	0	0	2	26	28
Total	7	6	27	26	66
MPA = 90.9%					
KAPPA = 0.86					

CHAPTER NINE

The Investigation of the Process of Conflict Management - Analysis and Discussion

9.1. Overview

Drawing on the five level framework of knowledge representation as the basis for the modelling of employees' conflict management process, as illustrated in employees' accounts of conflict episodes, this chapter is devoted to the analysis of the activities involved at each level of the five levels framework. The analysis was carried out, and is presented, in descending order, from Level 5 to Level 1, since the results of the operations carried out at one level constrain the way operations are carried out and structured at lower levels (see Chapter Seven, section 7.7.). The analysis of the data at each level was conducted according to the following procedure:

- | | |
|-------------------------|---|
| Level 5 analysis | - Identification of propositions
- Classification of propositions into domains |
| Level 4 analysis | - Analysis of the structure of the arguments
- Identification of warrants and backings |
| Level 3 analysis | - Classification of frames into Future Scenario Frame,
MAU Frame, Rule-Based Frame |
| Level 2 analysis | - Identification of conditional judgments |
| Level 1 analysis | - Identification of unconditional judgments |

The results obtained are discussed in relation to the different operations involved at the different levels of abstraction which were discussed in Chapter Seven. The main aim of this analysis to illustrate how the process of conflict management can be modelled using the five level framework as a methodological framework. The discussion of the findings also offers insights regarding how the way in which employees represent and

structure their conflict management problem reflects features of the social and organizational context within which the process of conflict management is located.

9.2. Level 5 Analysis - Discussion

In the Level 5 analysis, my purpose was to explore the employees' 'small world', that is, the material that they are willing to retrieve when representing their conflict management problem. Since the description of his/her own 'small world' is beyond the employee's language, I could only infer its content by identifying the propositions to which employees referred in their conflict management discourse (see Chapter Eight, section 8.3.1.). In this respect, I identified the propositions included in all the units of analysis and then classified them into 10 main categories which I called domains. These domains represented the most common areas of concern as they appeared in interviewees' discourse about their conflict management problem. These areas defined the content of the employees' small world, as well as constraining their decision making regarding their conflict problem.

Figure 9.1. The 10 Domains as Identified in the Analysis of the Interviews

1. CONFLICT ISSUE (C.ISS)

(Reference to the particular issue in disagreement; the issue is directly related to the task performed; e.g. unclear priorities over what should be done; misunderstandings/ mistakes during the performance of the task; unclear task division and subsequent responsibilities between colleagues; disagreements on scarce resources and the reward system; ways of approaching and relating to the other; different opinions on how the task should be performed.)

e.g. "Our disagreement had to do with how the machinery could be removed in a less costly way."

"The disagreement was not that much about which was the right drawing, but about the tone of voice he used when addressing me."

2. CONFLICT CHARACTERISTICS (C.CHAR)

(Issues on the intensity of conflict; the frequency and continuity of the particular conflict issue arising between the two parties; the seriousness of the issue in hand.)

e.g. "The issue was very important and needed an immediate solution."

"This was an ongoing 'problem' and I had been patient for over 8 months."

3. OWN ATTRIBUTES (OWN.AT)

(Reference to own personality characteristics such as age, character, experience or expertise in relation to the issue in question; intentions and goals regarding conflict and its resolution, as well as general aspirations and needs.)

e.g. "That's the way I am: I always express my opinion."

"My aim is not to make the other person ask me for forgiveness."

4. OTHER'S ATTRIBUTES (OTH.AT)

(Reference to the other party's personality characteristics, age, experience/expertise, intentions and goals regarding conflict and its resolution; general aspirations and needs.)

e.g. "He was a very arrogant man."

"He probably wanted to show off to the management, in the sense that he was very good at what he was doing."

5. OTHER'S BEHAVIOUR (OTH.B)

(Statements about the other party's behaviour during the particular conflict situation; tone of voice; way of approaching and reacting to the other; provision or absence of any evidence in relation to the issue.)

e.g. "All he was giving me was meaningless excuses."

"He came and 'ordered' me to do this, without offering any justifications for it."

6. POSSIBLE CONSEQUENCES (P.CON)

(Issues on the possible outcomes related to the issue in conflict, or to the way in which it is resolved; the possible consequences may refer to the organization, the specific department, the task performance or the employee/s directly involved in the situation.)

e.g. "A solution had to be found since the task could not be performed otherwise."

"This tension had an effect on the 'effective' functioning of the entire department."

"I felt hurt and betrayed."

7. POWER (POW)

(Reference to the organizational position held by either of the parties.)

e.g. "(There was not much I could do) since he was my immediate supervisor."

"(It all depends on) whether I disagree with a colleague of my supervisor."

8. RELATION TO OTHER (RELAT)

(Reference to the previous relationship with the other party as well as who is right about the issue in question.)

e.g. "Our relationship was never very warm."

"I knew that he was right on that."

9. ROLE EXPECTATIONS (ROLE)

(General pressure for compliance coming either from top management or from role expectations.)

e.g. "Any employee should keep the amount of mistakes he makes to a minimum."

"When you are an employee in a company, you have to adjust yourself there and 'function' accordingly."

10. SITUATIONAL CUES (SITU)

(Reference to interdependency of tasks between employees; time pressure; information exchange; factors external to the work context such as family or personal problems.)

e.g. "The task that I have usually to perform is quite autonomous."

"She had 'brought' her family problems to the workplace."

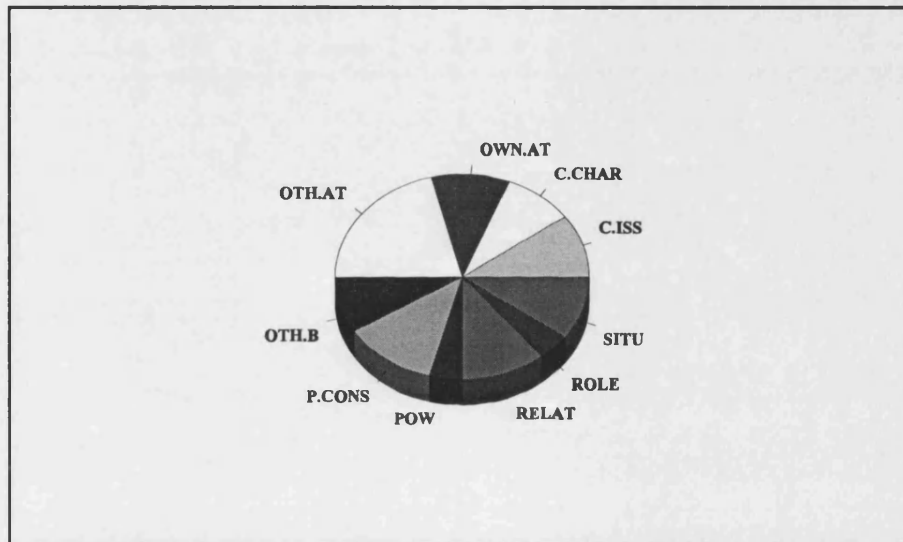
Table 9.1. illustrates the total number of propositions reported by employees interviewed in the two departments of E.P.E. It shows the breakdown of the propositions for each of the 10 domains, as identified (both frequencies and percentiles) in the analysis of the interviews; the number of propositions allocated to each of the domains found in the analysis is presented in order of descending preference. No difference was found in the number of propositions or the domains explored in actual and hypothetical episodes. A larger number of propositions was explored by employees in the R & D Department (353 over 207); however, the fact that employees in R & D reported more conflict episodes in comparison to the Supplies Department accounts for this difference.

Table 9.1. Total Number and Percentages of Propositions Allocated to Each Domain

1. OTHER'S ATTRIBUTES	117	21 %
2. POSSIBLE CONSEQUENCES	66	12 %
3. RELATION TO OTHER	62	11 %
4. OWN ATTRIBUTES	58	10 %
5. CONFLICT ISSUE	58	10 %
6. SITUATIONAL CUES	55	10 %
7. OTHER'S BEHAVIOUR	51	9 %
8. CONFLICT CHARACTERISTICS	49	9 %
9. POWER	22	4 %
10. ROLE EXPECTATIONS	22	4 %
TOTAL:	560	100 %

Figure 9.2. offers a graphical representation of the percentage of the total number of propositions given by employees interviewed, which shows the degree of exploration in each domain by the employees interviewed.

Figure 9.2. Graphical Representation of the Percentages of Propositions Identified in Each Domain



As indicated in Table 9.1., as well as in Figure 9.2., analysis of the areas to which employees refer when representing their conflict management problem revealed that the area of **other's attributes** (21%) was the most extensively explored by the employees interviewed. This finding is in agreement with other studies about conflict and its resolution. In their review of conflict behaviour literature, Knapp et al. (1988) suggested that issues such as target of interaction, perceptual congruence, and attributions of intent, account for the majority of variance in the choice of conflict communication strategies. Bies et al. (1988) stressed the importance of assessment of the other party's motives and intentions for the conceptualization process of the conflict situation. Perception of the other's action as being intentionally harmful has been associated often with conflict escalation, and thus has been studied mainly by conflict escalation research; for instance, Horwitz and Berkowitz (1990) suggested that making personal attributions about the other and conveying negative characterizations to

him/her - whether explicitly or implicitly - make people feel not just misunderstood but also demeaned and maligned.

The domain of **other's behaviour** (9%) was also explored by the employees interviewed. The importance of the strategies and tactics employed by the other participant in the conflict situation has been highlighted already by existing research on conflict resolution (Deutsch, 1973; 1982). In Chapter Two (section 2.5.2.1.), I discussed how Schonbach (1980; 1990) placed the other party's behaviour (in terms of 'accounts') at the centre of his process model of conflict management. Examining accounts during negotiations, Bies et al. (1988) suggested that the evaluation of the other person's account (i.e. explanation of behaviour) affects the individual's subsequent behaviour. Gray & Purdy (1990) referred to an individual's preoccupation with the other's behaviour, in terms of offering evidence and supporting facts for the behaviour followed. In general, the process models of conflict resolution, as presented in Chapter Two (sections 2.5.2.1. & 2.5.2.2.), have acknowledged the prominence of the other's behaviour at each stage of the conflict situation for the development of this particular situation.

In this study, it was also found that the domain of other's behaviour was closely related to the domain of other's attributes. In the course of the interviews held with the employees, an employee's evaluation of the other's behaviour was often associated with his/her evaluation of the other as a person. Negotiation research has focused on the joint effect, of an individual's evaluations of the other party's values/attitudes/ goals and behaviours, on the conflict resolution process (Gray & Purdy, 1990; Jehn, 1992). Putting together interviewees' references to other's attributes, as well as to other's behaviour, it becomes apparent that employees widely explore issues related to the other person, as found in their discourse about conflict problems (168 out of a total of 560 propositions). This tendency refers to what research on conflict has often been described as the conflict personalization phenomenon, during which people assign motivations - and, consequently, responsibility - to others. Even though conflict situations are characterised by the issues in hand, power conditions, strategies and

tactics used by the participants, "[...] often the persons involved only see the individual styles as characterising the conflict" (Hocker & Wilmot, 1985; p.64). In such situations, the discourse about the conflict incident focuses on the other party's personality and personal goals; for example, an employee from the Research group reports:

9:1 "It's all because of personal ambitions.. He wanted to take all the glory for himself and his group."

The domain of **own attributes** was also explored by employees. As indicated by the dispositional approach to conflict resolution (Chapter Two, section 2.5.1.1.), the effect of personality characteristics on conflict behaviour has been studied widely. Research has examined and established the importance of the following issues, amongst others, for conflict behaviour: age, education and years of experience (Shockley-Zalabak, 1988); assertiveness-cooperativeness, authoritarianism, motivational orientation, introversion-extraversion, need for achievement and control (Deutsch, 1982; Sternberg & Soriano, 1984; Putnam & Poole, 1987; Womack, 1988b); belief and value systems, goals (Knapp et al., 1988; Stefanakis, 1992); aspirations (i.e. needs and interests) (Gray & Purdy, 1990; Gray et al., 1996).

Examining the domain of own attributes in relation to that of other's attributes, we can see that other's attributes is most commonly explored in relation to one's own attributes (117 versus 58 propositions respectively). The seeds for the prominence of other's attributes in employees' exploration of conflict management lie in the divergence between causal attribution regarding the self and others. In Chapter Two (section 2.5.1.1.), I referred extensively to attribution theory's ideas (as developed by Heider, as well as Jones & Nisbett), according to which actors tend to attribute the other's behaviour to dispositional cues. The fact that employees refer to the salience of their own attributes in conflict situations should be seen in connection with the fact that conflict situations are social interactions where individuals alternate between the roles of actor and observer. According to Mead's theory of the human self (1934), a person sees himself both as 'subject', and as 'object': s/he is a subject of his/her own world,

in the sense that s/he acts on it but, in the meantime, s/he is self-aware that s/he is an 'object' in the social world of the others (i.e. the others observe him/her). Therefore, a person is able not only to observe him/herself, but also to assume the role (or perspective) of the other with respect to him/herself. The difference in the degree to which employees explore their own and others' attributes can be seen not only in terms of a difference in the availability of information, which is likely to exist between the actor and the observer, but also a motivational difference between actors and observers, in the sense that the actor is preoccupied with maintaining his/her self-esteem (Bem, 1972). Consequently, his/her impressions and judgments of him/herself are likely to be biased¹.

With reference to their conflict management problem, employees also explored the domains of **possible consequences** and **relation to the other**. Empirical work on conflict resolution has stressed the importance of possible consequences of conflict on this process (Knapp et al., 1988; Carlin, 1991; Gray et al., 1996); the affective component of conflict (i.e. frustration, anger) has also been acknowledged (Carlin, 1991; Jehn, 1992). The role of prior relationship between participants in a conflict situation has also been studied extensively (Deutsch, 1973; Putnam & Poole, 1987; Stefanakis, 1992). Perceptual congruence of opinions and beliefs, as well as negative affect and dislike between the participants, have also been associated with the use of communication strategies in conflict situations (Deutsch, 1982; Jehn, 1991). Finally, the issue of fairness and justice in regard to the particular situation has also been found to affect the conflict process (Stefanakis, 1992).

Another domain which received attention by employees was that of **situational cues** (10%). Existing studies of various factors affecting conflict behaviour have shown that situational aspects are an important influencing factor on the choice of conflict behaviour (Deutsch, 1973; Putnam & Poole, 1987; Carlin, 1991). In specific,

¹This view is also supported by Freud's empirical findings, according to which actors are less likely to be aware of their own non-verbal behaviour, the latter being more salient to the observers.

employees in the present study referred to the role that interdependence, information and factors external to the conflict situation (i.e. family issues) play on their conflict problem. This finding is in agreement with other organizational studies which have pinpointed the importance of job interdependency and information exchange to the conflict evolution and negotiation process (Rahim, 1986; Mills & Murgatroyd, 1991; Balke, 1992). The salience of interdependence is even more the case in an organizational bureaucracy such as E.P.E., since "interdependencies permeate bureaucratic social systems" (Diamond, 1993; p.232). Recent studies on organizations have suggested that the boundaries between work and family contexts are permeable, and that the impact of experiences in one domain may affect behaviours in the other (O'Driscoll, 1996). For instance, employees in E.P.E. often referred to issues which, even though they were not directly related to the conflict situation or the organizational context, nevertheless affected them in their conflict management problem; for instance, an employee from the Supplies department comments:

9:2 "[.] even though when we start working, we are supposed to leave the rest of the problems behind, this is not the case.. We are only humans."

Employees also explored the domains of **conflict issue** and **conflict characteristics** with reference to their conflict management problem (10% & 9% respectively). The importance which various studies have attributed to the content of conflict is reflected in their attempts to classify conflict situations according to the issue at stake. For instance, Mastenbroek (1987) proposed the use of different conflict strategies in organizations, depending on the issue in question (e.g. unclear priorities, misunderstandings and insufficient exchange of ideas between colleagues, unclear responsibilities, task division and disputes over scarce resources). Jehn (1992), in her ethnographic study on intragroup conflict, focused on disagreements regarding differences in viewpoints, 'administrative' conflicts (i.e. who does what) and disagreements on how resources are allocated. Mills and Murgatroyd (1991) have referred to the role of jurisdictional and status ambiguities, as well as rivalries regarding reward systems, as causing conflicts in the workplace. Gray and Purdy (1990), in their typology of conflict frames, suggested that participants in conflict often

refer to task-oriented issues (what the authors called 'substantive frame'). In the meanwhile, conflict characteristics such as importance of issue at stake, intensity, conflict history and perceived frequencies, have received the attention of research on conflict resolution (Kofron, 1986; Carlin, 1991). In their attempt to integrate organization theory and conflict research, Knapp et al. (1988) investigated the importance of the topic and one-shot versus ongoing controversies for employees' conflict resolution.

An interesting finding for the present research is that employees paid little attention to the domains of **power** (4%) and **role expectations** (4%) which they explored less. This finding seems to be at odds with existing organizational studies, which have pinpointed the salient role of power conditions and hierarchical positions of the parties involved in a conflict to the latter's conflict behaviour (Rahim, 1986; Wilson & Waltman, 1988; Womack, 1988b). Moreover, a series of organizational studies have established the importance of role expectations and conformity to conflict behaviour (Kofron, 1986; Carlin, 1991). Bies et al. (1988) have also found the existence of references to formal company policy and company norms in employees' discourse about conflict situations in their workplace. The minimal exploration of power is at odds with extant organizational studies on conflict resolution; however, the findings of these studies do not illustrate the extent to which employees are aware of the role that hierarchical power plays on their behaviour when dealing with conflict situations. Moreover, the limited exploration of these areas appears to be at odds, even in the context of the present study, in the sense that, as the Net Model of Conflict Handling Behaviour generated in the first part of the study revealed, power conditions determine, to a large extent, the conflict behaviour used by employees (e.g. when initial attempts to solve the conflict in an integrative way stop short, see Chapter Six, section 6.3.2.).

However, the limited exploration of the two domains can be seen as employees' 'unwillingness' to explore these areas of concern, which they perceive as 'unsafe'. As argued earlier, the issues that employees explore, in regard to their conflict management problem, define the boundaries of their 'small world' and constitute their

'background of safety'; in other words, these issues are areas which the individuals feel safe to explore. However, in the course of the problem exploration, there are certain other areas which are 'unbounded' in the sense that the employee has not made any contingency plans for it; (i.e. the 'worst case scenario' case). For instance, when the employee has to confront the possibility of going against the supervisor's will, s/he risks exploring issues beyond his/her 'background of safety'; s/he then feels 'unsafe' to proceed any further in this direction in the exploration. In such cases, the employee experiences feelings of fear which are either expressed explicitly in their discourse (e.g. "I am afraid of losing my job"), or indicated by the employee's resistance to continue with the exploration of the scenario ("It's not easy to do such things; we are not used to them." Since the domains of power and role expectations mark their 'small world', employees are reluctant to explore these issues, and consequently avoid possible confrontation with the worst case scenario; Janis and Mann (1977) have referred to this case as 'defective coping'.

In conclusion, Level 5 analysis enabled the identification of those aspects which employees consider to be important and thus influence them in the conflict management process. The analysis identified ten areas of concern which constituted the employees' 'small world' in regard to the conflict problem; these areas influenced the way in which employees represent their conflict management problem and, inevitably, constrained their decision making process.

The domains identified were used by all employees, irrespective of the department they worked in or of the decision node of the net model to which the particular episode (i.e. unit of analysis) referred. This reflects the influence of the wider socio-cultural, as well as organizational, context in the representation of the conflict management problem, since the 'small world' of the employees is formed under the impact of the 'grand world' (i.e. the social reality), which is shared by employees (Savage, 1972). In a sense, the social context, in the form of traditions, history, norms and assumptions, serves as 'received wisdom' (Humphreys & Berkeley, 1985). To the extent that employees operate within 'received wisdom', they may find this way of

approaching the problem to be 'natural' (Barthes, 1973). Since these issues have become 'naturalized' (rather than being 'natural'), employees are not even aware of taking these issues for granted, or even of the constraints this imposes on their structuring activities, especially at lower levels. However, even though they take certain elements of the decision making process as 'received wisdom', they actively develop other elements of the structuring operations. Therefore, even though problem representation is culturally determined at the higher levels of the multilevel framework, employees have the discretion to apply their own structuring operations and think for themselves about how to proceed with the problem solving inquiry.

9.3. Argumentation Analysis - Diagramming Employees' Arguments

Before I proceeded with the examination of how employees structure their conflict management (Level 4 analysis), I analyzed employees' arguments with reference to the conflict management problem, since Argumentation analysis serves as a bridge from problem exploration (Level 5 analysis) to the structuring of the problem (Level 4 analysis) (see Chapter Seven, section 7.7.2.). The purpose of this analysis was to go beneath the surface structure of employees' arguments, and elicit the chain of reasoning by which the respondents arrived at their decision about which conflict behaviour to choose, with a view to identifying the basic premises and assumptions upon which the credibility of the outcome of their argument rests. More specifically, and as discussed in section 8.3.2., the analysis focused on the identification of the warrants and backings used in employees' arguments in order to support their claims about the conflict handling behaviour used; the examination of backings (stated either explicitly, or left implicit in employees' arguments) revealed which were the (cultural and organizational) assumptions underlying employees' reasoning, and how these constrained the process of structuring the conflict problem at further stages of their decision making process.

In Appendix V, I have included all the extracts of the employees' argumentation which have been analyzed in the present study². As stated in Chapter Eight, the focus of the analysis has been the examination of those parts of employees' argumentation where they would make claims regarding the particular course of action they followed during the conflict episode reported, and give information which would serve as evidence, or as a further support, for the claim made. For this reason, in Appendix VI, I have included and described the function of the components of the argument which directly referred to employees' claims about their choice of conflict behaviour (referred to as 'main claim' for the purpose of the present study; see Chapter Eight, section 8.3.2.). Since the interview extracts presented in the Appendix represent fragments of employees' argumentation as revealed in their accounts of their conflict episodes, I decided at this stage to describe the structure of the entire argumentation chain given by an employee; this will enable the reader to get a flavour of the wider discourse context within which the 'main' argument, which was further analyzed in this thesis, was situated.

- 9:3 "It's as simple as that: when there are two people working in the same place and doing the same kind of job.. when you see that one of them is 'treated' better, in terms of the way she is paid, that surely annoys you. This has happened to me; I didn't discuss it with my colleague, but with our supervisor. I didn't have a fight with this colleague, even though I guess that somebody else wouldn't see the issue in those terms.. Because it was not her fault. When you are in a work environment, your supervisor is supposed to be responsible for certain issues. You are just an employee, and all you have to do is do your work as well as possible. Issues related to promotion and salary rise have to do with your supervisor, and the other colleague is not to blame. Even if this colleague uses his 'own way' to get a salary rise, this is not related to the point. I believe that the supervisor must have the ability to think clearly in such situations.
For instance, some time ago, there was another secretary working in here. All of a sudden, one day she got a substantial rise in her salary. I just freaked out. Because I knew the kind of (bad) work she was doing

²This Appendix includes the extracts of the 66 accounts of conflict episodes which refer to the various decision nodes illustrated in the Net Model of Conflict Handling Behaviour (see Chapter Six, Figure 6.1.). These 66 accounts constituted the units of analysis in Part II of this thesis.

and I knew that this had created a lot of problems in the department. When I was about to go away on holiday, our supervisor would tell me how difficult it was going to be for the department to manage without me around. Well, when I came back from my holiday, I realized that she had been given a substantial rise in her salary. I just freaked out. There was nothing that I could say to her; I was not even interested in her case. What I was interested in was the supervisor who had given her this rise and, according to what he told me, it was apparent that I was much better than her and that the department would have problems when I was going to go away for my holiday: I just wanted to talk to him; because, even if this woman had used 'dubious' reasons to get this rise, it was a matter of indifference to me. I just wanted my supervisor to be in a position to realize and think about how I was going to feel when such a thing happened; I also wanted him to realize that he was just using silly excuses to justify his action, and that it was out of the question for me to believe such silly excuses. Well, I went to him and discussed the issue with him: I just told him "judging by your action, I am not as good [as her] at my job". He replied that this was certainly not the issue, and that he only wanted to give her a rise because her salary was really low. Trying to justify himself, he also said that, in due time, I was also going to be given a rise. Of course, this explanation was not satisfying since the difference in salary between me and her was due to the fact that I was married and had been working in the firm for 6 more years. So, he thought that the other secretary had an unduly low salary so he gave her a rise. On the other hand, I felt that this was unfair; on that issue, he told me that he would also do something about my salary in due time. However, one day, he just left, and nothing changed. In any case, I am not sure if things would have changed, had he been around... In general, when one makes a mistake, then, for sure, one talks a lot of rubbish, in order to cover up this mistake. So, what reason was there for me to pay further attention to his argument? It may have been the case that the other girl went to him and complained about her salary, and that he did not wonder why there was this difference in salary between me and her. This shows that he made a rash judgement. At least, I know for sure that it was not an issue of liking her more than me. I don't really know why he behaved like that.. The overall situation worried me and made me sad. But, beyond this point, I didn't do anything else. (Comply) If he had still been around, I might have raised the issue once again."

DATA ————— CLAIM
 The two people work in the same position and do the same job You are annoyed

WARRANT
 Since both of you are doing the same job, you should have the same salary

BACKING (Implicit)
 Principle of equal pay, when performing the same job

DATA
 I was annoyed
(The claim of the previous argument becomes the data of this argument)

CLAIMS
 I didn't fight with the colleague
 Even though she may have used her 'way', it's irrelevant

WARRANT
 It's not her fault

BACKING
 In a work environment, the supervisor is responsible for things, such as promotion and salaries

DATA
 Another secretary working here got a rise in salary

WARRANT
 She was not doing her job well

CLAIM
 The supervisor must have the ability to think
 I got annoyed

BACKING
 In the past, problems arose (due to mistakes she did)
 The supervisor had complained to me about her performance

CLAIM
 I couldn't say anything to her
 I wanted to talk to the supervisor

WARRANT
 I wasn't interested in the woman's case

BACKING (Implicit)
 The supervisor is responsible for certain things

DATA ————— CLAIM
(The other secretary got an 'unfair' rise in salary; Data implied from previous argumentation) I minded the supervisor's behaviour

WARRANT
 Because he told me that I'm better than her

BACKING (Implicit)
 Because the salary must depend on the quality of work performed

CLAIM
 I wanted him to realize how I felt
 I wanted him to realize that he was giving me excuses
 I complained to him about this issue
 Beyond this point, I didn't do anything else

DATA
 He told me that her rise was due to her low salary
 He told me he would give me a pay rise

CLAIM
 His explanations were not satisfactory
 I felt that it was unfair

WARRANT
 Because our salary difference was justified

DATA
 He was telling me (same as above)

CLAIMS
 I'm not sure that things would have changed if he had still been around
 I had no reason to pay attention to what he was saying

WARRANT
 When one makes a mistake, one says nonsense in order to cover it

DATA
 Probably, the secretary went and complained to him (about her salary)

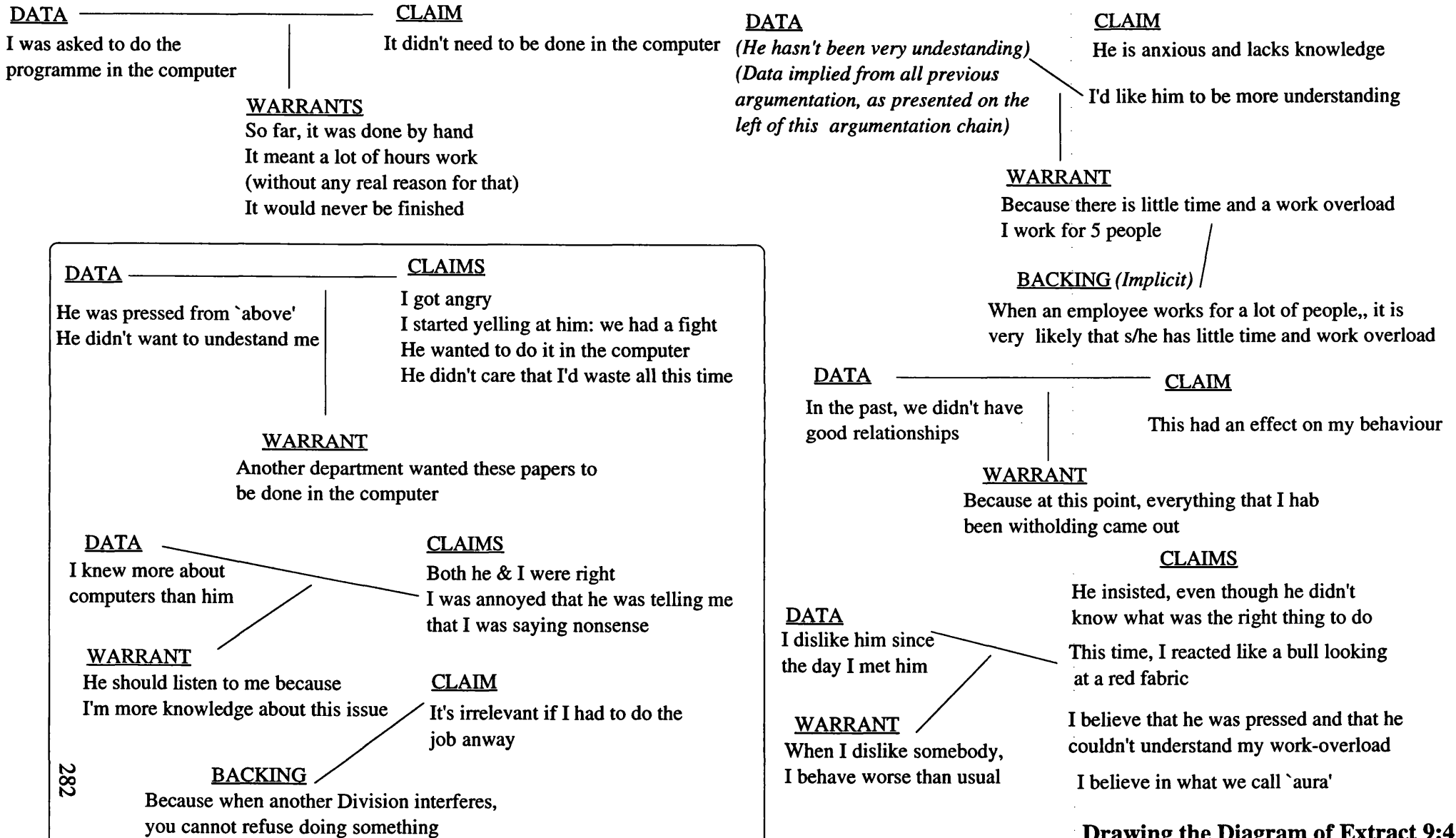
CLAIMS
 He made a rush judgment

WARRANT
 He didn't wonder why there was this salary difference between us

Drawing the Diagram of Extract 9:3

9:4 "There has been such an incident recently..I was made to do a (computer) programme that it didn't need to be done on the computer..it could have been done by hand, but nobody seemed to understand (me).. More specifically, it was one of the head of the divisions..There was no need for this programme to be done in the computer..so far, it has always been done by hand,..This meant a lot of lost working hours (in my part) and there was no rationale for my doing so..And, there is something that is never going to finish..I got very angry..I started yelling..we had a fight with that supervisor.. in the end, I had to do the job.. I tried to explain him.. but his rationale was that "since it can be done in the computer, it has to be done that way"..without caring that a great deal of (my) working time would be lost... Look, the whole situation starts before that..It seems that another Division wanted the documents to be done through the computer..in order to read them more easily.. So, his rationale was that "they want it that way, so it has to be done that way...". He was right in one sense, I was right in another sense... So, there was that fight.. I can understand that he was pressured from above..I could also tell that he didn't want to understand me..It's another thing to understand a point of view and say "I understand, but I have such and such order"... I was annoyed that he was telling me "what you are saying is nonsense..I want it this way..". Because I think that when I explain you something about computers, since I know it better than you..I demand that you have an understanding.. It's completely irrelevant if I had to do it anyway.. Because, when an issue has to do with another Division as well, one cannot refuse doing something..It's one thing to refuse doing something..and another thing to deny understanding something so obvious (as this incident).. In general, he is a very anxious person..and without knowledge..so, because he lacks knowledge, he becomes angry. I would like his reaction.. to be more understanding.. since there is few time and the work load is really high.. There are 5 people that I have to serve..and he wouldn't accept this fact.. In the past, there had been tense periods between us.. our relationships were never really friendly.. Surely, that [past relationship] had an effect on the way I behaved.. since I took everything out this time.. I behave abruptly.. since everything came as a flash..all those times that I had withheld everything.. and I way saying "I won't say it, I won't say it..".. Because..when I talk to a colleague, he may say "I agree with you, but I cannot do anything in that respect..". But, when I talk to somebody and he tells me the opposite thing and he insists because he does not know what is the right thing.. then, it's like you are talking to a wall..you feel like hitting your head against the wall.. It all has to do with the other person..if it's somebody that I like, most probably it's going to be solved in the course of the conversation..But, if there is somebody that for whatever reason I dislike, then I will react worse.. For instance, if that incident had happened with another colleague with whom I have better relationships,

probably it would not be so intense..I would have been more understanding.. and the other person would be the same..I would tell him/her "let's discuss it".. But, in that case, I reacted like a bull looking at a red fabric..Otherwise, I would also be worried, but not to such an extent.. I dislike him..Without anything in specific, I disliked him since the time I met him.. [...] I believe that he was pressed..and that he could not understand the amount of work that his request really meant for (me)..I don't believe that he acted like that in order to make me angry or give me more work because he doesn't like me. Look, I believe on what people call `aura'; you look at somebody and you like him, or you dislike him. That's what happened with this person.. Of course, I know that sometimes, your first impression proves to be wrong.. However, this has not been the case with this guy (i.e. supervisor)"



Looking closely at the argumentation chains followed by the two employees in their accounts of particular conflict episodes indicated that their argumentation can be described in terms of a series of arguments. The 'main' argument - in the sense that it constituted the argument whose premises and underlying assumptions were further investigated - is indicated in the box, in each diagram of these two employees' argumentation chains. As illustrated in the diagrams of both argumentation chains, employees make other claims which are 'peripheral' to their 'main' argument, in the sense that they are not used when assigning further structure to the conflict management problem (as Level 3 analysis suggested), but they nevertheless appear at this level of problem representation (see Chapter Eight, section 8.3.2.). Moreover, all the information which appears in the employees' argumentation chain, and which does not form part of the main argument, as defined for the purpose of this study, can be regarded as information which forms part of the definition of the situation in hand, on the basis of which the main argument is constructed; this information may take the form of claims, data, warrants or backings in the context of the other arguments. As illustrated in example 9:3, even though in the reconstruction of her account, this employee offers an elaborated argumentation chain, she does not offer any justification regarding the main claim of the argument (i.e. "after that point, I didn't do anything [*I complied*]"), on which the argumentation analysis in this study focused.

9.3.1. Identification of Warrants and Backings in Employees' Arguments - Eliciting the Inference Structure of Employees' Argumentation

As already mentioned (see Chapter Eight, section 8.3.2.), the purpose of analyzing employees' argumentation in this study has been the identification of the (explicit and implicit) backings used by employees as a further support for their main claim, that is, their decision to follow a particular course of action during a given conflict situation. Since, according to Toulmin (1958), backings are the 'field-dependent' components of the arguments, in the sense that their 'truthfulness' and acceptability rests on the particular context within which they are employed, the identification of the backings used in employees' argumentation will elicit the assumptions shared by organizational

members in the particular organizational context (E.P.E.), within which employees' accounts of conflict episodes are drawn.

The diagrams of employees' argumentation on their choice of conflict behaviour indicated that employees often have stated their warrants explicitly, which enabled the interpretation of the data as support for their claim, while, in most of these cases, they have not referred explicitly to the backing which would provide the reason ensuring the acceptability of the warrant used. In specific, when conducting the argumentation analysis, I identified 46 arguments (out of the 66 arguments included in the analysis) which contained explicitly stated warrants in their structure³. With regard to the backings in these (same) arguments, it was found that in only 16 arguments, employees stated explicitly the reason supporting their warrants⁴. Overall, 48 arguments analyzed were found to contain an explicit justification of some kind (i.e. warrant or backing)⁵. In summary, as the argumentation analysis in this study indicated, in their attempt to establish their claims, employees normally offer certain information to justify and support them, and show what must be assumed in order to derive the claim from the data. In these cases, the form of the argument would be "*if the data are accepted as true or valid, then the claim follows because..*". However, employees rarely make

³Within these 46 arguments, I identified 62 statements which had the function of warrants in the context of the arguments under examination. While, in some of the cases where more than one statement was identified as having the function of a warrant in any particular argument examined, these utterances were, in fact, further explanations regarding the (same) justification given; in other cases, employees would give more than one justification indicating the relevance between the data used and the claim made. A list of all the warrants identified in the analysis is included in Appendix VI.

⁴Within these 16 arguments, I identified 24 utterances which had the function of backings in the context of the arguments under examination. In cases where more than one statement was identified as backing in any particular argument examined, these utterances were, in fact, explanations regarding the (same) belief/value/assumption which served as a backing of the argument, rather than referring to different assumptions used in the context of the same argument. A list of all the backings identified in the analysis is included in Appendix VII.

⁵Three of these arguments contained justification in the form of backings, without providing any warrants.

explicit their underlying assumptions⁶ regarding their decision problem. Given the fact that these backings - which are left implicit - reflect the principles and beliefs in use in the particular context, an adequate understanding of the structure of the employees' argument structure requires bringing employees' underlying assumptions to the fore.

As a means of eliciting the backings which were left implicit in employees' argumentation, I decided to infer these on the basis of the warrants used in any particular argument, which were more often stated explicitly in employees' discourse. In specific, based on the information presented in the form of the warrant used in any particular argument, I attempted to reconstruct the inference structure used by the arguer in the particular case examined. In some cases, the backing of the argument could be inferred directly from the warrant stated in the same argument. However, in most cases, the underlying backing could not be inferred immediately from the statement used as a justification of the claim of the argument (i.e. warrant); rather, it could be inferred indirectly, from that statement in conjunction with other, intermediate propositions. In the latter cases, each step in the process of reconstructing the employee's inference structure was an inference move and was 'legitimized' by the fact that it followed logically from - and was recognized as acceptable by - as well as relevant to - the previous step⁷. The importance of reconstructing the various inference moves that employees follow when providing support to the main claim lies in the purpose of this study which was to use argumentation analysis as a means of eliciting how the arguer in fact reasoned from the premises to the claim of the argument, and thus, to identify the principles underlying this reasoning process.

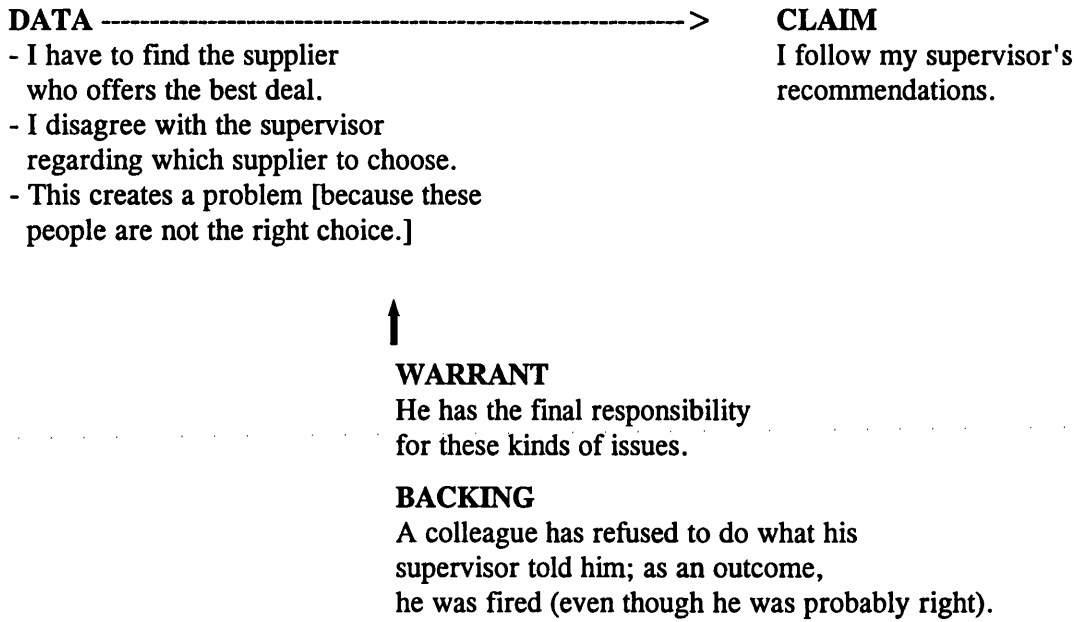
⁶Brockriede & Ehninger (1960) have proposed a classification of the assumptions that individuals make use of, in their argumentation; these assumptions can refer to (a) statistical records and general information which has been verified as true; arguments using such assumptions have been called: arguments from cause, sign, generalization, parallel case, analogy or classification; (b) rules coming from authoritative sources of information, and (c) inner drives, aspirations and traditional beliefs.

⁷van Eemeren et al. (1997) have also used this method of reconstructing a series of inference moves, left implicit in an individual's argumentation, as a means of making explicit the inference structure of the argument and of reconstructing the entire chain of the individual's reasoning.

At this point, I find it important to say that, when inferring employees' principles and beliefs by reconstructing their chains of inference reasoning, I was aware of the fact that making decisions regarding how the inference chain works in any particular argument examined is a matter of interpretation. In other words, it could be possible that, when reasoning about a particular situation, the arguer was using a different inference chain from the one I proposed. In this respect, and in order to be able to reconstruct a reasoning chain which closely represented the one intended by the arguer, during the analysis of the arguments, I took into consideration the social context within which this argument was constructed, that is, a Greek bureaucratic industrial company. As I have already argued when referring to accounts (see Chapter Three, section 3.2.), it is this social context which shapes the creation of accounts, as well as the world views which inform them. Thus, by being receptive to the particularities of this social context when attempting to unravel employees' inference processes in their argumentation about their conflict management problem, I believe that employees' (implicit) reasoning chains, as reconstructed and proposed in this study, can be seen as representative - to a great extent - of the beliefs and intentions of the arguers.

Below, I present a few examples of employees' argumentation and illustrate how the 'enterprise' of reconstructing the (partly implicit) structure of justifications in employees' arguments has been put into practice. Let us, for instance, outline the structure of the following argument (presented in detail in Chapter Eight, see extract 8:1) and have a closer look at its inference structure, as stated explicitly by the employee.

9:5 "According to our job description, I have to find the supplier who offers the best deal (Data). It may be the case that my supervisor 'propose' or order a certain choice of people to you [with which you disagree] (Data). This creates a problem [...] (Data). If I disagree with the supervisor regarding which supplier to choose, I just follow my supervisor's recommendations (Claim). Unless he realizes that I am right, in which case our discussion ends with a common agreement (Rebuttal). Even though you may still disagree, he has the final responsibility for these kind of things (Warrant) It has happened that a colleague has refused to do what his supervisor told him; the outcome of that situation was that this employee was fired, even though he was probably right (Backing)."



Focusing on the 'because' part of the argument, as stated explicitly in the above argument, and, more specifically, on the way that the backing offered supports the stated warrant, we can see that the inference structure of this argument, has an inference 'gap'; to put it simply, it is not very clear how the backing stated in this argument provides support to the warrant "the supervisor is responsible for these things". Rather than approaching the argument as having an 'inadequate' inference structure, I believe that this inferential 'gap' in the structure of this argument is only indicative of the fact that the arguer left the intermediate propositions - which would lead the listener logically to the stated backing - implicit, since he felt that they could be understood by his listener/interlocutor. Assuming the existence of a series of intermediate steps, at this point of the arguer's reasoning process, which were left implicit, the need arose to elicit them as a means of facilitating our understanding regarding how the stated backing offers appropriate support to the stated warrant. Trying to reconstruct the different steps of the employee's inference structure in this particular case would look like:

DATA ----->	CLAIM
- I disagree with the supervisor regarding which supplier to choose.	I follow my supervisor's recommendations.



WARRANT

He has the final responsibility
 for these kinds of issues.

INFERENCE STEPS

In a company, the supervisor is responsible for
 the decision making (for certain things).

If you challenge that, you may
 put your position at risk.

Based on my personal experience here,
 one colleague who refused to do what his
 supervisor told him, was fired
 (even though he was probably right).

Therefore: Not complying with the supervisor may lead
 to you losing your job.
 (irrespective of whether you are right or wrong)

I believe that one can claim safely enough that the inference structure I proposed above is representative of the employee's (implicit) reasoning, when offering reasons for his behaviour, and that the two inference moves between the warrant and the backing stated explicitly in the argument are necessary for understanding the connection between the warrant and the backing stated explicitly in the argument. I also believe that it is safe to go one step beyond the stated backing and assume that the premise which underlies this employee's inference reasoning in this argument is "not complying with the supervisor may lead to you losing your job".

The example in the diagram below appears to have a more complicated inference structure: the first statement presented as the backing of the argument is further elaborated and qualified as the argument unfolds:

9:6 "Some time ago, I needed some designers from another work-team to help me with an issue related to computers (Data). The supervisor of that team (my colleague) did not want to make them work on another task (Data). In the end, our supervisor had to intervene in order to reach

a compromise (main Claim). In general, when there is a disagreement between two employees from the same rank of the hierarchy, the disagreement is resolved only after the intervention of the supervisor (Backing). It all depends on the relationship between the two people involved; when you have a good relationship with the other person, you don't need to refer to the supervisor (Backing). When you have only a 'working' relationship and a disagreement arises, then the disagreement is sorted out through him (Backing)."

DATA	----->	CLAIM
- I had a disagreement with another colleague.		Our supervisor intervened in order to sort the situation out.



WARRANT (implicit)
 [My relationship with that colleague was only a 'working' (i.e. distant) relationship]

INFERENCE STEPS
 When two colleagues have a good relationship, they can sort out their disagreements without referring to their supervisor.

On the contrary, when they have a 'working' relationship the only way to resolve their disagreement is through the intervention of the supervisor.

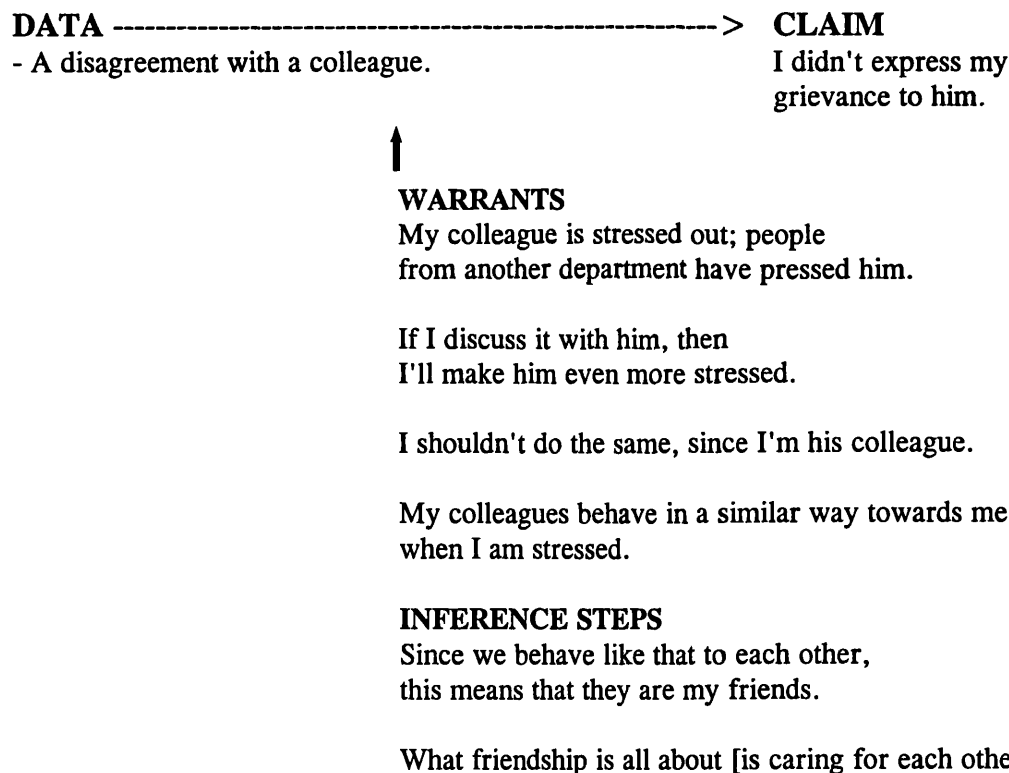
Therefore: The kind of relationship between colleagues is very important when resolving their disagreements.

When the two colleagues in disagreement have a friendly relationship, then they can work out a solution to their problem; (the contrary applies to situations where the two colleagues do not have a 'good' relationship)

Even though the employee presents an organizational rule (i.e. "when there is a disagreement between two employees from the same rank of the hierarchy, the disagreement is resolved only after the intervention of the supervisor") as the backing of the argument, he then introduces another reason (e.g. the issue of the nature of the relationship between the two parties in conflict). In the light of this reason, the previously stated rule is no longer appropriate, without modification (see last proposition in the inference structure).

The issue of the relationship between the two parties involved in a conflict situation is also raised in the following argument; this time, however, the series of inferences reconstructed makes direct references to the notion of friendship:

9:7 "There are times when you want to say something (express my disagreement) [to a colleague] but you just leave it for another time (main Claim). Because I see that the other person is stressed out and I know that, if I discuss it with him then, I'll make him even more stressed (Warrants). Since people from another department have pressed him, I guess I shouldn't do the same, since I'm his colleague (Warrant). This is not the right thing to do; you see, my colleagues behave in a similar way towards me: when they see that I'm pressed, they don't make things worse for me (Warrant). That's what friendship is all about (Backing)."



An inference structure which alludes to the intentions of the parties when approaching conflict was constructed for the following argument: this time, as a means of gaining an understanding of this employee's inference chain, it based on the information presented by him in the form of the rebuttal of the argument.

9:8 "I believe that it always depends on the other person's character, no matter whether or not it is a work-related issue (Warrant). In cases that I believed that there is going to be a (negative) reaction from that colleague (Warrant), then I didn't express my disagreement (main Claim). On the contrary, when I knew that the other person was not prejudiced (against me) and had the (good) intention of getting along well together at work, then we can engage in a nice conversation (Rebuttal)."

DATA ----->	CLAIM
- A disagreement with a colleague over a work-related issue.	I didn't express my grievance to him.



WARRANTS

I believed that he would react in a negative way.

I also believed that he was prejudiced and that he didn't have a 'cooperative' spirit.

INFERENCE STEPS

When one of the persons is not 'cooperative', then the disagreement cannot be sorted out.

Whether a disagreement can be sorted out between the parties depends on the persons' intentions when resolving their disagreement.

The aim of this section has been to illustrate how the backings supporting employees' reasons for committing themselves to a particular course of action in a conflict episode, and which were often left implicit, were inferred (either directly, or through intermediate inference moves) from the components of the arguments which were stated explicitly. In order to ensure that the inferences I proposed regarding the principles and assumptions underlying employees' arguments corresponded - as closely as possible - to the inference structure assumed by employees when explaining their reasoning, I decided to reconstruct employees' inference structures - as a means of eliciting the principles and beliefs entailed in their reasoning process) only in those arguments where the structure of the argument, as stated explicitly, included some kind of justification as a support to the main claim; that is, identification of implicit backings was undertaken only in arguments comprising stated warrants and/or backings in their

structure. A detailed list of the inferences followed by employees in these arguments is included in Appendix VIII; the last inference step in each of the employees' inference structures, as proposed in the appendix, represent the assumptions underlying employees' argumentation.

9.3.2. Examining How Employees' Inferences Work - The Assumptions Underlying Employees' Argumentation

In the previous section, my objective was to elicit the reasons offered in employees' arguments regarding the course of action taken in any particular conflict episode reported. Elicitation of the various inferential steps followed by employees in their arguments also shed light on the assumptions and principles underlying employees' inferences. These assumptions would sometimes have the function of the backing of the argument examined (e.g. see extract 9:7 where the stated backing "that's what friendship is for" is also the assumption which enables us to understand how the particular argument works); however, in most of the cases examined, these principles go beyond the backing of the argument, and constitute the next inferential step in the sequence of inferences (as described in Appendix VIII) which, nevertheless, follows logically from the backing of the argument. The importance of the identification of these assumptions, according to Govier (1987), lies in the fact that they are necessary for individuals' inferences to work, when reasoning and arguing. Therefore, and for the purposes of an argumentation analyst, these assumptions are important as a means of facilitating the understanding of how organizational members' reasoning work. Moreover, since these assumptions bear on the particular arguments examined (i.e. by constituting either the backings of these arguments, or by being immediately suggested by the backings in use), they are directly related to the particular social context within which they appear⁸.

⁸The notion of 'field-dependence', which is inherent in Toulmin's framework, has been treated in more detail in Chapter Three (see section 3.3.1.).

The reconstruction of employees' inference structure (presented in Appendix VIII) suggested the existence of the following assumptions in their argumentation on the conflict management problem.

A. The '*Obedience to Hierarchical Authority*' Assumption

This assumption has been widely used (explicitly or implicitly) in employees' arguments regarding conflict situations with their supervisor; it has been found in the reconstruction of inference structures when employees argued about their decision to comply with the supervisor or to avoid expressing their grievance to him. Let us first look at the kind of argumentation used by the secretary of the R & D Department when referring to a hypothetical situation of a disagreement with the supervisor:

9:9 "There have been cases where I wanted to express my disagreement, but I decided not to (main Claim).. because when you disagree with somebody higher up in the hierarchy, there is nothing you can do (Warrant). Therefore, whether you have a disagreement or not, you cannot say a word (Claim). Because your relationships with him will be spoiled and moreover, even though you don't mean to do so, you will inevitably mess with issues that you shouldn't (Backing)."

The inference structure of this argument resembles the one described in detail in the analysis of extract 9:5. This employee establishes his claim "I don't express my disagreement to the supervisor", by alluding to the hierarchical position of the other party in the disagreement; as the extract indicates, both the warrant and backing used by this employee refer to the issue of power. The underlying assumption in this argument, as suggested by the backing, would be the rule that "employees must not question the orders coming from the upper hierarchy"; the intermediate proposition connecting this assumption and the backing of this argument would be "questioning your supervisor will put your status in the company at risk"⁹. Some arguments regarding conflict avoidance further elaborate on the kind of risk implied by the previous employee. Two other employees from the R & D Department argue:

9:10 "When you disagree with your supervisor, you don't behave in the way you wanted to; you often 'swallow' your grievance (Claim). [Because]

⁹These inference moves are described in the diagram of extract 9:5.

you are afraid of your position (Warrant). You are afraid of a lot of things, mainly because of your financial situation (Warrant). If you had another source of financial security, you would then behave differently (Rebuttal)."

9:11 "In the past, I sometimes didn't express my disagreement (Claim) because I was afraid..of the supervisor. I was afraid of losing my job. (Warrant)"

Warrants used in both extracts seem to lie within the same implicit assumption "questioning the supervisor may lead to losing your job". The same principle seems to apply even in cases where employees failed to produce a full argument¹⁰ (see extracts 9:12 & 9:13). For instance, in the following argument, the employee reconstructs in great detail the conflict situation (data of the argument), and makes many claims without presenting any justification for his main claim:

9:12 "I proposed to my supervisor an idea that would improve the functioning of this area of work (Data) [...] The idea was put into practice but he did not inform me (Data). I didn't say anything (main Claim). Nobody cared about me; they just took advantage of me (Claim). They should have informed me (Claim) [...] I didn't want to take any financial reward (Claim) [...]"

9:13 "When I express my different viewpoint to the supervisor, he may not agree with it and will tell me to follow another course of action (Data). In this case, I simply comply (main Claim). It just means that my proposal was not accepted (Claim). It's normal: people have different viewpoints (Claim)."

I believe that the same organizational rule applies to other reported cases of conflict avoidance, even though there is no reference to the issue of power. The following employee's attempt to establish his/her claim on the grounds of such issues as the triviality of the conflict is not an adequate reason for explaining conflict avoidance, especially since the same employee has reported expressing minor disagreements to his colleagues:

¹⁰However, the inference structure of such arguments was not reconstructed, since these cases necessitated a great degree of speculation, which often could not be substantiated by the information offered in the particular argument.

9:14 "It was a minor disagreement (Data). I thought that the best thing to do was to not voice my disagreement (main Claim). Because I considered the issue to be of no importance (Warrant). Of course, one has to express oneself (Claim); otherwise, all these things accumulate within you, you go back home and you are frustrated (Claim)."

The same principle ("employees should follow the supervisor's recommendations") was found to underlie arguments regarding compliance with the supervisor. In fact, this principle lies at the core of all arguments on compliance. For instance, an employee from the Design Department structures his argument on his compliance in the following way:

9:15 "A month ago, I had a disagreement with my supervisor regarding the way of moving the machinery (Data) [...] This supervisor is a strong-minded person (*he always insists on his own opinion*) (Claim) and I do believe that this is the way it is supposed to be because he is the one to sign the official documents (Claim). Personally, I try to pass on to him what is the right thing to do (Claim). After the point where he keeps on insisting, I follow his order (main Claim). (Since) he is the boss and thus the person who is responsible for the final decision (Warrant)."

In comparing this argument with cases of conflict avoidance towards the supervisor, we can notice that this principle does not differ much from the assumptions underlying arguments about conflict avoidance towards the supervisor; this similarity is due to the fact that both of these propositions are bureaucratic rules relating to a hierarchical position which is strictly adhered to, especially in a bureaucratic work environment. Both of these propositions can be understood better in relation to another assumption which also remains implicit in employees' arguments, which is that the supervisor follows the guidelines given by top management, which aim to ensure the maintenance of the company; in other words, the goals set by the company must be the driving criterion for every course of action taken. The wide acceptance of these backings is also indicated by the fact that they are found in supervisors' arguments on conflict situations with their subordinates:

9:16 "My opinion will be followed (Claim).. since the subordinate lacks the necessary information (Warrant). For instance, he doesn't attend the meetings and, therefore, he is not aware of whether or not I am pressured by the top management to finish a certain task (Data)."

The same bureaucratic rule is also suggested by the warrant offered by the supervisor of the R & D Department in order to support his claim of firing an employee:

9:17 "[...] she had brought her family problems to work (Claim, implicit Data) [...] This situation started to cause problems within the work environment (Data).. things had to be sorted out (main Claim) [...] this situation was affecting the functioning of the division (Warrant)."

B. The '*The supervisor is responsible for solving problems in the workplace*' Assumption

This organizational (bureaucratic) rule was found to be used often by employees in their attempts to back up their arguments for asking the supervisor to intervene and thus resolve the conflict problem encountered:

9:18 "In a disagreement concerning technical issues, there have always been two opinions (Claim); each of us attempts to prove his case (Claim). The important issues are always solved in connection to the wider (bureaucratic) procedure (Backing). It all depended on the seriousness of the issue at hand (Warrant). Each of us argued on the way that the issue should be tackled and the final decision was taken by the supervisor (main Claim). The immediate supervisor is a mechanical engineer and experienced in his field (Warrant)."

9:19 "We may ask for the intervention of the supervisor (main Claim). This happens when neither of us is sure about how to proceed with the issue which is quite serious (Data). It primarily depends on the seriousness of the issue in dispute (Warrant). [In serious cases] we end up referring to the supervisor who will also be held responsible for the decision to be taken (Claim)."

This case clearly relates to Janis and Mann's notion of 'defective coping' (see Chapter Seven, section 7.8.). In order to avoid the responsibility of the decision to be taken, employees rely on the supervisor to make a decision, under the pretence that dealing with problems in the workplace is within his responsibility.

C. The '*Good Guys*' - '*Bad Guys*' Assumption

So far, we have seen that employees made use of the 'obedience to authority' rule when reasoning about their decision not to express their grievance to their supervisor. As far as conflict avoidance with colleagues is concerned, the assumptions used by

employees are different; this time, assumptions are drawn from personal experiences and beliefs outside the work context. For instance, an employee from Supplies reports:

9:20 "It may be the case that one of my colleagues is not sympathetic to the fact that I have a lot of work pressure at that moment (Data). What he asks me to do is not that urgent and in the meantime, he sees that I'm in a rush to finish another task (Data); nevertheless, he may insist on taking priority over the rest of the issues (Claim). In such a case, I usually don't say anything (main Claim).. because I know that he is so frustrated due to the work pressure he is facing (Warrant). I know the people here very well; I have gathered some information: e.g. you expect such a reaction from George, when he is under pressure (Backing) [...] On the other hand, when there is no pressure, the other person will be more relaxed as well when addressing you (Backing). So, I can tell that his reaction was just due to the pressure (Warrant). There are no 'personal' reasons behind such reactions (Warrant)."

The sort of implicit assumptions underlying the above argument would look like "There is always good intention in social interactions among friends" and "In friendship, people care for each other" (see inference structure for extract 9:8). Analysis of the arguments in connection to the 'withdraw' node indicated the use of the same assumptions:

9:21 "Our disagreement had to do with the way of performing a certain task (Data). I don't like this kind of behaviour so I express my disagreement (Claim). However, I don't believe that the other person is doing that on purpose (Warrant). I can understand the reason for his doing so; we are in contact (all the time) and we know each other's character (Backing). Since I know the other person's character and how he will react (in similar situations) (Warrant).. I won't pay any further attention to the event (main Claim)."

9:22 "If I believe that my colleague's reaction was meant as a joke (Warrant), I will just smile and I won't say anything (main Claim). Unless I realize that the other person behaved like that in order to insult me, then I'll answer him back (Rebuttal). I cannot let him insult me, especially in the workplace (Claim). However, the latter case happens very rarely (Claim). You see, I have worked here for a long time and we know each other very well; we have spent lots of time together (Backing)."

Employees use the same assumption (but this time from the opposite direction) in similar conflict situations with other colleagues; this rule is "when the other person is

not cooperative (e.g. has bad intentions), there is no chance of finding a solution to the problem". Employees who use this rule implicitly or explicitly in their discourse about conflict management problems, establish their claim for avoiding expressing their grievance on the assumption that the other person has bad intentions (and, thus, is not defined as 'friend'); therefore, based on their attribution of non-cooperative intentions towards the other person, and drawing on the assumption that, when at least one of the parties in conflict is not cooperative, then no mutually agreed-upon solution to the problem can be found, employees decided not to voice their disagreement; for instance, another employee from Supplies reports:

9:23 "I don't express my disagreement (Claim) when I know that the other person is not cooperative in the sense that s/he has an opinion and he is fixated on it (Data, implicit Warrant). In that case, my words would be wasted (Claim). I am not interested in whether or not he will agree with me; I just want to express what I believe (Claim)."

Similarly, another employee uses the same assumption for justifying his choice of withdrawing from the conflict situation with his colleague:

9:24 "It all depends on the two parties in conflict (Claim). It is possible that I just let it (the disagreement) be (main Claim). (Because) there are some people who are convinced; even though they listen to a third opinion, they just don't want to be persuaded (Claim, implicit Warrant)."

The assumptions identified in the employees' arguments regarding conflict avoidance and withdrawal between colleagues (i.e. "There is always good intention in social interactions among friends", "in friendship, people care for each other", and "when the other person is not cooperative (thus, not a 'friend': my addition), there is no chance of finding a solution to the problem") illustrate the importance of the issue of relationship, and of attributions about the other party, in the decision making process of employees. Unlike conflict cases with the supervisor - where warrants, backings and assumptions underlying employees' arguments centred on the power of the supervisor - the assumptions underlying employees' discourse when avoiding conflict situations with a colleague indicate that emphasis is put on the other party in conflict (e.g. existing relationship, attribution of intent).

9.3.3. The Implicit Nature of Assumptions Underlying Employees' Argumentation

As stated in section 9.3.1., the diagrams of employees' arguments indicated that 46 out of 66 arguments analyzed in the present study, in terms of Toulmin's framework of argumentative structure, included stated warrants, while only 16 out of the same 66 arguments included backings stated explicitly by the employee when arguing about his conflict management problem. Therefore, as this analysis indicated, employees often failed to produce a complete chain of argumentation when reasoning about their conflict management problem. Since the issue of incomplete argumentation is very important for the present study, in the sense that it does not permit employees to incorporate their claims into any kind of frame (see Level 3 analysis), I shall now attempt to shed some light on why the principles underlying employees' argumentation are left, most of the times, implicit.

I believe any argumentation theorist would agree with me that, when reasoning, individuals cannot possibly state all the information pertinent to the argument; for this reason, they necessarily leave some of this information unstated. In order to understand what kind of information is left implicit, we need to keep in mind the 'interactive' nature of employees' argumentation, and thus, understand the elements embedded in it in terms of the arguers' attempt to persuade their listener (see Chapter Seven, section 7.7.2.1.). Looking at employees' argumentation as a reasoning process which aims for the persuasion of its audience, we can understand that employees leave unstated those argumentative elements which are assumed to be understood and easily inferred by others. Therefore, omitting to state the 'because' part of the argument is an indication of the fact that they assume that the propositions relevant to this part of the reasoning process are presumed to be true and, thus, are common knowledge to both the arguer and his/her listener. Since they consider such assumptions well-known and 'trivially true' (Govier, 1987), they neglect to refer explicitly to them and assume that their listener is in the position to supply these propositions for him/herself. To put it simply, employees neglect to express those parts of the argument which are considered to be easily understood and accepted by the listener.

Let us have a closer look at the following argument from an employee of the Design group, since I believe that this argument offers an indicative illustration of incomplete structure of argumentation, as far as the 'because' part of the argument is concerned:

9:25 "This supervisor was really disgraceful (Claim) [...] Every time I expressed my disagreement to him, you would find an excuse to tell me (Claim, implicit Data). I was not persuaded by this kind of explanation but, after a point, I had to stop (comply) (main Claim). One does not initiate a fight over such issues (Claim)."

In this extract, the employee makes a lot of claims but he fails to establish his main claim (i.e. compliance with the supervisor) by giving any warrants. In her research on career decision making, Marouda (1995) indicated the significant role of priming subjects in the development of complete chains of argument, as well as in the incorporation of claims into a frame structure. However, even after priming him, the main reason supporting the argument remains implicit:

"I don't know.. we are not used to that; you simply cannot say such things (Warrant). I want the disagreement to stop (Warrant) Even though such a situation makes you frustrated, you just stop it (Claim). I think that everybody here acts in a similar way (Backing)."

So, even when primed, this employee could not present a full argumentation. However, his claims "we are not used to that", as well as "I think that everybody here acts in a similar way", suggest that the bureaucratic rule of adhering to power figures is at the core of his argument. This rule - even though never stated explicitly - puts constraints on any further structuring of his conflict management problem. Moreover, the statements "we are not used to that", "you just stop it" and "everybody here acts in the same way", which insinuate this (organizational) rule, also suggest the pervasiveness of this rule in this work context, the truth of which is accepted by arguers in this context, and is beyond question.

Toulmin et al. (1984) have posited that the 'because part' of an argument usually is not made clear or explicit; this is the case especially in business contexts where focus is put on the claim and factual data of the argument. In these contexts, they found that the

warrants tend to be understated since they are widely understood within a particular institutional context;

[warrants] are clearly understood, because all involved are intimately familiar with the organization's goals and values, which determine the operative warrants for most of such arguments." (Toulmin et al., 1984; p.386)

As the argumentation analysis in the present study has suggested, the 'because' part of employees' argumentation, in reference to their conflict management problem, consists of principles and beliefs which are agreed-upon by the employees of an organization, and which are enacted and communicated through the employees' discourse. The frequent absence of these propositions in employees' argumentation can be understood when taking into account that employees are not always aware of the assumptions underlying them and making them work, as well as of the embedness of the latter in their reasoning; in cases where employees are aware of these assumptions, they consider them as common knowledge which is also shared by their listeners. The fact that these assumptions are widely shared by employees (as indicated by the reconstruction of their inference structure: see Appendix VIII), suggests that they portray - and are fashioned by - the wider social and organizational context within which organizational members act, which also explains their implicit nature.

9.3.4. Looking at Employees' Assumptions Within the Social and Organizational Nexus

In the previous sections, I referred extensively to how I identified the warrants and backings either stated explicitly or left implicit in employees' argumentation on their conflict management problem. Going one step further in the reconstruction of employees' reasoning, I unravelled the missing assumptions which often underlied - and were implicitly suggested by - the premises used the arguments included in the analysis. These assumptions were found to be the following:

1. Employees must not question the orders coming from the upper hierarchy.
2. Employees should follow the supervisor's recommendations.
3. The supervisor is responsible for solving problems in the workplace.

4. There is always good intention in social interactions among friends.
5. When the other person has bad intentions, there is no chance of finding a solution to the problem.

The first three assumptions which were found to underlie employees' argumentation on their conflict management problem clearly draw on bureaucratic rules which are espoused and in use in E.P.E. When referring to organizational bureaucracies, we saw that a core principle of bureaucratic structures is the hierarchy of subordinate-supervisor relationships (see Chapter One, section 1.3.1.); within this structure, the supervisor is responsible for the work delegation to his subordinates and thus accountable for the latter's work. As indicated in the extensive application of the first three assumptions presented above, these bureaucratic rules are portrayed in employees' discourse when reasoning about their conflict problem, and constrain further structuring activities (see Level Three analysis). However, the use of these assumption has to be seen in connection to another assumption expressed explicitly on a few occasions "going against the supervisor's will may lead to losing your job" (see extracts 9:10 & 9:11). Thus, obedience to hierarchical authority, and adherence to bureaucratic rules and regulations, provide employees with a means of maintaining security; this is particularly important for the employees in E.P.E., given the problematic financial situation of the company and their consequent fear of finding themselves without a job. As the analysis indicated, these rules are normally implicit in employees' arguments, which is another indication of the extent to which they are espoused by organizational members. In their study of argumentation in business settings, Toulmin et al. (1984) noted the frequent use of implicit warrants and backings in business reports and presentations; such (implicit) principles reflected the overall objectives of the organization (i.e. increase in profit, well-functioning of the company) which are shared by organizational members. Thus, the fundamental principle underlying such arguments also seems to be the survival of the organization; this goal underlies - and also legitimizes - the organizational rules (as used in employees' arguments).

The other two principles, which were found to underlie employees' argumentation in conflict problems with colleagues, are drawn from values and the belief systems of the employees as formed within the wider social context. These assumptions seem to allude directly to the 'ingroup'/'outgroup' concept which is a core tenet for the Greeks. The 'ingroup' is defined as one's family, relatives, friends and friends of friends and, in general, people who show concern for one (Triandis & Vassiliou, 1972). The functional significance of the concept is appreciated when reviewing certain geographical and historical circumstances in Greece (e.g. mountainous country with scarce resources, political instability and crises created by wars or revolutions) which called for a continuous struggle for survival; within such circumstances, it was easier for the person to survive as a member of a group which thus provided protection and security (Triandis & Vassiliou, 1972). The appropriate behaviours characterizing interactions within the ingroup are cooperation, trust, protection and mutual help. The Greek's social behaviour has been found to be strongly dependent on whether the other person is a member of his/her ingroup; relations with members of the outgroup (that is, with people who are not concerned with one's welfare) are essentially competitive. In the case of the present study, the 'ingroup' concept refers to friendships developed in the workplace with people working in the same or other groups within the department; the rest of the people working in the same environment are categorized as the 'outgroup'.

Overall, as used for the purposes of the present study, argumentation analysis enabled me to examine employees' argumentation in regard to their conflict management problem. Examination of employees' arguments indicated that, in the majority of these arguments, employees did not explicitly authenticate the various rules they used as support to their main claim. Going beyond the level of what employees stated explicitly in their argumentation, this study illustrated that these arguments were established on the basis of assumptions which appertain to the particular social and organizational system within which they are located. The importance of the identification of these rules for the present study is associated with the fact that these

rules constrain employees in any further structuring of their conflict management problem (as it will be indicated in Level Three analysis).

9.3.5. Drawing Conclusions from the Present Analysis for the Argumentation Analysis Research

In Chapter Three (section 3.3.1.1.), I referred extensively to certain points of criticism made by argumentation theorists and analysts regarding the application of Toulmin's model for the description of the structure of argumentative texts. These points were primarily related to the difficulty of differentiating between the different components of the structure of an argument. Drawing on my experience when analyzing employees' arguments, I would like to make the following points:

First, as the present argumentation analysis has indicated, there are no 'external' criteria upon which we can differentiate which sorts of information are used as data, claims, warrants or backings in employees' discourse. For instance, we have seen that, in many instances, employees were making claims which they used as information on the basis of which they made other claims (e.g. the main claim of the argument analyzed in this study); therefore, these claims would operate as data in the context of the arguments used, in the sense that they were used unchallenged in order to establish their main claim about the behaviour used in conflict handling. It was also found that information which was used as data on some occasions had the function of a warrant in other arguments. In general, the form or the content of the argumentative elements were not suitable criteria for the analyst to be able to describe the structure of the argument under examination. Drawing on my experience in this study, the argumentation analyst needs to examine how the information included in the argument examined 'operates' in the context of this particular argument. In other words, the analyst needs to reflect on whether the arguer makes a claim when stating an utterance, or uses this claim as a piece of information which helps him/her define the situation at hand (i.e. data); similarly, the analyst needs to examine whether such information serves as a part of the definition of a situation or, rather, as a support of the claim

made. In summary, a proper description of the various argumentative elements needs to be based on the different functions that these elements play in the context of the particular argument, and depends on the way in which the particular arguer has selected what information to use as evidence or as the justification of his/her claim.

Second, in the present study, the diagrams of employees' arguments suggested the existence of argumentative elements which do not appear explicitly in the structure of the argument, in the way that the latter were stated by the arguer. For instance, the reconstruction of the inference structures used in employees' argumentation revealed connections between the assumptions which are not present in the argumentative text and the stated premises of the argument. For this reason, an adequate understanding of employees' argumentation necessitated the elicitation of these steps of their inference structure which were left implicit. Going beyond the level of the text and identifying the implicit parts of employees' argumentation chain also enabled me to appreciate how the stated elements of any particular argument are related to each other. In this respect, the argumentation analysis conducted in the study illustrated what Willard had argued in 1976; that is, argumentative texts are incomplete as outlines of the underlying reasoning, and only 'imperfect abstractions' of what arguers actually meant to communicate when presenting their arguments. Going back, once again, to the points of concern made by argumentation researchers, in regard to the difficulty of differentiating the component elements of real-life arguments when applying Toulmin's model, we can see that these points are related to the way in which the argumentative texts under examination were usually analyzed; a review of existing studies reveals that argumentation researchers were often found to restrain themselves - when describing argumentative structure - to what has actually been said or written by people. This approach when analyzing argumentative text seems to have been a common trend in the general field of discourse analysis, within which analysts tend to centre on the level of the text, even though they recognize discourse as a communicative event (van Dijk, 1997).

Third, as the findings of the argumentation analysis conducted in the present study suggested, examining arguments only at the level of what is actually included in people's discourse does not offer a reliable clue as to what this particular argumentation involves. For this reason, I decided to infer these parts of employees' argumentation which were not stated explicitly by arguers; in this way, I could identify propositions which, though unexpressed, were used as premises, to which employees were committed when making their claims. Since this approach on argumentation analysis involves relying on the analyst's inferences as a means of describing the arguer's argumentation process, argumentation critics have posited that the analyst needs to ensure that her description of the arguments examined mirrors the structure of the argument, as intended by the arguer him/herself (Freeman, 1991). Taking into consideration the organizational context enabled me to understand how employees' argumentation has been persuasive in this particular context. More specifically, the analysis suggested that the propositions which were left implicit in employees' argumentation were accepted as common knowledge by employees working in this particular organizational context, were assumed to be true, and were expected to be tacitly understood between those participating in the interaction (i.e. the arguer and his/her listener). These sets of tacitly shared beliefs and meanings were taken for granted when employees constructed their arguments, and the representation of their meaning allowed the reasons they offered to stand in a justifying relation to the claim of their argument. Thus, taking into consideration the particular social and organizational context within which employees' argumentation was shaped, I was able to understand how the particularities of employees' arguments, as revealed in my analysis, had a contextual function.

The importance of studying discourse as part of the context within which it is embedded has been foreshadowed in Toulmin's work, especially in his references to 'field-dependent' elements of argumentation (see Chapter Three, section 3.3.1.), while it has also been acknowledged by contemporary research (van Dijk, 1997; van Eemeren et al., 1997). For instance, Burelson (1992) has posited that the social context within which the argument under examination is located provides critics and theorists with

important clues as to how ideas, concepts, propositions and arguments are interpreted and utilized within this given context. Taking this proposition one step further, Kneupper (1978) suggested that argumentation critics should become *ethnomethodologists* in order for their reconstruction of the argument examined to approximate the meaning of the argument, as intended to be understood by the arguer him/herself. I believe that what enabled me - as an argumentation analyst - to gain insights regarding the sense in which the various argumentative elements were used and intended to be understood was the fact that, when interviewing employees and collecting the research material (i.e. accounts of conflict episodes), I have interacted with various employees (both during the interviews, as well as informally during coffee breaks), which provided me information (other than that appearing in the argumentative texts analyzed) about the wider context from which employees' argumentation on their conflict management problem - which was later analyzed - was drawn. Such a background information allowed me to justify my interpretations in terms of contextual considerations of the particular situation, and thus minimized the likelihood of my 'arbitrarily' assigning meanings to propositional elements of the arguments under examination. Thus, by having background information about the particular context, I was in a position to understand how the particularities of this context governed the way in which various utterances were combined and how pertinent information is structured in employees' argumentation; moreover, being sensitive to this information facilitated my understanding regarding how this context made employees' argumentation on conflict a meaningful and acceptable discourse in this particular setting.

Overall, the argumentation analysis undertaken in this study illustrated that an adequate understanding of people's argumentative discourse is possible only when taking into account both the properties of the text under examination, which have been stated explicitly, as well as those characteristics which are left implicit, and which can then be inferred through the consideration of the social context within which this discourse is fashioned. By going beyond the level of what has actually been said or written by the arguer, while being sensitive to the particular social context from which the

arguments examined are drawn, the argumentation analyst will be in a position to challenge Willard's claim, according to which "the argumentation theorist who diagrams the contents of speech texts is doing nothing more significant than drawing lines on sheets of paper" (Willard, 1976; p.313).

9.4. Level 4 Analysis - Discussion

For the purposes of the present study, the examination of employees' arguments on their conflict management problem aimed to elicit employees' reasoning process and the assumptions which bear on this process. The analysis revealed the kind of elements employees selected when reasoning about their conflict problem, while it focused on the types of the assumptions which underlied employees' argumentation and made their inferences work. The importance of identifying these assumptions for the present study is related to the fact that these argumentative elements constrain the way employees structure the problem into a frame structure (e.g. MAU, Future Scenario, Rule-based Frame).

The analysis indicated that, in many cases, employees did not incorporate their claims into a frame structure. Out of 66 arguments (e.g. main claims) made, only 40 led to structuring the conflict problem into a frame unit, which suggests that in a great number of the cases analyzed, employees failed to elaborate their arguments about their conflict management problem and to structure them into a frame unit. Even though there is an indication that, when employees referred to the 'Comply' node, they were less able to structure their claim into some form of framing¹¹, no conclusion can be drawn on the grounds of the few episodes included in the present analysis. However, this finding needs to be seen in relation to employees' over-reliance on the normative framework of organizational rules which are not challenged nor even stated explicitly.

¹¹12 out of 19 claims did not lead to a frame structure.

9.5. Level 3 Analysis - Discussion

My focus in Level 3 analysis was to examine the way that employees assigned structure to their conflict management problem, and represented this structure in their discourse about conflict situations. For the purpose of this analysis, I analyzed employees' arguments within the three frames (MAU Frame, Future Scenario Frame, Rule-Based Frame) which have been discussed earlier (see Chapter Seven, section 7.7.3.). 40 frames were identified. Table 9.5. illustrates the breakdown of the frames used by employees according to the decision nodes of the net model¹². The Rule-based frame was the most frequent frame unit used by employees (27 Rule-based frames out of 40 frames identified in the present analysis). Figure 9.3. offers a graphical representation of employees' arguments in the frames.

Table 9.2. Classification of Arguments for Each Decision Node in the Frames

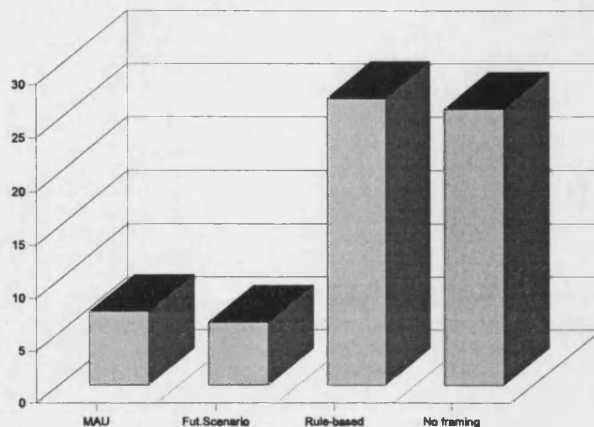
Decision Node	MAU	Future Scenario	Rule-based	No Framing	Total
Avoid	5	2	10	4	21
Comply	2	1	4	12	19
Interv.1¹³	-	-	-	2	2
Intervent.	-	-	9	3	12
Withdraw	-	2	2	1	5
Impasse	-	-	2	2	4
Other¹⁴	-	1	-	2	3
Total	7	6	27	26	66

¹²All frame units identified and analyzed are presented in Appendix V.

¹³This node refers to situations where employees asked for the intervention of the supervisor once-removed.

¹⁴This node refers to the three conflict episodes reported by Mr. X which do not correspond to the decision nodes indicated by the net model.

Figure 9.3.: Graphical Representation of Employees' Arguments in the Frames



Below, I present an example of each of the three frames in order to illustrate how employees' argumentation developed and was further structured in each frame unit:

Future Scenario Frame

9:26 "I had been patient for eight months (*withdrawal*). I was polite to him, in order to keep my temper under control. I behaved like that because I wanted to re-establish co-operation between us. I could not proceed with my task otherwise. For the sake of the work, I had to cooperate with him."

Multi Attribute Utility Frame

9:27 "There have been cases where I have wanted to express my disagreement to my supervisor (first alternative), but I decided not to (*comply*) (second alternative). Because when you disagree with somebody higher up in the hierarchy, there is nothing you can do. Therefore, whether you have a disagreement or not, you cannot say a word. [Had I decided to express my disagreement], then my relationship with him would have been affected and moreover, [...] I would have brought certain 'issues' to the fore which I shouldn't have."

Rule-based Frame

9:28 "I keep on insisting on my opinion (*impasse*). In this case, I know that what I'm doing is the right thing (rule) and that he is behaving in this way in order to show that he is better than me and has a better knowledge of the job (rule). Moreover, I am the one responsible for this task (rule)."

In the discussion of the Argumentation analysis, we noticed the extensive use of organizational principles, in the form of backings and assumptions underlying

employees' arguments. As the Level 3 analysis indicated, these principles served as rules which resulted in Rule-based Frames. Since the rule restrains the employee from any further exploration of alternative solutions, s/he is not able to structure his/her claims into any other frame, nor have any alternative solutions to his/her problem; this applied to almost all cases of conflict with the supervisor, as well as when asking for the supervisor's intervention (11 Rule-Based Frames out of a total of 12 frames), where obedience to hierarchical power has always been the rule used by employees in order to establish their claims; this rule does not allow employees to explore beyond the constraints the latter imposed upon them. In this sense, framing the conflict management problem in a rule-based structure creates an artificial situation of 'automatic' decision making, since the rule restrains the employee from further elaborating on the problem and thus from selecting among different alternative solutions to the problem¹⁵. However, this kind of 'automatic decision making' is artificial since the choice of conflict handling behaviour is not rule-based (e.g. there is a variety of alternative conflict handling patterns). However, the employee may approach his/her conflict management problem as a rule-based problem, in cases where s/he feels that his/her 'background of safety' is threatened by exploring other options; in such a case, the employee is involved in what Janis and Mann (1977) referred to as 'defective coping'. For this reason, one could claim that even though, according to the net model presented in Chapter Six, 'comply' appears to be a decision node, in fact, for most of the employees involved in such conflict situations, it is much more of an 'automatic' behaviour. This 'naturalized' way of reasoning about their compliance with the supervisor resembles the way that supervisors argued and framed their choice of enforcing their viewpoint to their subordinates (see extracts 9:16 & 9:17).

When structuring their conflict management problem within a MAU Frame, employees referred to two alternative courses of action which they considered available to them under the particular circumstances; their choice of action was determined by the evaluation of these alternatives according to certain criteria. For an adequate

¹⁵The notion of 'automatic' decision making was discussed in Chapter Six, section 6.5.

understanding of the issues entailed in a MAU frame structure, it is important to identify the alternatives explored by the employee, as well as the criteria on the grounds of which employees discriminated between the alternative courses of action explored. Examination of the alternatives employees used incorporated in their MAU frames indicated that the options explored were: avoid-express disagreement and comply-keep on disagreeing¹⁶. In all seven MAU Frames identified by the analysis, employees chose either avoiding or complying behaviour. Looking closer at the criteria they used in their evaluation of these options, we can see that the criteria which led them to the alternative chosen are the same organizational rules and beliefs which were used as rules in the Rule-based frames. For instance:

- 9:29 "I follow the supervisor's recommendation, even though I keep on disagreeing with him (*comply*) (first alternative). Because you are not aware of information related to this decision. When management insists, it means that there are some underlying reasons (rule). Should I insist on my point of view (second alternatives), the two levels could not cooperate effectively; one of us would have to be 'removed' from the workplace."
- 9:30 "There are times when you want to say something (*express disagreement*) [to a colleague] (first alternative) but you just leave it for another time (*avoid*) (second alternative). Because I see that the other person is stressed out and I know that if I discuss it with him then, I'll make him even more stressed [...] I guess I shouldn't do the same, since I'm his colleague. This is not the right thing to do [...] That's what friendship is all about (rule)."

In all seven MAU Frames analyzed, the alternative course of action which was not finally chosen has been explored in terms of a Future Scenario Frame. As indicated in extracts 9:26, 9:29 and 9:30, employees explored these alternatives in terms of a contingency plan (e.g. 'what could happen if I express my disagreement (or, continue disagreeing?'). However, in all cases, the contingency plans led to a negative evaluation of the alternative not chosen; in the meantime, the selection of the other

¹⁶Surprisingly, the option of 'referral to the supervisor once-removed', which was used by certain employees and which constitutes an 'effective' way of resolving conflict with the supervisor (in the sense that the conflict does not remain outstanding), is not explored by employees.

alternative was made on the basis of the rules already identified (see section on Argumentation analysis). Related to this finding is the fact that, in all MAU Frames, the criteria in favour of the alternative not chosen are not presented; however, these criteria seem to be related to the employees' general desire¹⁷ to express their grievances and find an agreed-upon solution to disagreements. This issue is related to the fact that the episodes analyzed are employees' reconstructions of conflict situations which have taken place in the past and, thus, the course of action chosen has already been implemented.

In summary, Level 3 analysis indicated that employees used MAU, Future Scenario and Rule-based Frames when structuring their conflict management problem. The small number of the units of analysis could not allow for making any conclusive statements. In general, Rule-based frames were more commonly used by employees in all decision nodes. The analysis also revealed that the assumptions identified in the Argumentation analysis served as rules in the Rule-based Frames, as well as criteria in the evaluation of alternative options in MAU Frames. The frequent use of these rules (as portrayed in both Rule-based Frames and MAU Frames) in employees' discourse suggests that the latter are substantially constrained in the way they structure their conflict problem. Nevertheless, the fact that employees were found to choose among any of the three frame structures for the representation of their problem illustrates that they also differ in the way they structure their conflict management problem.

9.5.1. Past Reconstruction - Coming to Terms with the Decision Taken

The investigation of the conflict management problem in the present study has relied on examining conflict situations which have taken place in the past. Therefore, having already taken a course of action, employees were asked during the interviews to represent retrospectively their conflict management problem.

¹⁷This desire has become apparent in references about generalized action statements (see Chapter Six, section 6.6.3.).

I find research on cognitive dissonance very relevant for an appreciation of the way in which employees reconstruct such situations. The core idea in cognitive dissonance theorizing is that there is a drive within the individual towards consonance of cognitions (Festinger, 1964). In cases where a person holds two inconsistent cognitions, s/he tries to alter one of those two 'dissonant' cognitions" in order to redress the negative experience of cognitive dissonance (Bem, 1967). According to Festinger (1957), dissonance is a post-decisional phenomenon¹⁸ which is likely to occur when the person has already made a choice among different alternatives, each of which having both positive and negative features. For instance, in the case of the conflict management problem, a particular employee wants to decide whether to express his disagreement to the other person or to avoid doing so. For this reason, s/he evaluates the pros and cons for each alternative, which could be the following: "I want to express my disagreement, because it makes me feel good to express what I feel" and "I want to avoid telling him that I minded because I don't want to put my job at risk". Having considered the different aspects of the problem, s/he decided to avoid expressing his/her grievance. Since the employee is aware of the negative aspects of the option selected, as well as of the positive aspects of the one rejected, s/he finds him/herself in a situation of inconsistency which gives rise to 'psychological discomfort'. Since this 'psychological discomfort' is "...a motivating factor in its own right" (Festinger, 1962; p.3), the employee has to deal with it by rationalizing about or bolstering the decision taken.

In light of this, employees' extensive use of organizational rules as a means of legitimizing their actions can also be seen as a means of bolstering the decision they have taken in an attempt to reduce possible feelings of dissonance. The use of organizational rules in order to justify employees' behaviour protects them from confronting the possibility of going against the action prescribed by these rules. In this way, they attempt to overcome any feelings of disapproval due to the action taken, since there is a legitimate purpose underlying the specific behavioural choice (Sitkin &

¹⁸On this issue, Festinger disagreed with Lewin who used the concept of cognitive dissonance in order to explain what happens before a decision is made.

Bies, 1993). What is even more important in cases where the decision draws on organizational rules is the fact that employees presented their arguments in such a way that they did not seem to have any other option but to follow the course of action prescribed by the particular organizational rule. For instance, in most cases of avoidance or compliance with the supervisor, the main claim of arguments took the form of "I had to.." rather than "I decided to.." Looking more closely at extract 9:10, we can see that the claim "I didn't express my disagreement [since he was my boss]" actually has the form of "I had to keep my grievance private" rather than "I decided to avoid conflict with my supervisor". Therefore, the employee's evaluation of the situation as not offering him/her any other (behavioural) alternative makes him more comfortable with his/her decision. In fact, a necessary condition for the person to experience dissonance is the freedom of choice; in cases where the person feels that s/he was forced to choose a particular course of action, then s/he does not experience any dissonance (Farr, 1995).

However, even though employees reconstruct their conflict management problem in a way which minimizes their feelings of dissonance, they still experience these feelings. This was apparent during the discussion of the net model where, in some cases of compliance or conflict avoidance with the supervisor, employees reported having experienced feelings of frustration and anger¹⁹. These feelings of regret or dissonance are related to the 'loss' of the other potential option (e.g. expressing their disagreement) which is espoused by employees, as indicated in their generalized action comments. According to Humphreys and McFadden (1980), feelings of post-decisional regret or dissonance are not likely to arise in circumstances where the employee has adopted 'defective' coping mechanisms (see Chapter Seven, section 7.8.).

¹⁹In some other occasions, feelings of discomfort and distress were implied by the overall discourse.

9.6. Level 2 Analysis - Discussion

Using Level 2 analysis, I examined the conditional evaluative judgments used by employees. As discussed earlier, at Level 2, individuals make conditional judgments when talking about the conflict problem, which reveal the extent to which they are prepared to explore the 'what if' questions. Some of the conditional judgments reported by employees are the following:

"When I don't express myself, it's bad."

"It all depends on the relationship; when you have a friendly relationships with the other person, you don't need to refer to somebody else."

"If he realizes that I am right, this is good."

"If you are right, the other person does not challenge you."

"When you go out for a dinner with a colleague, then it is easy to understand his character."

Overall, the analysis identified 39 conditional judgements with reference to the conflict management problem. Taking into account the 560 propositions made by employees when representing their conflict management problems (see Level 5 analysis), employees only made a small number of conditional judgements. This finding has to be seen in relation to the fact that employees reconstruct conflict management problems which have taken place in the past; thus, they have already moved to the solution of their problem. Moreover, the limited number of 'what-if' questions is also related to the way in which employees structured their conflict management problem at higher levels. For instance, Level 3 analysis revealed an extensive use of Rule-based Frames which prescribes for employees what course of action to take. Within this structure, the employee is not able to make trades-off between the various alternatives, since the rule allows only the exploration - and subsequently, the implementation - of a particular course of action.

The extensive use of rules is not only a means of legitimizing employees' actions, but also a means of enabling them to avoid the risk and uncertainty entailed in the management of conflict situations which may threaten employees' 'background of

safety'. Strictly following organizational rules 'protects' employees from further exploring options which makes them feel insecure or even induces panic. The exploration of 'what-if' questions needs to be seen in connection with the issue of 'worst case scenario' (see Level 5 analysis); we have already seen that in cases where the 'worst case scenario' is unbounded, considerable fear arises, since the employee finds a gap in the boundary of his/her background of safety (Sandler & Sandler, 1978). In these cases, further exploration of the conflict problem in the direction of the 'worst case scenario' may stop. Any 'worst case scenario' is defined as such under the influence of the particular social context within which the problem situation is located; Level 5 analysis suggested that the domains of power and role expectations mark the limits of employees' 'background of safety', beyond which the exploration of the conflict management problem is unbounded and likely to induce fear. Taking into account these considerations, we can understand how the exploration of questions like "What if I had expressed my grievance to the supervisor.." or "What if I had not complied with him.." is made in terms of the 'worst case scenario', which explains employees' 'reluctancy' to ask 'what-if' questions. This point is further illustrated in the discourse of employees who explored 'what-if' questions:

- 9:31 "If I had insisted on my point of view (e.g. not complying with the supervisor), the two levels could not have cooperated effectively and one of us would have had to be 'removed' from the workplace."
- 9:32 "If you express your disagreement [to my boss], your relationships with him will be spoiled and you will inevitably mess with issues that you shouldn't."
- 9:33 "If I hadn't behaved in the way I did, this would have had a bad effect on me; I could have even been fired."

Even though these employees explored 'what-if' questions, these questions clearly makes them confront the possibility of the 'worst case scenario' (i.e. "one of us [meaning himself] had to leave the workplace", "I could have been fired") which induces fear and thus inhibits any further exploration of the problem in this direction (e.g. "you shouldn't mess with these issues"). In this sense, the limited amount of 'what-if' questions in employees' discourse 'protects' them from confronting the

possibility of going against the bureaucratic rules (i.e. obedience to power, adherence to role expectations) which, for them, is an unbounded 'worst case scenario'.

9.7. Level 1 Analysis - Discussion

Through Level 1 analysis, I identified the unconditional judgments; these judgments represented the best alternative solution, as determined through the structuring and analysis of the problem in the previous levels. Some of the unconditional judgments found are the following:

"It's better for you not to talk about certain issues."

"In a work context, one must adapt and function according to the role expectations of the particular position."

"The best solution would be that a third person, higher up in the hierarchy, would intervene and make us have a discussion."

"The most important factor in such situations is self-pride (egoism)."

"We all must love this place and come here in order to work, not to exploit it."

"According to the way that the company functions, you have to discuss every issue with the person directly involved in the situation."

Overall, 42 unconditional judgments were made. The limited number of unconditional judgments in employees' discourse can also be seen in relation to the frequent structuring of the conflict management problem within a Rule-based Frame; this structure restrains the employee from assigning values or making best assessments regarding what is the most suitable solution.

9.8. Representation of the Conflict Management Problem in Mr. X's Discourse

In Chapter Six, I referred to the case of an employee whose way of handling conflict situations was quite unique in comparison with the employees of the two departments on which the present study focused. Analysis of the representation of the conflict management problem in his language discourse indicated that the way in which this

employee, Mr. X, represented his conflict problem did not differ from the discourse used by the rest of the employees interviewed. For instance, in Level 5 analysis, Mr. X's exploration of the problem fell within the 10 domains explored by the other employees (see Level 5 analysis). Moreover, analysis of the argumentation he used when reasoning about his conflict management problem illustrated that, when resolving the conflict in the way that his colleagues did, the sort of assumptions used in order to establish his claims were of the same nature as the ones used in his colleagues' arguments. For instance:

9:34 "One of the guidelines in our work (in Supplies) is to buy material which is cheap and of good quality at the same time (Data). A disagreement may arise between you and your colleague regarding which supplier to choose (Data) [...] In such situations, we refer to the supervisor who will take the final decision as well as the responsibility (Claim) [...] since it is an important issue (Warrant)."

9:35 "Two weeks ago, a new person came into the department (Data); he was a personal acquaintance of the boss (Data). [...] He had absolutely no knowledge about the job he was going to do (Claim) (*I didn't express my disagreement to my immediate supervisor*) (main implicit Claim). I showed him around as my supervisor had asked me to do (Claim). I am 48 years old and have been working here for 32 years; I still have some years before retiring (Warrant). All these years, I have understood when the 'doors' are open for you and when they are closed (Backing). I knew that if I hadn't behaved in the way I did, this would have had a bad effect on me; I could even have been fired (Backing)."

In both of these extracts, the bureaucratic rules constrain him when structuring his conflict management problem (e.g. use of Rule-based Frames in the case of both extracts). Comparing Mr. X's argumentation with the arguments of the other interviewees, we can see that the same assumptions are enacted in his arguments as in the arguments of the rest of his colleagues (see Argumentation analysis). Therefore, to a great extent, he shares - and thus perpetuates - the same organizational rules which are in use in that particular company.

However, Mr. X is not so consistent not only in terms of the conflict behaviour he employs (see Chapter Six, section 6.8.), but also in terms of the way he represents his conflict management problem. For instance, even though, in extract 9:35, he does not

even express his disagreement to his supervisor and adheres to the same organizational rules as the rest of the employees interviewed, in extracts 9:28 & 9:29, he threatens to kill his supervisor, should the latter not change his attitude towards him; in this case, the fear of losing his job does not appear to be the 'worst case scenario' any longer:

9:36 "I had serious problems with a supervisor a long time ago (Data). He was really powerful; he was a personal acquaintance of the boss (Data). However, he was a fake; all he wanted was to profit at the expense of the firm (Data). He also wanted to eliminate me (Data). I reached a point where I warned him "if you hurt me, I'll kill you. If you make another move, I'll kill you with my knife (main Claim). [...] I have two daughters who are old enough to take care of themselves; they both have their jobs (Data) [...] So, I don't mind if I am fired (Claim)."

9:37 "[...] Under the circumstances, I could not perform my job, since the job called for coordination between us (Claim) [...] [After having being patient for a long time] one day I grabbed him and swept him off his feet (main Claim). At that moment, I was putting my job at risk; I could lose my job or get a fine (Claim). I started beating him up (Claim). Soon, our colleagues intervened and I was asked to report on what had happened (Claim)."

In both of these extracts, Mr. X does not produce a complete argument regarding his choice of conflict handling behaviour; rather, he gives a lot of claims which are not further supported by any warrants. Due to his incomplete argumentation, he is not able to structure his problem into any of the frame units described. In general, both his behaviour and discourse on conflict resolution indicate that, even though he has not completely gone beyond organizational rules, he sometimes prefers 'breaking the rules' and thus challenging the organizational system.

9.9. Conclusions

The present chapter discussed the analysis of employees' accounts of conflict episodes according to the multilevel framework presented in Chapter Seven. The discussion focused on illustrating how the methodology proposed can be put into practice in the investigation and modelling of the conflict management problem in those nodes of the net model which indicated employees' involvement in decision making activities. The

operations entailed in each level of the framework were identified through the employees' language discourse, and enabled me to shed light on what is involved in the conflict management process. The modelling of employees' conflict management process, as proposed and undertaken by the present study, revealed that the way in which employees explore and structure their conflict management problem reflects the social and organizational context, within which they live and locate their conflict management problems. Specifically:

Level 5 analysis examined the exploration of the conflict management problem which set the boundaries of employees' 'small world' and defined their 'background of safety'. The analysis of employees' discourse indicated that issues such as the other's attributes and behaviour employed, conflict issues and characteristics of the conflict situation, possible consequences, pressure, relation to the other, own attributes and emotions, power conditions and situational aspects constitute the areas of concern which employees explore when representing their conflict management problem.

Level 4 analysis focused on the examination of employees' arguments, and revealed how the issues explored at Level 5 were expressed in employees' discourse. Toulmin's framework of argumentative layout was used as a means of eliciting employees' argumentation process. Argumentation analysis revealed the existence of a set of tacitly shared beliefs and meanings which employees take for granted when building their arguments on their conflict management problem; these beliefs allow the reasons to stand in a justifying relation to the claim and take the role of premises to which the arguer is committed in making the argument. The pervasiveness of these assumptions in employees' arguments indicated the prevalence of organizational rules in the representation of employees' conflict management problem. Finally, the identification of the main claim in each argument facilitated the identification of the type of frames which employees used in order to structure their knowledge of their conflict management problem and thus proceed with a solution to this problem.

My discussion of the argumentation analysis illustrated that an adequate understanding of people's argumentative discourse has been enabled through consideration of both the properties of the text under examination, which have stated explicitly, as well as of those propositions which were left understood, and which were inferred in the light of the particular social and organizational context within which this discourse has been fashioned. The pervasiveness of the social situation (i.e. cultural and organizational) as a means of eliciting the description of employees' argumentative structure has become apparent in the kinds of assumptions that employees used as their ultimate support for their claims, as well as in the implicit nature of these assumptions. Thus, drawing on the discussion of the present argumentation analysis, further research on this field needs to go beyond the level of what is actually presented in argumentative text to be analyzed and attempt to bring to fore those elements which are left understood. In this enterprise which involves making inferences, the analyst needs to be receptive of the particularities of the social context within which the arguments examined are fashioned.

Level 3 analysis examined the type of frame structures which employees assessed as relevant to the solution of their conflict management problem. Analysis indicated that the Rule-based frame was most extensively used by the employees interviewed for the structuring of their claims. The rules identified in the Rule-based Frames were found to constrain significantly the structuring of the conflict problem, and thus to restrain employees from any further exploration of possible alternatives.

Level 2 and Level 1 analysis focused on the examination of the conditional and unconditional judgments made by employees. Overall, a relatively small number of judgments were made by employees. With reference to conditional judgments, this finding is related to the fact that employees had already proceeded with the solution of the conflict management problem described. Moreover, the limited number of both conditional and unconditional judgments is associated with the extensive use of Rule-based structures in employees' discourse, which restrain them from exploring

alternative courses of action and thus from making any trades-off between them, or best assessments regarding the most suitable course of action.

Overall, the main conclusion drawn from the modelling of employees' discourse on their conflict management problem is that, employees' representation process of their conflict management is reflective of the particular cultural (i.e. Greece) and organizational (E.P.E.). context within which the conflict management problem is embedded. This context has provided employees with 'commonsense', 'naturalized' definitions of what is involved in the conflict management problem. For instance, it has provided the information which employees' retrieve when exploring their conflict management problem (e.g. areas of concern). This context has also provided the rules (in terms of bureaucratic prescriptions and social beliefs) which employees use in order to support their arguments regarding the way they resolve conflict situations in their workplace; these rules guide them - and thus, constrain them - towards a particular course of action, sometimes without enabling them to explore any possibilities beyond the alternative suggested by the particular (bureaucratic or social) rule. In the light of the particular contextual background, certain areas of exploration 'fall outside' employees' 'small world', that is the area which the latter are willing to explore. Overall, the social reality within which the conflict resolution process is represented was found to have a considerable bearing on the way in which employees conceptualize their conflict problems and deliberate on the course of action to use.

However, even though the way in which the conflict management process was modelled in this study revealed that the representation of the conflict management problem at higher levels of abstraction is, to a great extent, culturally determined by the social reality within which the problem is embedded, nonetheless, it was also illustrated that employees have the discretion to structure the problem further in their own (subjective) way. Therefore, another conclusion originated by the modelling of the conflict management problem undertaken in this study is that the way in which an employee represents his/her conflict management process is also reflective of characteristics 'unique' to the particular person (e.g. personality characteristics, needs, motives,

mechanisms for coping with uncertainty, past experiences); these characteristics enable a subjective meaning representation of the conflict management problem, which relates not only to contextual features, but also to characteristics of the particular individual. For instance, even though the wider social and organizational framework defines what is involved in conflict resolution (i.e. areas of concern to be explored), the way in which an employee expresses his/her conflict management problem is 'idiosyncratic' to the particular employee. Moreover, when formulating arguments regarding conflict management, employees have the discretion to choose the claims they make and how they are going to use the information already explored - and thus assessed relevant to the particular problem - in order to substantiate their claims (e.g. which information will be used as data and/or warrants). The discretion to structure the problem in his/her own way is also revealed when the employee selects a frame structure which s/he finds most suitable to his/her particular conflict problem. For instance, as the analysis indicated, employees frame their conflict management problem differently, even when the course of action (i.e. decision node) which was later implemented was the same (see Table 9.2.). Moreover, even when the way in which the conflict management problem has been structured allows employees to explore alternative possibilities (e.g. 'what-if' questions), or making best assessments regarding these possibilities, such exploration relates to the extent to which each employee is 'ready' for - or 'willing' to make - such an exploration (e.g. existence of any contingency plans). Finally, employees' discretion has also been apparent during the implementation of the course of action selected; as seen in Part I of this research, despite the limited number of behavioural patterns which employees reported using, the choice of a particular alternative in a given conflict situation was individual (see decision nodes of the model, Figure 6.1.).

The detection of the way to provide explicit modelling of the details of the ways in which different employees represent the idiosyncratic parts of their conflict management problem has been beyond the scope of the present study. Moreover, a larger sample of employees and conflict episodes would be needed for the detection of

possible differences in the way in which employees represent their conflict management problem, either with regard to the different decision nodes of the net model, or to the department in which they work.

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PART III

THE PROCESS OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION - PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

CHAPTER TEN

Conclusions and Practical Implications of the Present Study

10.1. Overview

This thesis set out to model the processing of conflict in organizational groups. A Greek industrial organization constituted the context within which the investigation of this process took place. In the course of open-ended interviews, accounts of conflict episodes were collected from 26 employees from two departments in E.P.E.; in these accounts, employees gave information regarding the way in which they conceptualized particular conflict situations, as well as regarding the way in which they dealt with conflict episodes within their department. Part I of the thesis was devoted to the modelling of employees' behavioural patterns during the evolution of particular conflict episodes in their workplace. The analysis of the interviews held with employees resulted in the generation of a net model of conflict handling behaviour, which captured the process which employees followed when engaged in a conflict episode occurring in the context of their department. As the model indicated, moving through the different nodes of the model involves assessment of the situation in hand. In certain parts of the model, the process which employees reported following when engaged in a conflict situation appear to be, to a great extent, 'automatized', in the sense that the assessment of the situation is very simple (e.g. assess whether a mutually agreed-upon solution has been reached as a result of discussions between the two parties; assess power conditions between the parties involved in conflict; enforce opinion when the other party is subordinate).

On the other hand, other parts of the process implied a more 'sophisticated' assessment of the situation in hand and, thus, employees' involvement in a decision making process; in these parts of the process (also called 'decision nodes' of the model), employees reported choosing among different behavioural alternatives. In this respect,

an appreciation of what is involved in employees' conflict resolution process called for the investigation of their cognitive operations, during which employees explore the alternative courses of action available to them, evaluate these alternatives, and finally make a choice and commit themselves to a course of action. The examination of the decision making process was undertaken in Part II of the thesis and was made possible by the use of the five levels framework of knowledge representation as a methodological tool for the modelling of the way in which employees represent their conflict management process. The modelling of both conflict handling behaviour and conflict management problem, which was undertaken by the present study, suggested that the process of conflict resolution appertained to features of the cultural and organizational context within which this process is embedded.

10.2. Conclusions of the Analyses - A Summary

10.2.1. Conclusions of the Findings on Conflict Handling Behaviour

The analysis in Part I of the thesis was based on employees' accounts of conflict episodes encountered in the context of their department. The construction of these accounts included information regarding the actual behavioural patterns that employees used when dealing with the conflict situation at hand. As a means of modelling employees' conflict handling behaviour, the analysis centred on the identification of the action statements included in employees' accounts of conflict episodes; in these statements, employees directly referred to how they behaved in any particular conflict episode occurring in the context of their department. Analysis of these statements enabled me to generate a Net Model of Conflict Handling Behaviour, as enacted by employees from the Research/Design and the Supplies Departments. The present study found that, when an employee defines a conflict situation as such, s/he has to decide whether to communicate his/her disagreement to the other person, or not (upper part of the net model). If the grievance is kept private, it is likely to keep recurring until the situation changes (e.g. removal of one of the parties from the situation,

communication of grievance to the other). If the employee expresses his/her disagreement to the other person, then a series of discussions are started in an attempt to find a solution to the problem; as a result of this interaction, the two parties may either reach a mutually-agreed upon solution (and, thus, the conflict episode is assessed as being successfully resolved), or fail to reach an agreement (and the conflict escalates to the bottom part of the net model). In the latter case, employees' behaviour was found to relate to the power conditions of the two parties engaged in that particular conflict episode. When the other person is a subordinate, the supervisor invariably forces his position onto him/her. On the other hand, when employees are in conflict with their supervisor, they comply with him almost 'automatically', with the exception of two cases where the subordinates' expertise outwits that of the supervisor. Finally, when the conflict situation is between two colleagues, employees appear to choose either to reach an impasse, or to withdraw from the conflict situation, or to refer to a third party (i.e. supervisor or another colleague) as a means of resolving the situation. In most conflict situations in which employees reported complying, withdrawing, reaching an impasse or referring to a third party, the conflict situation appeared not to have been resolved. Therefore, even though that particular conflict episode terminated, the conflict situation was likely to occur again, maybe under a different guise.

Analysis of the episodes reported indicated that most conflict situations fail to be resolved at the upper part of the model (i.e. during discussions between the two parties); as a consequence, employees usually resort to bureaucratic procedures for conflict resolution (i.e. forcing and complying behaviour, referral to a person higher up in the hierarchy), which usually bring the conflict episode to an end but fail to deal with the origins of the disagreement¹. In general, discussion of the model suggested that most of the conflict situations encountered in both departments, rather than being resolved, kept recurring.

¹The only exception is referral to the supervisor once-removed.

The main aim of the first part of this thesis has been to develop a methodology for modelling the way in which conflict handling behaviour evolves in the course of a given conflict episode. In this respect, this model should be seen as a result of an exercise undertaken by the present study, in modelling the accounts of conflict episodes, as reported by the employees working in two departments of a particular organizational setting. My objective when engaged in this exercise of modelling employees' conflict behaviour was to compensate for the way in which conflict resolution research has approached conflict behaviour; as extensively discussed in Chapter Two, the mainstream of existing research on conflict resolution has (a) offered a static examination of the conflict behaviour, by disregarding examination of any possible behavioural changes in the course of the conflict episode, and (b) modelled conflict behaviour separately from the context within which this behaviour was embedded. Taking both these issues into consideration when modelling employees' behavioural practices (as reported in their accounts of conflict episodes), I modelled conflict handling behaviour, as the latter evolved in the course of any particular conflict episode. Since the modelling exercise of conflict handling practices proposed in the present study, was based on the empirical data collected for the purpose of this study, the net model generated in the first part of this thesis is a 'grounded' model of conflict handling behaviour. At the same time, the modelling of employees' behavioural practices when dealing with conflict situations was anchored in the particular social and organizational context (i.e. a Greek manufacturing company), within which the conflict episodes had emerged.

As a result of the way in which I modelled conflict handling behaviour in this study, the analysis of the 124 accounts of conflict episodes reported by employees enabled the identification of common patterns of conflict behaviour among employees interviewed. The findings of the analysis of the conflict episodes illustrated a high degree of consistency in the way in which conflict episodes were handled, both within and between the two departments; taking as a point of departure the proposition that the particular context, within which employees' conflict behaviour is situated, bears on the way in which conflict episodes are handled, the discussion of the consistencies found

during the analysis centred on how - and the extent to which - particular aspects of the departmental, organizational and wider social context are portrayed in the modelling of employees' conflict behaviour. As the analysis indicated, on the one hand, the impact of the Greek cultural framework has been particularly apparent in the upper part of the model, and was suggested by employees' preference for expressing their disagreement and engaging themselves in conversations and arguments exchanged in the pursuit - even though usually fruitless - of a solution to the problem. This preference was also indicated in their generalized comments about conflict resolution in their workplace. On the other hand, the organizational framework has been mainly portrayed in the conflict handling practices used in the bottom part of the model, where employees relied on bureaucratic norms and E.P.E.'s centralized decision making system (e.g. reliance on positional power, referral to authority figures) as a means of resolving their disagreements. The extensive use of bureaucratic procedures for resolving conflict (as portrayed in such practices as forcing, complying or asking for intervention from the supervisor), as well as the frequent failure of the two parties to reach an agreement during initial discussions, have been related, in the present study, to employees' lack of commitment, which is explained in the context of their insecurity about the future (their own and the company's), due to the problematic financial situation in E.P.E.

The consistencies indicated through the modelling of employees' conflict behaviour were also found to exist when employees referred to hypothetical situations; this finding suggested that, even when referring to hypothetical conflict situations, employees still drew on the cultural and organizational framework which is common to all of them. Even though employees in both departments reported using the same behavioural practices when handling conflict situations within their department, conditions particular to each of the two departments contributed to a difference in the frequency according to which employees in both departments referred to their supervisor in order to deal with conflict situations with another colleague. The nature of the work performed in each department, as well as the nature of the relationships among employees, appeared to lead employees in the R & D Department to ask for the

supervisor's intervention more frequently than did employees in the Supplies Department; on the contrary, in similar situations, the latter refer to another colleague.

10.2.2. Conclusions of the Findings on Conflict Management

The discussion of the analysis in Part I of the thesis concluded with the identification of the decision nodes in the net model of conflict handling behaviour. Having acknowledged that an appropriate understanding and modelling of employees' conflict resolution process necessitates the investigation of employees' representation of their conflict management problem, Humphreys and Berkeley's five levels framework of knowledge representation was selected as the most suitable methodology for the modelling of the processes which employees follow when exploring information about their conflict problem, assessing possible alternatives and committing themselves to a course of action.

The appropriateness of this conceptual and analytical framework as a methodological tool for the modelling of employees' conflict management process was predominantly related to the following issues. First, it made possible a relativistic approach to the process of conflict management, in the sense that it focused on the employee's subjective meaning representation of his/her conflict management problem, which, as indicated by the present analysis, is reflective of the particular employee's personal characteristics, as well as of features of the contextual background within which this person lives. Second, this framework enabled a processual examination of the conflict management problem, through the inclusion of the five levels and the qualitatively different activities involved at each level of the decision making process. The elicitation of the various operations which take place within employees, from the initial conceptualization of a particular problem situation until their commitment to a particular course of action, allowed for the modelling the of the various stages entailed in the process of conflict management, as followed by employees. Third, the multilevel framework facilitated the examination of the conflict management problem as part of the social situation within which this process is located. The embedness of the social

context in the process of deciding on any particular conflict management problem is acknowledged at all levels of the process: through the notion of the 'small world', which sets the bounds of employees' social world, within which the employee conceptualizes his/her conflict management problem and express it in language discourse, structures his/her problem and explores alternative conditions in regard to his/her preferences.

On the assumption that the employee's representation of his/her management problem is revealed through his/her discourse about conflict situations in the context of his/her department, the analysis was based on the way in which employees reasoned about the conflict episodes reported (and on which the analysis of action statements was based, see Part I of the thesis). In this respect, the analysis in Part II of this thesis centred on the modelling of employees' representations of their conflict management problem, as revealed in their accounts of conflict episodes collected during open-ended interviews. 66 accounts of conflict episodes were analyzed, which alluded to the decision nodes identified in the Net Model of Conflict Handling Behaviour that was generated in Part I of the thesis.

Overall, employees were found to explore 10 domains which illustrated the areas of concern which define the context (i.e. 'small world') within which the exploration of their conflict management problem takes place; these issues have already been found to have an effect on the way in which conflict situations are resolved. Among the ten domains identified, the domains of power and role expectations were found to be explored minimally, which suggests that employees felt 'uncomfortable' talking about issues related to these areas. Employees' reluctance to explore these issues reflects the fact that the latter define the boundaries of their 'small world' and 'background of safety', in the sense that no contingency plans have been made by employees in regard to these issues.

Analysis of the employees' arguments enabled the identification of the reasons used by employees in support of their choice of a particular conflict handling behaviour. It was

revealed that employees used cultural and - mainly - bureaucratic assumptions as rules in support of their reasoning, when proceeding from problem exploration towards the solution of their problem. These principles were also used as rules in employees' rule-based frames, which were found to be the frames predominantly used by employees. The extensive use of rules stemming from the particular organizational bureaucratic background was found to restrict the problem space explored by employees, since these rules prescribed a particular course of action right from the beginning of the conceptualization of the problem. In this respect, these rules did not allow the employee to explore his/her conflict management problem in terms of future scenarios, or to evaluate alternative courses of action.

The examination of employees' representation of their conflict management problem also illustrated their inability to make trades-off among different alternatives (i.e. 'what-if' questions), or to make best assessments regarding the most suitable solution (i.e. unconditional judgments). The lack of conditional and unconditional judgments in employees' reasoning was attributed to the fact that employees' problem exploration space was considerably restricted by the extensive use of bureaucratic principles.

Taking as a point of departure the postulate that the investigation of the way in which employees represent their conflict management problem needs to take into consideration employee's subjective meaning representation of the particular situation, as well as being examined in the context within which it is embedded, the modelling of the conflict management process, according to the multilevel framework, enabled us to understand what leads employees to the choice of a particular behavioural pattern. The overall analysis of the employees' conceptualization of their conflict management problem indicated that, on the one hand, employees represent their conflict management problem in their own 'idiosyncratic' way, while, on the other hand, this representation also reflects - and is thus restrained by - mainly bureaucratic features of the particular organizational context.

Overall, the methodology that this study proposed for the modelling of the conflict management process allowed for the examination the conflict management problem as a process, during which the bearing of contextual aspects on the way in which employees represent and deal with conflict situations is portrayed through the interpretations that the latter make of their experiences. Moreover, modelling the different stages of employees' decision making process, when deliberating on how to deal with conflict situations, enabled us to examine how employees' representations, as indicated through their cognitive activities, appertain to the social and organizational context within which employees act and perceive the world, in each stage of this process.

10.2.3. General Conclusions about the Process of Conflict Resolution in E.P.E. - Integrating the Findings from Both Analyses

The aim of the present study has been to model the process of conflict resolution in two departments of an organizational setting. For this purpose, I examined first the conflict handling behaviour which employees use when involved in various conflict situations in their work context; having identified a variety of behavioural practices, I then focused on the way in which employees represent these conflict situations, and looked at what guides them in their choice of a particular behavioural pattern.

The analyses conducted in both parts of this research illustrated the importance of the modelling of both employees' behavioural patterns (i.e. overt behaviour) and of their representations of the conflict situation (i.e. internal processes) for an adequate understanding of the phenomenon of conflict resolution. As illustrated by the present analyses, examining conflict behaviour elicits how people handle a particular situation, while focusing on the way that this situation is conceptualized sheds light on what led them to this behaviour. As my review in Chapter Two of extant research in the field of conflict resolution revealed, the preponderance of studies have focused on the actions taken by the participants in conflict, rather than on their interpretations which guide

their decisions about action². In general, little empirical research has been conducted so far, which has addressed both conflict behaviour and interpretations of the parties during conflict situations.

The analyses of conflict behaviour and of employees' representation of their conflict management problem also shed light on the issue of outstanding conflicts, which was a particularly frequent phenomenon for the two departments of the industrial company which constituted the organizational context of the present study. As already discussed, most of the conflict episodes which fail to be resolved in an integrative way and during arguments exchanged by the two parties, fail to be resolved through the use of other modes of conflict resolution; this refers to most conflict episodes where employees avoid expressing their grievance, comply with the supervisor without being persuaded, withdraw or reach an impasse during a conflict situation with another colleague, or ask their supervisor to sort out the situation when in disagreement with a colleague). Analysis of the way in which employees represent their conflict management problem in these situations revealed that this is due to the types of elements which employees use in their reasoning process. Specifically, the extensive use of rules - most of which stem from the bureaucratic functioning of the organization - prescribes for them particular ways of dealing with conflict situations, and thus limits their exploration of possible alternative courses of action; such alternatives may be more constructive, in the sense that they might lead to the resolution of the conflict situation, as appears to be the case for the two employees who requested the intervention of the supervisor once-removed, in order to resolve the conflict situation with their supervisor. On the contrary, restraining themselves to the particular course of action which these rules propose, proves to be a defective way of dealing with conflict situations in the workplace, in the sense that most conflict situations, rather than being resolved, remain outstanding and thus keep recurring, often under a different guise.

²This tendency applied even to process models of conflict resolution which focused on the complex process of negotiation.

The analyses of the present research also indicated an integrative effect of personality as well as situational issues in the process of conflict resolution. More specifically, on the one hand, the impact of the context on conflict resolution has been apparent in the limited repertoire of behavioural patterns available to employees at different stages of a conflict episode, as well as on the way in which employees make sense of that particular episode. On the other hand, personality characteristics come to the fore when focusing on the choice of alternative behavioural practices which are available to employees at various stages of the conflict episode, as well as on the elements of the situation which each assesses as more important when deliberating on his/her choice of a particular course of action. The review in Chapter Two suggested that a great amount of research on conflict resolution has adopted either a dispositional or a situational orientation; while the former paradigm on conflict resolution research has looked at conflict behaviour in terms of personality characteristics, the latter has focused on circumstances related to the problem situation itself, and how they affect the way in which people behave in conflict situations. Drawing on the analyses of the present study, it has been illustrated that both personality and situational influences have a bearing on the way in which a conflict situation is resolved; therefore, an adequate modelling of the phenomenon of conflict resolution can only be achieved through a research paradigm which will integrate dispositional and situational perspectives on the study of conflict resolution.

A substantial part of the discussion of both analyses undertaken in the present study was devoted to the elicitation of the way in which the various aspects of the social context (i.e. both cultural and organizational) - which is shared by employees, and, within which the latter live and act - have a bearing on process of conflict resolution. The modelling employees' representations of their conflict management problem, as well as their subsequent behaviour, illustrated that:

(a) on the one hand, Greek culture provides the background within which the individual develops certain orientations regarding conflict and negotiation (e.g. preference for expressing one's disagreement and arguing for one's point of view; high level of respect for authority figures; strong differentiation between ingroup - outgroup

behaviour); these orientations are rooted in the value systems and cultural beliefs of the employees as members of Greek society;

(b) on the other hand, the bureaucratic structure of E.P.E., as well as of the two departments within which the interviewees work, provides organizational members with much of the information, and many of the assumptions and goals, which shape the ways of understanding conflict situations in the workplace, and which are expressed in actions taken by employees; in this respect, conflict resolution has been found - in this study - to be predominantly part of the social fabric of E.P.E., which is the organizational setting of the present case study; The bearing of the organization in conflict resolution is also portrayed in the high frequency of conflict episodes which are resolved through indirect and bureaucratic procedures, as well as in the bureaucratic assumptions identified in employees' reasoning.

Overall, this thesis proposed new ways for modelling the process of conflict resolution in organizational groups; this modelling was based on employees' accounts of conflict episodes encountered in the context of the two departments of a Greek industrial company, which constituted the organizational context of the study. The way in which employees' accounts were modelled in the first part of this thesis, enabled an understanding of how certain aspects of the cultural and organizational context, within which employees' conflict behaviour is anchored, are reflected in the Net Model of Conflict Handling Behaviour. The modelling of employees' representations of the same conflict episodes, in the second part of the study, revealed how these issues were conceptualized and represented in employees' discourse with reference to the decision nodes identified in the net model. The conclusions drawn from both parts of the present study bear implications for research on modelling conflict resolution.

10.3. Implications of the Present Study for Future Research on Modelling Conflict Resolution

The main aim of the present study has been to model the conflict resolution process followed by employees working in two departments of an organizational setting. The contribution of this study lied in identifying the conflict resolution structures and processes within the two departments on which this research centred, as well as offering insights into how the particular context, within which the conflict resolution process was embedded, shaped the way in which conflict situations are processed by employees in these departments. The present study comes under the umbrella of the descriptive approach to the study of conflict resolution, in the sense that it examines how employees actually choose their conflict handling behaviour. At this point, and in the light of the analysis of the process which employees follow when resolving conflict situations in their workplace, I come back to the research reviewed earlier on in this thesis, and highlight certain issues which need to be considered by future research which aims to model conflict resolution.

First, conflict resolution needs to be approached and examined as a process, and thus to focus on its evolution in the course of any particular conflict episode. In the present study, the process of conflict resolution was modelled from the stage of initial awareness of a conflict episode until the end of the episode examined, and the aftermath which it may leave. Adopting such a developmental approach when investigating the dynamics of conflict and its resolution leads to an understanding of not only what happens 'before' and 'after' a conflict episode (since the aftermath of a conflict episode may constitute the beginning of the next episode), but will also elicit what happens 'during' that particular episode. This necessity is suggested by the present analyses, according to which different behavioural patterns, as well as interpretations of the conflict situation, are associated with different stages of a conflict episode. Even though a great amount of research has focused on antecedent conditions and conflict aftermath (e.g. dispositional and contingency models), the review of the domain of

conflict research models indicated that the dynamics of conflict resolution have not yet been adequately addressed.

Second, the net model of conflict handling behaviour generated in the present study illustrates how, during different stages of a particular conflict episode, employees may use a variety of behavioural patterns in their attempt to resolve the conflict. For instance, they may decide to avoid a conflict situation, by not communicating the disagreement to the other person, and thus not getting involved in a kind of negotiation with the other party. Instead, employees may decide to enter the 'bargaining' phase and attempt to find a solution to the problem through negotiations, which may either be successful or not (e.g. negotiations reach an impasse). Finally, the two parties engaged in the conflict situation may decide to ask for third party intervention (i.e. the third party may be a colleague or their supervisor). As the model of conflict handling practices suggests, research within the domain of conflict resolution needs to address the different ways of resolving conflict. However, despite the proliferation of model development in conflict resolution research, these models are usually developed in isolation from each other. For instance, and on the one hand, there are models of negotiation which focus on the communication exchanged between the two parties when attempting to find a solution to the issue in conflict; research in this domain does not address situations where the two parties do not enter the negotiation stage. On the other hand, there are models within the domain of third party intervention research which focus on the role of the third party (e.g. arbitrator, mediator) in the resolution of the conflict situation. In general, and as Lewicki et al. (1988) have shown, model development has typically proceeded within the boundaries of a particular research paradigm (e.g. negotiation or third party intervention research), with little cross-fertilization of paradigms or research findings; this has resulted in a fragmentation of the study of conflict resolution, despite the abundance of research models within each domain of research. However, and in the light of the present research, adequate modelling of the phenomenon of conflict resolution in organizational groups calls for a research paradigm which will integrate elements from research conducted along disciplinary lines, and perspectives on the study of conflict resolution.

Third, as the findings from both analyses in this study suggested, conflict resolution appertains to the social context within which it occurs. For instance, in the present study, in regard to the behavioural patterns enacted by employees when engaged in conflict situations, the pervasiveness of the organizational context was reflected in the existence of few behavioural patterns used by employees in such situations, as well as in the high degree of consistency in the way in which conflict episodes were handled, both within and between the two departments. Similarly, in regard to the way that conflict situations were conceptualized and represented in employees' discourse, particular characteristics of the bureaucratic organization were portrayed in the way in which employees explored, textualized, structured and evaluated alternatives available to each particular situation. Thus, since, as the present study revealed, the process of conflict resolution draws heavily on the particular social context (i.e. a Greek organizational bureaucracy) within which it is embedded, these findings carry some implications for research on conflict resolution in organizations. In specific, empirical research on the way in which conflict situations are resolved in the workplace needs to examine the particular organizational setting which regulates the meaning of a conflict situation, and shapes the way in which it is resolved. In my review of extant research on conflict resolution, I pointed out that research in this field has often generalized findings from one study across various actors, issues and settings. For instance, experimental research has often 'blurred lines' between laboratory settings and in situ contexts; similarly, conclusions drawn from field studies on conflict resolution across various interpersonal situations have often been readily generalized to organizational settings, based on the assumption that people behave in the same way across situations. Modelling conflict resolution structures and processes as integrative parts of the organizational processes of a particular work setting will facilitate an understanding of the process that organizational members follow when resolving their conflict encounters in terms of an adaptational communication process which serves vital functions in the organizational culture (see section 10.8.).

Fourth, future research aiming to elicit the process followed by individuals when dealing with conflict situations needs to introduce the perspective of the actors (i.e. the

parties in conflict) to the study of conflict resolution which, so far, has been widely ignored. For instance, as the review of extant studies on this field of research revealed, the mainstream of research on how individuals resolve their conflicts has relied only on the inferences of the researcher who attempts to understand - and thus predict - what led each of parties in conflict to the choice of his/her particular behaviour (see Chapter Two, section 2.5.1.1.); in this respect, studies on conflict behaviour have often focused on researcher-imposed variables as a means of explaining what is happening during this process. As opposed to this research paradigm on conflict resolution, the present study modelled conflict resolution, based on the accounts constructed by employees who have participated in the conflict situation described; in these accounts, employees reconstructed particular conflict situations experienced in the context of their department, in terms of a sequence of various events, explanations about the situation, as well as reasons for their actions; as discussed in Chapter Three (section 3.2.), during these accounts, employees organized their experiences of conflict encounters.

In this sense, relying on employees' accounts for the investigation of the conflict resolution phenomenon implied relying on the perspective on the actors of the particular conflict situation, and on their interpretation of this situation. Due to the subjectivity entailed in the description of personal experiences and stories regarding real-life phenomena, existing practices in organizational research have shown reluctance to rely on the people's orientations and interpretations of events. However, the social-psychological perspective on conflict resolution has approached conflicts as social constructs and argued that parties in conflict interact on the basis of the meanings they assign to such situations; following this perspective, the present study paid tribute to the importance of the way in which employees themselves make sense of the conflict situations in which they are involved, and thus, modelled conflict resolution processes, drawing on employees' own orientation and perspective of what happened, as this was revealed in their accounts of conflict episodes.

Drawing on the findings of my analyses, in this section, I referred to the general implications of the present study for conflict resolution research. Next, I shall refer to

pertinence of the argumentation analysis undertaken in this study for further research on Argumentation analysis.

10.4. Implications of the Present Study for Argumentation Analysts

When modelling employees' representations of conflict situations, as revealed in their accounts, I used Argumentation analysis as a means of describing their reasoning regarding their conflict management problem. The use of Toulmin's layout of argumentative structure as an analytical tool for the description of employees' argumentation enabled me to unravel the latter's inference structures and identify the assumptions which underlied their arguments and guided them in their choice of course of action in a particular conflict situation. From the application of Toulmin's framework in the context of this study, and my experiences when analyzing employees' argumentation, some worthwhile suggestions can be drawn for researchers embarking on the analysis of real-life argumentative texts. I believe that these suggestions are worthwhile, especially when taking into consideration the extensive commentaries on the usefulness of Toulmin's framework for the description of ordinary argumentation³.

As the discussion of the Argumentation analysis, conducted in this study, indicated, employees' argumentative texts themselves were often incomplete as outlines of the underlying reasoning; for instance, in most of the cases, employees' argumentation did not contain backings which would serve as justifying principles for the reasons they offered regarding the particular course of action they decided to choose. Rather than being suggestive that Toulmin's framework cannot be successfully applied to real-life arguments, this finding indicated the need to fill in what has not been said by the arguer, and which was left implicit. In the context of the present study, some sets of

³On the one hand, there have been researchers who advocated that the components of an argumentative structure, as proposed by Toulmin, are present in people's ordinary argumentation (e.g. Dunn, 1981); on the other hand, argumentation critics have challenged altogether the usefulness of Toulmin's framework for the description of real-life argumentative texts (e.g. Willard, 1976; Freeman, 1991).

tacitly shared beliefs and meanings were inferred and found to be taken for granted by organizational members when building their arguments. The importance for the elicitation of these propositions for the present study lay in the fact that the assumption of these beliefs on the behalf of organizational members allowed their reasons to stand in a justifying relation to the claim, in their argumentation on their conflict management problem. For this reason, the analyst, whose research interest lies on understanding the arguer's argumentation process, needs to identify assertible propositions which, though unexpressed, they nevertheless constitute the premises to which the arguer is committed in making the argument being examined.

Thus, drawing on the discussion of the present argumentation analysis, when describing the structure of arguments, argumentation analysts need to go beyond the level of what is actually presented in argumentative text studied and attempt to bring to fore those elements which are left understood. In this enterprise which involves making inferences, the analyst needs to be receptive of the particularities of the social context within which the arguments examined are fashioned, in order to counterbalance her own interpretations with the meaning that the arguer actually intended to communicate when presenting his/her argument. The importance of the analyst's gaining an understanding of the characteristics of the social situation, within which people construct their arguments, is implied, in the context of the present study, by the pervasiveness of the social situation (i.e. cultural and organizational) in the kinds of assumptions that employees used as their ultimate support for their claims, as well as in the implicit nature of these assumptions.

Overall, my discussion of the argumentation analysis illustrated that an adequate understanding of people's argumentative discourse is enabled only when taking into account both the properties of the text under examination, which have stated explicitly, as well as those characteristics which are left understood, and which can then be inferred through the consideration of the social context within which this discourse is fashioned. According to my experience from applying Toulmin's framework in the context of this study, and since Toulmin himself has referred to the possibility of

certain components of the argumentative structure (i.e. backing) being implicit in the explicit structure of the argument examined, and advocated for the consideration of the social context when describing argumentation (e.g. through his notion of 'field-dependency'), challenges of the application of Toulmin's framework in ordinary argument should not be seen as related to the framework itself, but rather, to the way it has been applied by argumentation researchers and analysts.

Having referred to the implications that the present study bears for research on the field of conflict resolution and argumentation analysis, I need, at this point, to consider the limitations of this study.

10.5. Limitations of the Present Study - Areas for Further Research

The present study has modelled the process which employees from the Research/Design and Supplies Departments in E.P.E. follow when resolving their conflicts in the context of their department. Being aware of the limitations of my own efforts and the limited focus of the study, I shall now raise certain issues worth considering; these limitations need to be seen as a source of input indicating the areas where further research is needed.

First, the analyses and conclusions of this study were based on interviews held with employees working in two departments of the particular organization. In this respect, and as far as employees' behaviour when handling conflicts in E.P.E. is concerned, the robustness of the net model proposed by this study needs to be investigated. Since the model was generated on the basis of information collected from these two departments, information from other departments of that particular organization will be needed, in order to check whether they validate the approximate Net Model of Conflict Behaviour proposed by the present study, and/or the kind of refinement that they will call for. The same applies to the findings regarding the way in which employees from other departments represent their conflict management problem.

Second, the structure of the conflict handling model, as well as the constraints imposed by the social context (i.e. cultural and organizational) on the way in which organizational members conceptualize their conflict problems, are indicative of the particular industrial company, E.P.E., which functions in the context of Greek reality. In different organizational settings (e.g. innovative, rather than bureaucratic organizations) within, or outside of, the Greek context, the process of conflict resolution of the members of the organization (i.e. structural elements of the net model, as well as the representation of conflict situations), may differ. For instance, innovative organizations may offer their members alternative ways of dealing constructively with conflict situations within their work (e.g. a neutral ombudsman who will assist parties to work towards agreements; encounter groups with a problem-solving approach, which may increase possibilities for finding a solution to particular problems). Even though, according to the findings of the study, the organizational and social context will provide employees with assumptions and rules which will orient them perceptually to the conflict problems, the constraints posed by this context are likely to be different under a different organizational and/or wider social culture.

Third, the conclusions of the present analysis on the process of conflict resolution of employees in the two departments in E.P.E. are reflective of the way in which employees in these two particular departments resolve their conflict situations at a given point in the organization's history (i.e. a period of a year and a half). An examination of the process of conflict resolution in E.P.E. at a later stage of its development (e.g. where there is a change towards more de-centralized functioning) may reveal the use of alternative behavioural patterns, or ways of understanding the conflict situations.

Having considered possible limitations of the present study, and drawing on the findings of my analyses, I shall next focus attention on issues related to the practical considerations which the present study has raised.

10.6. Practical Considerations of the Present Study for the Conflict Resolution Research

"The major social value of intellectual work in the behavioural sciences consists in its providing organizing frameworks, clarifying ideas, and systematic concepts for helping those who are engaged in practical work to think about what they do more comprehensively, more analytically, and with more concern for the empirical soundness of their working assumptions."

Deutsch, 1982; p.19

Despite Deutsch's caveat presented at the beginning of this section, theory and practice in conflict resolution have generally remained conceptually autonomous arenas, with little comprehensive effort at bridge-building and integration. According to Lewicki et al. (1988), on the one hand, many theoreticians developed their models without attention to the possible implications of their research for practice; on the other hand, those interested in organizational application have tended to articulate simplified models or managerial principles, which cannot lend themselves to rigorous examination and testing. On the contrary, the present study aims to be useful, not only to conflict resolution theorists, but also to organizational practitioners. This is achieved through its thorough analysis of conflict episodes at both behavioural and perceptual levels. In their book on how to get disputes resolved, Ury et al. (1988) advocate that the first step in this process entails a 'dispute resolution diagnosis', which is attained through answering the following questions: (a) how disputes are handled (i.e. what are the dispute resolution procedures used), and (b) why these particular procedures are used. The present research provides answers to these questions since, on the one hand, it offers insights into how employees' process of handling conflicts can be modelled and, on the other hand, it proposes a methodology for the investigation of the cognitive processes in which employees are engaged when attempting to resolve such situations. In other words, this study illustrates how disputes are handled in a particular context, as well as the reasons underlying this choice; in this way, the present research on conflict resolution renders itself amenable to organizational application.

Since the conflict resolution process was found to draw heavily on the organizational context within which it is situated, the practical considerations of this study are related to one particular industrial company. Therefore, on the basis of the conclusions of the present study, this research will conclude with the implications for practice in E.P.E. Before doing this, I need to make explicit my viewpoint about issues of organizational application and the subsequent role of organizational analysts.

10.7. The Researcher as an Organizational Analyst and Consultant - Investigation, Analysis and Creative Synthesis of Possibilities

In this project, I investigated the process of conflict resolution as followed by organizational members of E.P.E. In order to examine this organizational process, I gathered information from organizational members regarding how they deal with conflict situations in their workplace while, at the same time, being part of this organizational environment enabled a better understanding and contextualization of the information collected. Having analyzed this information, I modelled the process of conflict resolution in the two departments in E.P.E. which were the focus of my investigation. The investigation and analysis of the conflict resolution process of the employees (as portrayed in their discourse) illustrated the actual situation of the organization ('what is').

However, the analysis of information regarding organizational processes, such as conflict resolution, needs to be complemented by a creative synthesis of the information collected, in order for this information to be useful to the particular organization. Putting together all these pieces of information and synthesizing them into 'new patterns and configurations' (Humphreys et al., 1996), the analyst moves from 'what is' to 'what could be better' in the future. On the basis of the conclusions of the analysis, the aim of the organizational analyst/consultant is to put forward possibilities for how the functioning of the organization may be improved. These possibilities are only viable in the context of the particular organization under investigation, and need

to be further explored by organizational members; it is the latter, and not the organizational analyst, who need to decide on whether they desire to challenge the operating mode of the organization and, if so, what changes they wish to bring in the processes of their organization. In this light, the role of the consultant is to provide support to organizational members in the process of the agreed transformation.

The idea behind the possibilities of the transformation of organizational processes lies in the very image of the organization as an 'enactment process' which is shared by organizational members. When presenting the perspective of this research on organizations (see Chapter Three, section 3.4.), I argued that organizational culture is not only portrayed, but also maintained, through both the formal and informal interactions of organizational members. According to Humphreys et al. (1996; p.31),

"organizations are the outcome of human mediation and practices: as such they are not natural, but historical. As history, they are open structures, which can thematise their own temporality and make it an object of reflection. Such open structures are permanently creating themselves through those human practices that are their support and foundation."

Hence, the process of conflict resolution is an 'open process' which can thus be challenged. However, before reflecting on how this process can be amenable to change, we have to remember that the conflict resolution process, like other organizational phenomena, is a creative communication process which is 'functional' and adaptive to the particular organizational context (see section 10.4.). For this reason, and before looking at the possibilities for more effective modes of functioning within E.P.E., I will recapitulate on how the way that employees in E.P.E. resolve their conflicts is adaptive to the organization's present condition.

10.8. Conflict Resolution as an Adaptational Communication Process - A Reciprocal Relationship between Conflict Resolution and Organizational Culture

We have already seen that organizational research has associated bureaucracies with the creation of fixed and inflexible organizational structures and formalized human relationships. However, in Chapter Three (sections 3.4. & 3.4.1.), I discussed my assumption that the relationship between conflict handling and the organization is reciprocal. The analysis of employees' conflict resolution process, both at a behavioural and cognitive level, indicated that this process is shaped by the organizational context within which it is embedded, in the sense that this context provides the rules which guide - and thus restrain - employees' behaviour and reasoning in conflict situations. Looking at the findings of this study through a different lens, we can see that both employees' behaviour and their reasoning reinforce the organizational system; as the analysis indicated, bureaucratic rules are widely embraced by employees in both departments, and are often used as prescriptions for action in conflict situations. In this way, the structural features of the organization both legitimize and constrain employees' actions (Bartunek, 1984).

The perspective of the present study on the dynamic interaction between organizational structures and human agency has been shared by few studies on organizational conflict. This suggested that, while, on the one hand, the way that employees handle conflict situations is affected by the particular organizational context, on the other hand, these behavioural practices may also reinforce, or instead challenge, the organizational system (Bartunek et al., 1992). Analysis of employees' behaviour and reasoning indicated that the process of conflict resolution within E.P.E. leaves the existing modes of operating unchallenged and, therefore, promotes the existing culture of this organization and ensures the maintenance of the status quo. For instance, it was found that a great number of conflict situations are solved unilaterally and through official procedures, especially since most of the conflicts are solved at the bottom part of the model. However, practices like asking for the supervisor's intervention when in disagreement with a colleague, as well as the use of enforcement or compliance

according to the other's hierarchical position, without seeking alternative solutions, reinforce the existing authority structure and centralized way of organizational functioning. In a similar vein, Martin (1992) suggested that, by withdrawing from conflict situations with colleagues, employees leave unchallenged the existing modes of operating.

Overall, the conclusions drawn from the present research suggest that, when resolving their conflicts, organizational members conserve the status quo of the company. In order to understand why this process is 'functional' in the context of the particular organizational setting, we have to come back to the issue of the problematic financial situation of the enterprise, coupled with a wider crisis in the market of this industry. This situation has created feelings of uncertainty and insecurity for employees regarding their own future, as well as the future of the company; as a consequence, organizational members appear to avoid being personally involved in, and committed to, their work. In their attempt to minimize the uncertainty they are likely to experience when challenging the existing system, employees limit themselves to what is familiar. According to Brown (1993), practices such as conflict avoidance or quick settlement (as illustrated in the use of compliance, withdrawal and referral to supervisor) conserve the energy and order of the organization.

Attempts to maintain the status quo of the system are illustrated even further in the case of Mr. X., which was discussed in detail in Chapter Six (section 6.8.). As indicated by his behavioural patterns in conflict situations with other members of his department, this employee likes challenging the system, in the sense that he prefers, from time to time, to transgress the ways of dealing with conflict, which are prescribed by the bureaucratic rules⁴. In light of this, it is not surprising that he is treated like a deviant by the rest of the group; this approach, on the behalf of the rest of his department,

⁴However, on some occasions, Mr. X. still adheres to the more 'conventional' modes of handling conflict situations. Moreover, as the analysis of his reasoning suggested, the same bureaucratic rules appear to guide his way of resolving conflicts, as in the case of the rest of the employees interviewed.

illustrates a mechanism of the system, which is set forth in order to ensure its maintenance.

Hence, on the one hand, the way in which organizational members in E.P.E. generally resolve - or fail to resolve - conflict situations in their workplace (as revealed by the analysis of the two departments) thwarts any possibility of innovation, the latter being a characteristic inherent in any conflict situation (see Chapter One, section 1.5.). On the other hand, organizational research has acknowledged the interrelations among conflict, change and organizational development (Brown, 1993). The recognition of conflict as an integral component of organizational growth and maintenance is particularly relevant nowadays as companies confront ongoing change and uncertainty. In these circumstances, contemporary organizations need to be poised to appreciate emerging opportunities and to circumvent pitfalls (Tjosvold, 1991).

10.9. Practical Considerations for Conflict Resolution in E.P.E. - Proposals for Creative Transformation of the Organization

As already mentioned, the importance of conflict in organizations has been established already by organizational researchers and practitioners. Moreover, its constructive effects have been associated with the way in which it is resolved. More specifically, at an intra-departmental level, the issue of conflict and its effective resolution is crucial, since the importance of organizational teams (in the form of work teams, departments or divisions) lies, in large part, in their allowing for diverse contributions and perspectives and forging them into an integrated approach (Tjosvold, 1991). On the other hand, when conflict takes the form of 'destructive fighting', it is likely to have an effect on relationships among employees, reduce job satisfaction and, consequently, organizational effectiveness (see Chapter One, section 1.4.). Therefore, taking into account that organizational debate and cooperative efforts are fostered by 'positive' conflict (Brown, 1983), a recommendation for an organizational transformation in E.P.E. is two-fold:

- (a) to develop mechanisms for dealing with conflicts which have failed to be resolved, and thus have become destructive;
- (b) to develop strategies for promoting constructive conflicts.

As the net model of conflict handling behaviour indicated, a great number of conflicts in both the R & D and Supplies Departments escalate to the bottom part of the model and, even though the particular episode may terminate, the conflict situation itself does not. Since, on these occasions, conflict remains outstanding and thus has the potential to become destructive, E.P.E. needs to take a proactive approach by opening up possibilities for the employees to express their concerns. For instance, it may establish a complaint-handling system, to which organizational members will have the opportunity to bring grievances and problems with their boss and colleagues. The effectiveness of this system will depend on its credibility, in the sense that employees will be convinced that their concerns will be taken seriously and that steps will be taken for their problems to be resolved (Crawley, 1992). The credibility of the system will also be enhanced by it being run by a neutral chairperson; this person, through fact finding and mediation, will assist organizational members to work towards agreements. At present, various organizations have devised grievance systems in which ombudsmen work to manage group dynamics and resolve disputes in their organization (Rahim, 1986); such systems may be made more or less elaborate, depending on the needs of the particular organization. The case of the two employees in the R & D Department who referred to the supervisor once-removed in order to resolve the disputes with their bosses, can be seen as a complaint-handling procedure, which is in use at E.P.E. However, this procedure is not adequate for the resolution of unresolved disputes in the organization, especially since it has been found that employees are often worried about reprisal, if they refer to the supervisor once-removed to settle their dispute with their boss (Crawley, 1992).

Coming back to the conclusions drawn from the analysis of the two departments, we can say that a large amount of conflicts in E.P.E. fail to be resolved, in the sense of the two parties' reaching a joint agreement on the issue in dispute. As a result, most of

these situations are rarely resolved, since escalation to the bottom part of the model seldom makes for an effective solution to the problem (see Chapter Six, section 6.3.). For this reason, and as a means of enhancing the procedures for dispute resolution in E.P.E., it is very important for the organization to focus on the level at which the two parties are engaged in problem-solving activities, and examine how these activities can be rendered more effective.

Even though the conflict resolution practices of employees in E.P.E. are not effective in this respect, the 'seeds' for more effective ways of resolving conflict are present in the ways in which employees often deal with current conflict situations. For instance, as the discussion of the analysis in section 6.3. indicated, most disputes are openly expressed and both parties are engaged in a conversation; it is exactly at this point, where employees are engaged in negotiation activities, that efforts to reach a joint agreement fail, thereby escalating the disagreement; consequently, it is at this point that the organization can aid its members to enhance the quality of their negotiation activities, and thus promote constructive resolutions of conflicts in the workplace. In this respect, various organizations have made use of dispute resolution training programs, during which employees have the opportunity to understand better how they handle their disputes in the workplace. These programs take a problem-solving approach to conflict and aim, through the use of step-by-step procedures, to increase employees' repertoire of behavioural practices during conflict situations, as well as to enhance the quality of conflict resolution. The training programs, which take the form of T-group techniques, or team-building procedures (Rahim & Bonoma, 1979), often focus on changes in both the behaviour and attitudes of group members regarding how the latter approach conflict situations.

For instance, at the behavioural level, employees learn how to be engaged in a constructive controversy; in other words, they learn how to confront the other person with whom they have the disagreement. According to Tjosvold (1991), confrontation and open discussion must be practised skilfully in order for the parties to 'delve into' issues and problems. Being engaged in constructive dialogue implies that employees

are willing to understand each other's perspective, point out weaknesses and possible strengths in each other's arguments, clarify positions, and work together towards solving their joint problem. In general, adopting an integrative and collaborative approach when handling disagreements corresponds to the idea of 'thesis-antithesis-synthesis'; Tjosvold (1991) drew on this idea when referring to the dynamism of 'positive conflict resolution'; according to him, through the stages of elaborating, searching and integrating, employees gather information, identify strengths and weaknesses in both arguments, and finally synthesize and bring different ideas together. Practising problem-solving techniques and cooperative forms of debating clarifies confusions and possible misunderstandings by the two parties, while it increases chances for solutions to be found and adopted.

However, promoting more effective ways of dealing with conflict requires more than learning problem-solving techniques and making changes at the behavioural level. Rather, effective conflict resolution necessitates changes in the way in which employees perceive and approach conflict situations in their workplace. The first step would be for employees to become aware of their assumptions when engaged in a conflict situation, and of how the former affect the way they deal with conflict situations in their workplace; more productive solutions to the problems is thus associated with the replacement of these assumptions with more 'viable' ones.

For instance, the habitual way in which employees referred to conflicts implied that they look for the winner and the loser in such situations; the following comments are indicative of such assumptions:

"In general, when one is involved in a disagreement, one wants to have one's opinion prevail..in a calm way, and through a dialogue with the other person."

"Each of us presents his own point of view.. and the best will win."

As revealed in the above discourse, when engaged in a conversation, employees often debate in order to find out who is 'right' or who is 'wrong', or who 'wins' and who 'loses' the argument, rather than combining their ideas in the pursuit of a productive

solution to the common problem. The idea underlying this win-lose approach is that employees often assume that their objectives are opposing and that the conflict is competitive. On the contrary, effective conflict resolution necessitates a win-win approach to conflict situations; for instance, employees have to learn not to assume that their own position is superior to the other's; to identify strengths in the other's arguments; not to focus on their differences but, rather, on their shared points of view (Tjosvold, 1991). Moreover, the change towards adopting a win-win approach will be fostered through the employees' feeling that they have common goals, and seeking mutual benefit, when working for the solution of a problem. The idea of a 'shared vision', through which employees promote the organization's, as well as their own, goals and needs, will strengthen the bonds amongst members of the groups and make them more committed to work together to find the best solution to any particular problem.

The above discussion should be seen as an exploration of various possible ways in which the process of conflict resolution among organizational members in E.P.E. could improve at a future stage of its development. The discussion has focused on proposing ways of enabling more 'positive' conflict resolution procedures. The rationale behind this approach is that the existence of conflicts is constructive for the organization, given the fact that such occurrences are solved in an integrative way. Having adopted this perspective, the present discussion focused on suggesting possibilities for reducing destructive conflicts, whilst promoting constructive ways for their resolution. As far as the latter is concerned, a viable transformation of E.P.E. necessitates developing a positive approach towards conflict; by acknowledging the fact that the lack of conflict, as well as the inadequacy of its procedures of resolution currently in use, thwart innovation, E.P.E. will be in a position to challenge the existing centralized procedures of decision making; such an organizational development seems desirable, especially since, as the analysis of the company indicated, conflicts in decision making are handled poorly at the present. If adequately challenged, this organizational process will be open to creative transformation which will value the diverse views of organizational members, and develop the skills to confront them directly. Even though

the discussion of diverse opinions can be an arduous task, the constructive discussion of opposing ideas is essential for successful innovation, and has been found to improve the quality of decision making (Johnson et al., 1990).

The conditions of ongoing change and uncertainty, within which organizations of the present have to survive and prosper require the latter to innovate and adapt. For this reason, the process of organizational growth and development needs to be brought to the fore. A creative transformation of E.P.E. would be feasible only after the organizational members explore the various alternative possibilities for further development of the organization and proposals for the transformation of its processes. In this light, the present proposals venture to be a resource for organizational participants in any creative synthesis of changes which may be considered desirable for their own organization. In this regard, I would like to conclude with the Ackoff's caveat (Ackoff, 1974; in the *Preface*):

"my objective is not to convert those who are satisfied [...] but to give those who are dissatisfied cause for hope and something to do about it."

Postscript

Life always takes its own course; and, as is often the case, this course reminds us that there is a difference between life and research. E.P.E. went bankrupt in 1995. Currently, it is under public ownership; responsibility for the company has been transferred to a state bank until a new owner is found from among the private sector. As yet, there are no proposals for the regulation of the company; any decisions or organizational planning await the establishment of new ownership.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX I

Interview Guide

Talk about the department and the work team in which you work

- what is the nature of the work performed there?
- what is the nature of the work you perform in your work team?

.....

Please try to recall a recent conflict which has arisen between you and another person working in the same department or work-team. Describe in detail what happened.

Probing Questions:

- How did it all start?
- What was the disagreement about?
- What communication was exchanged during the incident?
- What was your/the other person's reaction?
- How was the conflict eventually handled?
- Were you satisfied with the way that the conflict situation was managed?

APPENDIX II

Presentation of Two Whole Interview Transcripts

Interview Transcript: 1

(Dimitra): Good morning. My name is Dimitra Y. and I am 37 years old. I am married and have two children. In order to become a secretary, I had to finish high school and go to a technical school.

(Interviewer): How long have you been working here?

D.: It has already been eight years that I have been working in E.P.E. Since I started working in this firm, I have been in the Supplies Department. Here, I have been doing different sort of things, but, all the time, working for the department.

I.: What exactly do you do here?

D.: In summary, it has to do with typing, keeping archives of things, managing the mail correspondence.. Of course, I work for Mr.F (*Head of the Department*) as his secretary.. everything that has to do with dealing with telephones, his files and the documents he has to produce. However, at times, extra tasks appear; these may be only for a limited amount of time, they are not routine. In general, I deal with all secretarial tasks..

I.: In the course of your work, do you need to interact with people working in this department?

D.: Yes.. with all of them. I mean, I need to fulfil different tasks for each one of them. For instance, I may have to do only some typing for one, I may have to do filing for another one.. in general, I do something for everybody working here.. to do something on a daily basis. That's O.K... since I could say that the relationships among the folks here are good.. I mean inside the department.. I think they are good.. Of course, some of them are old employees and some new. In earlier days, in order to make a comparison... there were some people.. now, they are gone.. back then, personally, I didn't like the climate in this department.. the relationships were different.. Now, I think it's better..

I.: Do you think then, that it all had to do with those people?

D.: Yes.

I.: Can you recall a recent incident when you had a disagreement with another person working in the department?

D.: You mean me having a disagreement with somebody? It just so happens that I don't have fights (*she starts laughing*)..neither arguments with other people, because.. This is not a joke, honestly, I hadn't had any argument with anybody. In general, we never had a confrontation with anybody. Actually, I could say that as much as I try to help

them out (*when they need something from me*), they are equally trying.. from the youngest to the oldest person.. to behave nicely to me. We don't have problems..

I.: I am also interested in incidents of minor importance.. which arise in the course of the daily work..

D.: No, we don't have any.. Look, for example, if you make a mistake and the other person asks you to correct it.. well, this is not a disagreement. Disagreement means.. to have different opinions about something, isn't it so? Therefore, we don't have any.. Even if, let's suppose, that for x reasons, a person working here, due to his character, he likes shouting and making a fuss.. well, to me, he always behaves in a good way.. that's for sure.. At least, according to my experience, nobody has ever insulted me, or said something bad to me.. I believe that I also behave to them, in an equally good manner...

I.: I am particularly interested in seeing how you sort out those minor issues..

D.: Look, I can only speak for myself.. and for my relationships with the rest of the people working here... If the two persons working over there (*she shows me two employees working at the far end of the room*), have a problem between them.. that I am in no position of knowing.. not that I care anyway.. (*Beginning of the conflict episode No.1*): However, to become more specific...the other day, John..because he was really pressed with work.. Because, in this department, despite of some other problems that we have to deal with.. we do not work in 'normal' conditions.. For instance, it may be the case that the telephones are quiet for a quarter of an hour.. but after that, we may have calls constantly for a period of 2 hours.. Or, it may be the case that one's office is empty (no paper work to be done), and in half an hour, one has a huge pile of papers in front of oneself.. Well, as I was saying, this continuous pressure of time inevitably creates tension in everyone of us.. Well, the other day, John kept on coming in and out of my room, all the time.. all the time.. He was searching for something in a drawer.. he was doing that for the work purpose, I am sure of that... he didn't do that on purpose.. Nevertheless, this made me furious.. And, on top of that, I had to help him, I had to leave what I was doing in order to help him.. and he was telling me all sorts of things.. I just let him say everything he wished.. As soon as he finished, I asked him to have a discussion about it and we both explained the situation.. It's nothing personal, we don't have any personal reasons (e.g. like trying to get back at each other).. it's just the work pressure that brings you to a point that you behave abruptly. As I was telling you earlier, I don't face any problems with any of the guys working here.. Actually, all of them.. most of them.. are good persons and hard workers.. When your objective is, like mine, to come here and work in such a way that I perform my job well.. Well, I think that something must go terribly wrong in order to create a problem...

I.: Can you be more specific about what happened in this incident?

D.: Nothing happened.. He justified his behaviour "you see how everybody has put pressure on me, since we started working today.." I do understand him.. however, the fact is that, one doesn't come to work in a good mood.. One may have a thousand different problems.. For this reason, you may put up with somebody's behaviour today,

and don't make a big deal out of it.. On the contrary, the next day, you may be worried, or have a personal problem, and thus are not able to put up with it.. Of course, when I refer to 'personal problems' I don't mean something really serious. For instance, when somebody at home is ill, you don't really come to work in a great mood, as a happy camper.. (End of the conflict episode No.1).

I.: Can you think of another incident where you were in disagreement with somebody from this department?

D.: Look, my character is such that I never behave badly to anybody, for any reason.. despite any problem that I may have at home, or a personal problem.. I never cause a problem to anybody.. Therefore, it may be because of me that I have such good relationships with folks here, all of whom are really good guys.. However, most probably, I behave in a similar way even outside this context, at home or with my friends.. That's the way I am.. It has to be something really nasty that I will create a fuss. Actually, I think that when it comes to behaviour in the workplace, everything is more difficult.. at least for me.. Because, when you are with your friends, you take the opportunity to talk in a different way.. In here, you are supposed to respect certain rules, an 'etiquette' in regard to your colleagues. On top of that, we have to spend 8 hours per day together. If you have a fight with one person, or disagree with another one.. you see.. It all has to do with your character.. Personally, if I reach the point that I have exchanged nasty words with somebody, I just cannot come here the next day and work as if nothing has happened between us.. For this reason, I prefer to behave in such a nice way that we never reach this point.. Because I know myself.. I know that if such a problem will occur, I will personally face a problem of coming back to the previous kind of relationship with the other person.. It is all a matter of respect and dignity that one has towards the fellow person. It all depends on how you see things, how you can cooperate with the others, and up to which extent you can be intimate and make jokes with the other..

I.: Therefore, there have been incidents where you kept your grievance private, without expressing it to the other? Or, incidents where you expressed yourself to the other..

D.: Look, I don't express my disagreement, only in cases where I know that the other person's character is such.. To put it more simply, when I think that my words are going to be wasted..

I.: Can you be more specific?

D.: For instance, if I believe that I cannot have a decent conversation with you, for reasons that have to do with your character.. I can gather it from your entire conduct which has been apparent on a daily basis, as my colleague.. then, I prefer not to discuss it.. do you follow me? What I am trying to say is that.. if I believe that the other person is in a position to hear what I am telling him and have a nice conversation and for this conversation to be fruitful.. then, we can discuss it.. However, this (*i.e. instances where no conversation can be held*) doesn't happen here.. Another issue is the issue of age.. For instance, you behave to Mr. George (*he's the older guy in the dept.*) differently from John, Bill, James.. just because of the age difference. With the latter

three, you are of similar age.. Not only in this context, but even if you met him in the street.. Similarly, to Mr. F (*Head of the dept.*), you also behave differently..

I.: Can you remember, then, a case where you either expressed, or failed to express, your grievance?

D.: (*Beginning of the conflict episode No.2*): Look, I believe that in every case, no matter if it is in the context of your work, or family, or school, or friendship.. it always depends on the other person's character.. I strongly believe so.. When I know that the other person was not 'prejudiced' and that he had every good intention of working all these hours here without creating any problem, and thus, have good relationships with each other and perform our jobs well and nothing more than that.. in this case, we discuss the (conflict) issue nicely. I tell him my perspective on things.. Or, for instance, in cases where I know that the reason is the pressure of work.. because, as I told you earlier, personally, I don't face any problem with the guys.. So, there were cases in the past, where the other person didn't appear to pay attention to the fact that I was overwhelmed with a lot of things.. So, instead of being patient for about 10 minutes, and waiting for me to finish off his paper then.. instead, he would come to me and demand that I deal with his paper right then.. even though his paper was not that urgent.. However, he could see that I was dealing with other things which are really important and urgent.. In this case, I didn't say anything.. because I knew that, probably, in order to behave like that (not being understanding), he is frustrated due to the pressure he is facing (in his work). Because, with my experience here, I have seen that, when there is no pressure, the other person will also be more relaxed and he would come to give me something to do and tell me to do it at my own pace. So, you can tell that it is due to the pressure of work that he is behaving like that.. Therefore, there are no 'personal' reasons behind such reactions.. Because I know the people here and I am positive that there are no other 'reasons' for doing that.. I have gathered some information: e.g. Bill's character is such and such, James is like that, you can expect such a reaction from George when he is pressed.. or when he is ill, or when he is worried about things.. on the other hand, another person would never behave like him in a similar situation.. You carry all this information with you all the time.. it's your data.. (*End of the conflict episode No.2*).

In general, I would say that usually I express my grievances.. (*Beginning of conflict episode No.3*): The only time when I might not have expressed it must have been with Mr. F (*Head of the dept.*) The only reason for doing so is that.. he is an old man.. and a rather peculiar character.. Nevertheless, we do have a very good relationship. But, when, for different reasons, I perceive that he has a different opinion about a given issue, I don't say anything.. I just don't want to say anything (express my disagreement), it's not that I am not 'allowed' to say anything..

I.: Why do you react like that?

D.: I would say that it has to do with his character, and not with his position. Because there have been other people in his position, even 5 months ago.. because people in this position change very frequently.. Well, there was another person in his position who was half of Mr. F's age. With this person, we used to have lunch all together (people working in the dept.), we had a different relationship altogether. Now, it's natural that

Mr. F has different beliefs and value systems.. I would never dream of making a fuss about a silly issue like that.. never.

I.: Why so?

D.: Because, to begin with, I don't want to cause any problem to him. Moreover, I don't want to get upset and get involved in a fight with him.. since, as I told you, we are completely different as persons.. we cannot function at the same level.. (End of the conflict episode No.3).

I.: Have you experienced any other disagreements in this department?

D.: I told you that in general we don't have many disagreements in this department.. (Continuation of the conflict episode No.1): In general, you discuss these issues openly with each other, and the problem is sorted out; after that, we are back to our normal (harmonious) relationship. For instance, in the case with John, that I was telling you about earlier on.. Well, when we were discussing the issue, he was trying to justify his behaviour from his point of view.. in the meantime, I was trying to explain things from my point of view and make him understand my own work pressure. It is also likely that my words `registered' in his mind, in the sense that it made a difference for the next few days..

I.: What do you mean?

D.: He would behave even more nicely to me.. Of course, since then, the same kind of situations have happened again and again.. you see, it depends on how calm the other person is going to be when he faces the same kind of situation.. (End of continuation of the conflict episode No.1.)

I.: Would you say that you are satisfied with the way you handled the situation?

D.: In general, I am.. Because, I have seen cases of people working in my position who had problems with the rest of the employees working in the dept. In fact, I am referring to the girl who was working as a secretary before me.. she was facing serious problems with her co-workers.. She sometimes would fight with them.. Of course, it has to do with other things as well.. For instance, it depends on how well you perform your job as an employee in order that the others cannot really challenge you and, thus, make you misbehave.. You see, since I have been working many years here, I really know my job well. Moreover, as a person, I am not satisfied unless I do my job well.. so, these kinds of problems don't apply to me..

I.: I do agree with you.. but, from time to time, there may still be incidents which cause disagreements..

*D.: Sure.. but, when these incidents happen only once per year and only last for a short while, you cannot really claim that this is a disagreement.. I am sorry, but I cannot really tell you much about disagreements here.. Maybe because my character is such.. but also, it has to do with these guys as well.. It's also that as a person, I can judge *(what sort of relationship I can have with)* each of these people.. for instance, with one of them, it is possible that we can have a more intimate relationship.. with the other, a less close relationship.. That's the reason that we don't have conflicts.. Of course,*

these people may have disagreements with each other, but I am in no position to know about it.. However, as a general rule, I believe that all these problems have to be dealt with in discussions (*between the two parties involved*).. in order for each of them to understand what is bothering the other person..

I.: Why do you believe so?

D.: Because, what is really my outer aim is the existence of good relationships here.. Because, as far as I am concerned, I could never imagine that I would have to come to work and not talk to the colleague next to me, or have to give him the cold shoulder.. such a situation would bother me.. But then, maybe, another person is not like me regarding this issue.. For these reasons, I sometimes choose not to say anything to the other person.. Of course, I don't have the same type of relationship with all of the people working here; this means that I have certain criteria regarding these people (*according to which I assess what I should do*); I guess that they have understood it.. and, for this reason, some of these people can have a joke with me, while some others cannot.. because I haven't given them the 'go ahead' to do so..

Of course, all these (*criteria*) that I have been telling you about, have to do with the work context. Because, outside here, you associate with family and friends.. There, the relationships are very different.. you simply don't have the same intimacy when in here and when with a friend.. even the way of talking may differ from how you talk to your colleague.. the latter 'demands' you to talk to him nicely.. since we all come here for the same purpose.. and since we all carry the same types of problems from home.. For these reasons, you have to respect your colleague much more than your friend, with whom you may be abrupt sometimes.. with that friend, you can discuss the issue even later and, in any case, he knows you much better than that.. On the other hand, (*Beginning of conflict episode No.4*): *things here are different.. especially in terms of the pressure of work.. In general, there are different issues involved here.. you have to remember that, until recently, we belonged to the public sector.. Back then, there were different rules.. now, things are different.. Of course, there were, and still have been, all sorts of unfair things that may happen.. in terms of promotions or financial issues.. There are plenty of reasons which give rise to such problems and which don't allow you to behave in the same way as you do outside the work context.. you have different aims here, and different outside of here.. For instance, when two people are working in the same place and do exactly the same job, however, one of them is treated better than the other.. in financial terms.. well, then you get angry.. Personally, I have experienced such a situation.. I didn't discuss it with the person who was my colleague.. I just discussed it with the boss.. why that thing had happened.. Personally, I have never had a fight with a colleague.. Maybe somebody else would think that I should have talked with that colleague.. However, it was not her fault (the colleague's). In a work context, the person who is above the others is supposed to be responsible for certain things.. On the other hand, you, as an employee, have to do your job as well as you can.. Issues relating to promotion and rise in salary have to do with your boss, the other person involved has nothing to do with it.. It's completely irrelevant if that person (i.e. the colleague) has used certain 'weapons' to arrive there.. this is irrelevant.. However, I do believe that the person who is higher up in the hierarchy has to be able to understand such issues, by himself.. To put it simply: The girl who was*

working here some time ago, suddenly, and without any apparent reason, got a substantial rise in her salary. I went nuts when I found out.. Why? Because I knew exactly what she was doing, I knew that some problems had occurred in the department because of her (i.e. mistakes in her job), I knew that our boss had come to me and asked me "what are we going to do now that you are going to take your holiday?".. Well, when I got back from holiday, I realized that she had got that rise, and that drove me crazy.. What should I say to her? I didn't want to tell her anything.. I was not even interested in her case.. What I was really interested in was that boss.. who had approved that rise, and who had let me know how much better I was than her in my job.. and who had told me how difficult it was going to be for the department when I was going to take some time off.. If the girl had used 'other' ways (to get a rise), that's not my concern.. I just wished that he had been able to sit down and think and figure out how I would feel because of this thing.. and understand that he was only giving me poor excuses.. I could not even bother paying attention to his excuses.. So, my problem had to do with him and not her..

I.: So, what happened?

D.: I went to him and discussed the issue with him.. I told him "this rise means that I am (the quality of what I am doing is) inferior to her.." He told me "no, it's not like that at all.. I just wanted to give her a rise because her salary was really low".. He even tried to justify himself.. by saying that soon, things were going to happen for me as well.. However, I was not happy with his excuses.. because, even though we did have a difference in our salaries, this difference had to do with the fact that I had been working 6 years more than her, and that I was also married.. So, our boss thought that this girl's salary was really low, so he offered her the same salary as mine. On the other hand, it's natural that I felt that this was not fair.. and he told me that one day, I was going to get a really substantial rise in my salary. However, he left (this job), so things remained the same.. I don't really know what he would have done, should he have remained here.. I never really bothered to take his explanations seriously.. I didn't care about them.. Because, when you make a mistake.. because you haven't assessed the situation correctly.. then, you are likely to say all kinds of silly things in order to cover up for the mistake you've already made, can you follow me? So, what's the reason for me to pay attention to this (discourse)? It may be the case that this girl complained to him about her financial situation, and he wondered why the two of us had a different salary.. so, it just maybe because he didn't really pay enough attention to the issue.. I am sure that it had nothing to do with him liking her, on a personal basis... I could see on a daily basis, that this was not the case.. I knew it.. I don't know why he behaved like that.. I got upset and the whole issue made me sad.. But, after that point, I didn't pursue the issue any further.. Should he still have been around, I might have investigated it more.. However, since he left, I didn't manage to discuss it any further.. after a while, the girl also left.. so, nothing was ever done... (End of conflict episode No.4).

Interview Transcript: 2

(Nikos): I have worked for this company since 1969. Before coming to this department, I was working for a similar department. Slowly, different departments merged together, so I ended up in this department 2 years ago. I am the supervisor of the Design team. In total, this work team consists of 14 employees, all of whom work in this room. [If you noticed, in the room adjacent to this one, the programming team work.] Our relationships are good in general.

(Interviewer): What is the nature of the work entailed in your team?

N.: In general, working in designs means having autonomy; nevertheless, on a lot of occasions, one is dependent on another, therefore, coordination between people working here is a 'must'. Of course, the supervisor always has a say in such affairs.. and he is also in contact with everybody.

I.: Do you need to coordinate with the other supervisors of the division?

N.: Sure. I need to coordinate with them, on a daily basis.. both with the supervisor of the Research Department, Mechanical Engineering, as well as Programming Departments. After our team, the work goes to the programming people. Work done by the Research Department comes to us... it's like a chain.. researchers conduct research on a particular task, then this comes to us for doing the design, the analysis goes to the programming.. and finally everything goes to the industry (i.e. Production Line). If the production encounters a problem, then it depends where it goes.. if it has to do with designing, it comes to the design team.. in general, these things have to do with the design, since the actual product takes a form only in designs.. and it is mainly the design that production is called to put into concrete.

I.: Can you recall a recent incident where there has been a disagreement either in the context of your work team or of the wider department?

N.: I cannot recall a specific incident.. (*Beginning of the conflict episode No.1*):but, surely, there are disagreements.. because any particular designer has his own rationale when designing. And, in cases in which he insists on this rationale, and wants to do the design according to this rationale, then he has to be able to prove that this was the way it should be done. It is at this stage then, that a disagreement usually arises, and eventually gets sorted out.. since the best opinion prevails in the end.. nothing takes place [i.e. no decision is taken] in an obligatory way.. For instance, it may be the case that the designer says "this thing should be done in this way, because it is better for the production, and the entire project.." and he gives valid reasons for this opinion.. then it's this opinion which is put into effect.. (*End of the conflict episode No.1*).

I.: What happens in the case where two of your employees get involved in a disagreement?

N.: They may solve it between themselves.. otherwise, they'll ask me.. This happens generally speaking, and not only in instances where there is a work-related issue.. for instance, regarding their leave of absence.. or some of their relationships.. then, they ask me in order to sort things out.. if the problem is a serious one.. In general, when there is a tension between employees, then I am responsible for intervening and seeing

what is actually going on.. I have to calm things down.. Because, we are in a design office.. people are doing some thinking.. so, one cannot scream... there must be a calm environment in here in order for the employees' production level to be satisfactory.

I.: So, do you generally go to them (i.e. intervene), or they come to you?

N.: Most of the time, they come to me.. When the issue has to do with a particular task, I try to figure out what is the best thing to do.. if it is something personal, or something more general, then I just give my advice.. whether it should be done this or that way.. I cannot really enforce my opinion... In general, I would say that they follow my recommendations.. This may have to do with the fact that I am an old-hand in this profession and I have a lot of experience in work-related issues, plus the fact that I am the supervisor.. Of course, in this place, I have only been the supervisor for 2 years. But, in the departments I worked in previously, I also had a supervisory position.. so, I believe that this helps.. since I know better the way that things work here.. and how one needs to behave to the people he is working with. More specifically, I think that one has to be straight-forward, objective.. to be fair to others.. and if somebody else has the potential of climbing up in the hierarchy, then, one has to help him.. because this is also good for the sake of work, since this person will also be likely to be more productive, when he sees that people help him get promoted.

I.: According to your experience so far, which would you say is the best way of dealing with things when in disagreement?

N.: *(Beginning of the conflict episode No.2): It takes lots of discussion and exchange of arguments.. Because when in disagreement, it may be the case that you (i.e. the supervisor) decide to enforce your opinion.. because you can do so, when you are the supervisor.. But this may result in causing negative results.. I mean that the other person will do what you say, but he will create problems for you and find various excuses.. e.g. "I cannot understand X", or "such and such problem suddenly occurred".. therefore, the outcome may not be so good.. On the contrary, when you discuss the issue and give adequate reasons to the other, e.g. "indeed things should be done like that, for such and such reason", then I believe that he will understand you better, he'll do things more quickly and, in general, the best outcomes are likely to occur.*

I.: What do you mean that he may create different sorts of problems?

N.: *For instance, if he believes that his own viewpoint is the best one, and you make him understand in which respects he is not right and that things should be done differently.. in other words, when you don't enforce your opinion to him.. then, he will easily understand it.. otherwise, his natural reaction would be "my viewpoint is the best, but still, it's not followed.." and he would be indifferent..*

I.: Can you recall a specific incident?

N.: *I still cannot recall anything specific.. but I could say that such things have to do with the everyday functioning of the department.. For instance, it may be the case that I see that a design has to be finished sooner than the timetable suggested... because this design interferes with other parts of the project.. In this case, things make me put on*

more pressure.. Putting pressure on people, it has created disagreements such as "it's just not possible for the task to be finished earlier". In this case, I have to look closer at what is really happening, and how I can help in order to get the specific task finished earlier..

I.: So, what did you do?

N.: I've just been cooperative.. by trying to think of (various) parallel solutions.. for instance, in this case where the task wouldn't be finished by the deadline proposed.. a parallel solution would be to ask for the assistance of somebody else, if the task is really very demanding, and if it is indeed estimated that it cannot be finished on time.. Because, in a lot of cases where a certain task is estimated to finish by X time, it means that it really has to finish by that date.. That means that the supervisor necessarily has to find a certain solution..

I.: What sort of reaction do you get from your subordinates then?

N.: They are persuaded.. I believe so.. Because if they were not persuaded.. as I told you earlier, there would be negative reactions.. So, if the subordinate wasn't persuaded once, twice or even more times, then, at the fifth time, his reaction would be much more 'abrupt'. But we don't have such problems.. at least for the time being. Then, the situation would explode.. because you can keep it inside yourself for a few times.. but after the fifth time, then, there is an explosion.. because (the employee would wonder) "since the boss was not right any of these times, how could I keep on doing what he is telling me, since I can see that this is nonsense?" That's why I'm telling you (that they are persuaded).. logic always prevails.. the logic of what is practical.. because, due to my lengthy experience, I am not irrational when asking things; for that reason, I don't get irrational reactions (End of the conflict episode No.2).

I.: So, you believe that your subordinates express their grievances to you?

N.: Sure, plenty of times.. Because I have given them this initiative.. sometimes, I even provoke them (to tell me so). Because, one needs the opposite opinion as well.. since this may lead to better results.. so, sometimes I even provoke them to express freely their opinions.. in different ways.. for instance, I even tell them "you are obliged to express yourselves when you have a different opinion". I put it to them as their obligation. Because I'd love to listen to opposing opinions, when there are any.. and to discuss them. However, I know that there are times when I am a bit more austere with them.. more than I should be.. so, there are some (employees) who don't dare to ask me, or express their opinions.. for instance, the young people.. they are kind of frightened.. for this reason, I provoke them to go beyond this fear and express themselves freely.

I.: What do you mean when saying that you are more 'austere' to them?

N.: (Beginning of the conflict episode No.3): For instance, I am more austere regarding the right way of doing things.. there shouldn't be any unnecessary delays.. there should be quietness in the department.. I don't like seeing people moving (from their desks) without any reason.. these are some of the issues on which I am more austere.. but not always.. It all depends on how quickly the task proceeds; if I see that

there is an undue delay, then it's clear that I become more austere. In such an event, I call the employee concerned and I tell him so. I tell him "on this and this point, you are lagging behind.. and that's the reason for the task not having proceeded the way it should.. it may also be the case that, from time to time, the level of my voice is raised more than usual (i.e. I yell at him).. like that, this may set an example for the rest of the employees.. this happens only in cases where it needs to happen.. in cases where I see that things are getting worse.. then the level of my voice is certainly raised.. but this doesn't happen always.

I.: In such a case, how does the subordinate react?

N.: Usually, he [genuinely] accepts my opinion.. that is if my arguments are right.. he accepts it.. Of course, there are no such things as "I will never do it again"; I mean, I don't want him to repent. I just want him to keep it in his mind that he did something wrong and that he will never repeat it in the future, if possible.. Because, in the course of the work, it is inevitable for mistakes to occur, and sometimes keep recurring.. Nevertheless, we need to try to avoid the repetition of the same mistakes.. (End of the conflict episode No.3).

I.: So, have there been cases of the employee behaving otherwise?

N.: If he doesn't accept [my opinion].. I might have to report him [higher up] for misconduct.. ask to get him fired.. however, this thing has never happened.. not in my career.. because I don't really believe in such measures.. that is, to refer to somebody else higher up and tell him such things about one of my subordinates.. I've never gone higher up to say that a particular employee here is not good enough.. I just tell him [the subordinate] my opinion in order for him to have it in mind.. I've never gone to such extremes, because I believe that I am able to control the situation better by myself.. I don't think that going higher up can help in any case.. Even though I know that there is control from higher up, in the sense that the directors get informed about what happens here.. and we all know that there is control from higher up.. but, beyond that, I don't think it's wise to go to my supervisor all the time and keep him informed about each of my designers working here, since I am the one responsible for the functioning of this department and for the people working here..

I.: Can you remember a case in which you either expressed your grievance.. or one that you didn't?

*N.: I cannot recall.. in any case, there are very few cases where I haven't expressed my disagreement.. I usually do express myself.. it has to do with my character. I even express my disagreement to persons who have higher positions in the hierarchy.. if I believe that I am right, I always express it.. (*not a dyadic conflict situation: not included in the analysis*): There have only been a few times when I didn't express my disagreement.. because I didn't have the chance to do so.. for instance, when in a meeting, you may have a different opinion but you cannot express it, because they don't give you the opportunity to talk.. therefore, in this case, you don't express your disagreement.. Or, for instance, I don't express my disagreement when I don't want to 'harm' somebody; in such a case, I don't express my disagreement.. but there have only been very few occasions like that.. Otherwise, I always express my disagreement.*

I.: What do you mean when you say that they don't give you the opportunity to talk during a meeting?

N.: A lot of times this may happen.. that you don't get the chance to talk.. maybe because there is very little time.. it may be the case that priority is given to the director, or vice director, or somebody higher up than the head of a department to talk.. as a consequence, that person has to talk and the issue is covered.. there are a lot of reasons of a similar nature..

I.: Can you recall an incident of disagreement with a colleague?

N.: (*conflict with another department: not included in the analysis*): Usually, we have disagreements with the Production Line.. for instance, with the head of the department working with the elastics.. we are often in disagreement.. because, the outcome of our job gets materialized through them.. in the course of them putting it into effect, there are such disagreements.. a series of discussions takes place.. sometimes they are quite intense.. all of this, in order to end up with finding the solution which is best for our job.. Why do you get to disagree? Because sometimes, the way in which we have designed something calls for more work on their part.. So, in their attempt to do as the least work possible, they claim that people working in designs should have given them more information.. and, that's how our disagreement starts..

I.: What makes the difference regarding how a disagreement is solved?

N.: Personally, it all depends on who is the other person I'm talking to.. his character.. and the kind of argumentation he uses on this particular issue.. in other words, he may tell me "I believe that it is more functional for us if you give us the information in such and such a way"; or, he may just say "I want the information to be sent like that, so you have to do so".. in the latter case, the disagreement becomes intense. I cannot really say why, in the latter case, he behaves like that.. I think it depends on his emotional state at that particular moment.. or, he may think that if he argues in the latter way, then he is right.. that he puts the message across that he is right.. that's what he thinks.. On the other hand, when he uses the first approach, then we actually sit down and find out what is actually happening.. While in the second case, I may also have a look at the issue, but I will also react in a negative way.. but still, I'll use some arguments. Because, you see, due to the nature of the work in designing, we have a general view about the entire sequence of work.. that is, how the different parts of the product are assembled together, how the analysis [of these parts] is made, how the different parts are cut and put back together again.. all these different stages are in a designer's head.. Therefore, keeping in mind what is good for the company, we may decide that it is better to spend some extra hours working on them, since, like that, the rest of the departments as well as the entire project will profit.. consequently, the company will have to spend less money for the project.. even though that particular department will have extra work.. You need to explain [this rationale] to them in order for them to grasp it.. Since each of the departments which work for the project by putting the designs into effect just know that this department has proposed this particular [time and work] schedule. However, in each design, we need to know the entire project, and all the steps until its realization. So, in order for them to make their job less demanding, they ask for more information. However, by giving them such

information, this may cause problems in the latter stages of the process.. therefore, you need to present your arguments regarding why you must not disclose such information [at this stage]. However, when the other person presents this disagreement in the form of a demand, instead of trying to cooperate with each other.. well, this influences me.. you then have all the reasons to react the way you do.. On the other hand, when the other person asks for your cooperation, because he thinks that if you help him, then he can perform his job better, then your reaction is different. Of course, even in the former case, you have to address the issue.. however, this demand gives rise to a more intense way of reacting.. Sometimes, even the level of voice is raised.. this is natural, since you are upset. Of course, after the immediate moment of being upset, then you address the situation more calmly. We both look closely at the issue, at what the other person wants, and if this will benefit or harm the entire project. If it is for the job's benefit, it is done; otherwise, it isn't. Actually, it is often not me that gets involved in such a discussion.. I just assign this task to a designer and ask him to examine why they have made such a request. So, it's after him looking closely at the issue, that we both sit down together and discuss whether they are right or wrong.. and for what reasons this is so..

In many cases, both those who request something and those who just demand it, use arguments.. I would say that it all depends on his character and on how he behaves like a person.. According to my point of view, the people who are really self-centred, they usually don't use arguments.. they just demand something.. maybe, they think that they have right on their side.. they are people with lots of self-pride.. Of course, it may also be due to the amount of stress.. that is, they may think "if I don't have it my own way, then, I'll face delays, since the amount of work to be done is really high".. maybe it is because of the conditions of working here..

I.: How do you deal with a disagreement, when you are very stressed with your job?

N.: It has happened that I talk differently.. sometimes.. however, I really try to avoid it.. I tell myself "this is not the right way; using arguments is the right way".. I really try to avoid it.. I sit down on my own and think.. how I should react, before I actually do something.. I just try to get hold of myself and see things more calmly.. and then do something. That's what I do even when I am not here [in the firm]. It has to do with my character. I generally try to use reasoning when disagreeing with somebody.. even though there are always going to be cases where you get upset.. Nevertheless, I have to admit that, in a workplace, you need to behave according to certain rules.. your behaviour needs to be in line [with those rules], and thus the way you report to those higher up than you.. Outside the work context, things are a bit more relaxed. Of course, you still have [to comply with] the rules set by society, however, you feel freer.. in regard to your behaviour outside here.. with members of your family, your friends, people you interact with.. outside, you feel freer.. I mean, you escape from the rules in use in a workplace.. Which are these rules? Well.. I would say.. respecting the object of your work.. which is also reflected in relationships.. respect regarding the hierarchical position of people working in the company.. all these may exist in order for things to work in the right way.. So, one has to think of these things, and react in an adequate way.. I believe that my subordinates have such respect...

I.: Can you recall a conflict incident with your supervisor?

N.: (*Beginning of the conflict episode No.4*): Well, this person is not my supervisor any longer.. he was around before this supervisor came.. I remember that we had some very intense disagreements.. it was not only me.. but all his subordinates faced problems with him.. We got to the point that each of us would wonder "whose day is it today for having a fight with this boss?" or, every Monday, when he would call anyone of us, we knew that we had to go in [his office] and have a fight with him.., rather than working with him.. The reason behind this was that.. because he used to be in the army, he had a paranoid.. really paranoid rationale.. that doesn't mean that all people working in the army are the same.. on the contrary, on average, these people are stable in their opinions.. As for him, he [what he would say] was beyond question.. he wouldn't accept any comment on that.. he wouldn't take any explanations.. that was it [what he said].. And, in this respect, there were fights.. Because, let's say that it was about this task which could only be finished in 2 months time.. Well, he told me that it needed to be finished in 5 days.. That was completely crazy.. When you tried to explain to him how [things are usually done], he would say "it needs to be done that quickly, and [I accept] no more comments on that. I want it done in 5 days."

I.: Did you express your disagreement to him?

N.: Of course.. and, it was on that issue that we were involved in fervent disagreements.. "this is not possible.." .. our disagreement was really intense.. Of course, this task could not possibly have been finished in 5 days.

I.: So, what would happen?

N.: Well, I guess that he kept on with his own rationale of things, that is "in 5 days".. I would say "no way, in two months", he would go on "well, give it 5 days, and you'll see that it will be finished by then".. I would just leave [the room] and the issue was left like that.. either, one forgot everything about the issue (i.e. to be finished in 5 days), and it would eventually finish in 2 months.. I believe that such a thing happened because he was not very much aware of what is entailed in our job.. But, instead of him deciding that he needed to investigate this issue even more [i.e. because he was not aware of things], and go through the entire chain of work in detail, in order to be able to reach his own conclusions.. he rather tried to make his own timetables and deadlines and say "this task can be finished in 5 days.. and that's it.. there is not going to be any more time allocated for this task."

I.: Why do you say so?

N.: It may be the case that he wanted to show off to the management.. to show that he is a multi-talented person and that he can finish off many jobs much more quickly than they used to be finished..

I.: So, if I understood correctly, would you keep on with [i.e. continue] this disagreement with him, or not?

N.: For this particular person.. because he was that type of person who would provoke you in different ways.. I, as well as other colleagues, would express our disagreement to him.. Of course, that means that up to a certain point, because after a while, we got

tired of it and one would say to him "well, it's O.K., we will see" and off we went [from his office] and the issue would be over.. Because, he was such a person that when he would see you nodding and saying "O.K." [to what he said], then he would put an end to the conversation.. even though he would eventually have it his own way..

I.: Did such a situation have an effect on you?

N.: Sure.. it would influence my relationship with him.. we were in a constant state of tension.. psychologically, the situation was not good.. at least as far as I am concerned.. and it would affect our relationship in general, and, to a certain extent, the way of functioning in this particular department. (End of the conflict episode No.4)

I.: What do you mean?

N.: (Beginning of the conflict episode No.5): Yes, the good functioning of this place.. because.. he would interfere a lot in this department.. in the way that various tasks were performed.. in the procedures.. regarding the designers who were working for him [i.e. under his supervision].. and would thus create problems.. For instance, when I was allocated to carry out a certain task.. I would reflect on the time [limits], and I would make a programme [i.e. timetable and work allocation] [the interviewee is the head of one work-team in the R & D Department] So, I would make this programme which had to be followed.. Well, he would stop one of the designers, because he wanted him to deal with something else instead. However, on the other hand, he would complain that the other job hadn't finished yet. Well, in this case, when you would tell him "it's because you stopped this designer [and assigned him another task], that's why the other task hasn't been finished yet", then he would say "no.. he has to finish the first task and the second task as well".. you see, [he would say] such kinds of [paranoid] things..

I.: I still don't understand why..

N.: It's probably because he had his own rationale regarding management.. he was using his own way of managing.. and he thought that this was a better way of doing things.. He interfered with things.. But I think that he must have been a problematic person, because the firms in which he had been working in the past, would dismiss him after a while.. (End of the conflict episode No.5)

I.: Are you happy with the way you have handled conflict situations so far?

N.: In general, I would think so.. but things could have been better.. Of course, it also depends on your subordinates in the specific case [we are talking about].. on the way they work.. and so on. Things would have been better if the time pressure was not that high.. especially here, that is the design team.. then, employees here would be able to work [more relaxed] having more time at their disposal.. Then, our relationships, as well as the way we would handle our disagreements, would have been much better.. That is, more 'calm', fewer incidents of disagreement.. because we would have more time to reflect on things.. and a much better psychological mood for all of us.. since time wouldn't press us that much any longer.. However, still, our relationships are pretty good, as well as the way we handle such things..

I.: Do you behave differently when in disagreement with your supervisor?

N.: I wouldn't think so.. I use the same sort of arguments with all colleagues (i.e. subordinates, supervisors, colleagues).

I.: So, what about that supervisor that you were referring to earlier?

N.: (Beginning of the conflict episode No.6: This episode is related to the conflict episode No.4.) [The employee refers to the same conflict situation described earlier, but this time, he reports a subsequent episode from the same conflict situation: having failed to persuade the supervisor (and thus, having to comply with him) after a series of time, the interviewee - in this episode - decides not to voice his disagreement in the first place]:

But, he was [a special case].. because he was conclusive, and he wouldn't accept any kind of arguments.. You would explain him that this thing couldn't be done for that and that reason and, in the middle of your explanation, he would interrupt you "yes, but I want it like that". In some cases, there was hardly a discussion.. he wouldn't take it.. After a point, you got tired.. so you ended up saying "what's the point of discussing it? since we are going to arrive at the same conclusion.. that is, we are going to have a fight.. so, there is no point in discussing it."

I.: Why did you think it was much better not to discuss it?

N.: Because, prior examples had led us to this decision.. Since we wouldn't get any results [from such discussions].. the discussion would be without any meaning..

I.: How did you cope with this disagreement, which was not solved?

N.: I was sure that things couldn't be done the way he claimed.. this disagreement would remain unresolved, however, there were indications that the task wouldn't be finished [by then]. Actually, on a couple of occasions, I had reminded him "do you remember that issue?".. well, he had forgotten all about it.. since he was also an old person.. it was impossible for him to change his behaviour.. he had even admitted himself that "since I haven't changed for 50 years, could I change now?" That was his nature.. moreover, he was a military person.. he was a person who couldn't adapt to the nature of the work here.. to the way that the industry functions.. to the requirement of the particular position he had.. I don't think that he was meant to work here.. I think it would suit him if he could work as a private businessman and thus work according to the rules that he made up for himself since, in such jobs, there are such rules.. you see, in each profession, there are certain rules.. Here, there are specific rules regarding the way in which any specific position works.. regarding how the firm works.. You see, he wouldn't work within these rules, he just couldn't and that's the reason he also left other industries. I believe that all of us are obliged, when doing a certain job, to adapt to the specific conditions (of that job), to those rules, and to how we must behave in that specific job, in that specific task.. (End of the conflict episode No.6)

I.: What do you have in mind when behaving during a disagreement?

N.: To resolve it for the benefit of the work.. in general, and secondly, not to create any 'psychological' problems for the other fellow-worker.

I.: What do you mean?

N.: For instance, the way that you are going to say it to the other person i.e. "you have done this mistake, you have to correct it and do it like that".. this way is important; otherwise, it may create a problem.. this problem may be a minor one, or even major.. it depends on that other person's character, that is, the person who committed the mistake.. Therefore, it may be the case that you deal with the entire issue in such a case that the issue is solved for the firm's interest, but in the meantime, there are not going to be any (psychological) problems for the person who made that mistake..

I.: Has this always been the way you behaved?

N.: Yes.. I always behave like that.. I pay particular attention to this point..

I.: Can you now recall any other disagreement?

N.: (Beginning of the conflict episode No.7): Due the nature of my character.. there have been times that I felt that the other person had bad intentions towards me.. when acting in a certain way... Due to the nature of my character, however, I tend to forget easily. That is, I do something about that at that particular moment, but, I don't keep it eternally within me. That's the way I am... I cannot recall any event now...

I.: Can you try to be more specific? .. in order for me to understand, for instance, how you realized that the other person had bad intentions..

N.: You are right.. because there are times that you just think that the other has bad intentions.. [it's your imagination really]. That's why I am telling you that there have been times that I understood that the other had bad intentions.. because there are certain other times that I thought so, but this was not the case..

I.: So, can you tell me such an example?

N.: I remember that in my interactions with other colleagues, there were certain things that shouldn't have been done in that way.. so, I detected that the other had bad intentions.

I.: Did you express your grievance to the other?

N.: Yes, I did express it.. directly to the person.. and the person tried to prove that he didn't mean bad, but that he did that for X and Y reasons.. some of such arguments were persuasive, some of them weren't.. And, I can say so, because I would take into account third people's reactions.. for instance, during meetings.. these people were saying that this thing (i.e. what the other person did to the interviewee) was not right.. things should have been done in another way..

I.: So, did you tell it to those other people as well, or they were present when things happened?

N.: Yes, they were present, during the meetings, and they heard all these discussions.. yes, there were instances of intense confrontation.. All these wouldn't have happened, if he had taken another actions.. Because, when there are two different opinions regarding a certain issue.. between my work-team and another work-team.. then, I am obliged to refer to somebody (i.e. the head of the other team) and tell him "you know,

I think that things should be done in this and this way.. " If I don't behave like that, but, instead, I go directly to the person higher up in the hierarchy (than both of us) and tell him "I don't believe that what the other person is right, for this and this reasons.. here are my arguments.. so, I propose for things to be done like this".. then, this indicates that I have bad intentions.. Because, if I do such a thing, I do it for two reasons: first, I do it in order to show off and be promoted, but, the bottom line is that I harm the other person, because he may have not realized it (i.e. the mistake), or for whatever reason, he may have missed it. In any case, I'm obliged.. the proper functioning of the firm requires that I go and find that colleague and discuss this issue together.. and if he is not persuaded, or I'm not persuaded (from each other's arguments), then, I report it (to the supervisor).. I tell him "both of us discussed the issue, but he thinks so and I think so.." On the contrary, if I go directly to our supervisor, without letting the other person know it, and without first discussing it with him... then, I can tell that the other person doesn't mean well.. And, as I was telling you before, in that incident, I gathered that the other person had a bad intention against me..

I.: But, why would he have bad intentions?

N.: A possible reason may be that he wanted to hurt me.. for whatever reason.. maybe in the past, when performing my job, it just so happened that he was harmed from something I did.. Or, it's just because of his character.. because there are such kind of persons.. For instance, he may want to gather (take into account) a series of my mistakes, in order for him to show off.. However, these kinds of mistakes are considered to be normal (in the course of the work). Surely I know that there are mistakes which can be made on purpose.. however, in all other cases, in the course of performing a job, these mistakes are normal.. Because, when, in a design, you write down the dimensions.. and instead of 12, you write 21 meters.. because at this moment, you are writing dimensions for a list 50 pages long.. then, this (the mistake) is considered normal.. So, since he wants to promote himself, through using my own mistakes, then, I reckon that there are underlying bad intentions behind his actions..

I.: So, did you express your disagreement?

N.: Sure I did.. in an assertive way.. I told him that "this is not the right way for you to do things".

I.: So, was the disagreement sorted out?

N.: Sure.. of course, he tried to prove that "no, I didn't do it in order to harm you.. it just happened that our supervisor asked me, so I had to answer him back.. you see, that's the excuses he used...

I.: Weren't you persuaded with these reasons?

N.: No, because the telephone is not far.. (to call me) in order for us to find a specific solution... or, in certain instances, the two of us would meet before him meeting the supervisor.. let's say that you just have a conversation now and he doesn't tell me anything.. and at 11 o'clock, he reports it to the supervisor.. therefore.. But you see,

due to my character, my relationship with him is not really affected.. because I forget such incidents.. I say "it's O.K.; he behaved like that.. so what? it doesn't really matter.." and I try to say "he'll understand that he did something wrong".. that's what I think.

I.: Does he?

N.: Up to a point, I think he does.. I can tell that this method of mine (i.e. my reaction) has a (good) effect.. and due to the fact that, even though you are right, you still discuss it with him.. or, even if he is right, he explains you the situation.. you can tell that this method is effective.. it is effective... (End of the conflict episode No.7).

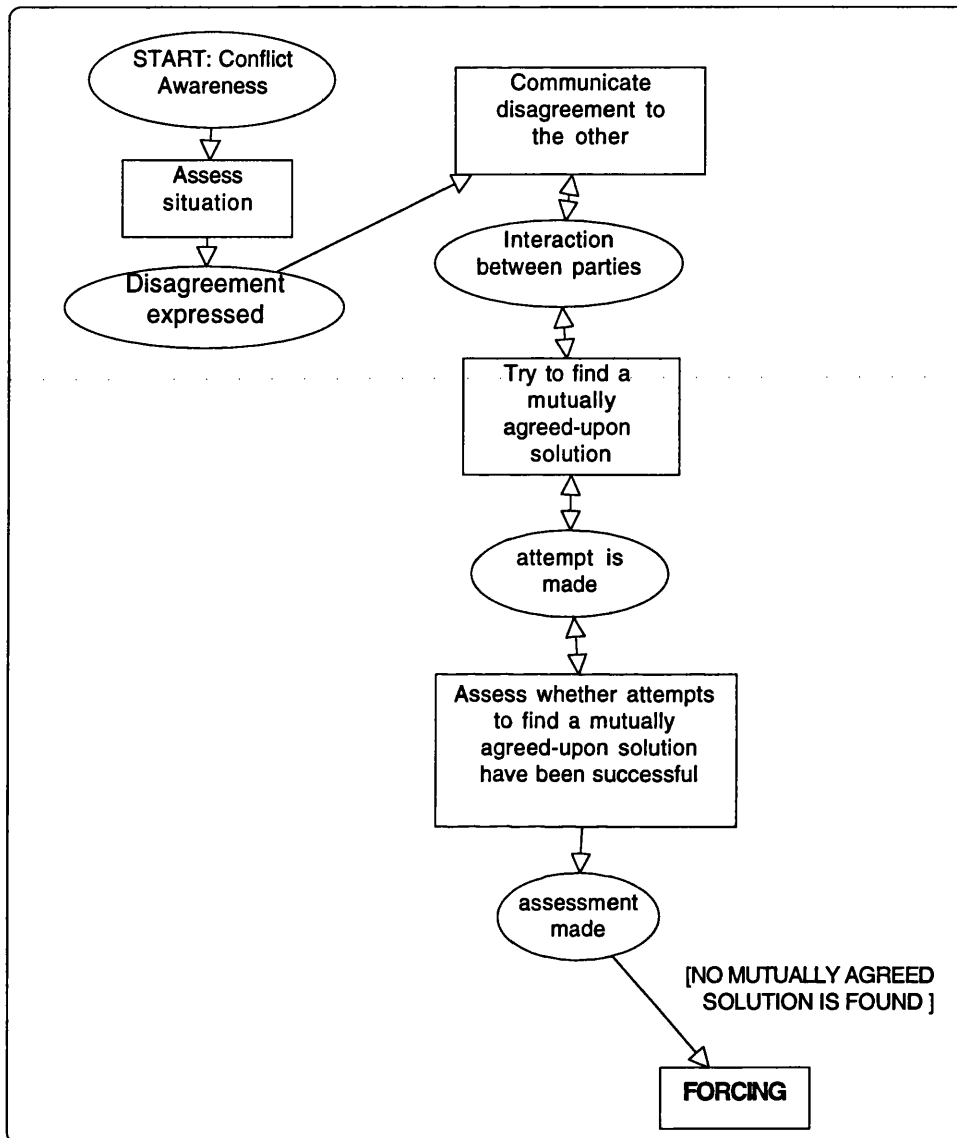
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APPENDIX III

Identification of Action Statements within a Unit of Analysis

1. "Even though it may sound difficult to believe, I never faced problems with my subordinates, other than telling them to do something today and them arguing back that they couldn't because they had to do something else beforehand. The reason for this [absence of problems] may be that the work division is such that the tasks to be performed are clearly independent of each other; therefore, one doesn't have to interfere with anybody's work. It may also be due to luck.. actually no, because I was personally responsible for the selection of my subordinates.. it is due to the fact that my subordinates are serious people. There are no major conflict incidents.. the structure of the job is such... Even though there are differences in the way of working, for instance somebody is slower than another when performing the task, yet, there are not many conflict incidents. Maybe this is special to the kind of work done in the department, which calls for 'coexistence', so that it does not get spoiled and one won't be able to continue working. On the contrary, in other big industries, work issues are (comparatively) independent. So, certain people may decide to be good in front of the boss in order to get a promotion or a rise in salary. Here, things are clear. This is something special that happens in the Research group; employees are just waiting for a rise in salary. Whether one gets promoted or not, depends on people higher up in the hierarchy (than myself), on top management and on one's typical qualifications as well.
In relation to the problems that I mentioned earlier, *what I say is eventually done* (**Forcing**) because the subordinate doesn't have adequate information. For instance, he doesn't attend meetings, so he is not in a position to know whether top management has put pressure on me to finish something. Therefore, according to my reasoning, he has to leave whatever he's dealing with at that moment, otherwise our work group [Research group] will get into trouble. *In such cases, the subordinate may ask me "what's going on with you, all of a sudden, since you know that up to now, I have been working on something else."* (**Awareness of the problem - Disagreement expressed**) *In such cases, your response depends on the issue in question: I may 'open my cards' and tell him "do it, because that was what happened in the general meeting.."; or, in cases where there is an issue of confidence for those higher up in the hierarchy, I just tell him "do it now, and I'll explain to you later".* (**Interaction between the parties - Conflict situation is not resolved**) You never say things like "do it because I say so."

Graphical Representation for Example 1

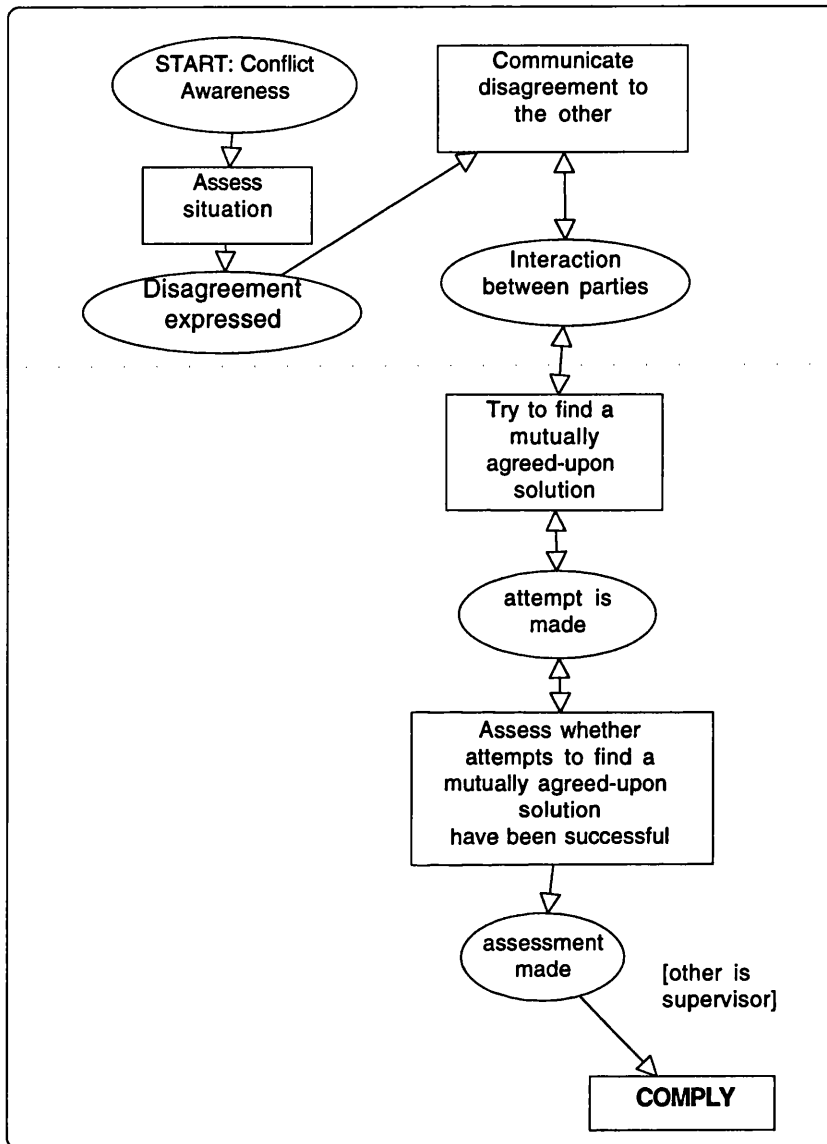


2. "It's as simple as that: *when there are two people working in the same place and doing the same kind of job.. when you see that one of them is 'treated' better, in terms of the way she is paid, that surely annoys you. This has happened to me; (Awareness of the problem)* I didn't discuss it with my colleague, but with our supervisor. I didn't have a fight with this colleague, even though I guess that somebody else wouldn't see the issue in those terms.. Because it was not her fault. When you are in a work environment, your supervisor is supposed to be responsible for certain issues. You are just an employee, and all you have to do is do your work as well as possible. Issues related to promotion and salary rise have to do with your supervisor, and the other colleague is not to blame. Even if this colleague uses his 'own way' to get a salary rise, this is not related to the point. I believe that the supervisor must have the ability to think clearly in such situations.

For instance, some time ago, there was another secretary working in here. All of a sudden, one day she got a substantial rise in her salary. I just freaked out. Because I knew the kind of (bad) work she was doing and I knew that this had created a lot of problems in the department. When I was about to go away on holiday, our supervisor would tell me how difficult it was going to be for the department to manage without me around. Well, when I came back from my holiday, I realized that she had been given a substantial rise in her salary. I just freaked out. There was nothing that I could say to her; I was not even interested in her case. *What I was interested in was the supervisor who had given her this rise and, according to what he told me, it was apparent that I was much better than her and that the department would have problems when I was going to go away for my holiday: (Awareness of the problem)* I just wanted to talk to him; because, even if this woman had used 'dubious' reasons to get this rise, it was a matter of indifference to me. I just wanted my supervisor to be in a position to realize and think about how I was going to feel when such a thing happened; I also wanted him to realize that he was just using silly excuses to justify his action, and that it was out of the question for me to believe such silly excuses. Well, *I went to him and discussed the issue with him: I just told him "judging by your action, I am not as good [as her] at my job". (Disagreement expressed)* He replied that this was certainly not the issue, and that he only wanted to give her a rise because her salary was really low. Trying to justify himself, he also said that, in due time, I was also going to be given a rise. Of course, this explanation was not satisfying since the difference in salary between me and her was due to the fact that I was married and had been working in the firm for 6 more years. (Interaction between the two parties - Conflict situation is not resolved) So, he thought that the other secretary had an unduly low salary so he gave her a rise. On the other hand, I felt that this was unfair; on that issue, he told me that he would also do something about my salary in due time. However, one day, he just left, and nothing

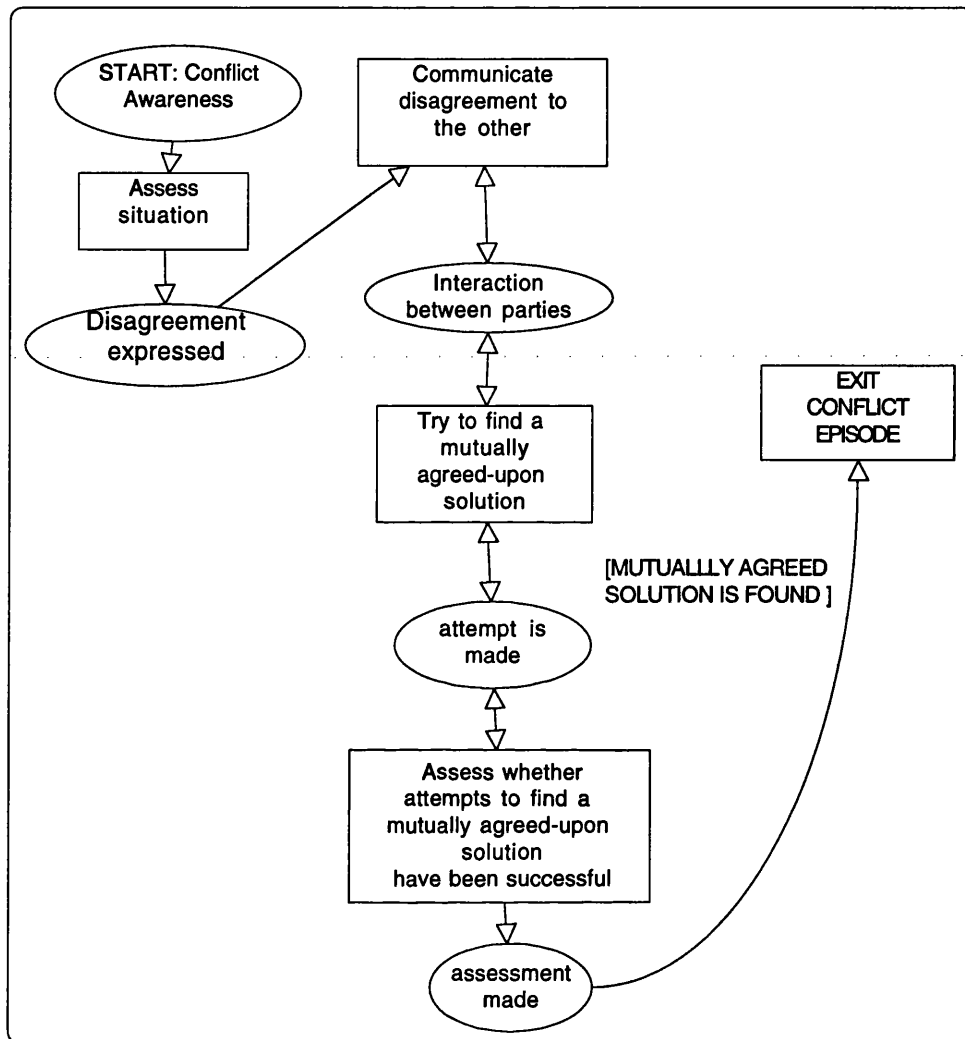
changed. In any case, I am not sure if things would have changed, had he been around... In general, when one makes a mistake, then, for sure, one talks a lot of rubbish, in order to cover up this mistake. So, what reason was there for me to pay further attention to his argument? It may have been the case that the other girl went to him and complained about her salary, and that he did not wonder why there was this difference in salary between me and her. This shows that he made a rash judgement. At least, I know for sure that it was not an issue of liking her more than me. I don't really know why he behaved like that.. *The overall situation worried me and made me sad. But, beyond this point, I didn't do anything else.* (Comply) If he had still been around, I might have raised the issue once again."

Graphical Representation for Example 2



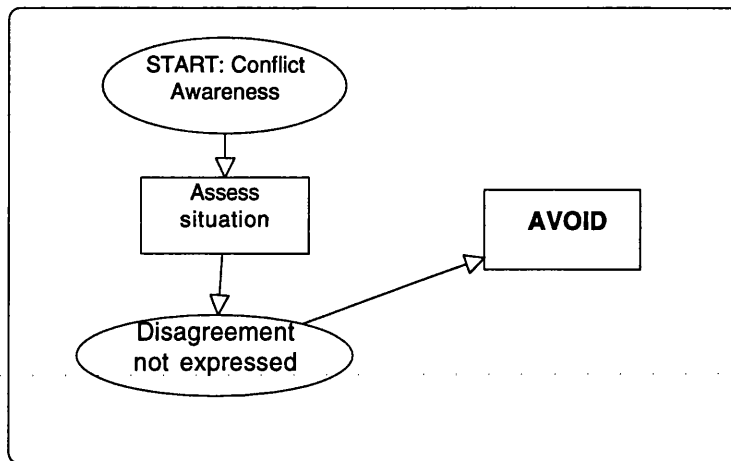
3. "In general, when one is involved in a disagreement, one wants to have one's opinion prevail.. in a calm way, and through dialogue with the other person. For instance, when I propose that the drivers take a certain route, I do so for the job's sake and not for personal reasons.. Because, in being truthful, everybody believes that the issues he is dealing with are more important and thus urgent. You may recognize that another colleague's issues are also important, but you are not going to put yours aside.. That's the whole truth... When both of us insist on our point of view, *we finally agree that the drivers have to collect the material from both places; if this is not possible, each of us has to sacrifice something else that we had asked the drivers to do for us the same day.. In the event that both materials are very urgent and need to be brought in immediately, we usually hire an extra lorry for that day.* (Disagreement is successfully solved) Because, we are not going to create a 'fight' over such issues; for all these have only to do with the job itself. We don't fight for our personal benefit, but for the company's benefit... therefore, *when the other person tells you that a particular material needs to be brought into the firm urgently in order for the work to proceed* (Awareness of the problem), we just hire an extra lorry and the issue is resolved. Of course, all these discussions have to be brought to an end quickly since there is time pressure: the drivers are there waiting for you to give them instructions. On average, they can only call at 10 out of the 25 places in the course of a working day. *You just ask your colleague why he proposed such and such an itinerary and he just has to give you the reasons...* (Interaction between the two parties)"

Graphical Representation for Example 3



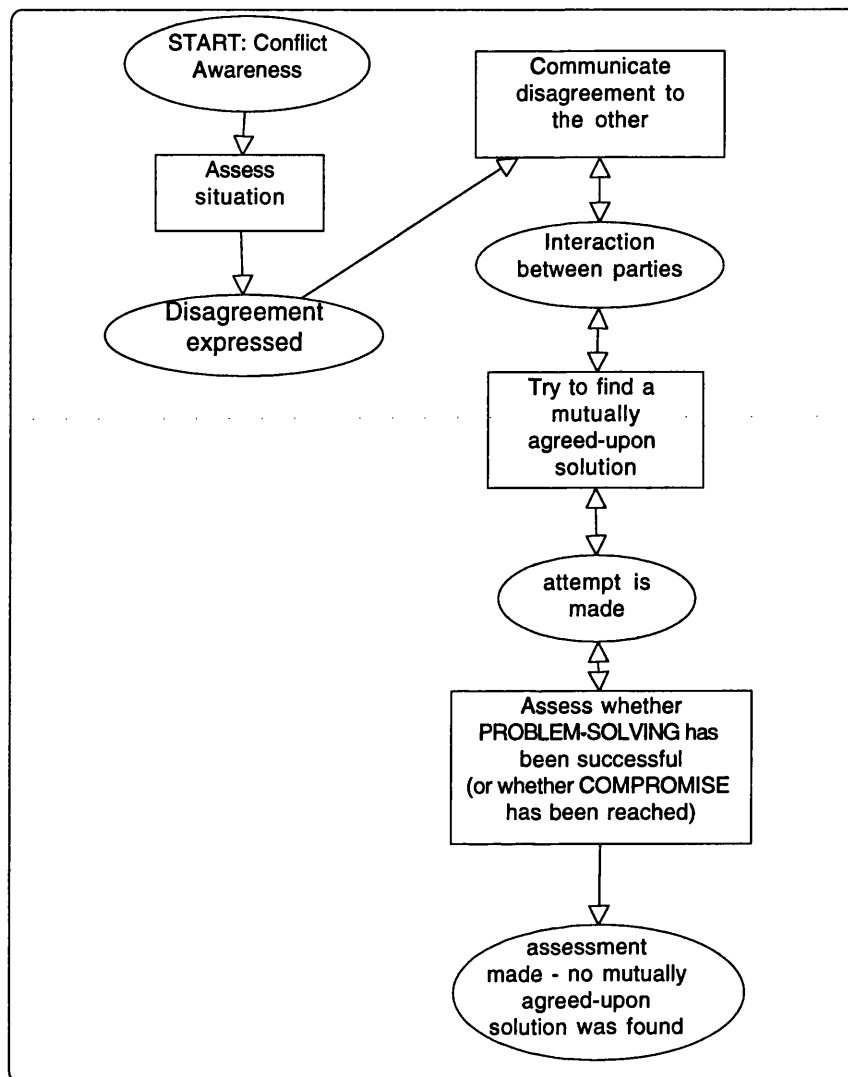
4. "On some occasions [in the past], I did not express my disagreement to Mr.Y [my supervisor]. I don't discuss with him, (Disagreement not expressed - Avoid) not because of any reasons such as... he is just an old person with an 'idiosyncratic' personality.. we do have a good relationship.. But, *if at a certain stage, I realize that he has another opinion about a particular issue, (Awareness of the problem)* I don't even mention it to him, I just don't want to, it's not because somebody doesn't let me.. It all depends on his character, not on his position. For me, [hierarchical] position doesn't play any role. For instance, there was another person in this position [supervisor] a year ago; this person was half the age of the current supervisor. Then, we had lunches together, we just had another kind of relationship; there was an intimacy between us. In the case of this supervisor, he just has other principles and beliefs. During the eight working hours, do you think that I would create a problem [with him] for a silly reason ? No way, I'll never do such a thing..never.. First of all, I would not like to create a problem for him. Moreover, I wouldn't like to get angry or cause a clash between the two of us. Since, as I'm telling you, I can see that we are completely different persons.. completely different.. That's the way I am; of course, I don't say that everybody else behaves the way I do; it's just me.."

Graphical Representation for Example 4



5. *"There are people who work on something, and they just keep it 'classified', in the sense that they don't tell anybody what they are working on. They 'play their cards close to their chest' in order to keep things secret. They don't communicate with other people. I have come across such a person in this department... (Awareness of the problem)* He used to be my colleague.. He got me to the point that I just wanted to beat him up.. Why was he behaving like that? Because he was an 'arsehole', to put it simply. He believed that, if he discussed with me what he had been doing, I would then his job and then his position would be threatened. So, he just kept things secret and stopped communicating with me.. he was literally doing the work by himself.. I had been patient for 8 months.. *In the beginning, I was polite.. I tried to keep my temper, control myself and talk to him calmly; I invented one thousand different ways in order to communicate with him.. he had created a 'wall' around him.. (Interaction between the two parties - Disagreement is not resolved)* I knew him outside the work context.. He was a mean person.. because, when you go out for dinner and start drinking with each other, then, it's very easy to get to know the other person. Well, he behaved like that, in order that nobody else could get to know his job, in order to feel that he was indispensable [to the firm]... I couldn't perform my job.. because I had to work in cooperation with him.. You cannot begin to imagine how much I tried to control my temper.. I was so patient because, even if you do the slightest thing in here, there are certain 'informers' who will tell everything to somebody higher up.. it may even be the person with whom you have the disagreement.. *Our disagreement was on a daily basis, every hour of the day.. (Disagreement expressed)* He would invent different lies in order to avoid me; for instance, when he saw me coming, he would hide himself behind a document and pretend that he was too busy to discuss with me.. and he would leave the office.. Our relationship was awful.. I had been patient in order to establish an interaction between us.. I was acting like that for the sake of work.. what else could it be ?"

Graphical Representation for Example 5



APPENDIX IV

Identification of the Propositions Within a Conflict Episode

"There are people who work on something, and they just keep it 'classified', in the sense that they don't tell anybody what they are working on. They 'play their cards close to their chest' in order to keep things secret. They don't communicate with other people (*Domain: Conflict Issue*). I have come across such a person in this department.. He used to be my colleague.. He got me to the point that I just wanted to beat him up.. Why was he behaving like that? Because he was an 'arsehole', to put it simply (*Domain: Other's Attributes*). He believed that, if he discussed with me what he had been doing, I would learn his job and then his position would be threatened (*Domain: Other's Attributes*). So, he just kept things secret and stopped communicating with me.. he was literally doing the work by himself.. I had been patient for 8 months.. (*Domain: Conflict Characteristics*) In the beginning, I was polite.. I tried to keep my temper down, control myself and talk to him calmly; I invented one thousand different ways in order to communicate with him.. he had created a 'wall' around him.. I knew him outside the work context.. He was a mean person.. (*Domain : Other's Attributes*); because, when you go out for a dinner and start drinking with each other, then, it's very easy to get to know the other person (*Domain : Relation to Other*). Well, he behaved like that, in order that nobody else could get to know his job, in order to feel that he was indispensable [to the firm].. (*Domain : Other's Attributes*). I couldn't perform my job.. (*Domain : Possible Consequences*) because I had to work in cooperation with him.. (*Domain : Situational Cues*). You cannot begin to imagine how much I tried to control my temper.. I was so patient because, even if you do the slightest thing in here, there are certain 'informers' who will tell everything to somebody higher up.. (*Domain : Possible Consequences*) it may even be the person with whom you have the disagreement.. Our disagreement was on a daily basis, every hour of the day.. (*Domain : Conflict Characteristics*) He would invent different lies in order to avoid me (*Domain : Other's Behaviour*); for instance, when he saw me coming, he would hide himself behind a document and pretend that he was too busy to discuss with me.. and he would leave the office.. (*Domain : Other's Behaviour*). Our relationship was awful.. (*Domain : Relation to Other*). I had been patient in order to establish an interaction between us.. I was acting like that for the sake of work.. (*Domain : Own Attributes*).. what else could it be?"

APPENDIX V

Analysis of Employees' Arguments on their Conflict Management Problem as Found in the 66 Conflict Episodes Analyzed - Classification of Arguments in Frames

A. RULE-BASED FRAMES

1. "In a disagreement concerning technical issues, there have always been two opinions (Data); each of us attempts to prove his case (Data). The important issues are always resolved in connection to the wider (bureaucratic) procedure (Backing). It all depended on the seriousness of the issue at hand (Warrant). Each of us argued about the way that the issue should be tackled, and the final decision was taken by the supervisor (main Claim). The immediate supervisor is a mechanical engineer and experienced in his field (Warrant)."
2. "If I believe that my colleague's reaction was meant as a joke (Warrant), I will just smile and I won't say anything (main Claim). Unless I realize that the other person behaved like that in order to insult me, then I'll answer him back (Rebuttal). I cannot let him insult me, especially in the workplace (Claim). However, the latter case happens very rarely (Claim). You see, I have worked here for a long time and we know each other very well; we have spent lots of time together (Backing)."
3. "When you disagree with your supervisor, you don't behave in the way you wanted to; you often 'swallow' your grievance (main Claim). (because) you are afraid of your position (Warrant). You are afraid of a lot of things, mainly because of your financial situation (Warrant). If you had another source of financial security, you would then behave differently (Rebuttal). For all these reasons, you may pretend that you don't understand or hear things; you comply with him (Claim). I believe that the lower the salary of an employee, the less free you are (to behave) in the workplace (Backing)."
4. "We may ask for the intervention of the supervisor (main Claim). This happens when neither of us is sure about how to proceed with the issue which is quite serious (Data). It primarily depends on the seriousness of the issue in dispute (Warrant). [In serious cases] we end up referring to

the supervisor who will also be held responsible for the decision to be taken (Claim)."

5. "When having a disagreement with a colleague, I sometimes ask the opinion of another colleague (main Claim). This happens in cases where the issue is important, for instance when ordering a material which costs a lot of money (Warrant). We want to hear to somebody else's viewpoint (Claim)."
6. "It all depends on the two parties in conflict (Warrant). It is possible that I just let it (the disagreement) be (main Claim). Because there are some people who aren't convinced; even though they listen to a third opinion, they just don't want to be persuaded (Warrant)."
7. "There were times when I didn't express my disagreement to a colleague, even though I would have liked to (main Claim). Let's say that I was not in the right mood to discuss the issue at that very moment, or that I had something to do that was urgent and I didn't want to waste 10 minutes of my time (Warrants). For these reasons, I thought that I was much better not to discuss it (Claim). In any case, the other person is entitled to have his own opinion (Claim)."
8. "There are cases in which I disagree regarding an issue but I do what he tells me (main Claim).. since he is the supervisor (Warrant). For instance, we may have a disagreement regarding the priorities with which I had to perform certain tasks (Data). Since he wants me to do things in a certain way, I just do so (Claim). I don't really care (Claim)."
9. "Some time ago, I needed some designers from another work-team to help me with an issue related to computers (Data). The supervisor of that team (my colleague) did not want to make them work on another task (Data). In the end, our supervisor had to intervene in order to reach a compromise (main Claim). In general, when there is a disagreement between two employees from the same rank of the hierarchy, the disagreement is resolved only after the intervention of the supervisor (Backing). It all depends on the relationship between the two people involved; when you have a good relationship with the other person, you don't need to refer to the supervisor (Backing). When you have only a 'working' relationship and a disagreement arises, then the disagreement is sorted out through him (Backing)."

10. "The disagreement was about some documents that my supervisor insisted I type into a computer programme (Data). The issue was raised by another department which wanted documents typed (Data). However, there was no reason to put this data into the computer since that would mean a great deal of time wasted (Data). It was an enormous work load and I had to do a lot of other things in the meantime; he just didn't want to realize that (Data). In general, he is a very stressed person and does not know much about the job (Data) [...] Eventually, I ended up doing it *his* way (main Claim). Because, when another department also is involved in the disagreement, you cannot refuse to do something (Backing)."
11. "It all depends on the situation (Warrant). When the disagreement is about an issue which will be presented outside the work team (Data), we refer to the supervisor (main Claim). Unless when the disagreement involves a minor issue, then, we sort it out directly between the two of us (Rebuttal)."
12. "I don't express my disagreement (main Claim).. because I may be afraid of my supervisor; I am afraid of the supervisor.. of losing my job (Warrant). That is what usually happens when somebody has a low position in the hierarchy; one starts liking his position too much [to jeopardize it] (Backing)."
13. "There are plenty of conflicts with colleagues who are much older than me (Data). Personally, I couldn't care less about expressing my disagreement to such a colleague (main Claim). Of course, I may also disagree with a colleague who is of similar age to me (Data). But still, we couldn't discuss it (Claim) since, in the workplace, you cannot have a pleasant discussion with the other person; simply, there is no time for it (Warrant). If the other person was my friend, I would have the patience to engage myself in conversation, with each of us trying to persuade the other (Rebuttal). But, trying to persuade him [my colleague]..no way (Claim)."
14. "When my viewpoint is not the same as that of a colleague, we ask the supervisor to resolve the situation (main Claim). In general, when employees are in disagreement, it is the upper level who takes the final decision (Backing)."

15. "A month ago, I had a disagreement with my supervisor regarding the way of moving the machinery (Data) [...] This supervisor is a strong-minded person (*he always insists on his own opinion*) (Data). I do believe that this is the way it is supposed to be because he is the one to sign official documents (Claim). Personally, I try to 'pass' him the message regarding what is the right thing to do (Claim). I continue up to a certain point; after that, [if he keeps on insisting] I follow his order (main Claim). He is the boss and is responsible for the final decision (Warrant). If he wants it like that, I do it like that, and the issue is over (Claim)."
16. "I believe that it always depends on the other person's character, no matter whether or not it is a work-related issue (Warrant). When I believe that there is going to be a (negative) reaction from that colleague (Warrant), I don't express my disagreement (main Claim). However, when I know that the other person is not prejudiced (against me) and has the (good) intention of getting along well together at work, then we can engage in a nice conversation (Rebuttal)."
17. "It may be the case that one of my colleagues is not sympathetic to the fact that I have a lot of work pressure at that moment (Data). What he asks me to do is not that urgent and, at the same time, he sees that I'm in the middle of other tasks and am in a rush to finish them (Data). Nevertheless, he may insist on asking for priority over the rest of the issues (Data). In such a case, I usually don't say anything (main Claim), because I know that he is so frustrated due to the work pressure he is facing (Warrant). I know the people here very well; I have gathered some information: e.g. you expect such a reaction from George, when he is under pressure (Backing) [...] On the other hand, when there is no pressure, the other person as well will be more relaxed when addressing you; he will ask me to do something at my own pace (Backing). So, I can tell that his reaction was just due to the pressure (Warrant). There are no 'personal' reasons behind such reactions (Warrant)."
18. "This is the only supervisor to whom I don't express my disagreement (main Claim). The only reason is that he is an old person and he is quite idiosyncratic (Warrant). When I realize that he has a different opinion about things, I don't comment on it (Claim). There is nothing that makes me behave like that; I simply don't want to (Claim). It has nothing to do with his position (Claim). This person's attitudes and beliefs are completely incompatible with mine (Warrant). I don't want to cause any problem over a silly issue (Warrant). Because I don't want

to become angry, or to cause him any problem, since I see that we are completely different people (Warrants)."

19. "It was a minor disagreement (Data). I thought it was best not to voice my disagreement (main Claim). Because I considered the issue to be of no importance (Warrant). Of course, one has to express oneself (Claim); otherwise, all these things accumulate within you, you go back home and you are frustrated (Claim)."
20. "In cases where the issue (in disagreement) has to be dealt with on the spot (Data), I may insist on my own opinion (main Claim). If he understands that I'm right, then the issue is over (Rebuttal). Otherwise, I follow my course of action (Claim), since a decision has to be taken and since I believe that this decision is the right one (Warrants). In such a case, I have to take responsibility for my actions (Claim)."
21. "We had ordered some material that we urgently needed and the supervisor would not sign that form (Data). He was about to retire; probably he was not interested in his work any longer (Data). After unsuccessful attempts to tackle the issue with him, I made a written report which was sent to the supervisor once-removed (main Claim). I was quite an old-hand at the job and we urgently needed this material (Warrants)."
22. "According to our job description, I have to find the supplier who offers the best deal (Data). If I disagree with the supervisor regarding which supplier to choose, I just follow my supervisor's recommendations (Claim). Unless he realizes that I am right, in which case our discussion ends with a common agreement (Rebuttal). Even though you may still disagree, it is his responsibility (Warrant) It has happened that a colleague has refused to do what his supervisor told him; the outcome of that situation was that this employee was fired, even though he was probably right (Backing)."
23. "I may not express my disagreement to my supervisor at that moment (main Claim). Because it may be the case that the situation is very tense (Warrant). Or even that he may not give you the opportunity to express yourself (Warrant). But, the time will come when I will not be able to control it (Claim)."

24. "If the other disagrees with my course of action, I keep on insisting on my own opinion (main Claim). This happens when I believe that I'm doing it the right way, or even when I judge that the other person has told me something in order to look as if he is better than me and has better a knowledge of the job (Warrants). Then, I let him know that I'll do it in my own way (Claim), since I am responsible for this task (Warrant)."
25. "One of the guidelines for our work (in Supplies) is to buy material which is cheap and of good quality at the same time (Data). A disagreement may arise between you and your colleague regarding which supplier to choose (Data). In such situations, we refer to the supervisor who will take the final decision as well as responsibility for the action taken (main Claim), since it is an important issue (Warrant)."
26. "In the past, I sometimes didn't express my disagreement to the supervisor (main Claim). I even began to blush as I went to knock on his door (Claim). It had to do with my age; I was only 25 years old and lacked work experience (Warrant). Then, I was the most polite person in Greece (Claim). Now, I feel powerful; I believe in myself (Claim)."
27. "Our disagreement had to do with the way of performing a certain task (Data). I don't like this kind of behaviour so I express my disagreement (Claim). However, I don't believe that the other person is doing this on purpose (Warrant). I can understand the reason for his doing so; we are in contact (all the time) and we know each other's character (Backing). Since I know the other person's character and how he will react (in similar situations) (Warrant).. I won't pay any further attention to the event (main Claim)."

B. MAU FRAMES

28. "I follow the supervisor's recommendation, even though I keep on disagreeing with him (*comply*) (main Claim). Because you are not aware of information related to this decision (Warrant). When management insists, it means that there are some underlying reasons (Backing). Should I insist on my point of view, the two levels could not cooperate effectively; one of us would have to be 'removed' from the workplace (Backings)."

29. "There have been cases in which I wanted to express my disagreement, but decided not to (main Claim). Because when you disagree with somebody higher up in the hierarchy, there is nothing you can do (Warrant). Therefore, whether you have a disagreement or not, you cannot say a word (Claim). Because otherwise, my relationship with him would have been spoiled and, moreover, without meaning to do so, you would have messed inevitably with issues that you shouldn't (Backing)."
30. "I complied with him [the supervisor] (main Claim). I was new to the company and he was my immediate supervisor (Warrant). I just wanted to take in some information since I was new in the job (Data). He was very ironic as a person; his character was the main reason underlying this problem (Data). [...] Even if I had kept on disagreeing with him (*not comply*), he would not have paid any attention to me (Claim). When you are new in a company, you cannot really say much (Backing)."
31. "There are times when you want to say something (express my disagreement) [to a colleague] but you just leave it for another time (main Claim). Because I see that the other person is stressed out and I know that, if I discuss it with him then, I'll make him even more stressed (Warrant). Since people from another department have pressed him, I guess I shouldn't do the same, since I'm his colleague (Warrant). This is not the right thing to do; you see, my colleagues behave in a similar way towards me: when they see that I'm pressed, they don't make things worse for me (Warrant). That's what friendship is all about (Backing)."
32. "I don't express my disagreement to my colleague (main Claim) when I know that the other person is not cooperative, in the sense that s/he has an opinion and is fixated on it (Warrant). In that case, my words would be wasted (Claim). I am not interested in whether or not he will agree with me; I just want to express what I believe (Claim). It doesn't mean that my opinion is always the right one (Claim). When I don't express my disagreement to him, I may discuss it with somebody outside the work context (Claim). Because you always want to express what you think (Claim) [...]"
33. "Two weeks ago, a new person came to the department (Data); he was a personal acquaintance of the boss (Data). [...] He had absolutely no knowledge about the job he was going to do (Data) (*I didn't express my disagreement to my immediate supervisor* (main Claim: not stated

explicitly). I showed him around as my supervisor had asked me to do (Claim). I am 48 years old and have been working here for 32 years; I am still dependent on my salary and I need some years before retirement (Warrants). All these years, I have understood when the 'doors' are open for you and when they are closed (Backing). I knew that if I hadn't behaved the way I had, this would have had a bad effect on me; I could even have been fired (Backing)."

34. "Personally, I would prefer the situation in the office to be more calm (Claim). Generally, there is a tension in the air which makes me feel nervous (Claim). I could have expressed my complaint to my colleague, but I thought that it was much better if I didn't (main Claim), with regard to good working relationships between colleagues (Warrant). Because I didn't know how my colleague would take my comment; I didn't want him to think that I gave him a serious warning (Warrants). I didn't want to put extra pressure on him, since I knew that he was stressed out (Warrant). I could have told him another time when he was not that stressed (Claim). But, when the moment passed, there was no real reason for me to express it (Claim)."

C. FUTURE SCENARIO FRAMES

35. "I knew from the very beginning that every time he called me into his office, we would have a fight and not a discussion (Data). The reason was that he had an irrational way of thinking; he was very rigid in whatever he was saying (Data). He would insist on my finishing the job in X time, even though it was apparent that this was not feasible (Data) [...] He didn't know much about the job and, instead of asking for explanations from us, he would draw his own conclusions in a rush (Data). He might do so in order to show off to the management (Claim). I would always express my disagreement to him, but I would soon get tired of the situation and decide to do it *his* way (i.e. comply) (main Claim). Because, when 'agreeing' with him, the situation was over (Warrant)."
36. "Up to a point, I had lost hope in that supervisor (Claim). He was quite old and had been working in the army for most of his life (Data). I knew that, even if I had a discussion with him, I would end up at the same point, that is fighting (Warrant). Prior examples had made me think so; every time I tried to explain to him why things should not be done in the way he wanted, he would interrupt me in the middle of the discussion and insist on his line of thinking (Backing). After a point, I became

disappointed (Claim); I thought that it was pointless to have a discussion (main Claim), since we would end up quarrelling again [...] (Warrant)."

37. "In this incident, I sensed that the other person had bad intentions towards me, because he referred to the supervisor over a mistake I had made, instead of coming to me in the first place (Data). I believe that he acted with bad intentions (Data). [...] He used excuses in order to persuade me that he didn't do that in order to harm me (Claim). Because, in the course of work, mistakes are inevitable (Claim) [...] In this case, I normally don't do anything and forget about the entire issue (*withdraw*) (main Claim). I do so because I believe that the other person will realize that he was wrong (Warrant). In the past, this method has been proved to be effective (Backing)."
38. "There are some people who perform a task and keep it secret.. so that the other person cannot find out anything.. I had such a colleague once (Data). He was an 'arsehole'.. it's simple that..; he thought that if he would have a conversation with me and let me know (what he's doing), I would learn his job.. and that would jeopardize his position (Data) [...] I had been patient for eight months (*withdrawal*) (main Claim). I was polite to him, in order to keep my temper under control (Claim). I behaved like that because I wanted to re-establish co-operation between us (Warrant). I could not proceed with my task otherwise; for the sake of the work, I had to cooperate with him (Warrant)."
39. "There are cases when I just express my disagreement and don't wait to listen to the other person's answer (main Claim). I just want to say what I feel and get it out of my system (Claim). Because I know from my experience the sort of answer I am going to receive; it is negative (Warrant). Since I have known the other person for 5 or 6 years, I know his reaction (Backing). That is, his reaction would be indirect and in accordance with the bureaucratic procedures (Warrant)."
40. "This supervisor was appalling (Data) [...] This disagreement with my supervisor had continued for a long time (Data). I hadn't discussed the issue with him (main Claim). I wanted to believe that things were going to change, since I knew the reason underlying his behaviour (Warrant). I simply couldn't discuss such an issue (Warrant)."

D. ARGUMENTS NOT STRUCTURED WITHIN ANY OF THE FRAMES

41. "My disagreement with my supervisor was due to our different ways of thinking regarding that issue (Data). I discussed it with him and told him that his decision would have consequences for our department; because we really needed that employee (Data). [Eventually, I had to comply with him] (main Claim, implicit). There was no common point of conversation between us (Data). I believe that, when you have a managerial position, you have to put yourself in the other person's shoes and reflect on what you would do if you were in his position (Claim)."
42. "Once, my supervisor assigned to me a task that was beyond the team's responsibilities and was urgent (Data). I don't know his reasons for so doing; maybe he wanted to avoid conflict with his own supervisor (Claims). I expressed my disagreement to him; however, in the end, I had to do the job (main Claim). Such things happen in the course of daily work; tension arises due to the pressure of work (Claim)."
43. "There have been cases where I have withdrawn from a disagreement with a colleague (main Claim). When he insists on his own opinion and I cannot persuade him otherwise, I stop arguing any further (Claim). During the discussion, I always try to have good arguments (Claim)."
44. "I often ask a colleague to intervene, in cases where I cannot persuade the other person (main Claim). The other person may not be persuaded because I didn't make him understand my point (Claim). Or, he may become selfish and not want to admit that what he is saying is not right [...] (Claim)."
45. "I proposed to my supervisor an idea that would improve the functioning of this area of work (Data). The idea was put into practice but he did not inform me (Data). I didn't say anything (main Claim). Nobody cared about me; they just took advantage of me (Claim). They should have informed me (Claim) [...] I didn't want to take any financial reward [...] (Claim)."
46. "There are some cases where you simply cannot resolve your disagreement with the other colleague (Data). In such cases, you let your supervisor know about this issue (main Claim). It is possible that somebody higher up in the hierarchy may intervene in order to sort out the issue (Claim)."

47. "So far, there have been some minor disagreements when asking a colleague to help me with the performance of a task (Data). This happens especially to me when the colleague is not my subordinate [I am at the same point of the hierarchy as the other person] (Claim). On such occasions, I have to ask for the intervention of our supervisor in order for the situation to be resolved (main Claim)."
48. "During that incident, a colleague tried to impose his opinion on me (Data). He was a member of another work-team in the Division and I needed his help regarding an issue that was their responsibility (Data). However, he insisted that I should be aware of this issue, even though it was not my speciality, in order to be able to cope better with everyday work (Data). During the conversation, I insisted on my opinion; that is, I would always ask his advice on such issues (main Claim). I would never take such initiative since this was the responsibility of somebody else (Claim). Eventually, we both insisted on our own points of view (Claim). Nothing happened in the end (Claim). We both went on with other things..no problem (Claim)."
49. "Personally, when disagreeing with my supervisor, I make sure not to make a big deal out of it.. most of the time, by giving in to him (main Claim). I express my opinion (Claim). If it's accepted, that's fine (Rebuttal); otherwise, I give in (Claim)."
50. "In cases where a task is performed jointly with somebody from another work-team, this person may want to present this work as a result of his own effort (Data). In such cases, I prevent him, even by going to the immediate supervisor (main Claim). At the outset, we have a discussion about it (Claim). If he understands that I am right, that's fine (Rebuttal). Otherwise, I will make a report to the immediate supervisor (Claim)."
51. "He (the supervisor) would mess up the entire functioning of the department and cause problems (Data). For instance, I would assign a certain task to somebody that should be done in X time (Data). He would then stop this designer and ask him to do something else instead while, in the meantime, he would complain that the first task was not completed yet (Data). [In such situations, I simply resigned myself to him] (main Claim). I don't know why he was behaving like that; probably, he believed that in such way he would be more effective in his management (Claim). I guess that he had always been a difficult person; since he had been fired from other workplaces as well (Data)."

52. "This supervisor was really disgraceful (Data) [...] Every time I expressed my disagreement to him, he would find an excuse to tell me (Data). I was not persuaded by this kind of explanation but, after a point, I had to stop (*comply*) (main Claim). I don't know (why I didn't keep on disagreeing with him]; we are just not used to that; you simply cannot say such things (Warrant). I want the disagreement to stop (Warrant) Even though such a situation makes you frustrated, you just stop it (Claim). I think that everybody here acts in a similar way (Backing)."
53. "The other day, my supervisor asked me to work on a computer programme, even though that was the responsibility of another department (Data). He just didn't want them to interfere with this task (Data). Of course, this disagreement was also 'transferred' to upper levels of the hierarchy as well (Data). As for me, I recognized that this was their responsibility and I told my supervisor that this would create a problem for us with the other department (Claim). He insisted [and I complied] (main Claim). Personally, this situation does not put me in any conflict with other colleagues (in that department) (Claim); they know that I am involved in this task but, at the same time, they know that I just follow orders (Claim)."
54. "As a person, I like pursuing what is right and some colleagues have a problem with that (Claim). For instance, I don't like the fact that some employees often work over-time because there is no such need (Data). Especially since the company faces financial difficulties (Data). When I tell them so, they get angry; they want me to mind my own business (Claim). However, I believe that we should come to this place because we love it, and not because we want to exploit it (Claim). [...] There is no outcome of such a conversation (*withdrawal*) (main Claim). When you are right, the other person cannot really say much about it (Claim)."
55. "This woman sitting in front of the computer has recently become a mother (Data). For this reason, the company pays all her wages but allows her to come only 4 days per week in order to take good care of the baby (Data). However, the days that she does come to work, she works over-time; and that means extra money (Data). I would really like to confront her on this issue, because, that means that she does not really need the one-day leave of absence (Claim). When she works over-time, the company has to pay her double salary and this is costly (Data). Nobody but me asks such questions (Claim). So far, I haven't confronted her (main Claim). It just happened that way; these are really difficult questions to ask (Warrant)."

56. "[I would comply with my supervisor] (main Claim, implicit). There were occasions when he told me that I *had to* do something in a particular way (Data). However, he didn't mean that 'I had to' because he was saying so; he just meant that he was also following orders (Data)."
57. "I went to the manager one level-up and told him that I refuse to work with that supervisor (main Claim). He was telling me how to do things but I knew he was wrong (Data)." [...] This may happen when the supervisor is less knowledgeable than his subordinates (Claim). That is why it is wise for the supervisor to be well acquainted with his area (of responsibility) so that the subordinate cannot possibly question him (Claim). Otherwise, it's probable that problems like that arise (Claim)."
58. "A long time ago, my supervisor gave a rise to the other secretary in the department even though she was not entitled to it (Data). I was sure that he didn't do so because he liked her (more than me) (Data). When I asked him why he did so, he just gave me excuses in order to cover for his error of judgment (Data). He even told me that he would soon give me a rise as well (Data). The whole situation made me sad (Claim). Nevertheless, I didn't insist any further (main Claim). It's normal that, when somebody makes a mistake, he tries to use a lot of excuses in order to cover up this mistake (Claim). However, he soon left the division and there was nothing I could do (Claim). If he had still been around, I might have raised the issue again (Claim)."
59. "When I expressed my different viewpoint to the supervisor, he may not agree with it and will tell me to follow another course of action (Data). In this case, I simply comply (main Claim). It just means that my proposal was not accepted (Claim). It's normal: people have different viewpoints (Claim)."
60. "When I first came to this job, the supervisor wouldn't give me enough responsibilities and tasks to perform (Data). This was probably the case because he had a 'preference' for another colleague of mine (Data). Once, I complained to my supervisor about it but nothing really changed (Warrant); so, I didn't say anything again (main Claim). I was quite experienced, so I knew that the supervisor was not supposed to have such an attitude towards both of us, but there were other 'underlying' reasons (Data). In general, as a person, I don't confront others (Claim)."

61. "Until recently, I would not express my disagreement to my colleagues; I just kept my feelings inside me (main Claim). However, withholding all this anger had consequences for my health; I had stomach problems or headaches (Claim)."
62. "The only incident of disagreement arises because I am a smoker and my colleague, who doesn't smoke, is annoyed with the smoke (Data). There is always a kind of fight going on; he complains, I answer back, and so on (*withdrawal*) (main Claim). However, there are always good intentions behind these actions (Data) [...] This situation keeps recurring all the time (Data)."
63. "This colleague kept secret some issues that we jointly had to work on (Data). He would even lock all the relevant papers in his drawer every time he was not around (Data). In such circumstances, I could not perform my job, since the job called for coordination between us (Data) [...] [After having being patient for a long time] one day I grabbed him and swept him off his feet (main Claim). At that moment, I was putting my job at risk; I could lose my job or get a fine (Claim). I started beating him up (Claim). Soon, our colleagues intervened and I was asked to report what had happened (Claim)."
64. "I had serious problems with a supervisor a long time ago (Data). He was really powerful; he was a personal acquaintance of the boss (Data). However, he was a fake; all he wanted was to make profit at the expense of the firm (Data). He also wanted to eliminate me (Data). It reached the point where I warned him "if you hurt me, I'll kill you. If you make another move, I'll kill you with my knife (main Claim). [...] I have two daughters who are old enough to take care of themselves; they both have their jobs (Data) [...] So, I don't mind if I am fired (Claim)."
65. "An employee lower in the hierarchy is not usually aware of certain information which is available to the supervisor (Warrant). As an employee, I have to tell my opinion to my supervisor (Data). If the supervisor wants to discuss this issue with me, then this is moral satisfaction for me (Claim). After that point [if he disagrees], I don't pursue the issue any further (main Claim)."
66. "It is very usual to have a disagreement regarding what are the priorities of tasks, or about when you can finish a certain task (Data). In such cases, I surely comply with him (main Claim). I always express my disagreement but, most of the time, his decision is taken (Claim)."

APPENDIX VI

List of Warrants Stated Explicitly in Employees' Arguments (providing support to the main claim of the argument)

1. It all depends on the seriousness of the issue
2. The immediate supervisor is a mechanical engineer and experienced in his field.
3. If I believe that my colleague's reaction was meant as a joke.
4. .. you are afraid of your position.
5. You are afraid of a lot of things, mainly because of your financial situation.
6. It primarily depends on the seriousness of the issue in dispute.
7. This happens in cases where the issue is important, for instance when ordering a material which costs a lot of money.
8. It all depends on the two parties in conflict.
9. Because there are some people who are convinced; even though they listen to a third opinion, they just don't want to be persuaded.
10. Let's say that I was not in the right mood to discuss the issue at that very moment and I had something to do that was urgent and I didn't want to waste 10 minutes of my time.
11. Since he is the supervisor.
12. It all depends on the situation.
13. ..because I may be afraid of my supervisor; I am afraid of the supervisor.. of losing my job.
14. ..since, in the workplace, you cannot have a pleasant discussion with the other person; simply, there is no time for it.
15. He is the boss and is responsible for the final decision.

16. I believe that it always depends on the other person's character, no matter whether or not it is a work-related issue.
17. When I believe that there is going to be a (negative) reaction from that colleague.
18. Because I know that he is so frustrated due to the work pressure he is facing.
19. I can tell that his reaction was just due to the pressure.
20. There are no 'personal' reasons behind such reactions.
21. The only reason is that he is an old person and he is quite idiosyncratic.
22. This person's attitudes and beliefs are completely incompatible with mine.
23. I don't want to cause any problem over a silly issue.
24. Because I don't want to become angry, or to cause him any problem, since I see that we are completely different people.
25. Because I considered the issue to be of no importance.
26. Since a decision has to be taken and since I believe that this decision is the right one.
27. I was quite an old-hand at the job and we urgently needed this material.
28. (Even though you may still disagree), it is his (i.e. the supervisor's) responsibility.
29. Because it may be the case that the situation is very tense.
30. Or, even that he may not give you the opportunity to express yourself.
31. This happens when I believe that I'm doing it the right way
32. Since I am responsible for the task.
33. Or, even when I judge that the other person has told me something in order to look as if he is better than me and has better a knowledge of the job.
34. Since it is an important issue.
35. It had to do with my age; I was only 25 years old and lacked work experience.

36. I don't believe that the other person is doing this on purpose.
37. Since I know the other person's character and how he will react (in similar situations).
38. Because you are not aware of information related to this decision.
39. Because when you disagree with somebody higher up in the hierarchy, there is nothing you can do.
40. I was new to the company and he was my immediate supervisor.
41. Because I see that the other person is stressed out and I know that, if I discuss it with him then, I'll make him even more stressed.
42. This is not the right thing to do; you see, my colleagues behave in a similar way towards me: when they see that I'm pressed, they don't make things worse for me.
43. When I know that the other person is not cooperative, in the sense that s/he has an opinion and is fixated on it.
44. I am 48 years old and have been working here for 32 years; I am still dependent on my salary and I need some years before retirement.
45. ..with regard to good working relationships between colleagues.
46. Because I didn't know how my colleague would take my comment; I didn't want him to think that I gave him a serious warning.
47. I didn't want to put extra pressure on him, since I knew that he was stressed out.
48. Because, when `agreeing' with him, the situation was over.
49. I knew that, even if I had a discussion with him, I would end up at the same point, that is, fighting.
50. Since we would end up quarrelling again.
51. I do so because I believe that the other person will realize that he was wrong.
52. I behaved like that because I wanted to re-establish co-operation between us.
53. I could not proceed with my task otherwise; for the sake of the work, I had to cooperate with him.

- 54. Because I know from my experience the sort of answer I am going to receive; it is negative.
- 55. That is, his reaction would be indirect and in accordance with the bureaucratic procedures.
- 56. I wanted to believe that things were going to change, since I knew the reason underlying his behaviour.
- 57. I simply couldn't discuss such an issue.
- 58. We are just not used to that; you simply cannot say such things.
- 59. I want the disagreement to stop.
- 60. It just happened that way; these are really difficult questions to ask.
- 61. Once I complained, but nothing really changed.
- 62. An employee lower in the hierarchy is not usually aware of certain information which is available to the supervisor.

APPENDIX VII

List of Backings Stated Explicitly in Employees' Arguments (providing further support which legitimizes the warrants of the main claim)

1. The important issues are always resolved in connection to the wider (bureaucratic) procedure.
2. You see, I have worked here for a long time and we know each other very well; we have spent lots of time together.
3. I believe that the lower the salary of an employee, the less free you are (to behave) in the workplace.
4. In general, when there is a disagreement between two employees from the same rank of the hierarchy, the disagreement is resolved only after the intervention of the supervisor.
5. It all depends on the relationship between the two people involved; when you have a good relationship with the other person, you don't need to refer to the supervisor.
6. When you have only a 'working' relationship and a disagreement arises, then the disagreement is sorted out through him.
7. Because, when another department also is involved in the disagreement, you cannot refuse to do something.
8. That is what usually happens when somebody has a low position in the hierarchy; one starts liking his position too much [to jeopardize it]
9. In general, when employees are in disagreement, it is the upper level who takes the final decision.
10. I know the people here very well; I have gathered some information: e.g. you expect such a reaction from George, when he is under pressure.
11. On the other hand, When there is no pressure, the other person as well will be more relaxed when addressing you; he will ask me to do something at my own pace.

12. It has happened that a colleague has refused to do what his supervisor told him; the outcome of that situation was that this employee was fired, even though he was probably right.
13. I can understand the reason for his doing so; we are in contact (all the time) and we know each other's character.
14. When management insists, it means that there are some underlying reasons.
15. Should I insist on my point of view, the two levels could not cooperate effectively; one of us would have to be 'removed' from the workplace.
16. Because, my relationship with him would have been spoiled and, moreover, without meaning to do so, you would have messed inevitably with issues that you shouldn't.
17. When you are new in a company, you cannot really say much.
18. That's what friendship is all about.
19. All these years, I have understood when the 'doors' are open for you and when they are closed.
20. I knew that if I hadn't behaved the way I had, this would have had a bad effect on me; I could even have been fired.
21. Prior examples had made me think so; every time I tried to explain to him why things should not be done in the way he wanted, he would interrupt me in the middle of the discussion and insist on his line of thinking.
22. In the past, this method has been proved to be effective.
23. Since I have known the other person for 5 or 6 years, I know his reaction.
24. I think that everybody here acts in a similar way.

APPENDIX VIII

A List of Employees' Reconstructed Inference Structures

- 1¹. It all depends on whether the issue is serious



When the issue is important, employees need to consult the supervisor and let him make the decision



The immediate supervisor is a mechanical engineer and experienced in his field



The more experienced and knowledgeable a person is about an issue, the better decision is likely to take



Since the supervisors are usually more knowledgeable and experienced, the supervisors need to be responsible for taking the decisions (for important issues)

2. I believe that my colleague's reaction was meant to be a joke



I know that because I have been working for a long time here, and we know each other very well



I know that they have good intentions towards me



When somebody's reaction is a 'joke', s/he means well



A person who means well is a friend



There are always good intentions among friends

¹The number adjacent to each inference structure corresponds to the way in which employees' arguments (from which the inference structures presented here are extracted) were numbered in Appendix V. In order to put the inference structure into context, see Appendix V.

3. You are afraid of your position



When you disagree with your boss, you put your financial situation at risk



Your financial situation is at risk in the event of you losing your job



When you disagree with your supervisor, you may lose your job



The lower the salary of an employee, the less free s/he is (to behave) in the workplace



Given that an employee wants to keep his/her job, s/he shouldn't disagree with the supervisor

4. It primarily depends on the seriousness of the issue in dispute



When the issue is important, employees need to consult the supervisor and let him make the decision



The supervisor is responsible for making a decision (for important issues)

5. This (i.e. consulting a third colleague) happens in cases where the issue is important, for instance when ordering a material which costs a lot of money



Should the issue in dispute be important, you need to be very cautious when making a decision



By consulting others' opinions, you ensure making a better decision



For serious issues, you need to consult more opinions.

6. It all depends on the two parties in conflict



Some people aren't convinced; even though they listen to a third opinion, they just don't want to be persuaded



This has been indicated by my past experience



When the other person doesn't want to listen to another opinion, (nor to be open enough to be convinced by the other), then there is no point in continuing the conversation



When the other person has not a 'cooperative' approach when in disagreement, then the disagreement is unlikely to be resolved.

7. I was not in the right mood to discuss the issue at that very moment



You need to be in the right mood, in order to decide to communicate your grievance to the other person

(in the same argument)

I had something to do that was urgent and didn't want to waste 10 minutes of my time



When pressed for time, you don't waste time in communicating your grievance to the other person



Meeting the deadlines is more important than sorting out the difference in opinions with your colleague

8. Since he is the supervisor (*I complied*)



Employees should do what their supervisor tells them to do

9. It all depends on the relationship between the two people involved; when you have a good relationship with the other person, you don't need to refer to the supervisor



When the relationship is good between colleagues who disagree, they can sort things out



However, when you have only a 'working' relationship and a disagreement arises, then the disagreement is sorted out through the supervisor



When the relationship is not close, then they cannot work out a solution to their problem



When the disagreement between colleagues cannot be sorted out otherwise, the supervisor is responsible for resolving it



When there is a disagreement between two employees of the same rank, the disagreement is resolved only after the intervention of the supervisor

10. When another department is also involved in the disagreement, you cannot refuse to do something



As an employee, you cannot refuse to do things which have a wider effect on the functioning of the company

11. It all depends on the situation



When the issue is important, employees need to consult the supervisor and let him make the decision



The supervisor is responsible for making a decision (for important issues)

12. I am afraid of the supervisor; I'm afraid of losing my job



When you disagree with your supervisor, you may lose your job



Given that you want to keep your job, you should not disagree with the supervisor



According to my experience, the lower your position in the hierarchy, the more you try not to jeopardize it]

13. In the workplace, you cannot have a pleasant discussion with the other person; simply, there is no time for it



When pressed for time (and given that your relationship with your fellow worker is a working one: *as implied by the rebuttal of the argument*) you don't want to get involved in a dispute and try to sort it out

14. When employees are in disagreement, it is the upper management who takes the final decision



The supervisors are responsible for decision making (in this company)

15. He is the boss and is responsible for the final decision



In general, when employees are in disagreement, it is the upper level who takes the final decision



The supervisors are responsible for decision making (in this company)

16. I believe that what the other person's reaction is going to be when attempting to solve the disagreement, always depends on his/her character



If the other party is not cooperative (he is prejudiced; he doesn't have good intentions), there is no chance for the disagreement to be resolved



So, when you expect that the other person will react in a negative way, there is no point in wasting your time trying to solve the disagreement: you know that in such situations the issue in dispute cannot be sorted out



When one of the parties is not 'cooperative', the disagreement cannot be sorted out

17. I know that he is so frustrated due to the workload he is facing and that there are no 'personal' reasons behind such reactions (i.e. he doesn't mean bad)



I know the people here very well and I have seen them how they react under pressure



Such experience puts me in a position to know that the workload is the cause of many conflict incidents, and that there are no 'underlying' personal reasons



When the conflict is due to pressure of work, you don't really mind



You don't pay attention to conflicts arising due to pressure of work, since this is a natural thing to happen (in a workplace)



The above indicates that the other person doesn't mean to cause you problems



There are always good intentions between friends

18. The only reason is that he is an old person and he is quite idiosyncratic



This person's attitudes and beliefs are completely incompatible with mine



When you disagree with somebody (boss) with whom you don't share the same opinions, then there is no point in expressing your disagreement, since it is not likely that you'll find a solution

(in same argument)

I don't want to make a fuss over a silly issue



When I disagree with somebody with whom I don't have anything in common, I become angry, and cause him problems



When you express your disagreement, you may cause problems to the other person, and you may become angry

19. I considered the issue to be of no importance



When the disagreement is minor, you don't really mind



In cases of minor disagreement (with your boss), you contain your grievance

20. A decision has to be taken and I believe that this decision is the right one



When you disagree with a colleague and you believe that you are right, then you should go ahead with your decision

21. I was quite an old-hand at the job and we urgently needed this material



In case of an important issue, when you are an experienced employee, you may have the alternative not to comply with your supervisor (i.e. go to the supervisor once-removed)

22. Even though you may still disagree, it is his responsibility



In a company, the supervisor is responsible for decision making



If you question the above, you may jeopardise your position



It has happened that a colleague refused to do what his supervisor told him; the result was that this employee was fired, even though he was probably right



Not complying to the supervisor may cost you your job



Employees should not keep on disagreeing with their supervisor (given that they want to keep their job)

23. It may be the case that the situation is very tense



When the situation is very tense during a disagreement (with the supervisor), it's better not to keep on disagreeing and give in

(in the same argument)

He may not give you the opportunity to express yourself



When your boss doesn't allow you to express yourself, there is nothing else you can do

24. I believe that I'm doing it the right way (and I am responsible for the task)



When in disagreement with a colleague and you believe that you are right, then you should go ahead with your decision

(in the same argument)

I judge that the other person has told me something in order to appear to be better than me and have a better knowledge of the job (and I am responsible for the task)



When you detect that the other person (i.e. probably colleague) has bad intentions, then you should go on with your decision

25. It is an important issue



When the issue is important, employees need to consult the supervisor and let him make the decision



The supervisor is responsible for making a decision (for important issues)

26. It had to do with my age; I was only 25 years old and lacked work experience



When you are young and inexperienced, you don't dare expressing your disagreement to the supervisor



[Otherwise, you may put your job at risk]

27. I don't believe that the other person is doing this on purpose



I know the person's character and how he reacts in similar situations through my daily interactions with him



When you know the other person and are in good terms with him, you know that he doesn't mean bad



When you are friends with the other, you don't continue minor incidents of disagreement

28. You are not aware of information related to this decision



When the management insists, it means that there are some underlying reasons



One should follow the course of action proposed by those who have more information



Employees should comply to their superiors



Not complying to the superiors, may cause them losing their jobs



Because, if you insist on your point of view, the two levels could not cooperate effectively; one of the two would have to be 'removed' from the workplace

29. Because when you disagree with somebody higher up in the hierarchy, there is nothing you can do



Because when you disagree with your superiors, your relationship with him may be spoiled and, moreover, you may mess up issues that you shouldn't, without meaning to do so



Disagreeing with the supervisor may harm you



Employees shouldn't disagree with the supervisor

30. I was new in the company and he was my immediate supervisor



When you are new in the company, you cannot really say much (*to your boss*)



In a work organization, nobody pays attention to a newcomer's opinions

31. I know that the other person is stressed out and if I discuss it with him, then I'll make him even more stressed



When you express your grievance to a colleague, you make him even more stressed



I don't want to stress my colleague, who is also my friend



That they are my friends is also suggested by the fact that they behave in a friendly towards me



The notion of friendship implies that you should care about your friends

32. I know that the other person is not cooperative, i.e., that s/he has an opinion and is fixated on it



When the other is not cooperative, there is no point in expressing your disagreement (since s/he is not going to listen to you, or change his/her opinion)

33. I am 48 years old and have been working here for 32 years; I am still dependent on my salary and I need some years before retirement



I knew that if I hadn't behaved the way I had, this would have had a bad effect on me; I could even have been fired



This is suggested by my previous experience of working here

34. Because I didn't know how my colleague would take my comment; I didn't want him to think that I gave him a serious warning



I didn't want to put extra pressure on him, since I knew that he was stressed out



I behave like that for the sake of our good relationship



Expressing your disagreement to the other person may create extra problems to him/her (e.g. stress him/her)



When you have a good relationship with a colleague, you don't want to create problems to him



In a friendly relationship, you should care about the other person

35. When 'agreeing' with him, the situation was over
↓
Prior examples have made me tired and showed me that no other solution could, in any case, be found
↓
When you cannot persuade your boss otherwise, the only thing you can do is comply with him
↓
Otherwise, you may lose your job

36. I knew that, even if I had a discussion with him, I would end up at the same point, that is fighting
↓
Prior examples had shown me that this was happening all the time
↓
When you know from the beginning that the discussion with your boss won't lead anywhere, there is no point in expressing your disagreement
↓
Because eventually, you know that you have to comply
↓
Employees should comply to their supervisor

37. I do so because I believe that the other person will realize that he was wrong
↓
This method has proved effective in the past: when the other has not been cooperative, you make him/her more cooperative in the future, by showing your 'good will'

38. I behaved like that because I wanted to re-establish co-operation between us
↓
When the other is not 'cooperative', there is no chance to find a solution to your disagreement
↓
When the other has not been cooperative, you make him/her more cooperative in the future, by showing your 'good will'

39. I know from experience that the answer I am going to get is negative: his reaction will be indirect and in accordance with the bureaucratic procedures



Since I have known the other person for 5 or 6 years, I know what his reaction will be



When the other person is not cooperative, there is no point in getting involved in a discussion with him



When the other is not cooperative, there is no chance of finding a solution to the problem

40. I wanted to believe that things were going to change, since I knew the reason underlying his behaviour (i.e. he was not cooperative)



When the other is not cooperative, by showing your 'good will', you'll make him/her more cooperative in the future

(in the same argument)

I simply couldn't discuss such an issue



When you know that your grievance has to do with your supervisor's character, you cannot say a thing



Otherwise, you may lose your job



Employees should do what their supervisor tells them to

52. We are just not used to that; you simply cannot say such things



(In this particular work environment), employees don't express their grievance to the supervisor *(at least, when the grievance has to do with the supervisor's character)*



Everybody here reacts in the same way: they don't express their disagreement to the supervisor.

(in the same argument)

I want the disagreement to stop



The only way to give an end to your disagreement with the supervisor, is to comply with him



Everybody here reacts in the same way

55. It just happened that way; these are really difficult questions to ask



When the grievance has to do with a sensitive issue, you tend not to voice it

60. Once, I complained to my supervisor about it, but nothing really changed



Once you've expressed your disagreement to your supervisor, it's nothing else you can do, but comply

65. An employee lower in the hierarchy is not usually aware of certain information which is available to the supervisor



Due to the lack of information, the employee has to follow his supervisor's recommendations



The only thing an employee can do is to express his disagreement to the supervisor



Because the decision making should be done by the supervisor who has the final responsibility for things

APPENDIX IX

PRESENTATION OF THE CODING SCHEME FOLLOWED DURING ARGUMENTATION ANALYSIS - INSTRUCTIONS TO THE SECOND CODER

The coding scheme employed in the present study as a basis of analysis of employees' arguments regarding their conflict management problem is the framework of argumentational structure, as introduced by Toulmin (1958). The way in which the notion of an 'argument' is defined in this framework refers to a constellation of statements aiming to justify or refute a certain opinion and persuade an audience. The manner in which these statements are ordered within the discursive text constitutes the argumentational structure of that text.

The analytic framework which I used in the present study, and which you are now asked to use, breaks down an individual's argument into different components; for Toulmin, argumentation is a movement from accepted **Data** through a **Warrant** (or **Backing**) to a **Claim**. An important characteristic of this framework that you need to remember when using this tool for the analysis of employees' arguments is the fact that in order to identify these argumentative elements, you need to focus on the functional roles of these elements, rather than the argumentative form. In other words, in order to understand the structure of argument to be analyzed, you need to reflect on the role which the statements examined play in the context of the particular argument analyzed.

Below, I discuss an example of a conflict management problem, following this structural framework. In this example, which is an extract from an interview with an employee, I follow Toulmin's rationale and discuss the function of the elements of the argument as a defence of an opinion against an (imaginary or real) interlocutor who challenges it.

"I just wanted to take in some information since I was new in the job (**Data**). He was very ironic as a person (**Data**) [...] I complied with him [the supervisor] (main **Claim**). I was new to the company and he was my immediate supervisor (**Warrant**). Even if I had kept on disagreeing with him (*not comply*), he would not have paid any attention to me (**claim**). When you are new in a company, you cannot really say much (**Backing**)."

In the above interview extract of a particular conflict management problem, the employee's main claim "I complied with my supervisor" follows from the information (i.e. data) that "I just wanted to take in some information.." and "He was very ironic as a person". At this stage, the relationship between the data used and the claim to be supported is not yet apparent, in the sense that we cannot tell why the specific information of being a new employee in the company, as well as of considering the other person to be ironic, is relevant to the person's decision (i.e. claim) to comply with his supervisor. This relation is revealed through the use of the warrant "I was new in the company and he was my immediate supervisor" which illustrates how the data supports the particular claim. However, at this stage, we still need further justification for the warrant presented; in other words, the person needs to explain what makes him/her think that the warrant adduced is valid. For this reason, the person refers to his/her belief that "when you are new in a company, you cannot really say much". With this argument, the employee attempts to justify the way he dealt with the specific conflict situation. For this reason, he framed his claim and structured different aspects of the conflict situation in such a way that the conflict behaviour chosen was regarded as the 'best' alternative available.

Following Toulmin's layout of argument structure, and for the purpose of this analysis, employees' arguments on their conflict management problem will be coded in terms of their basic component parts (i.e. Data, Claim, Warrant, Backing). However, you need to take into consideration that these structural elements of an argument may not be fully presented on each occasion. In employees' arguments (which constitute examples of ordinary language), it is possible that you will find some elements of an argument missing, since employees may leave much unstated. Therefore, acknowledging the particular (and often messy) nature of ordinary argumentative discourse, you need to approach this analytic framework of argument structure as a model for a complete argument, which refers to elements which may not be present in all cases, rather than attempting to find the various elements of the argument, as proposed by Toulmin, stated explicitly in any given argument to be analyzed.

For the purpose of the present analysis, the definitions of the various structural elements included in an argument, as proposed by Toulmin, are presented below. These definitions - which were devised according to the particular discursive context within which this framework is now used - will serve as a comprehensible orientation when analyzing employees' arguments. In this way, I believe the application of Toulmin's model as a means of analyzing employees' arguments will be facilitated. In the meantime, and while using these definitions as guidelines for our analysis, you need to reflect on the function of the argumentative elements within the context of the particular argument analyzed.

Claim: A statement which contains structure and is presented as the outcome of the argument. Each argument may contain many claims in regard to the conflict management problem. However, for the purpose of this study, the analysis will focus only on the main claim of the argument, that is, the conflict handling behaviour the employee used in that particular conflict episode.

"Work in our department cannot proceed if disagreements are not freely expressed." (Claim)

"There was nothing else I could do but comply, since he was my immediate supervisor." (main Claim)

Data: An utterance which constitutes the evidence at the employee's disposal. It may refer to past events; information about the situation at hand (i.e. the specific issue in disagreement); information about the communication exchanged between the two parties, as well as their specific behaviour; information regarding the nature (or the requirements) of their job; any other general information which was related to the main claim of the argument.

"He asked me to work on a computer program, which was not our responsibility."

"According to our job description, we have to find the supplier who meets certain requirements."

"The company faces financial difficulties."

"The disagreement had continued for a long time."

In many occasions, employees may make claims which they then used as data for further substantiating their choice of course of action (main claim). Let us have a closer look at the following argument:

"It may be the case that one of my colleagues is not sympathetic with the fact that I have a lot of work pressure at that moment (*claim used as Data*). In such a case, I usually don't say anything (main Claim).. because I know that he is so frustrated due to the work pressure he is facing (Warrant). I know how he reacts when he is under pressure (Backing). When there is no pressure, the other person will be more relaxed as well when addressing you (Backing)."

Even though the utterance "this colleague was not sympathetic towards me, on that occasion" is not a (factual) information, but instead, a claim that the employee is making at this point (the acceptability of which is questionable), in this argument, the employee uses this utterance as an information on the basis of which she makes her claim for deciding not to voice her grievance; in this particular case, this information triggered a situation where the arguer experienced (i.e. felt) being in conflict with that colleague.

The point that I am trying to make here once again is that, you need to examine this utterance in the context of the particular argument examined. When doing so, you will be able to understand that this utterance plays the role of 'data' which is used as a point of departure for this employee in her conceptualization of the particular conflict situation. In other words, you should code as data any utterance which was used by the employee as a point of departure in the particular argument, on the basis of which the main claim was made. You may often find that employees are making claims which they use as information on the basis of which they made other claims. In such cases, these claims would operate as data in the context of the arguments used, in the sense that they remain unchallenged in order to establish their main claim about the behaviour used in conflict handling.

Warrant: An utterance which is used as a guarantee, a rule or a reason and serves as a support to the main claim of the argument; this rule is often presented in the form of a self-evident truth. For the purpose of the present analysis, we are only interested in data, warrants and backings in reference to the arguer's conflict behaviour; therefore, warrants will be rules which give us the reason of employees' behaviour in the particular episode. The use of such a rule in an argument enables us to understand the relevance of the data offered to the main claim made. These rules may refer to different levels of

generality; for instance, a specific warrant may allude to a concrete reason, which refers to information relevant to that particular case;

"The issue [at stake] was serious."

"Because he is an idiosyncratic person and he is quite old."

"I had something urgent to do."

On other occasions, a warrant may express reasons which more directly allude to the person's beliefs (stemming from social and/or organizational values).

"I was afraid of my supervisor."

"In the workplace, you cannot have a pleasant conversation."

Usually, there was no external criterion for differentiating between data and warrants in employees' arguments; in general, a warrant can be any utterance which the subject has recognized as a reason supporting his main claim. For this reason, and in order to distinguish between data and warrants of a particular argument, you will need to reflect on how the particular employee has chosen to use the information which s/he has included in his/her argument. If a statement is used as part of the definition of the situation in hand, then this statement will be considered to be part of the data of this particular argument; on the contrary, if the employee is using the (same, or similar) statement in order to support his/her main claim (i.e. conflict behaviour), then this statement has the role of a warrant in the particular argument. The point I wish to make here is that the various pieces of information which is included in an employee's argument can often be used either as the data of the argument, or as a reason which supports his/her main claim. For this reason, when analyzing and describing the structure of the specific argument, you need to focus on how the arguer intended to use this information in the context of the argument constructed.

Backing: An utterance which refers to an additional assumption used as a means of further supporting the warrant stated (explicitly or implicitly) in the argument; for the purpose of this study, the backing is an assumption which provides support to the warrant; in this sense, a backing serves as a source which guarantees the acceptability and truthfulness of the rule it refers to. The backing of an argument may take the form of a factual information (i.e. observations made in the past), or a principle, value or belief which is enacted in employee's belief system from the social context, the organizational environment, or his/her past experiences as an individual.

"We know each other for years."

"For important issues, the supervisor needs to take the responsibility for taking a decision."

"Prior examples have made me think so."

Utterances Containing More Pieces of Information

In some occasions, a single utterance may contain more than one piece of information. For instance, in the following example, the employee presents his claims and data within the same statement:

"In the case that I disagree with my supervisor over the priorities to be followed, I then do what he says."

This statement, which is the main claim of an argument includes in it the data of the argument, which would look like "In some cases, I disagree with my supervisor over the priorities to be followed". In such cases, the first part of the statement will take the role of data in this argument, while the second part of the argument will constitute the claim of the argument.

Basic Rule of Thumb When Analyzing Employees' Arguments

In general, and as repeatedly stated in this protocol of the coding scheme used in the present study, the form or the content of the argumentative elements are not suitable criteria for the analyst to be able to describe the structure of the argument under examination. Rather, as argumentation analysts, we need to examine how the information included in the argument 'operates' in the context of this particular argument; we need to examine whether such information serves as a part of the definition of a situation, or, rather, as a support of the claim made. In summary, a proper description of the various argumentative elements needs to be based on the different functions that these elements play in the context of the particular argument, and depends on the way in which the particular arguer has selected what information to use as evidence, or claim, or as the justification of his/her claim.