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A STRUCTURE FOR PROBLEM SOLVING BETWEEN UNION AND
MANAGEMENT*

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A STRUCTURE FOR PROBLEM SOLVING BETWEEN UNION AND MANAGEMENT

Four brief case studies (a quality-of-work-life committee and three Scanlon Plan plants) explore the effects on individual participants and group discussions of mixing or separating the roles of bargaining and problem solving. A separate group differentiated from bargaining facilitates problem solving but requires integration with the union and management organizations.

Organizational psychology has contributed little so far to the improvement of union-management relationships (or any other interorganizational problem). While the law has formalized the highly effective institutional systems (Dunlop, 1958) of conflict resolution in the United States and while skilled industrial-relations practitioners have improved the functioning of particular collective bargaining relationships (Healy, 1965), the evolving social technology of planned social change has contributed little to collective bargaining (Beer and Driscoll, 1977). [For notable but limited exceptions to this generalization see Blake, Sheppard, and Mouton (1964), Hundert (1974), Rober (1975).] For example, following Schein's (1969) analysis, an "interorganizational process consultant" would focus on improving the processes of problem solving, decision making and communication between the union and management as organizations. The purpose of this paper is to describe and explore in four locations an interorganizational structure to facilitate problem solving between unions and management organizations.

Conceptual Underpinnings

A union and management in a collective bargaining relationship have both different and common interests. Wages will always be a cost to management and income to the employees in a union; but increased sales and consequent employment satisfies both organizations. Walton and McKersie (1965) describe two different social processes to maximize one organization's interests depending on whether a topic represents different or common interests with another organization.

Walton (1976) summarizes these two modes of interpersonal behavior, called here bargaining and problem solving, in Table 1:

TABLE 1: Bargaining and Problem Solving as Alternative Modes of Behavior

BARGAINING

1. Behavior is purposeful in pursuing own goals.
2. Secrecy
3. Accurate personal understanding of own needs, but publicly disguised or misrepresented-- don't let them know what you really want most so that they won't know how much you are really willing to give up to get it.
4. Unpredictable, mixed strategies, utilizing the element of surprise.
5. Threats and bluffs.
6. Search behavior is devoted to finding ways of appearing to become committed to a position; logical, nonrational, and irrational arguments alike may serve this purpose.
7. Success is often enhanced (where teams, committees, or organizations are involved on each side) by forming bad stereotype of the other, by ignoring the other's logic, by increasing the level of hostility. These tend to strengthen in-group loyalty and convince others that you mean business.
8. Pathological extreme is when one assumes that everything that prevents other from reaching other's goal also must facilitate one's own movement toward his goal; thus, one would state his own goals as being to negate goal achievement of the other.
9. Etc.

PROBLEM SOLVING

1. Behavior is purposeful in pursuing goals held in common.
2. Openness
3. Accurate personal understanding of own needs and accurate and open representation of them.
4. Predictable; while flexible behavior is appropriate, it is not designed to take other party by surprise.
5. Threats or bluffs are not used.
6. Search behavior is devoted to finding solutions to problems, utilizing logical and innovative processes.
7. Success demands that stereotypes be dropped, that ideas be given consideration on their merit regardless of sources, and that hostility not be induced deliberately. In fact, positive feelings about others are both a cause and an effect of other aspects of problem solving.
8. Pathological extreme is when one will assume that whatever is good for others and group is necessarily good for self. Cannot distinguish own identity from group or other person's identity. Will not take responsibility for own self.
9. Etc.

While most union-management relationships in the U.S. emphasize bargaining, this paper assumes that an effective and efficient relationship from the perspective of both sides must include both bargaining and problem solving. Walton and McKersie identify these processes as ideal types present in any union-management relationship. The present argument is stronger. A good union-management relationship must include individuals and groups actively engaged in the behavioral process of problem solving with the other organization or its own interests suffer on two grounds. First, the relationship is less effective because it misses the innovative solutions to common problems more likely to emerge from a problem-solving process. And second, it is less efficient because bargaining wastes time in areas of agreement.

While problem solving and bargaining require different behavior of participants for success (Table 1), such conflicting requirements are common in organizations. For example, Lawrence and Lorsch (1969) report that the departments in manufacturing firms have varying degrees of formal structure to perform the tasks required by their contacts outside the organization. The members of these departments also hold different orientations towards time and other people. In that study, successful firms differentiate to match external demands.

This paper explores the usefulness of differentiating or separating the processes of bargaining and problem solving in a union-management relationship. Differentiation here means different people specialize in problem solving as representatives of the union or employees and of management. This separation removes the expectations of bargaining behavior built into representative roles in collective bargaining (Walton and McKersie, 1965).

These behavioral expectations are probably both external and internal. They can arise from both union and management constituencies and from the self images of representatives themselves. Katz and Kahn (1966) refer to these as respectively intersender and intrareceiver role conflicts.

In a provocative discussion of organizational development in unionized workforces, Kochan and Dyer (1976) reach the same general conclusion on the need for differentiation but they do not spell out its mechanics.

This study will explore three hypotheses formalizing this argument.

1. If people from formal bargaining roles engage in problem solving, they experience conflicting behavioral expectations both from their constituents and from their self images.
2. Some personal strategies to cope with this conflict, such as withdrawal, reduce the likelihood and the effectiveness of problem solving.
3. Assigning some people from both union and management to exclusively problem-solving roles increases the likelihood and the amount of interorganizational problem solving.

In order to explore these hypotheses, this paper examines four case studies, one, a joint committee on the quality of work life in a large urban hospital, and the others, three manufacturing plants using the Scanlon Plan (Lesieur, 1958).

The Quality of Work Life Committee

Methodology

The first study examines the meetings of a union-management committee charged with establishing an experimental program to improve the quality of work life in a large, voluntary hospital located in an urban area in the northeastern United States. This brief case description is part of a larger

research project and only the information relevant to these hypotheses is presented here.

The joint committee includes members of the hospital administration, an attending physician, and representatives of the three employee associations covered by collective bargaining agreements at the time of the case: one association of the residents and interns, another association for nurses, and a union for other direct care and support workers such as nursing aides, housekeeping staff, and dietary staff. Each association was affiliated with larger organizations: city and state associations for the resident staff and nurses respectively and an international union for the other hospital workers. Thus, in terms of the hypotheses this committee is not differentiated: the three employee representatives come from bargaining roles.

The quality of work life program was initiated by the National Quality of Work Center (NQWC) as an experiment to improve both the satisfaction derived by workers from their jobs and the performance of the work organization. This program received funding from the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare to support the efforts of an outside consultant towards these objectives and also to support an independent assessment of the program's effects. Originally, the Center suggested the program to the international union representing the direct care and support workers. At the instigation of that union, the three employee associations met with the hospital's administration and agreed to participate in this program. A union-management committee designated by the administration and these three employee associations held meetings: first, to identify a unit within the hospital for the experimental program and, then to select a consultant to undertake the program. Besides representatives of the hospital administration and the

employee associations, these meetings typically included a representative from NQWC and a member of the university-affiliated team assessing the effectiveness of the program.

The data for this study comes from a diary maintained by the independent program-assessment team. At least one member of this team describes each meeting of the union-management committee. The content of this diary varies over time. Some entries describe the frequency and direction of communication among the members of the committee. All entries list the meeting's participants, an assessment of its climate, particular problems discussed by the committee, and specific comments made by committee members.

This report focuses on the representative of the international union of hospital workers, a full-time, paid member of the international union staff supporting the hospital local. The international union is more typical of collective-bargaining agents than the associations representing the doctors and nurses.

Results

The international staff representative moves through three stages in his involvement with the Committee during its first 10 months and 19 committee meetings. Initially, he participates actively in Committee discussions and moves from an orientation of suspicion to trust in the Committee members. For example, at the outset, he raises concerns about the number of administration representatives on the Committee because a number of administrators had shown up unexpectedly at the first meeting of this designated Committee. After nine meetings, however, he drops this concern and indicates that unequal representation is no problem, "I trust everyone."

Indeed, he becomes the focal member of the Committee, ranking first in frequency of participation in half the meetings. Under the Committee's rule of rotating responsibility for its direction, he chairs the first Committee interview with a prospective consultant for the program. After this high point of involvement, he refers to the Committee as "my baby."

After several meetings and because of the groups slow development in accomplishing its tasks, the independent assessment team proposes and finances the use of a process consultant to assist the group (Schein, 1969). With the assistance of that consultant, the group continues to work on its assigned tasks.

In a second stage, after about 5 months of meetings, external events increase pressure on the union representative from his constituency concerning his participation in the Committee. A new hospital director takes office and initiates a separate program to increase productivity. At the same time, the municipal government providing support to the hospital experiences a financial crisis threatening both the hospital and the union. These developments make cooperation with management unpopular politically. At this point, the international representative misses two consecutive Committee meetings.

The comments of other Committee members during those meetings describe him as personally threatened by his involvement in the Committee with its heavy management and professional membership and by the possibility of imposed productivity changes. Both the President and the Vice President of the local union are described in the meetings as skeptical about participation in the Committee. As the representative comments on his return, after missing these meetings, "I can't hobnob for an hour a week and then face you as the opposition if necessary."

In his third stage, the union representative does return to participate in the Committee's meeting, but over the course of the next two meetings he specifies his role more carefully. He repeats his willingness to work with the Committee and offers to clarify with his union the difference between the quality-of-work program and any unrelated productivity changes. He stipulates for the first time however, that this committee's proposals are not final, presumably reserving that decision to the union. Finally, he states that he would be unable to attend the Committee's meetings in the future; he would send an assistant in his stead. With the union representatives active participation, the Committee completes two major tasks during this 10 month period: selecting a ward for the quality-of-work program and retaining a consultant to initiate the program.

Conclusions

The pattern of this union representative required to engage in problem solving with the management on issues of potential common interest supports the three hypotheses. First, he experiences role conflict. His initial concern over the Committee's composition suggests his own uncertainty about meeting with management. While continued meetings with the group modify his personal suspicions, the expectations of his constituents continue to question his discussions with management. As stated in the second hypothesis, his efforts to cope with this conflict limit effective problem solving. He repeatedly threatens to withdraw from the Committee and misses several meetings. His pattern of conflict and response support the third hypothesis. As a member of an undifferentiated Committee, he experiences role conflict. It is possible a more differentiated Committee would remove this impediment to problem solving. To explore this possibility, this study describes three plants where such differentiated committees operate as part of the Scanlon Plan.

Three Plants with the Scanlon Plan

The Scanlon Plan is a plant-wide system to generate productivity gains through employee committees and to share these gains with all employees through a monthly financial bonus (Lesieur, 1958). Although no figures exist, the Plan is probably at present the most widespread system of union-management cooperation on production problems in the U.S. Joseph Scanlon developed the Plan in the late 1930's while a member of the United Steel Workers, to facilitate cooperation to improve a plant's competitive position. Today his protege, Fred Lesieur, a former local union president, serves as a consultant to unions and managements installing the Plan. Recently several major manufacturing firms have encouraged their local managers to experiment with the Plan (Recent Initiatives, 1976). The then National Commission (now Center) on Productivity and Work Quality has recently published a summary of the empirical studies on the Plan showing positive results in about two-thirds of the reported cases (1975). The focus of concern here is the elaborate system of employee committees set up under the Plan.

The Scanlon Plan as described by Lesieur (1958) includes two types of committees set up independent from the union-management bargaining process. The Production Committees in each organizational unit (e.g. department) include employee representatives elected by the non-supervisory members of that unit. By tradition and at the urging of Lesieur, union leaders (e.g. stewards, safety committee members) do not serve on these Committees. While the unit supervisor heads this Committee's regular informal discussions and chairs its one formal meeting each month, the Committee can bypass the supervisor and refer an employee suggestion to a plant-wide joint Screening Committee. Thus these Production Committee representatives are charged specifically with

increasing productivity, although employee suggestions inevitably deal with personal comfort and maintenance as well.

The Screening Committee coordinates the Plan's activities in the plant and resolves disagreements or major plant decisions originating in the Production Committees. Thus, it too is separate from the bargaining process. The Plant Manager chairs this Committee and retains final decision on production issues. The plant staff managers also sit on the Committee. Employees are represented by elected members of the Production Committees and by the head of the local union. The union head monitors both the Plan's operation and the Screening Committee's discussion to insure that issues covered by the labor agreement are not dealt with by the Committee.

Methodology

In order to explore the usefulness of these differentiated structures described by the Plan's proponents, this study describes one-day visits to three plants using the Plan accompanied by an outside consultant on the Plan. The three are all manufacturing plants varying in size (1000, 500, and 100 employees). Each is represented by a different union (two major internationals and a local independent). The visits include the monthly Screening Committee meeting in each plant and semi-structured interviews with the plant management including the personnel-industrial relations manager, local union heads, union stewards and Production Committee representatives. Questions in the interviews deal with the relationship between the union and the Plan and the Plan's committee system.

Results

Do specialized structures differentiated from bargaining between union and management facilitate problem solving between these organizations? First, differentiation of people does exist. Elected employees on the Production Committees are not the union stewards for that unit. This separation varies across the three plants. The largest plant had little overlap, while the two smaller plants have several Committees where stewards or union safety-committee members also serve on Production Committees. Strauss and Sayles (1957) also note the few natural leaders to staff both the union and the Plan in small plants. The Screening Committees in all Plan plants are not purely differentiated structures by membership although they are devoted to problem solving on areas of common interest. Both the union president and the personnel-industrial relations managers are members.

These two people, however especially the union head, fill special roles. They monitor the discussion from the perspective of the bargaining process. In two of the Screening Committee meetings, these monitoring roles actually ruled certain issues out of the discussion. In addition, the outside consultant states and encourages that exclusion of bargaining issues in the Plan's introduction and in the visits described here. In one plant, the union president is going to review the Production Committees' minutes before they are distributed to the Screening Committee.

The Production Committee participants interviewed report that they engage in problem solving rather than bargaining, seeking solutions to production problems rather than using threats to demand changes in

working conditions. Inevitably in a human rather than a mechanical process, safety and contract issues are raised on occasion in Production Committees. Such complaints are usually referred to the appropriate union representative although the lines between these areas are not completely clear.

The three Screening Committee meetings observed compare favorably with normative criteria for problem solving (Schein, 1969). Many members participate in the discussion, both managers and elected employee representatives. Participation reflects information on problems rather than organizational position. For example, skilled craftspeople from other departments discuss each department's suggestions along with the appropriate staff managers. And finally, these elected representatives confront the plant managers and their staffs on past suggestions which are not yet implemented.

The three Committees observed vary in their approaches to problem solving. Some plant managers initiate a larger proportion of remarks in the meetings and decide issues either unilaterally or before complete discussion. Nonetheless, the open problem-solving process described above functions to some extent in each of these meetings between management and union members.

Conclusions

The separation of problem-solving from bargaining under the Scanlon Plan in these three cases facilitates the former process. First, roles are clearly defined. Employee representatives in the Production Committees focus on productivity. A strong and frequently verbalized norm precludes labor-contract issues and eliminates most of these issues. In the Screening

Committee, the Production Committee representatives focus on problem solving while the union heads safeguards employee interests when the discussion spills over onto bargaining issues. Since there are no clear lines around bargaining issues, the union head protects employee interests rather than simply serving as a parliamentarian. Discussion of bargaining issues can be curtailed immediately by invoking the Scanlon Plan norm if the union head feels the discussion jeopardizes the interests of bargaining-unit employees. Two of the three meetings dealt with bargaining issues (work rules and assignment of overtime) in passing and without the interruption of the union heads.

Second, these cases show a variety of responses to such conflict of roles as exists. In one Screening Committee, the union head took almost no part in the discussion. This withdrawal probably resulted from an extremely salient conflict in personal role expectations. He was meeting with the management on the same afternoon to negotiate a new local contract. In the Production Committees where stewards also serve, two such people describe their roles as similar in all discussions with management including the Plan. They "stick up" for their less vocal and aggressive peers. The Production Committee for them is one of many avenues to get management action. While this personal redefinition allows them to fill two potentially conflicting roles, these dual representatives may well shy away from considering productivity-related suggestions with any potential for employee resistance. As hypothesized (1 and 2), these responses impede problem solving.

In each of these plants, the employees are aggressively pursuing through the Scanlon-Plan Committees productivity increases unlikely in

many union-management relationships. In all the plants, some union members feel their fellow employees go too far: they see a speed up and fear future layoffs. These internal challenges pose a real and continuing threat to the Plan, but so far the three union leaderships manage the changes proposed under the Plan to the satisfaction of the major interest groups in the membership. Interestingly, these three union heads support the Plan although two have replaced the union heads who helped introduce the Plan.

And finally, as evidenced by the consideration of a range of production problems by elected representatives from the bargaining unit in these three plants, the differentiated structures of the Plan (Production and Screening Committees) facilitate problem solving in the midst of a bargaining relationship. Hypothesis 3 is thus supported.

Discussion

These four cases suggest that organizational design can improve the interorganizational process of problem solving. A committee or working group composed of employee and management representatives under the Scanlon Plan engage quite easily in problem solving in the midst of a bargaining relationship, partially at least because they are not the same people who engage in bargaining. The quality-of-work-life committee case demonstrates that problem solving and bargaining require different behavior from their participants (Walton and McKersie, 1965). At least some of the responses to this conflict in roles (the international representative's withdrawal) as well as customary bargaining-role behavior (his threats of withdrawal) interfere with effective problem solving. Thus a process consultant

might suggest a special committee with representatives elected by the employees to deal specifically with a problem where the management and the union have common interests. The quality of work life is such an area, but the hospital case described here demonstrates the difficult demands placed on a union leader asked to participate in such a process.

While Lawrence and Lorsch (1969) identify this need to differentiate groups to deal with such different organizational tasks, they also emphasize the need for the organization to coordinate the different groups. (Lawrence and Lorsch call this integration.) Any group set up especially for problem solving must be coordinated with the respective union and management organizations. Union officials feel this need acutely in their political organizations where another set of elected officials poses a threat to their positions. Supervisors, however, also need to know the limits of any joint union-management committee.

The Scanlon Plan represents one approach to integrating a differentiated problem-solving group into the ongoing activities of the union and management. The Production Committees are subordinate to the existing union and management organization. These Committees cannot deal with contractual matters. Besides this rule, a hierarchy of authority subordinates the Production Committee to the Screening Committee where the local union head and the plant manager make final decisions.

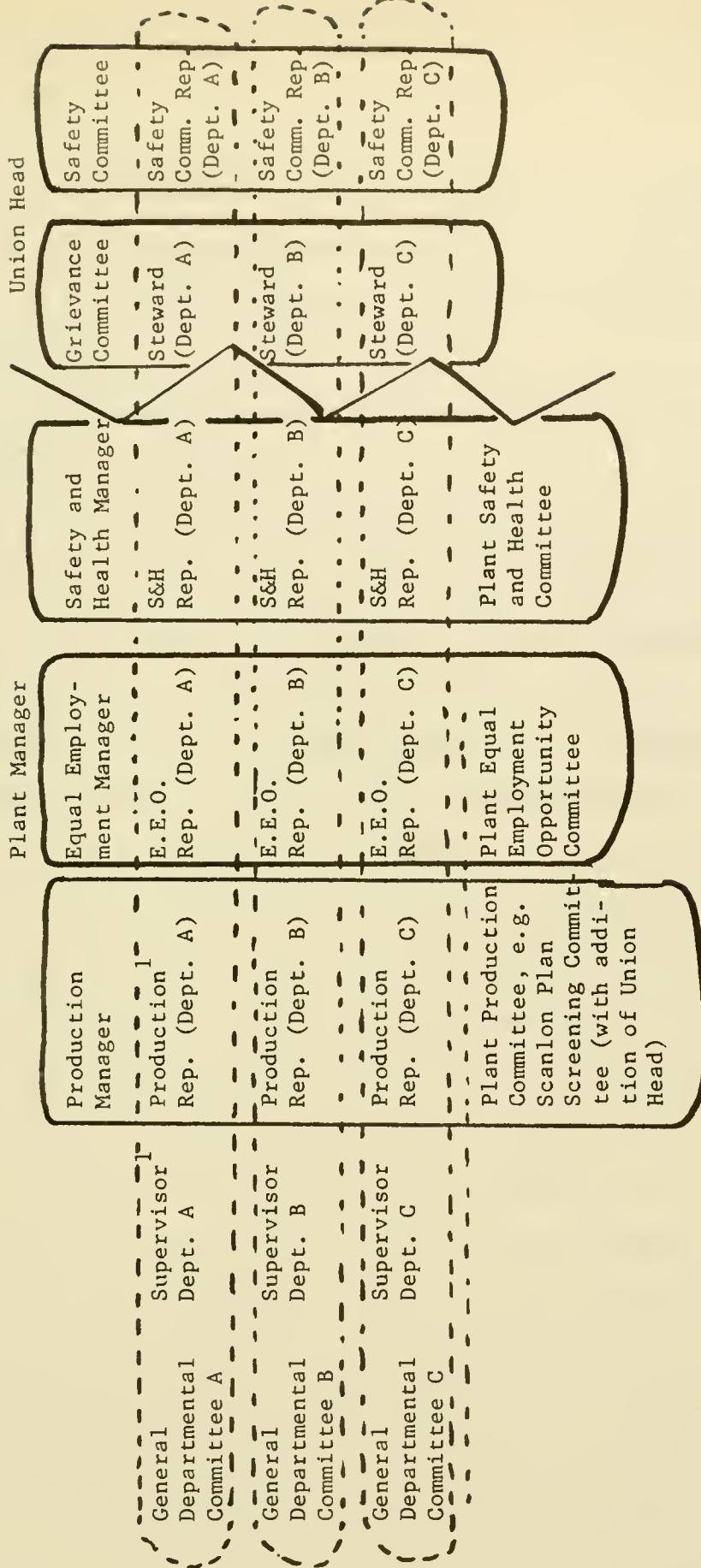
Students of organizational design identify many ways to coordinate differentiated or specialized activities (Galbraith, 1973). Rules and a hierarchy of authority are two of the simplest. A matrix organization represents a more elaborate form of integration. For example, if an organization devotes substantial attention to various goals in employee relations,

elected representative might serve a variety of functions including productivity (as in the Scanlon Plan), equal employment opportunity and safety and health. If these representatives exercise substantial authority, then a first-line supervisor might only coordinate these representatives for a given department, sharing control over them with staff managers responsible for functional committees in the plant (This organizational design is described in Figure 1).

These four existing cases demonstrate the potential for a process consultant to improve the relationship between a union and management by designing an appropriate organizational structure to support problem solving. Experience under the Scanlon Plan in unionized firms provides additional guidelines for problem solving on production matters whether the label be organizational development, job redesign or the quality of work life. Besides establishing the differentiated and integrated structure of committees for problem solving described above, the Scanlon Plan also uses an outside consultant who is neutral between the union and management. The value of such a third-party consultant recurs in studies of organizational change (Grenier, 1967). The Plan also shares the gains from productivity through a monthly bonus. Although equity suggests such gain sharing, other organizational change projects often stop short of this commitment (Dyer, 1976).

The interorganizational processes between a union and management include both problem solving and bargaining and, as Kochan and Dyer (1976) point out, bargaining goals must always take precedence for a labor union. Nonetheless, the bargaining process itself can also be systematically changed. Healy (1965) describes a phased strategy to change a collective bargaining relationship:

FIGURE 1: Hypothetical Matrix Organization to Coordinate Employee Representatives With Union and Management Organizations



1. Scanlon Production Committees include department production representatives and the departmental supervisor.

1. improve the existing relationship (focusing primarily on the performance of the grievance procedure as a problem to both parties);
 2. create ad-hoc study groups to gather information and identify points of agreement on particular problems;
 3. create continuing study groups for the same purpose to deal with new problems as they arise;
 4. initiate continuous negotiations by allowing the modification of the contract as new problems or points of agreements are identified by study groups.
- Thus the two parties may change a collective bargaining relationship either to include problem solving on production problems as in the four cases reported here or on bargaining issues as Healy (1965) describes. On bargaining issues, problem solving may remove barriers from the grievance procedure, focus areas of disagreement or identify common problems.

A bargaining process with some problem solving or at least the recognition of a common problem may well be a prerequisite for problem solving on production matters (Kochan and Dyer, 1976). In a conflict-ridden relationship, even the neatly differentiated problem-solving structure described here may only serve as another site for bargaining tactics.

Conversely as described by Healy (1965), an undifferentiated group of bargaining negotiators from both sides may engage in problem solving without the facilitation of the differentiated structure described here. In such settings however, Healy describes a number of ground rules often adopted to facilitate problem solving, e.g. no positions are binding, ideas are freely exchanged, and no publicity is allowed. These ground rules conform to normative guidelines for problem solving (Schein, 1969).

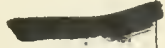


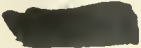

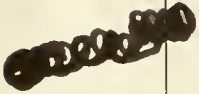
The four cases in this study suggest the usefulness of a separate group of employee representatives to focus on problem solving within a union-management relationship. These exploratory findings support Lawrence and Lorsch's (1969) emphasis on the need for differentiation in organizations facing multiple tasks in their environment. Just as Lawrence and Lorsch find within management, coordinating or integrating these differentiated groups poses difficult but solvable problems for the union and management. This study identifies organizational design as a tool for process consultation in union-management relationships. The potential for applying this and other insights from the applied behavioral sciences to this key set of organizations remains largely untapped.

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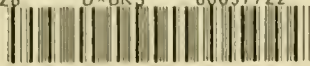
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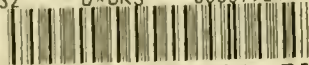
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