Effective conflict management: use of the behavioral style model

John R. Darling
School of Management, Rockhurst University, Kansas City, Missouri, USA
W. Earl Walker
School of Management, Rockhurst University, Kansas City, Missouri, USA

Abstract
A primary key to successful
organizational leadership is
effective conflict management.
This article addresses the use of
the behavioral style paradigm as a
tool to manage conflict effectively
for the benefit of the individuals
and the organization involved. An
actual case is used, involving a
conflict between a president and
vice president for finance. The
concept of behavioral style, with
its various interactive dimensions
and four basic styles. is introduced
and analyzed. The strengths,
weaknesses, and communication
orientations of each of the four
styles are also analyzed and
applied to the case situation.
Finally, the importance of
understanding the primary backup
styles of individuals and the key
role of Style Flex in conflict
management are thoroughly
discussed and analyzed.

Introduction

Whether conflict within an organization is viewed as desirable or not, the fact is that conflict exists and is endemic. As human beings interact in organizations, differing values and situations create tension. Conflict is thereby viewed as a situation in which two or more individuals operating within a unit appear to be incompatible. When such conflict is recognized, acknowledged and managed in a proper manner, personal and organizational benefits will accrue. A caring, effective manager uses this situation as an opportunity for growth for both the organization and individuals.

Effective managers use conflict creatively to stimulate personal development, to address apparent problems, to increase critical vigilance and self-appraisal, and to examine conflicting values when making decisions (Blome, 1983, pp. 4-5). In the past, management theorists used the term "conflict avoidance", but today this phrase is increasingly replaced with the phrase (and concept) of "conflict management". Conflict management recognizes that while conflict does have associated costs, it can also bring with it great benefits. Today's managers seek not to avoid, but to manage conflict within the organization (Nurmi and Darling, 1997, pp. 157-8).

The purpose of this analysis is to introduce the concept of behavioral style as a tool whereby managers can more effectively manage conflict within their organizations. The concept of behavioral style, adapted from the principle of social style (see Bolton and Bolton, 1984; Merrill and Reid, 1981), provides a useful paradigm for helping individuals in an organization understand themselves and others. An understanding of behavioral style thereby provides a basis for visualizing personal strengths and weaknesses of individuals, and procedures for dealing with high stress in organizational relationships. Models for interpersonal flexing – what we call Style Flex – are also introduced as techniques through which managers can adjust their behaviors. This adjustment enables these managers to more effectively understand and interact with others, thereby contributing to successful conflict management in organizational settings.

Nature of conflict

Conflict arises due to a variety of factors. Individual differences in goals, expectations, values. proposed courses of action, and suggestions about how to best handle a situation are unavoidable. When we add to these differences the unease arising out of a business' future, conflict often increases (Walker, 1986, pp. 137-49; Bolman and Deal, 1997, p. 163). Conflict is further exacerbated today by changes in technology, global shifting of power, political unrest, and financial uncertainties. These factors – and many others – make conflict a reality. To some managers, this inevitable disharmony is lamentable and should be avoided at all costs. To others, conflict presents exciting possibilities for the future, particularly if managed in a positive, constructive fashion (Darling and Fogliasso, 1999, pp. 384-5).

Traditionally, conflict within an organization has been seen as a sign of a problem. Conflict meant there were differences of opinion, alternatives which needed to be considered, and opposing points of view to be studied. Today, the fact that conflict signals these very things is often seen as a sign of a very good organization (Hellriegel *et al.*, 1995, pp. 430-1). Perhaps a comparison would be an organism in the

plant or animal world that finds itself in a hostile environment. If the organism develops the coping skills necessary to survive in the environment, it will change and thrive. If it does not, it will die. Adaptation, accommodation and flexibility are the keys to survival in such a situation (see Mazmanien and Nienaber, 1979, pp. 191-4).

Organizations are often found to be in similar precarious situations, and the same survival skills apply in the organizational setting. Changes in operational procedures, personnel, clientele, product line, financial climate, and even corporate philosophy and/or vision will happen. Managers need to develop flexible, new coping skills to continue functioning in a positive, productive way in the midst of sometimes unsettling events. The productivity of confrontation arises from the fact that conflict can lead to change, change can lead to adaptation, and adaptation can lead to survival and even prosperity (Walton, 1976, pp. 5-7).

Managers may feel uncomfortable with conflict. Many see it as something to be suppressed in all situations. But a more realistic, practical view of discord presents a different picture. While traditionally managers have seen their role as being to keep the peace at all costs, a more enlightened view is that managers view conflict as an indication that something needs their attention (see Nurmi and Darling, 1997, pp. 158-65). Just as a physical discomfort may signal a more serious personal physical problem which needs attention, conflict may signal a potentially serious (or developing) comparable situation for the organization.

It is impossible to eliminate conflict totally. Circumstances and individuals change, with such changes creating the possibility of creative, positive growth. Properly managed, conflict fosters an understanding and appreciation of differences. It presents new and different possibilities. It shifts the paradigm of the status quo. Managers who try to eliminate conflict will not last long, while those who manage it well will typically experience both organizational benefits and personal satisfaction (Darling and Fogliasso, 1999, p. 385). Furthermore, their employees and their organizations are much more likely to thrive.

A case situation

Consider the case of George Hensley (a pseudonym), recently appointed President

and Chief Executive Officer of Intertrak.Com, Ltd (a real-life case, but disguised name). Six months into his new position, he realized something was not right. It was not the position; Hensley enjoyed the strategic planning, key personnel recruitment and development, and his many other responsibilities. He particularly enjoyed his perceived opportunities to have a positive impact on the growth and development of the firm with which he had been involved for several years. The position of president was fine; it was one of the members of his management team – his vice president for finance – with whom he could not seem to work as effectively as he would like.

Soon after he assumed his position, Hensley had met with the vice president to discuss a new procedure for decentralizing budget control responsibilities to various divisional operations. The idea focused on placing more responsibility for control on the managers of these operations. Because the training process for this operational procedure promised to take a considerable amount of time, Hensley and the other members of the firm's executive committee were eager to review a proposed plan as soon as possible. About halfway through Hensley's discussion, the vice president indicated that a plan would be developed as quickly as possible, and he would then discuss it with the president. That initial meeting had occurred over two months ago. When Hensley asked about the plan in a recent conversation, the vice president appeared somewhat disturbed and indicated that he would respond as soon as he had time to develop the plan thoroughly. Hensley concluded that the vice president was apparently delaying development of the plan due to his own preference to control Intertrak.Com's budgets directly.

Some social scientists might refer to such an incident as a communication problem or personality conflict. Others might view it as a lack of sensitivity or understanding on the part of one or both individuals. Perhaps it can best be viewed as a possible difference in behavioral style. When such conflict-generating differences occur, they can often cause frustration and resentment in organizations, even leading to an individual's possible resignation or untimely departure. In a study of characteristics that make executives successful, McCall and Lombardo (1983, p. 28) identified the inability to adapt to individuals with different styles as a major contributor to conflict and thereby a deterrent to effective conflict management in organizations.

[231]

Concept of behavioral style

Behavioral style reflects a pervasive and enduring set of interpersonal behaviors. Rather than focusing on the innermost workings of one's personality or on one's values or beliefs, behavioral style focuses on how one acts – that is, on what one says and does. Does a person ask questions or issue commands? Decide issues quickly or analyze the facts in detail before making decisions? Confront conflict situations directly or avoid them? Allow policies to govern or adapt policies to fit changing conditions?

As noted by Alessandra (1996, p. 22), people have been fascinated with one another's behavioral differences over the ages. Beginning with the early astrologers, theorists have attempted to identify these behavioral styles. In ancient Greece, for example, the physician, Hippocrates, identified four temperaments – sanguine, phlegmatic, melancholic, and choleric; and in 1921, famed psychologist, Carl Jung, who was the first individual known to study personal styles scientifically, described them as intuitor, thinker, feeler, and sensor (Keirsey and Bates, 1984, pp. 27-30).

Since then, psychologists have produced many different models of behavioral differences, some with numerous possible personality blends. Sometimes the various styles have been given abstract behavioral-science names, and others have been named after birds, animals or even colors (Birkman, 1995. pp. 37-41). However, a common model throughout the centuries has been the grouping of behavior into four somewhat distinct categories.

Blending the thoughts of several scholars, these behavioral styles may be referred to as: relater, analyzer, director and socializer. No one of these behavioral styles is necessarily better or worse than any other. Research by the authors indicates that all four styles are generally found in the populations of industrialized countries, although not necessarily evenly. Each person has a dominant behavioral style that is reflected in how that individual works, interacts and communicates with others. Observation of an individual is the key to understanding a person's behavioral style, and the best way to identify one's own behavioral style is to receive feedback from others.

Major interactive dimensions

The determination of behavioral style is based almost exclusively on observable data from human interactions. Mehrabian (1971,

pp. 30-2) emphasized that types of behaviors of individuals can be grouped together in clusters. For example, a highly assertive individual exhibits not just one assertive behavior, but also a pattern of interrelated behaviors. A highly responsive person does likewise with an interrelated group of responsive behaviors. Thus, the foundation for behavioral style rests on the clusters of behaviors that people exhibit in interactive situations.

Researchers largely agree that two dimensions of interactive behavior – assertiveness and responsiveness – determine one's behavioral style (Merrill and Reid, 1981, p. 44). Assertiveness is the degree to which behaviors are seen by others as forceful or directive. Responsiveness is the degree to which behaviors are seen as emotionally expressive or emotionally controlled (see Figure 1). More responsive people tend to react noticeably to their own emotions and to those of others, while less responsive people are more guarded in expressing their feelings. See Figure 2 for examples of assertive and responsive dimensions of interactive behavior.

Four basic behavioral styles

The crucial interactive dimensions of assertiveness and responsiveness form the two axes of the behavioral style model. Each quadrant of this model represents one of the four behavioral styles – relater, analyzer, director or socializer (see Figure 3). Note that the analysis presented here focuses primarily on the four major quadrants of the behavioral style model. A more detailed analysis requires subdividing each quadrant into more precise subsets or subquadrants (see Bolton and Bolton, 1984, pp. 135-7). Although no single behavioral style works better than any other, our research on conflict management has led to the conclusion that flexibility – the ability to get along with people whose styles differ from one's own – frequently distinguishes success or lack of success in conflict management situations. Major definitive research on style classifications was done by Merrill and Reid (1981).

The relater behavioral style combines higher-than-average responsiveness with a comparatively low level of assertiveness. Individuals reflecting this style tend to be sympathetic to the needs of others and are quite sensitive to what lies below someone's surface behavior. Of the various behavioral styles, relaters are most likely to use empathy and understanding in interpersonal problem-solving and conflict situations. In
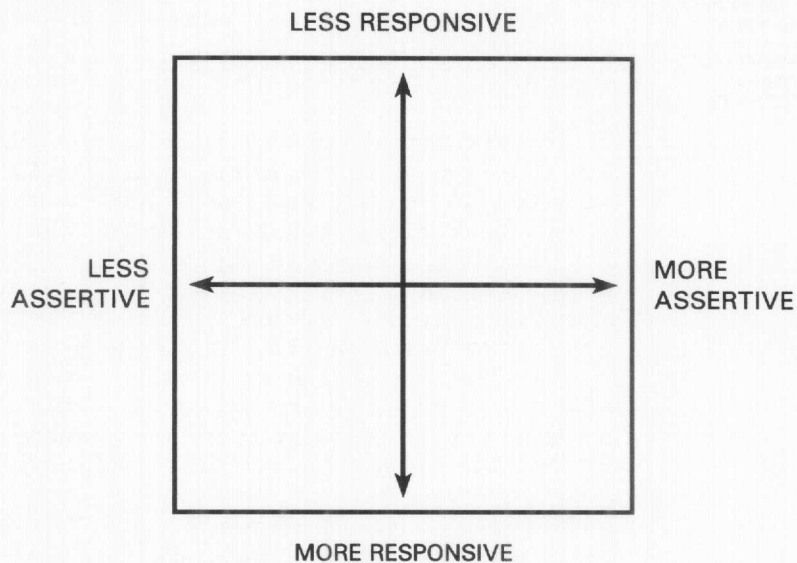
Figure 1
Major interactive dimensions


```
                    LESS RESPONSIVE

                           ↑
                           |
   LESS          ←——————————+——————————→          MORE
ASSERTIVE                  |                    ASSERTIVE
                           |
                           ↓

                    MORE RESPONSIVE
```

Figure 2
Examples of interactive dimensions

1. Less use of gestures.
2. Less facial expressiveness.
3. Appear less friendly.
4. Dress more formally.
5. Less expression of feelings.
6. More task oriented.
7. Less interest in small talk.
8. More time use discipline.

LESS RESPONSIVE

LESS ASSERTIVE

1. Move more slowly.
2. Speak more slowly.
3. Speak more softly.
4. Are less confrontive.
5. Are "ask" oriented.
6. Decide less quickly.
7. Less risk oriented.
8. Less eye contact.

MORE ASSERTIVE

1. Move more rapidly.
2. Speak more quickly.
3. Speak more loudly.
4. Are more confrontive.
5. Are "tell" oriented.
6. Decide more quickly.
7. More risk oriented.
8. More eye contact.

MORE RESPONSIVE

1. Gesture more frequently.
2. More facial expressiveness.
3. Appear more friendly.
4. Dress less formally.
5. More expression of feelings.
6. More people oriented.
7. More interest in small talk.
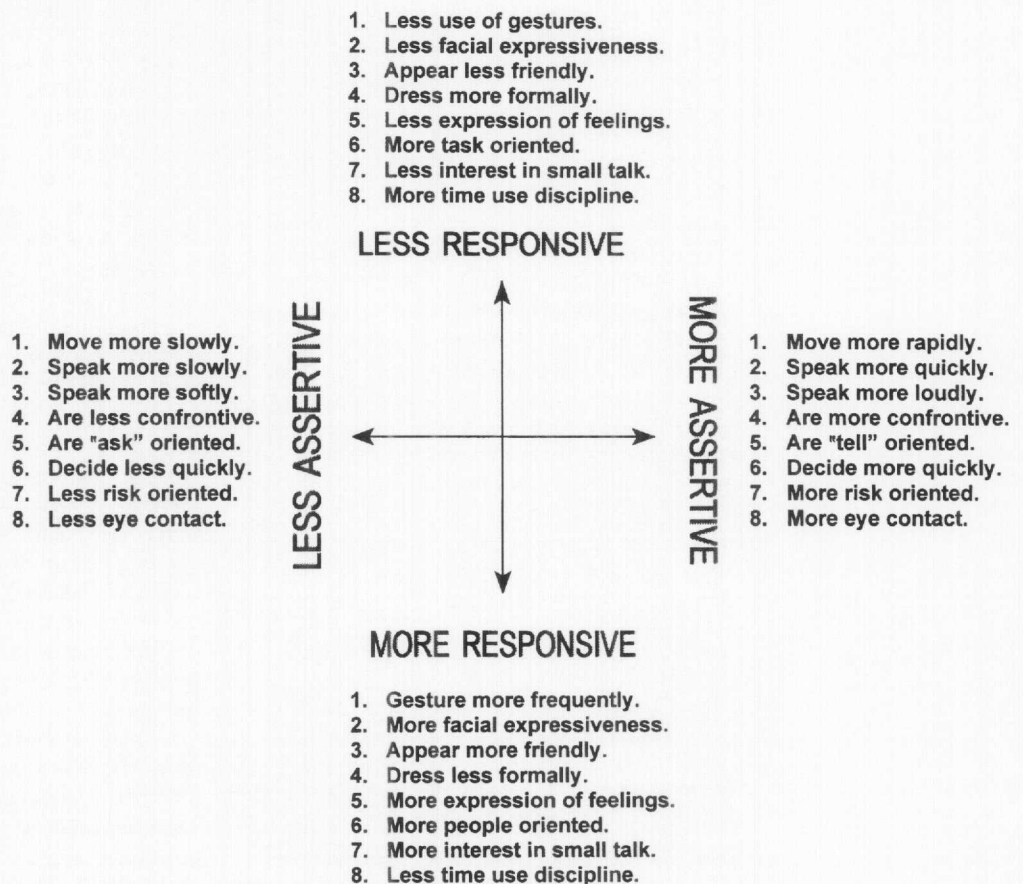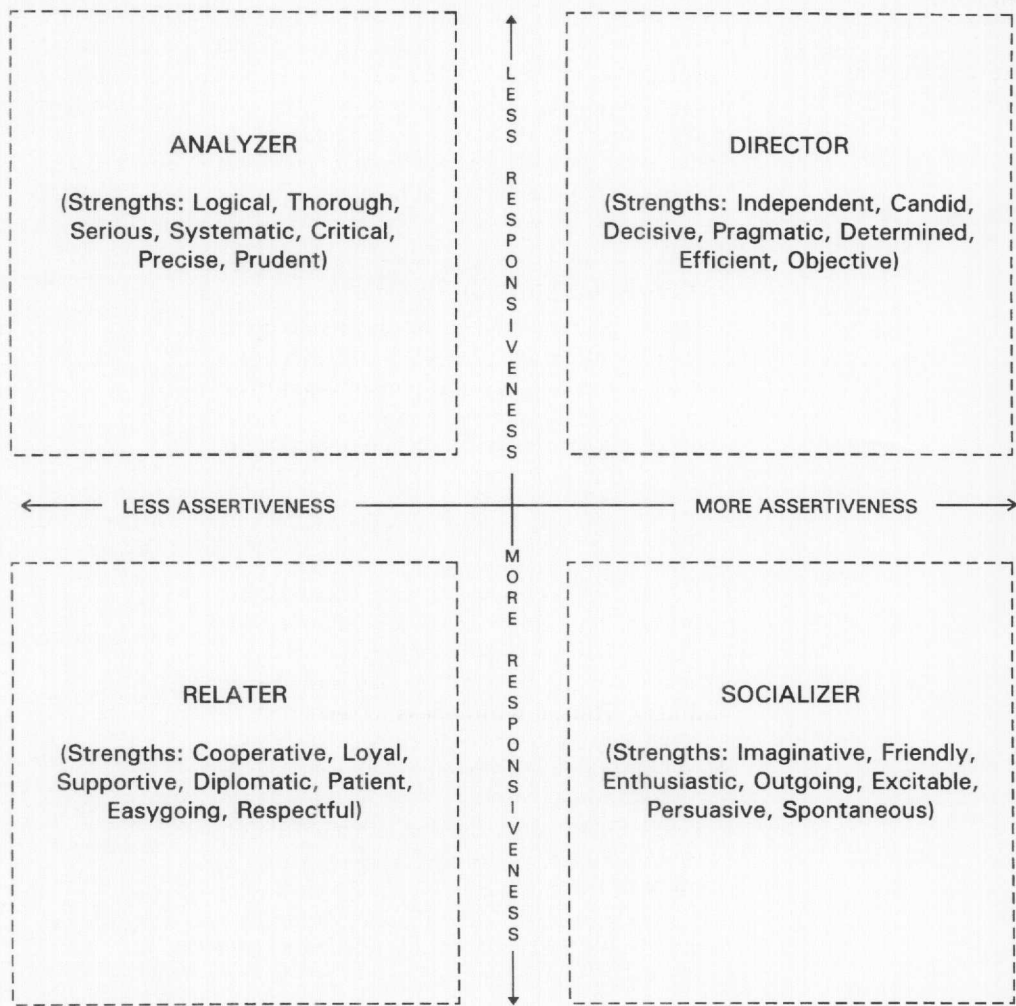8. Less time use discipline.

Figure 3
Interactive dimensions and strengths of basic behavioral styles

addition, the relater's trust in others often brings out the best in their colleagues. Relaters are genial team players who like stability more than risk and who care greatly about relationships with others. They are likeable, often somewhat timid and slow to change, and generally resist direct conflict involvement.

The analyzer behavioral style combines a low level of emotional responsiveness and a low level of assertiveness. Analyzers tend to take precise, deliberate and systematic approaches to their work, and usually gather and evaluate much data before they act. Also, analyzers are generally industrious, objective and well-organized. Analyzers are self-controlled and generally cautious people who prefer analysis over emotion. They also prefer clarity and order, often are viewed as being a bit formal, and tend to resist compromise in conflict situations.

In their behavioral style, directors blend a low level of emotional responsiveness with a

relatively high degree of assertiveness. Such individuals tend to be task-oriented, know where they are going and what they want, express themselves succinctly, and get to the point quickly. Directors are often pragmatic, decisive, results-oriented, objective and competitive. They are usually independent, willing to take risks, and are valued for their ability to get things done. Directors are firm and forceful people, confident and competitive, decisive and generally determined risk takers in conflict situations. While their impatience sometimes generates concern by others, the directors leave little doubt about who is in charge of the conflict issue under consideration.

The socializer behavioral style integrates high levels of both emotional responsiveness and assertiveness. Socializers tend to look at the big picture, often take fresh, novel and creative approaches to problems, and are willing to take risks in order to seize opportunities, particularly in conflict

situations. A socializer's ability to charm, persuade, excite and inspire people with visions of the future can be a strong motivating force. Socializers tend to decide and act quickly on management issues. These individuals are outgoing, optimistic and enthusiastic people who like to be at the center of things. Socializers are creative and innovative individuals who have lots of ideas and love to discuss them at length.

Styles within organizations

Effective management teams are made up of and value all four types of individuals, and the most productive management team in a firm will usually have a balance of individuals who reflect each behavioral style. According to management consultant Peter Drucker (1973, p. 616), management tasks require at least four different kinds of human beings: the people person (relater), the thought person (analyzer), the action person (director), and the front person (socializer). Drucker also suggests that finding the strengths of all four types in one manager is unlikely. Thus, a willingness to recognize and develop individuals with each style can enable a total management team to reflect the assets of all four styles.

In the opening illustration, Hensley's vice president reflects an analyzer behavioral style. Such individuals contain their emotions and tend to reach conclusions slowly. They gather facts, ask questions and study data. Very often, analyzers process information without providing visible feedback – not even a nod or a frown. They also tend to be cautious about extending friendship and showing personal warmth. Analyzers are sometimes thought of as detail persons, as individuals who are more interested in "getting it right" than in meeting deadlines, more concerned with consistency than with excitement and, because of this, often contribute to conflict in interpersonal settings. On the other hand, such individuals as Hensley who reflect a directive style, typically know what they want, where they are going, and how to get there quickly. Because directors push for concrete results rather than necessarily pleasing people, they sometimes appear cold, indifferent and somewhat autocratic, and thereby may often generate excessive levels of interactive conflict within organizations.

Once Hensley has identified his vice president's behavioral style, he may be able to modify his own behavior to fit better with the vice president – possibly without changing his basic style – helping to improve the vice president's performance and contribution to goal achievement, and thereby manage the conflict situation more effectively. This phenomenon can be referred to as Style Flex. The vice president will likely notice that things are going more smoothly and that there is less friction between Hensley and himself, but he may not be aware of what Hensley is doing. He may even believe that Hensley has become better at his job, not just better at getting along and communicating effectively with him.

The responsibility for effective conflict management in an organization lies with all members of the team. An awareness and sensitivity to behavioral style, both one's own style as well as the styles of others, can help to facilitate achievement of the organization's goals by the entire team. The functional dynamics of a team are greatly affected by the styles of its members (Kofodimos, 1991, p. 2), and thereby impact directly on effective conflict management.

Social scientists have developed new terms for the ability to get along better with other people, particularly in conflict situations. These terms are "social intelligence" and "emotional intelligence". It has recently been concluded that one's social intelligence or emotional intelligence may be just as important as intelligence quotient (IQ) for being successful in today's business environment. In some cases, these different concepts of intelligence may be more important than IQ. According to Alessandra (1996, p. 21), in a recent study done at Bell Labs, a high-tech think tank near Princeton, New Jersey, groups of electrical engineers were surveyed. These individuals were asked to name the most valued and productive engineers on the teams. Surprisingly, those who were named were not necessarily the people with the highest IQs, the highest academic credentials, or the best scores on achievement tests. The major leaders on those teams were the people whose social intelligence put them at the heart of the communication networks that would spring up during times of conflict, crisis or innovation. Goleman (1998, p. 7) discusses the importance of emotional intelligence in leading others. He defines emotional intelligence as managing one's own feelings to enable others to work together effectively.

Strengths and weaknesses of styles

The strengths of each behavioral style are summarized in Figure 3. In addition to strengths, however, each behavioral style

[235]

also has characteristic weaknesses (Bolton and Bolton, 1984, pp. 27-8) primarily because a given behavioral style tends to be less developed in the areas in which other styles are more developed. Normally, an individual lacks the strengths of the style diagonally across the grid from his or her own style (see Figure 3). Cooperativeness, for example, is one of the relater's greatest strengths, but one of the director's weak points. Contagious enthusiasm, a strength of the socializer, is rarely an asset of an analyzer. Likewise, the decisiveness of a director may be lacking in a relater, just as the thoroughness of the analyzer is seldom as well-developed in a socializer.

Some of the weaknesses of a particular behavioral style, as noted in Figure 4, result from an overextension of the style's strengths. In fact, McCall and Lombardo (1983, p. 26) note that a major cause of failure occurs when a manager's strength is allowed to become a weakness. The overextension of one's strength, such as in some conflict situations, may therefore lead to management ineffectiveness. Thus, a relater's supportiveness can be a weakness when a course of action that could have a negative impact is not challenged. An analyzer's quest for quality may become a liability when additional time is devoted to low-priority items while more important matters are left unattended. Likewise, the director's push for short-term results can be inappropriate when it forfeits greater long-range advantages, just as the socializer's imaginative dreams can divert attention

from basic repetitive tasks that must be done daily. Wise managers capitalize on their strengths and develop strategies for minimizing possible damage from their weaknesses (Drucker, 1999, pp. 66-7). One way to minimize or offset their weaknesses is to ensure that the management team is composed of individuals whose dominant behavioral styles represent the entire grid, and there is a willingness on the part of all members of the team to work together for the benefit of the organization as a whole.

Communication orientation of each style

The behavioral style of each of the two individuals in the conflict situation is reflected in the manner in which Hensley and his vice president communicate (verbally and non-verbally). Elsea (1987, p. 38) has noted that there are four basic communication orientations that correspond to the four behavioral styles: people-oriented (relater), process-oriented (analyzer), action-oriented (director) and idea-oriented (socializer).

Each of these orientations has a set of messages that tends to dominate interpersonal communications (see Figure 5), particularly in conflict situations. Understanding one's own behavioral style and communication orientation, and those of other individuals, can provide a basis for more effectively dealing with conflict issues that might arise. As an action-oriented director, Hensley has a tendency to want to

Figure 4
Weaknesses of behavioral styles
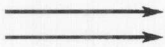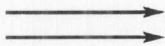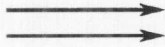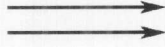
Style	Strengths	(Can Become)	Weaknesses
Relater	Supportive Easygoing	⟶ ⟶	Conforming Permissive
Analyzer	Precise Systematic	⟶ ⟶	Exacting Inflexible
Director	Determined Objective	⟶ ⟶	Dominating Insensitive
Socializer	Enthusiastic Imaginative	⟶ ⟶	Undisciplined Unrealistic

Figure 5
Basic behavioral styles and communication orientation

ANALYZER	DIRECTOR
(Process-Oriented) Communicates about:	(Action-Oriented) Communicates about:
Facts and figures Policies and procedures Systems and organizations Planning and forecasting Analysis and control	Getting things done Objectives and results Performance and productivity Efficiency and moving ahead Decisions and achievements
RELATER	SOCIALIZER
(People-Oriented) Communicates about:	(Idea-Oriented) Communicates about:
Needs and motivations Teamwork and team spirit Feelings and beliefs Values and self-development Emotions and relationships	Innovation and change New ways of doing things Creativity and possibilities Alternatives or options Concepts and grand designs

get things done efficiently and move ahead with decisions. On the other hand, his vice president, as a process-oriented analyzer, is primarily concerned with procedures, systematic decision making and control.

According to Elsea (1987, pp. 38-40), people-oriented relaters are typically interested in the personal lives of others and are sensitive to their moods and concerns. They would rather meet and interact in social settings. Their offices are often gathering places with room to sit, tea or coffee to drink, and plants and pictures of family to look at. They are often considered the conscience of an organization and are uncomfortable with conflict management solutions that fail to take into account human elements. Process-oriented analyzers prefer logical, systematic conversations, not spontaneous off-the-cuff reactions. They are patient, have relatively long attention spans, and are usually good listeners. Analyzers are the conservatives of an organization, communicate accordingly, and are usually uncomfortable with innovation and change, thereby often contributing to conflict within an organization.

Action-oriented directors usually have short attention spans, tend to interrupt the conversations of others, and try to avoid small talk. They would rather meet in an ad-hoc fashion than sit through formal meetings. Directors are usually the doers of

an organization and are generally uncomfortable with those who are not. As Hensley once commented: "I don't have ulcers – I'm just a carrier". Idea-oriented socializers are imaginative, full of ideas, and sometimes difficult to understand. They like to challenge people around them, which may account for why their interpersonal communication skills are often not as polished as other styles. Socializers are the creative influence, often the renegades, within an organization; hence, they often make other people uncomfortable and thereby contribute to conflict.

Primary backup styles

Backup behavioral styles come into focus as responses to high levels of stress and conflict within the dynamics of an organization. An individual's primary backup style is a predictable yet unconscious shift to more extreme, rigid and non-negotiable behaviors. Backup behaviors are usually counterproductive for the individuals using them and are very trying on interpersonal relationships. Bolton and Bolton (1984, pp. 42-3) note some key ideas with regard to backup behaviors, particularly as contributors to interpersonal conflict.

Backup behaviors offer a way of focusing on personal needs and relieving tensions. At

[237]

the same time, backup behaviors tend to increase the stress and conflict levels of other individuals. Backup behaviors are not the only ways to relieve stress, but they require little initial effort and often provide quick relief. When an individual operates in a backup style, a shift to a more extreme form of behavior has occurred. As shown in Figure 6, individuals under stress tend to move further out on the assertiveness and responsiveness scales. Behaviors characteristic of their dominant style become exaggerated, transforming their strengths into weaknesses. The avoidance backup style of Hensley's vice president, for example, reflected the conflict generated in the interaction regarding the idea of decentralizing budget control at Intertrak.Com, Ltd. Hensley must exercise caution that he does not respond to his vice president by shifting into his autocratic backup style, thereby creating a self-perpetuating and non-productive cycle of conflict and countervailing conflict.

The rigid backup behavioral styles are often a response more to pressures inside the person than to the interpersonal situation. Operating in a primary backup mode, a person takes a non-negotiable stance toward the interaction. Regardless of other people's needs, the demands of the situation, or other factors, the individual tends to interact in a single characteristic way and no other. Thus, backup behaviors are usually inappropriate to personal interaction and effective conflict management within an organization. In fact, the "my-way-not-your-way" or "my-way-or-the-highway" aspect of backup behavior can produce major strains on interpersonal relationships.

The shift from dominant behavioral style to primary backup style usually occurs without conscious choice, thought or premeditation. Further, backup behaviors are predictable; that is, persons of the same behavioral style tend to employ the same backup behaviors.

Backup behaviors are usually counterproductive and create communication blockages. Extreme, rigid or non-negotiable behaviors undermine motivation and tend to raise other people's stress and conflict levels, thereby undercutting their productivity. The result may be even more stress for the person exhibiting the backup behavior. Usually, after an individual has moved into a backup style, tensions within the individual are reduced and that person typically returns to a normal range of behavioral style. However, if tension continues to build, the individual may move into a second backup style, and

perhaps even a third and fourth backup style, as noted in Figure 6.

Importance of style flex

The concept of behavioral style and a consideration of its elements are useful in helping to understand one's self and the interactive behaviors of others, particularly within the arena of conflict management. However, it is not enough just to understand one's behavior or the behavior of others in the organization; one must also seek to adapt the skills of Style Flex that can enable the parties to function in a comfort zone congruent with the situation. Style Flex provides a way of interacting and communicating within another person's comfort zone without losing one's integrity or naturalness of expression. In short, Style Flex is a key to interacting more effectively in an organization, particularly in conflict situations. In the case illustration, for example, there are a number of actions (Style Flex possibilities) Hensley may take to facilitate successful interaction and communication with his vice president. These include accenting common behaviors, flexing from his own style, increasing or decreasing assertiveness as appropriate, increasing or decreasing responsiveness as appropriate, or flexing to the specific behavioral style of the vice president (Bolton and Bolton, 1984, pp. 70-1).

Identifying and using those behaviors that Hensley and his vice president may have in common are among the most important dimensions of successful Style Flex in conflict management situations. Using those actions will enable Hensley to continue to be natural and will help him to keep his own stress level relatively low. Such behaviors should constitute the major portion of Style Flex interactions in managing conflicts.

It is sometimes helpful to think of Style Flex not simply as flexing toward another person's style, but as flexing away from one's own style (see Figure 7). Each style tends to have at least one major weakness, and an awareness of this weakness may enable an individual to adjust away from his or her dominant behavioral style (Bolton and Bolton, 1984, pp. 71-3). For example, relaters should stretch and reach toward challenging goals and demonstrate their commitment to self-determination and a results orientation in conflict situations; analyzers should make appropriate decisions and act with reasonable haste; directors should concentrate on listening carefully to others;

Figure 6
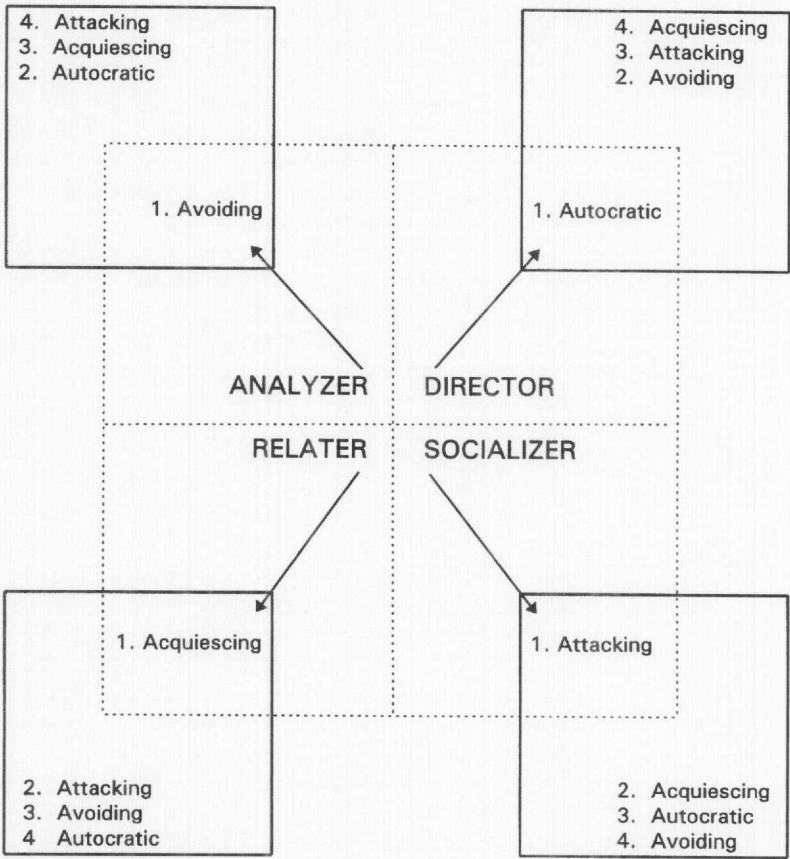Primary and sequential backup behavioral styles

```
┌─────────────────────────┐         ┌─────────────────────────┐
│ 4. Attacking            │         │ 4. Acquiescing          │
│ 3. Acquiescing          │         │ 3. Attacking            │
│ 2. Autocratic           │         │ 2. Avoiding             │
│                         │         │                         │
│        1. Avoiding      │         │       1. Autocratic     │
│                         │         │                         │
└─────────────────────────┘         └─────────────────────────┘

              ANALYZER      DIRECTOR

              RELATER       SOCIALIZER

┌─────────────────────────┐         ┌─────────────────────────┐
│        1. Acquiescing   │         │       1. Attacking      │
│                         │         │                         │
│                         │         │                         │
│ 2. Attacking            │         │ 2. Acquiescing          │
│ 3. Avoiding             │         │ 3. Autocratic           │
│ 4  Autocratic           │         │ 4. Avoiding             │
└─────────────────────────┘         └─────────────────────────┘
```

Figure 7
Flexing from a particular behavioral style

If an Analyzer, DECIDE

A slow, systematic fact-gathering process and cautious decision-making can create stress in others. When flexing, make a real effort to decide. Don't let fact-gathering and review of alternatives be a hindrance to the progress of others. Once a decision has been made, act on it.

If a Director, LISTEN

A fast-paced, active goal-oriented approach can cause stress in others. When flexing, make a real effort to listen to others. Try to clearly understand their ideas and suggestions. Equally important, listen until the nature and strength of their feelings are understood and clearly perceived.

If a Relater, STRETCH

A slower-paced, people-oriented, cooperative, low risk approach can create stress in others. When flexing, be sure to stretch. Demonstrate self-direction. Set and strive to achieve attainable stretch goals. Don't dodge issues. Communicate important points of view.

If a Socializer, RESTRAIN

A general tendency toward quick, impulsive decisions and actions can cause stress in others. A high energy level and verbal fluency may intimidate others. When flexing, be sure to restrain impulsiveness. Also, restrain talkativeness when others start to speak. Don't try to talk over them.

and socializers should restrain their impulsiveness and desire to be talkative.

An increase or decrease in assertiveness may be an appropriate Style Flex so as to facilitate successful interaction. For example, when a relater or analyzer temporarily flexes his or her style toward the comfort zone of a director or a socializer, assertiveness should be increased. Likewise, when a director or a socializer temporarily

flexes his or her style toward the comfort zone of a relater or an analyzer, assertiveness should be decreased accordingly.

An increase or decrease in responsiveness may also be an appropriate manner in which to flex one's style. For example, when an analyzer or director temporarily flexes his or her style toward the comfort zone of a Relater or Socializer, responsiveness should be increased. Likewise, when a relater or a

Table I
Flexing to different behavioral styles

Flexing to analyzers	Flexing to directors	Flexing to relaters	Flexing to socializers
Be on time	Be on time	Be relaxed and moderately paced; have a comfortable posture; speak softly and avoid harshness in voice	Be energetic and fast paced; and have direct eye contact
Be moderately paced; lean back somewhat; avoid loud voice	Be energetic and fast paced; have erect psture and direct eye contact	Invite conversation; draw out opinions; listen reflectively; don't judge ideas, counter them with logic or manipulate	Allow time for socializing; talk about experiences, opinions and people; to a degree, reflect fun-loving behavior
It is better to be more rather than less formal in clothing, speech and manners	Get to business quickly; use time efficiently	Communicate patiently; encourage expression of doubts, fears or misgivings; facilitate decision making without excessive pressure	Socializers like arguments – to a point; avoid becoming too dogmatic
Get to business quickly; be prepared, systematic, factual, logical and exact	Be specific, clear and brief; don't over explain, ramble or be disorganized	Mutually agree on goals; negotiate action plans with completion dates; offer co-operative support where desirable; be sure to follow through on responsibilities	Discover dreams and intuitions
List the pros and cons of proposal and alternatives	From the beginning to the end, focus on results	Offer assurance that decisions will have minimum risk	In support of ideas, use testimonials from people seen as prominent
Show why approach is best and has relatively little risk. Don't exaggerate the advantages	Select the key facts, and use them when making case; present facts logically and quickly	Maintain ongoing contact	Keep a balance between flowing with the socializer and getting back on track
When possible, allow to proceed deliberately, even slowly	Provide a limited number of options		Focus first on the "big picture"; follow up with action plans and details
When too indecisive, encourage a decision	Stay on topic; keep the pace up; and honor time limits		Ensure that action plans are made and followed, and that details are taken care of
Follow up in writing	If at all appropriate, ask directly for a decision		
See the milestone dates are in action plan; and set up progress reports	Depart quickly but graciously		

John R. Darling and
W. Earl Walker
*Effective conflict
management: use of the
behavioral style model*

Leadership & Organization
Development Journal
22/5 [2001] 230–242

socializer temporarily flexes his or her style toward the comfort zone of an analyzer or director, responsiveness should be decreased. Essentially, Style Flex involves adding or subtracting a few key behaviors to increase or decrease assertiveness or responsiveness. Table I lists some of the preferences of each style as well as guidelines for flexing toward the style of another person.

At best, Style Flex involves sensing another individual's preferred ways of relating and communicating, modifying one's behavior to achieve congruence with some of those preferred ways, monitoring the interaction, and then responding to the feedback one receives from the other individual. Style Flex must be based on respect, fairness and honesty in conflict management. One's ability to flex behavioral style at crucial times will contribute to effective and compatible conflict management within the leadership team of an organization, as well as lead to increased productivity and satisfaction among team members.

Conclusions and implications

The behavioral style model can be a very important reference point in conflict management. To incorporate behavioral style in conflict management, the idea is neither to change one's basic behavioral style nor to imitate the other person. The best and perhaps most productive interpersonal relationships and communications occur when two styles become complementary, with each individual's strengths compensating for the weaknesses of the other.

In the case of Intertrak.Com, Ltd, such complementarity resolved the conflict between President and CEO George Hensley and his vice president. As Hensley learned to understand and be more responsive to the behavioral style of his vice president, he began to use the strengths of that individual to help make their interpersonal interactions and communications work more effectively with fewer conflict situations. Hensley also shared the concepts of behavioral style with others on his leadership team, in addition to the vice president. An appreciation for the behavioral strengths of others, and an understanding of their corresponding behavioral weaknesses became a reality. An ability to assist others in dealing more effectively with high stress, and providing useful models for interpersonal flexing also helped to greatly reduce conflict and tension.

As Hensley, his vice president and others used the new understandings and paradigms of behavioral style, they were all able to make more meaningful contributions to successful conflict management in the organization. In so doing, each of them became more valuable members of the organization and management leadership team. When behavioral style is understood as a key to goal achievement in an organization, the synergistic result of increased conflict management effectiveness becomes a reality.

Management researchers and practitioners will no doubt find the concepts and models of behavioral style to be valuable tools for the further research on, and understanding of, conflict management. Conflict arises due to a variety of factors, but in many cases conflict exists in organizations due, at least in part, to the variations in behavioral style among individuals. In various consultative situations regarding conflict, the authors have found the tools of behavioral style to be extremely valuable in helping individuals understand themselves and others who are in the conflict, and thereby manage conflict more effectively. In helping various organizations to build more effective management leadership teams, the authors have relied extensively on the concepts and paradigms of behavioral style. This has also been true in various cross-cultural organizational settings.

In addition, the strengths and weaknesses of the various behavioral styles provide bases for further research on effective conflict management between and among individuals with different styles. The success encountered by various flexing techniques also provides opportunities for further research. The authors welcome suggestions and responses from other management researchers and practitioners regarding their efforts in addressing the various issues in conflict management, as well as the procedures and models they have found to deal effectively with conflict issues in different types of organizations. Also, we strongly recommend the use of behavioral style as a means for addressing conflict management in various organizational settings that cross-cultural boundaries.

References
Alessandra, T. (1996), "The platinum rule", *Insight*, Vol. 165, pp. 20-4.
Birkman, R. (1995), *True Colors*, Thomas Nelson, Nashville, TN.
Blome, A.C. (1983), "Conflict: friend or foe", *Interface*, Winter.

[241]

Bolman, L. and Terrence, D. (1997), *Reframing Organizations*, 2nd ed., Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, CA.

Bolton, R. and Bolton, D.G. (1984), *Social Style/Management Style*, American Management Association, New York, NY.

Darling, J.R. and Fogliasso, C.E. (1999), "Conflict management across cultural boundaries: a case analysis from a multinational bank", *European Business Review*, Vol. 99, pp. 383-92.

Drucker, P. (1973), *Management: Tasks, Responsibilities Practices*, Harper & Row, New York, NY.

Drucker, P. (1999), "Managing oneself", *Harvard Business Review*, March-April, pp. 65-74.

Elsea, J.G. (1987), "Management communications: form and substance", *Clinical Laboratory Management Review*, Vol. 37, pp. 37-41.

Goleman, D. (1998), *Working with Emotional Intelligence*, Bantam, New York, NY.

Hellriegel, D., Slocum, J.W. Jr. and Woodman, R.W. (1995), *Organizational Behavior*, 7th ed. West Publishing Co., New York, NY.

Kanter, R.M. (1977), *Men and Women of the Corporation*, Basic Books, New York, NY.

Keirsey, D. and Bates, M. (1984), *Please Understand Me*, Prometheus Nemesis, Del Mar, CA.

Kofodimos, J.R. (1991), "Teamwork at the top: the need for self-development", *Issues and Observations*, Vol. 11, pp. 1-3.

Mazmanien, D. and Nienaber, J. (1979), *Can Organizations Change?*, Brookings Institute, Washington, DC.

McCall, M.W. and Lombardo, M.M. (1983), "What makes a top executive?", *Psychology Today*, Vol. 17, pp. 26-31.

Mehrabian, A. (1971), *Silent Messages*, Wadsworth, Belmont, CA.

Merrill, D.W. and Reid, R.H. (1981), *Personal Styles and Effective Performance*, Chilton, Radnor, PA.

Nurmi, R.W. and Darling, J.R. (1997), *International Management Leadership: The Primary Competitive Advantage*, International Business Press, New York, NY.

Walker, W.E. (1986), *Changing Organizational Culture*, University of Tennessee Press, Knoxville, TN.

Walton, R. (1976), "Interpersonal peacemaking: confrontations and third party consultations", in Dunnette, M.D. (Ed.), *Handbook of Industrial and Organizational Psychology*, Rand-McNally, Chicago, IL.

Further reading

Gabarro, J.J. (1979), "Socialization at the top: how CEOs and subordinates evolve interpersonal contracts", *Organizational Dynamics*, Vol. 7, pp. 2-23.

Ridge Training Resources (1982), *Style Flex Planning Guide*, Ridge Training Resources, Cazenovia, New York, NY.