

Know conflict behaviors.

- Competing behavior
- Accommodating behavior
- Avoiding behavior
- Collaborating behavior
- Compromising behavior

Define conflict management.

- Conflict management is a series of steps involving both process interventions and structural interventions to manage conflict.

Describe process interventions and structural interventions.

- Process interventions are personal characteristics, informal rules, constituent pressure, conflict of interest, power and status, and organizational policy.
- Structural interventions are selection, training, and contextual modifications.

Understand the limits to conflict management and their application to criminal justice organizations.

- Goal attainment by competing parties
- Consequences of conflict episodes
- Conflict management must be economical of time and effort

Understand the role of conflict in organizations.

- Conflict within criminal justice organizations can be both beneficial and harmful.
- Conflict may be beneficial to the long-term health of criminal justice organizations. Eliminating it may not be practical or possible and could be counter-productive to these organizations.

**Case Study: MULTI-JURISDICTIONAL DRUG UNITS**

Warren County was a thriving municipality that enjoyed a broad base of political and economic support due to its manufacturing growth, diverse population, and low crime rate. In fact, the low crime rate was attributed to stable families, steady employment, and, for the most part, a good school system. The county had over fifteen cities, each of which had fairly stable communities. This positive perception of the county changed with the introduction of crystal methedrine (crystal meth) and its proliferation in the county through secret laboratories. County officials, in coordination with city officials, decided to pursue a strategy to combat this new drug and its production and distribution.

The plan involved the creation of a multi-jurisdictional drug unit specifically directed toward crystal meth.

The unit was to be composed of officers from all fifteen municipalities in the county, yet problems surfaced at initial discussions and deliberations on how the unit was to be organized. Some cities did not like the ways the unit was going to be supervised and budgeted. Others felt that the bigger cities were forcing themselves onto the small cities and sought greater control over the unit. The three largest cities in the county did desire a much larger role in how the unit was to operate, and this was due, in large part, because they had more immediate resources to devote to

CASE STUDY—continued

the unit, and they were promised more federal pass-through monies that were being distributed to the state as part of a larger joint collaboration between the federal government and the state government directed toward drug enforcement.

In spite of some initial organizational problems, the unit began its work in earnest, resulting in ten cities agreeing to be part of this collaborative approach to drug enforcement. Early in the deliberations among the municipalities, there were many issues on which agreement was difficult to achieve. One issue that did not raise the concerns of governmental officials was the operation of the tactical unit. It was decided that if raids were going to be conducted on homes within the county, they would be done by a coordinated use of officers from each city. Each city was to designate two to three officers who would be part of a tactical response team, only to be used under specific circumstances. The supervisors learned from their experiences that raids were not that common and pulling the team together at short notice would not be difficult to accomplish.

For eighteen months, the multi-jurisdictional unit functioned with full authority to investigate, apprehend, and arrest drug suspects. The original purpose of the unit to "seek out and destroy laboratories producing crystal meth and arrest perpetrators" became a difficult mission to achieve. One problem was that most officers really did not have the kind of training to understand what was involved in a laboratory and how the crime scenes were to be managed. Only after some costly errors and mistakes did the unit's command realize that to properly raid these types of laboratories there was a need to coordinate with fire departments and their hazardous materials personnel. As one of the officers realized early in their raids, the police were becoming the "blue canaries" for the fire department.

To facilitate communication with the many fire departments within the county, the unit's commander suggested that the police chiefs represented in the collaboration approach their respective fire chiefs to begin a dialogue on how best to accomplish the mission of pursuing crystal meth laboratories. For the police chiefs, this meant opening up communications with other city departments with which they had, at best, limited relations. In fact, in some cases, the police were in direct competition with their fire departments for resources, and many of the police chiefs did not want to begin discussions with the fire chiefs due to a long history of complaints and disagreements. In addition, the unit was getting bad commentary from the local press.

The major paper in the county produced data to show that the unit was actually doing very little investigation and arrests for crystal meth production and distribution in its first eighteen months of operation. Instead, most of the arrests were for simple possession and distribution of small quantities of marijuana among teenagers. The paper jokingly suggested that if this was going to be the purpose of the unit it would be better served by simply paying police to attend high school dances! Moreover, the unit was responding to more and more crimes that were clearly outside its mandate. Not only were they investigating drug-related criminal activities, albeit in small numbers, but in addition, they were being asked to back up other specialized units that were effectuating home search warrants for violent criminals. This mission "creep" brought out even more critics. Some even called for the disbanding of the unit because it really served no useful purpose. Rumblings also were heard among the unit's members who thought they were pursuing crystal meth laboratories but now became adjuncts to their own departments. Many considered going back to regular patrol in their home communities.

The issue came to a head when the unit executed a search warrant for a suspect involved in crystal meth production and raided the wrong establishment, killing the owner of the house. To compound matters, the owner was an elderly gentleman who was a veteran and the former coach of a local high school football team. As soon as the tragedy unfolded, the collaborative cities each pulled their officers from the unit and admitted no wrongdoing in the tragedy. An ensuing investigation by the district attorney's office found no criminal responsibility on the part of the officers but did comment on what it viewed to be a poor organizational structure to accomplish its mission. The investigation revealed poor supervision of officers, the lack of a clear chain of command, the tendency for officers to listen to their "home" supervisors as opposed to unit supervisors, and poor definition of authority in the memorandum of understanding that created the unit regarding roles and responsibilities.

The decision by the district attorney's office to not prosecute anyone for the killing did not resonate well with the family of the victim and many members of the community. The family brought forward a multimillion-dollar lawsuit against all ten municipalities involved in the collaboration and functioning of the unit. The lawsuit claimed gross negligence by those in charge of the unit leading to the wrongful death of an innocent citizen. Each municipality sought to fight the lawsuit by separating itself as the primary agent

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CASE STUDY—continued

responsible for the unit's management, supervision, and operations, even though there was clear evidence that specific persons made management decisions on behalf of the unit. A jury awarded the victim's family \$200,000 in compensatory damages and \$1,000,000 in punitive damages, citing what they believed to be poor communications among the cities on how the unit was to be managed and administered. The jury, somewhat begrudgingly, placed the blame for the wrongful death on the municipality whose officer actually shot the citizen. The jury foreman told a reporter that jurors could not believe how the cities did not clearly define the roles and responsibilities of the unit in the beginning. In the words of the jury foreman, the "unit spent more time bickering and fighting among themselves

and between themselves and other law enforcement agencies; it is a wonder that they accomplished anything."

CASE STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What type of conflict is described in the case study?
2. Multi-jurisdictional drug units are common across the country. What issues should be discussed and by whom before such a unit is created? How much of the impetus for the creation of these units can be attributed to increased federal funding and the irrational fear of drugs?
3. Suggest ways in which the conflict described in this case study could have been managed more effectively. Should the unit have ever existed?



Think like an Administrator

Conflict is common within criminal justice organizations. Criminal justice administrators have recognized that the best they can do is manage conflict; eradication of organizational conflict is not only impossible to achieve, it also may be counterproductive. So, the best strategy is to appropriately manage conflict within organizations. Because we know that eradication of conflict is not possible within criminal justice organizations, how do we best manage organizational conflict?

1. Can you harness conflict by encouraging competition among groups within the organization?
2. How much conflict centers on the distribution of resources in the organization?
3. How does the desire for critical information create an atmosphere of conflict across criminal justice organizations?
4. How does a poor reward system create conflict within criminal justice organizations?
5. Describe "de-confliction" within police agencies, especially those agencies focused on multi-jurisdictional drug investigations.
6. How can conflict be used to initiate change within criminal justice organizations?
7. How do you know when conflict is both productive and/or nonproductive?