REPRODUCING CONFLICT IN AN ONLINE GROUP:

STRUCTURATION IN INTERGROUP CONFLICT

By

PATRICK M. HOCKERSMITH

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS IN COMMUNICATION

WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY
Edward R. Murrow School of Communication

May 2005

To the Faculty of Washington State University:

     The members of the Committee appointed to examine the thesis
of PATRICK M. HOCKERSMITH find it satisfactory and recommend that it be accepted.

_____
              Chair

_____

_____

REPRODUCING CONFLICT IN AN ONLINE GROUP:

STRUCTURATION IN INTERGROUP CONFLICT

Abstract

by Patrick M. Hockersmith, M.A.
Washington State University
May 2005

Chair: Patty Sias

This paper details a qualitative study that investigates social interaction in a virtual group of college students who are from diverse locations but attend a single university through that university's distance education program. The group comprises the student government for that university's Distance Degree Programs (DDP). The study seeks to advance understanding of online communication processes through the interpretative study of communication tactics and effectiveness. The study looks specifically for insight into the role of agency and structure in the perpetuation of a social activity, in this case a conflict with the DDP administration, in a group that is widely dispersed and uses electronically based communications. Using Giddens' (1984) research tactics, the study assesses the applicability of structuration theory in understanding conflict and it researches what perpetuates this particular disagreement.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

Page

SECTION 1

INTRODUCTION

Virtual groups and the social systems they constitute are becoming more important. One place virtual groups have developed importance is in higher education. An increasing number of United States colleges and universities offer online education. Whether one attends college online or on campus, social interaction is a significant feature of the educational process. Therefore, a student government for online and distance students that is concerned with student life should, and does in some cases, follow. Because online education is relatively new and the concept of an online student government is quite new, little if any research exists concerning online student-government operations. Thus, to gain knowledge of online communication within the student government, this research project studies a conflict in which one of the first online student governments finds itself. This study examines the meeting transcripts for indications of what perpetuates the conflict, and it assesses theoretical value of structuration theory in understanding intergroup conflict.

The two main factors considered in this study, named by Giddens (1984), are agency and structure. Agency is the ability of a reflexive, knowledgeable person (agent) to exercise discretion in choosing an action; structure consists of the rules and resources an agent engages when taking action. These concepts are developed in Giddens' structuration theory, which explains the process by which groups produce and reproduce social structures. Therefore, structuration theory provides the fundamental theoretical elements for analyzing group communicative practices for this study. It also provides a conceptual basis for how rules and resources shape communication processes.

SECTION TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Brief history of social theories

Coherent social theories have a long, rich history that dates back to ancient and pre-modern political philosophers (Baer, 1998). Moreover, social theory was vital to the evolution of sociology as a separate discipline in the nineteenth century. Comte, Durkheim, Weber, and Marx are just a few of the scholars involved in its development and its elaborate views of social mechanisms (Baert, 1998; Craib, 1992). In addition, these nineteenth-century theorists' works are frequently found in twentieth-century social theory assumptions. For example, structuralism and functionalism assume Durkheim's holistic depiction of society whereby society is studied as an irreducible whole. Furthermore, both structuralism and functionalism consider the relationship of the different parts of a social system and their contribution to the system; and structuralism and functionalism convey a naturalistic viewpoint with tendencies toward objectivism. Functionalist philosophy, in particular, from Comte forward has looked toward biology as the science providing the most similar model for the social sciences (Cassell, 1993; Craib, 1992). Structuralists look for the underlying social structures that determine people's action and thought, presuming that individuals are rarely aware of the structures. Functionalism presumes the existence of 'universal functional prerequisites'; for a social system to endure, a number of functions or needs must be satisfied. Functionalists, therefore, look at how various social practices satisfy the needs of the wider social system.

'Interpretative sociologies' have become the main alternatives to structural-functional hegemony (Baert, 1998). Interpretative sociologies include symbolic interaction, dramaturgical approach, and ethnomethodology. Symbolic interaction and the dramaturgical approach draw from Mead's assumption that individuals have the ability to reflect upon their own and on others' actions. Unlike the deterministic characteristics of structuralism and functionalism, people's

actions are not believed to be simply the result of obligatory social structures. Instead, interpretative models view people as actively deducing information from the environment and acting according to their interpretations. Structuralists and functionalists are not positivists, though. Structuralists have insisted that empirical laws can only be found in physics and chemistry (Kilminster, 1998).

According to Baert (1998), Garfinkel's ethnomethodology and related theories emphasize human agency and reflectivity. Both ethnomethodology and structuration theory are influenced by Alfred Schutz's social phenomenology and Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*. Ethnomethodology considers the degree to which people reconstitute social order in their daily activities. In addition, Baert writes that structuration depends on both Goffman and Garfinkel to express that individuals know a great deal about social life, which results in Giddens' postulate that knowledge is generally tacit rather than discursive.

Neo-functionalism, genetic structuralism, structuration, and critical theory, which came to the forefront in the 1970s and 1980s, have two features in common (Baert, 1998). These theories try to integrate opposing philosophical and theoretical traditions and overcome the dualisms of earlier theories. These theories attempt to overcome determinism and voluntarism through the integration of structuralists' thinking and the theoretical approaches of interpretative sociology (Kilminster, 1998).

Genetic structuralism and structuration theory reject deterministic views of the social world in which people have structures imposed upon them. Instead, these two approaches depict people as active agents – their behavior constrained, but not determined, by social structures. These theories argue that people generally know how to act according to implicit, shared rules. People draw upon these rules and thereby reproduce them. In general, structuration theory examines the relationship between these social structures and human agency (Baert, 1998). "All social actors, it can properly be said, are social theorists, who alter their theories in the light of their experiences and are receptive to incoming information which they may acquire in doing so" (Giddens 1984, p. 335).

Structuration theory

Structuration theory is an ontology of social reality that attempts to overcome entrenched dualisms of social theory: subjectivism versus objectivism, individual versus society, and social atomism versus holism (Berends, Boersma, & Weggeman, 2003). Structuration theory resulted from Giddens critical considerations of social theories that focus on structures, such as Marxism, Merton and Parsons' structural functionalism, interpretive sociologies such as Garfinkel's ethnomethodology, Mead's symbolic interactionism, and Schutz's phenomenology. Giddens (1984) claims to have incorporated important insights from these theories while eliminating many of their weaknesses.

According to Kilminster (1998), to achieve theoretical synthesis, Giddens attempts to overcome dualisms in social theory by integrating a wide variety of diverse disciplines. Kilminster states that Giddens integrates, to name just a few, Heidegger's existentialism, Gadamer's hermeneutics, and Foucault's and Derrida's post-structuralism. Furthermore, Giddens' tactic is intended to replace the 'orthodox consensus' that dominated sociology in the post-war period, which is characterized by the adherence to functionalist theory and positivist epistemology. This information makes it possible to note that Giddens' theory did not develop out of nothing (Baert, 1998). Giddens uses theory to form an eclectic, multi-theoretical approach to support his propositions (Kilminster, 1998). Giddens reports:

> The theory of structuration was worked out as an attempt to transcend, without discarding altogether, three prominent traditions of thought in social theory and philosophy: hermeneutics or 'interpretative sociologies', functionalism and structuralism. Each of these traditions, in my view, incorporates distinctive and valuable contributions to social analysis – while each has tended to suffer from a number of defined limitations. (Giddens 1981, p. 26)

Baert (1998) asserts that Giddens follows a general trend in the social sciences away from positivist epistemology and the deference for knowledge supported by the empirical sciences. In addition, Giddens (1984) expresses openly the desire to avoid logical empiricism of the natural sciences because of his belief of its inapplicability to social theory. Explicitly, Giddens believes that societal factors acting in the same manner as causal relationships of natural sciences cannot explain human conduct (Baert, 1998). More simply, Giddens believes that people call upon structures for the initiation of their actions, and the production of social life is a skilled performance by the agent (Cohen, 1989). Giddens argues that social systems do not have agency; only human agents can call on systems. In functional analysis, the view that systems 'repay' or 'eliminate' their own parts according to the value of those parts and according to the needs of the system suggests that systems have the capacity to arbitrate social life. This logic requires that systems be responsible for organizing the activities through which they are reproduced. Structuration theory, on the other hand, states that agents are responsible for the production and reproduction of social systems that guide their action. Consequently, Giddens believes social theory should study actors as agents of social life; structuration theory reconceptualizes the dualism (irreducibility) of individual and society as the duality (inseparability) of agency and structure. Agency and structure, the subjective and the objective, encounter each other in recurring social practices (Berends et al., 2003).

To develop structuration theory, Giddens reworked the concepts of social structure and agent in the following manner. Social systems have structural attributes. A social system exists through the reproduced social practices that occur between actors or groups of actors (Giddens, 1984). Thus, according to Giddens, practices are the chief domain of the social sciences. Practices are recurring and regularized (structured) actions of individuals situated within a social system, creating and recreating that system (Giddens, 1976). Structure, therefore, is a property of social practice. "Social structure has often been seen as a stable, constraining phenomenon, like the skeleton within a body or

the walls of a building" (Berends et al., 2003). However, Giddens drafts structure as dynamic: as both constraining and enabling, both the outcome and the medium of social interaction (Giddens, 1976). Structures are outcomes in the sense that they are produced and reproduced in interaction; and they are the medium for interaction in the sense that actors do not construct social reality from nothing, but draw upon preexisting structural elements in their actions.

As stated earlier, according to structuration theory, structure consists of rules and resources. Rules are implicit formulae for action. Resources are all personal traits, abilities, knowledge, and possessions people bring to interactions. Production happens when people use rules and resources in interaction. Reproduction occurs when actions reinforce features of the systems already in place. Giddens (1984) perceives two types of rules: interpretative and normative. Interpretative rules govern the way actors understand their environment (Berends et al., 2003). Interpretative rules consist of shared knowledge and organizing rules that guide social interaction (Yuthas, Dillard, & Rogers, 2004). They make up the cognitive facets of social structure. Normative rules legitimize action. These structures represent the norms and values that validate action. Social agents express normative rules as specific rights and obligations. Of course, Giddens' definition of structure is broader than the generally accepted definition of structure. His definition includes what is termed 'organizational culture' in organization theory (Berends et al., 2003).

It is important to note at this point that Giddens describes structuration theory for macroscopic applications. Nevertheless, Seyfarth (2000) points out that researchers have also applied it to small group decision making and to the field of communication. While structuration has been shown to be useful in these applications, empirical data on the application of structuration to an online group involved in a conflict is scarce or nonexistent.

In the application of Giddens' theory to the proposed research involving the student government, the theory states that the leaders have agency over their actions. The student officers are

responsible for their actions. Structure, nevertheless, guides but does not determine agents'

behaviors. Further, to understand why agents act as they do, research should find what structures are

reproduced. The research question posed below attempts to uncover those structures by studying the

reproduction of the practices related to the goals and values of the group. Goals and values represent

the group's understanding of why it exists. As previously explained, values develop the normative

rules from which the group acquires knowledge of how to act, what is acceptable and proper social

behavior. Determining what goals and values are reproduced reveals why the student government

exists as a social entity, thereby exposing the structure of the student leaders' practices that the group

perceives to be valid – its normative rules.

RQ1: What goals and values do the student government members reproduce through their

interactions?

Goals are defined as what a person or group strives for and makes plans to achieve. Values

are those core beliefs held important by a person or group. The student government lists a set of

formal goals and values in documents that are available online. However, what is stated and what is

practiced may not agree. Therefore, this study will look for interactions that reproduce

undocumented goals such as gaining the authority to budget the services and activities (S&A) fees,

and values such as the solidarity of the student government organization. Goals and values

frequently represent *why* the social system exists. The next research question, which investigates

mediating factors of structure, examines *how* the system reproduces action.

Returning to the previous description of structuration, not only do structures enable but they

constrain action as well. Therefore, to learn why the student government members act in specific

ways, this research project not only locates what structures are reproduced, but it also uncovers how

those structures influence student government activity. The second research question asks

specifically that.

RQ2: How do social structures mediate the group's activities?

Those social structures include the context in which the student officers most frequently communicate – online, through chatrooms and message boards. Therefore, consideration is given to the attributes of online communication practices. Sproull and Kiesler, (1986) report that technology tends to restrict the communication process because electronic media are intrinsically leaner than face-to-face communication and convey a limited set of communication cues. Thus, online groups face more barriers to effective communication than traditionally situated groups (Hightower, Sayeed, Warkentin, & McHaney, 1997). Research suggests that improvements in communication through electronic media may be difficult to achieve. Literature suggests that problem solving and task completion are slower when performed through electronic media; face-to-face meetings are faster (Gallupe & McKeen, 1990) even when tasks are low in complexity (Straus, 1996). The lack of face-to-face contact in electronic communication may negatively influence message understanding (Desanctis and Monge, 1998). However, given sufficient contextual information, mutual understanding can be very high in electronic communication, and individuals can become highly cohesive across distances (Abel 1990). The inference of research is that electronic interaction can support successful group behaviors. While the current study will look for issues of communication and the effects on individuals within the group, this study does not attempt a comparison with a face-to-face group. Therefore, it cannot support or deny the findings of studies such as Desanctis and Monge (1998). The study merely considers the attributes of online communication.

Thus far, structuration has not been related to the main thrust of this research, conflict. Describing specific details of structuration theory and conflict theory will assist understanding conflict through structuration theory. That description begins with a more detailed description of structuration and an explanation of Giddens' (1984) term, 'knowledgeability.'

Giddens (1984) defines knowledgeability as having knowledge of preexisting rules and

resources, thus having the ability to reproduce them. Giddens explains that most of this knowledge is contained in what he calls practical consciousness. Practical consciousness refers to generally tacit knowledge whereby actors understand the context and the conditions of their actions, but are unable to express them discursively. Although most knowledge is held within practical consciousness, some of the actor's knowledge is propositional in nature, thus creating the need to act in ways that test the propositions for accuracy or practicality. This explanation of practical consciousness provides one avenue for variations in agents' actions. Structuration defines other avenues as well, which are detailed below.
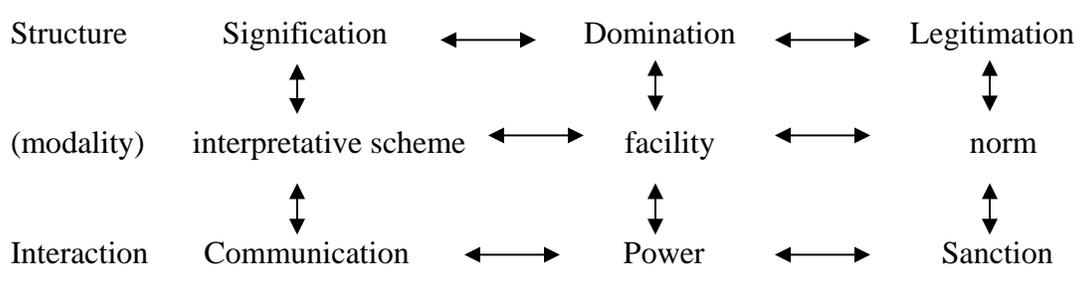
As Giddens describes it, agents must call upon their knowledgeability to extract preexisting rules and resources to determine action. Their practices are possible because of a preexisting structure. This notion suggests that actors are not bound to current structure. Agents have the power to act differently or to say no through preexisting structures. Therefore, the means to reproduce systems also allows for variations between actors. Furthermore, as previously proposed, knowledge of social systems does not suggest that agents are fully knowledgeable of their motives, conditions, or consequences of their actions (Berends et al., 2003). From this lack of knowledge, structuration predicts that actions often have unintended consequences (Gidden's, 1984). It is important to realize that, while structuration denotes the process whereby social systems usually function to reproduce the status quo, at times social systems may be subjected to distinct changes. Agents interact in ways that allows the possibility of affecting change upon existing social codes.

To determine how agents interact, then, Giddens' (1984) proposes the following categories of structure: legitimation, signification, and domination. Legitimation structures consist of the norms, values, and moral obligations of a social system. These structures indicate what actions and attitudes are considered appropriate or legitimate (Macintosh, 1994). For example, orientations and mentoring relationships convey legitimate organizational norms of behavior to new organizational participants.

Signification structures in organizations help members give meaning to the circumstances in which they function and to their roles within the organization. Formal statements of rules represent one mechanism for creating shared meaning within organizations. Domination structures manage access to authority and resources (Giddens, 1979). One example of domination structures involves formal reward or discipline systems that can influence the behavior of organizational participants. Reward systems are designed to associate resources with desirable behaviors that serve the organization's interests and are consistent with the organization's norms and values (Flynn & Hussain, 2001). Domination is an agent's capacity to command material factors.

Along with the categories of structure, Giddens (1984) describes 'modality' as a link between action and structure, and actors draw on modalities, such as knowledge and skills to allocate resources, to produce and reproduce structure. When agents interact, they draw on interpretative schemes such as knowledge resources to make sense of their own and others' actions, thus producing and reproducing structures of signification (Flynn & Hussain, 2001). Giddens (1984, p. 29) diagrams the mutual dependency of agency and structure and their link via modalities in table 1.

Table 1: Giddens' (1984) Categories of structure and their modality

Structure	Signification	⟷	Domination	⟷	Legitimation
	$\updownarrow$		$\updownarrow$		$\updownarrow$
(modality)	interpretative scheme	⟷	facility	⟷	norm
	$\updownarrow$		$\updownarrow$		$\updownarrow$
Interaction	Communication	⟷	Power	⟷	Sanction

In the diagram, concerning signification, interpretative schemes are the cognitive means by which each actor makes sense of what others say and do. They are the reference frames and 'knowledgeability' used by agents to communicate. Further, the structural property of norms and values connect sanctions with structural legitimation (Giddens, 1979).

As for domination, an agent's ability to draw on resources of power is related to domination at the level of structure. Giddens (1984) identifies two types of resources of power: command over allocative resources (objects, goods and other material phenomena) and authoritative resources (the capability to organize and coordinate the activities of social actors). Giddens also emphasizes two types of power. He proposes the 'transformative capacity of human action,' which may be a positive outcome, and 'relational power,' or domination, involving reproduced relations of autonomy and dependence in social interaction, which may have negative connotations. Macintosh (1994) says power in its broad sense is the ability to get things done, while power in its narrow sense is simply domination. Giddens (1979, 1984) states that all social relations involve power in both senses, but the exercise of power does not occur in one direction only; power can be exercised by superiors and subordinates alike. He emphasizes the 'dialectic of control', that all social relations involve both autonomy and dependence. Normally, power flows smoothly and its effects go unnoticed. However, conflict can expose power. Furthermore, while power works to control individual actions and gain cooperation, it also works to free action. A description of conflict theory, which is described below, helps to explain further the dialectic of power.

In summary, structuration theory is a dynamic theory of social and institutional order. It provides conceptual methods to situate knowledge and information within the social system. In addition, structuration attempts to unite a number of perspectives into a single, coherent ontology. Structuration explains that human interaction calls upon social structure, but humans have agency to change the structure or incorporate other structures, thus accounting for variations in actions. To define processes of structure, Giddens proposes three categories of structure. These categories delineate between various properties of structure, one of which involves power.

Conflict Theory

Because Giddens proposes that conflict can expose power, and because he defines conflict at the macroscopic level, a description of particular aspects of conflict theory follows in order to provide background information for Giddens macroscopic description and theoretical position and to define the applicability to a microscopic perspective. A number of definitions of conflict exist. Developed by Frost and Wilmot (1978), one of the more useful definitions for the current study reads that conflict is "the interaction of interdependent people who perceive incompatible goals and interference from each other in achieving those goals" (p. 9) Conflict will not occur without interdependence, and it does not exist without awareness of the conflict. Furthermore, Kornblum (1997) states that the concept of power holds a central place in conflict theory. "Power is the ability of an individual or group to change the behavior of others" (p. 22). The centrality of power leads to a discussion of Marx and Weber.

Marxism argues that economic inequality is at the heart of all societies (Kornblum, 1997). Some people will have more than their fair share of a society's economic resources. It is in the interests of those who have wealth to keep and extend what they own, whereas it is in the interests of those who have little or no wealth to try to improve their status. Marx hypothesized that social class conflict would eventually create sufficient force for change and capitalism would collapse. Yet, Marx's theory fails to explain the movements of the 1960's such as women's rights movements and environmental movements. Economic inequalities were not the sole basis for these movements, nor were those who joined these movements necessarily exploited workers as Marx's theory predicts. Because of this shortfall in Marxism, as Kornblum (1997) states, other conflict theorists such as Weber expanded social classes to include not only economic position, but also social status and power. Thus, the importance of power in conflict theory is evident.

Conflict theory proposes that conflict is not responsible for destruction alone.

Macroscopically, conflict theorists suggest that the role of power is just as important as the influence of shared beliefs in explaining why society or social systems do not disintegrate. Simmel (1955), for instance, argues that conflict is necessary as a basis for the formation of alliances. Simmel advocates that:

> . . . the synthetic strength of a common opposition may be determined, not by the number of shared points of interest, but by the duration and intensity of the unification. In this case, it is especially favorable to the unification if instead of an actual fight with the enemy, there is a permanent threat by him (p. 104).

With a communication perspective, Folger and Poole (1984) state that describing conflict as purely productive or destructive is ". . . an idealization. We have rarely observed a conflict that exhibits all constructive or destructive qualities . . .; indeed, many conflicts exhibit both productive and destructive interaction" (p. 7).

Structuration Theory and Conflict

Having provided the above description of pertinent aspects of conflict theory, a description of conflict through the lens of structuration is in order. To explain conflict through structuration theory, Giddens tends to add to conflict theory rather than redevelop it as he has done with other sociological terms. For instance, he borrows the term 'contradiction' from Marx. Giddens defines contradiction as "oppositions or contradictory alignments between two structural principles in the organization of societal systems" (Cohen, 1989; p. 262) whereby principles operate in terms of each other but at the same time contravene one another (Giddens, 1979). "Structural contradictions are structural in the sense that the inconsistencies to which they refer are conceived analytically as chronically reproduced properties . . ." (Cohen, 1989; p. 262). Therefore, structural contradictions "involve an intrinsic interrelationship between two 'clusters' or spheres of institutionalised [sic] activities, each of which only exists in virtue of its

relation to the other, yet each of which tends to undermine or subvert its counterpart" (Cohen, 1989; p. 263). For example, Marx names socialized production and private appropriation as the fundamental contradiction in structural principles: humans produce collectively – thus interdependently; however, private individuals appropriate the results of human production (Craib, 1992).

Gidden's (1979, 1984) details the relationship between contradiction and conflict. Contradictions occur because of stress created by system integration, which Giddens defines as follows:

> 'Integration' may be understood as involving reciprocity of practices (of autonomy and dependence) between actors or collectivities. Social integration then means systemness on the level of face-to-face interaction. System integration refers to connections with those who are physically absent in time or space. (1984, p. 28)

Adding to Frost and Wilmot's (1978) definition, Giddens says that conflict occurs where individuals or groups *express* differences of interest and action. Conflict, therefore, occurs due to an underlying problem of the social structure. Giddens states:

> Conflict and contradiction tend to coincide because contradiction expresses the main 'fault lines' in the structural constitution of societal systems. The reason for this coincidence is that contradictions tend to involve divisions of interest between different groupings or categories of people. . . . Contradictions express divergent modes of life and distributions of life chances in relation to possible worlds which the actual world discloses as immanent. (1984, p. 198)

Hence, contradiction is the potential basis for conflict arising from divisions of interest. Conflict is the actual struggle between actors and groups (Cohen, 1989). Contradiction is a

necessary, but insufficient, cause of conflict. For instance, the current study examines the contradiction that exists between the administrators and the student government. The contradiction between the two groups is the result of the groups having contravening structural principles, which were exposed when an administrator wrote the 2004/2005 budget and the student government believed that their group should have authority over its creation. This contradiction has become a conflict through the student government's attempt to nullify that budget. However, if the student government had merely accepted the administration's budget, though they believe the student government should be responsible for it, only a contradiction would exist. With this information in mind, the final research question is developed to examine the features that perpetuate the conflict:

RQ3: How do structural properties reproduce the group's conflict over S&A funds? Giddens (1984) defines structural properties as "institutionalized features, giving 'solidity' across time and space" (p. 24).

In review, structuration theory places agency in the hands of the agent rather than placing control within a social system, thus eliminating determinism. Through a rather complicated definition of terms, structuration theory identifies structural contradictions. Structuration defines contradiction as a fracture in underlying structures between agents or groups of agents. The categorization of structures according to their nature – legitimation, signification, or domination – can expose the sources of contradiction that may lead to conflict. Conflict is the action of agents that may develop from a particular contradiction. From structuration theory, three research questions were developed that are intended to identify the contradiction that perpetuates the conflict between the student-government group and the DDP administration. To answer the research questions, principles and methods of research that are described below are employed.

SECTION THREE

METHODS

First, a description of the agents, the organization, the group, and the argument are provided. The student government in this study was established in 1998 and consists of seven elected Senate members, an elected President, and an advisor (History, 2004). These officers can live anywhere and still participate in the student government while they attend the university from a distance. In 2004, the officers were all located in Oregon and Washington State. However, members have been in Florida, Pennsylvania, Washington D.C., and other diverse locations. Although no officer has yet lived outside the United States while serving, one officer in 2003-2004 was a citizen of Turkey. Regular attendees of the bimonthly meetings include most officers (a quorum of five officers is frequently not obtained, but no one officer misses meetings regularly) and the student government's advisor. The advisor's participation does not appear to develop a context involving the DDP organization. The advisor makes regular announcements concerning student government activities and developments, but does not provide regular information concerning DDP. This may be due in part to the fact that, until recently, the advisor was not located in a face-to-face relationship with DDP administration. That office was located at a satellite campus.

At any rate, publicly available documents such as the mission, vision, and list of goals state that the student government functions to support non-academic services and activities for their constituents through student paid S&A fees. These services and activities include working with the universities' Distance Degree Programs (DDP) to fulfill a number of student-life needs. For instance, the student government instituted the position of DDP career counselor. The student government also sponsors a two day campus 'Open House' to which

students are invited to attend and take campus tours, attend non-academic seminars (as well as

DDP sponsored, one-day academic seminars), and participate in social events.

Without the student government and the S&A funds allocated for these events, very

few student-life services and activities would be possible. Therefore, the allocation of S&A

funds is an important decision for a large number of DDP students, a decision in which the

student government feels it should have a large role. Because of this opinion of the student

government, a disagreement arose in May of 2004 between the group and DDP

administration. Based on the constitution of other student governments of the university's

multiple campuses, and according to the DDP student government's own constitution, an

S&A fee committee, comprised of students (only one of whom is from the student

government) and administrators, is responsible for establishing the fiscal budget. However, as

the key link between students and student activities, the student government failed to establish

the committee for the spring of 2004. The failure resulted in the budgeting process becoming

the responsibility of the student-government advisor, singularly. The advisor constructed the

budget in February and March of 2004 after repeated requests for assistance from students and

officers. The advisor is an employee of the DDP, hired and directed by the DDP

administration though the salary is a part of the S&A fees budget. After the university's

Board of Regents approved the budget that the advisor drafted, the student government

approved it in May 2004. After that time, the student government came to believe that, in the

absence of an S&A fee committee, they alone should be responsible for the budget that is sent

to the Regents. Through the several months of discussion concerning the possibility of

requesting an audit and finally voting for one in October, the student government publicly

suggested (and privately stated) that the DDP administration purposely developed the budget

without student input and possibly misallocated student funds. This situation supplies the example of virtual group conflict for this study.

The study looks specifically for insight into the role of agency and structure in the perpetuation of the conflict, described above. The conflict has persisted for eleven months. That persistence appears to be due to the agency and structure of the student government organization. Data concerning the conflict was collected for the first eight of those eleven months, ending when this analysis began. Data was also analyzed for four months prior to the development of the conflict to study agency and structure, and their reproduction, which exist external to the conflict but aid in its reproduction. The data consists of public documents, particularly the transcripts of senate meetings.

Also important to the research project is the nature of the relationship between the researcher and the student government. This researcher was closely involved with the organization for three years. This researcher has been a member of the student government and has worked for the student government to facilitate their tasks. As participant-observer during the first four months of the conflict, this researcher has insight into the persistent nature of the conflict that aids in the analysis of the data. Giddens explains a need for this type of closeness in the relationship in his description of interpretative research techniques. Interpretative research involves close consideration of the perspective of the participants. "It is my belief that any group of persons, primitives, pilots, or patients, develop a life of their own that becomes meaningful, reasonable and normal once you get close to it" (Giddens, 1993, p. 684). Giddens indicates that behavior that looks irrational to an outside observer is not irrational when seen in context; thus, he expresses a preference an interpretative research method.

Silverman (1993) states that, to develop a qualitative method for analysis, a researcher defines what elements and variables will reveal the interactions that compose the nature of the system's social dynamics. Then the researcher relates these variables to an analytical model that connects elements and variables to process. Similarly, Giddens (1982) proposes three units of analysis: structural principles, structure, and elements of structure.

First, according to Giddens, the goals of the research project need to be defined; what is the purpose of the research? Structuration analysis is primarily interested in finding how beliefs and structures are produced and reproduced, and how they are transformed over time. Giddens defines this as an 'analysis of recurrent social practices': "The starting-point for theoretical thinking and empirical work in the social sciences should . . . be understood as the analysis of recurrent social practices" (Giddens 1993, p. 252). Understanding how a group functions results from that analysis. From this description, the processes by which the production and reproduction of group structures and the factors that influence them should be discernable.

Second, to achieve the goals of analysis, three main elements for analysis are employed. The first element, structural principles, refers to why a system exists (Giddens, 1984). For the current research project, RQ1 concerning the reproduction of goals and values attempts to uncover why the social system exists. The reason it exists develops from exposing what particular functions (goals and values) the student-government members reproduce.

The second element (or unit of analysis), mediation of social activity through structures, delineates the basis for both legitimacy and authority within the system. RQ2, how social structures mediate the group's activities, fulfills this requirement by exploring the factors that enhance or restrain agency.

After researching these questions, it is possible to consider the elements, or properties, of structure. The elements of structure constitute Giddens' final unit of analysis, which refers to the institutional features that compose the organizational structure. The third research question, which asks how structural properties reproduce the group's conflict over S&A funds, investigates the conflict through Giddens third unit of analysis.

As Giddens (1984) explains, membership in organizations, and location within those organizations, affects the agent's perspective. A process that involves the interactions between the student government and the DDP administration would present two distinct perspectives of both the issues and the proposed solutions that are advanced by those on either side of a conflict. Nevertheless, this research considers whether the structures of the student organization explain the leaders' social behaviors. The DDP administrators' perspective is not considered.

As stated earlier, the individual actors are the agents of social reproduction practices. Organizations, therefore, do not have agency (Giddens, 1984). The apparent ability of organizations to act consists of the agency of its constituent members. For example, the statement 'the club decided to . . .' stands for a statement about the actions of individuals. Consequently, to look inside an organization, one needs to consider how individual practices contribute to organizational action (Berends et al., 2003). Thus, the actor rather than the group or collective is the unit for consideration.

In addition to the interpretative analysis, the messages are categorized by structural domain and according to the source for that structure to support claims of general trends in structure. The analysis looks specifically at the domains of domination, legitimation, and signification to identify and categorize any given structure. These domains are divided into sub-domains that suggest the likely source of the structure. These sub-domains are the

organization (the university), the group (student government), and the position (personally obtained positions of leadership, formal or informal).

The domain of legitimation is studied by assessing whether a statement or action appears to be accepted or rejected by others and whether it is recurring, thus suggesting authority and legitimacy. Attempted actions by agents or statements that assume authority or agency will suggest a perception of the environment in which the group exists. Because the messages are categorized according to the likely source of the structure, claims of institutional features that feed the contradictions are supported. The reproductions, theory suggests, will expose the conditions that perpetuate the conflict.

Obviously, a single statement may belong to one, two, or all three domains. For instance, the agency of the vice president allows that person to call the meeting to order. Calling the meeting to order suggests the power of the *position* of vice president. The vice president receives *legitimation* of the action through the norms of meeting protocol established in the student-government constitution. The vice president's *domination* over the resources, such as the privilege to address the group, occurs for the duration of the meeting. Furthermore, *signification* occurs as the attending officers interpret the call to order as a condition under which the meeting is conducted. Other statements, such as speaking out of turn, may not be legitimated, and would not belong to all three domains. Still other statements may fit the three domains but fall into the sub-domains differently than in the example above. For instance, making a statement such as "the student government has been given the duty of finding a speaker for the fall, on-campus student event," suggests legitimation from the university (or at least from the DDP administration) to make decisions. Signification, in this case, involves understanding that the student government works within, or subordinate to, the university; and domination of the larger organization is evident in the message through the giving of the responsibility.

The structural principles were studied using formal, publicly available transcripts of bimonthly senate meetings. The analysis includes all meetings from the time the disagreement developed in May 2004 until this research project began in December 2004. All references to the budget are subject to the analysis. Furthermore, randomly selected message sets from the meetings between January 2004 and December 2004 are also analyzed to define relevant structures that exist outside the conflict and to locate structures that are passed from leader to leader as new officers are elected. A message set covers the entire discussion of a topic during a particular meeting. The rules and resources exposed through analysis of these discussions may influence the conflict as well. The unit used for the analysis includes entire statements, or messages, made by agents.

The first step in the analysis involved recording the messages' structural domain. Recording simply entailed marking in the margin of a printed version of the transcripts which domain or domains each message represented. Highlighting the various messages according to the structural domain became confusing because a single sentence can belong to all three domains. For evaluative purposes, the need for this researcher to print the transcripts became obvious; printing enhanced the processes of reflecting, comparing, and instantly locating a particular sentence. Because a message can belong to all three domains, several readings were usually required with individual reflection upon each of the three domains. This researcher also attempted to record the messages in a table with a column for each domain; however, that too became awkward because of confusion over which message had been recorded to which domain. Therefore, in the margin each analyzed message contained a 'D' for domination, an 'S' for signification, an 'L' for legitimation, or some combination thereof. The sub-domains were marked in the same way: a 'U' for university, a 'G' for group, and a 'P' for positional sources of structure.

The close readings during the domain categorization of messages revealed recurring goals. From the goals, values were identified and named according to their qualities. For the purpose of documentation, an example of the occurrence of the goal and value was recorded. Recording also documented examples of reproduction. From the knowledge of the reproduced values and the location of the message within the domains and sub-domains, structures that reproduce the values over time became clear. For structures involving resources or normative rules (rules that legitimize action), structure identification derived from first recognizing the structure's domain and secondly naming the reproduced value; only then was the structure objectified. In other words, four structures were named by categorizing the message according to its structural domain, then identifying the reproduced value, and finally finding a term that adequately describes the nature of the structure. The two interpretative rules (shared knowledge and organizing rules) were objectified when answering RQ2, which deals with mediating structures, because these two rules mediate interaction but do not have a specific goal or value associated with them, as do the identified normative rules. These rules were recognized and documented during domain categorization as were the others, but were not named until answering RQ2. They were named in the same manner as the others except that no goal or value is attached to these structures. The names of all structures were further developed through discussions with the thesis committee in an attempt to accurately distinguish the nature of each structure.

During analysis, none of the structures were categorized as a resource, a normative rule, or an interpretative rule. The categorization is provided here post hoc for describing how the structures were identified and named. Two structures appear to represent group resources: recollections of history and referencing institutional agency; two structures are identified here as normative rules: self-referencing and constructing group identity; and two structures are labeled here as interpretative rules: using the online communication medium and following meeting

procedures. The structures have overlapping qualities and do not appear to fit neatly into only one of these categories, either as a rule or a resource.

Lastly, demarcation of structural properties that perpetuate the conflict occurred through the total process of research, which involved reading, rereading, categorizing structures, analyzing, and answering the research questions, but not until after the structures were identified and named (names were altered after identifying structural properties, however). Naming the structures solidified its observed nature, from which structural properties were identified and explained. Properties as institutionalized structural features identify why the conflict resists resolution.

This researcher believes the importance of being closely involved and possessing a thorough understanding of the group and the context in which the group operates cannot be overstated. Giddens' statement that a specific perspective is enhanced through close association became obvious during this categorization process. However, as was also made evident during a discussion with one professor who is a member of this researcher's thesis committee, such closeness can cause the researcher to overlook specific aspects of the nature of the communications. Therefore, this researcher believes that the researcher should consult with objective observers so that such oversights will be less likely. This researcher failed to notice that the student government rarely considers the students comprising the constituency of the student government.

In summary, this research project analyzes recurring social practices. Interpretative analysis of the production and reproduction of structures and the agency of the individual has value in determining why a disagreement over the disbursement of S&A funds has not been arbitrated quickly and in determining the applicability of structuration to intergroup conflict in an online group.

SECTION FOUR

RESULTS

According to structuration theory, interactions result in recursive, embedded, and lasting structures that are preserved across time and space to interact with people's interpretation of those structures in old or new situations (Giddens, 1984). The process is, therefore, longitudinal and cyclical. For example, the use of chatrooms as a communication tool draws upon electronic and physical resources such as personal computers, software, and the internet to communicate in particular ways and according to particular rules. Chatroom usage depends on following certain rules and norms (such as netiquette) that have been established over time. Moreover, using rules and resources is cyclical, being performed in specific instances and not in others (such as accessing the chatroom for committee meetings at specific times and using their previously learned netiquette skills during those meetings and not using those skills when not online). Recurring processes of the student government include functions such as announcing items of business like budget expenditures, discussing projects such as upcoming events, and reporting on progress like the formation of the S&A committee.

Further discussion will rely upon tables to summarize the research findings. The findings focus on the six specific structures that the student government reproduces. Because the structures are exposed through the research questions, a discussion of the answers to the individual questions follows.

RQ1: Reproduced goals and values

Recurring processes include certain goals and values that are reproduced through online interaction. Reproduction suggests that the student government members place

significant value on group autonomy, authority, recognition, and cohesion. Specific

reproduced goals that perpetuate these values include passing nearly all formal motions

without a 'no' vote, attempts to gain authority over the S&A budget, attempting to

distinguish themselves from the rest of the student body at graduation, and holding more

meetings during summer months than the group's constitution sanctions.

Autonomy, for this research project, refers to the value of working without influence

from outside sources, such as the DDP administration. Autonomy is independence and self-

direction. It is frequently expressed through the student government's interactions that fail

to recognize the role of the group within the larger organization – their interdependence.

Authority is defined here as the value for power to influence or control. One way the

student government expresses value for authority is through its efforts to control S&A

funds. Autonomy and authority are similar in that both are values concerning the nature of

the organization and the group's agency. However, they are not the same because autonomy

is a perception of independence while authority is a perception of power. Authority can

exist within interdependent structures while autonomy does not guarantee power. Specific

examples of the reproduction of each value are provided during the discussion of Table 2.

Recognition involves the value for acknowledgment from others, either other student

government members or people outside the group. It is recurrently observed in two ways, as

the student government members' attempts to distinguish themselves from other students

and as uncritical expressions of praise. Group cohesion is defined for this study as the value

for the appearance of group accord. Cohesion and recognition are similar values in that

both involve perceptions of the group. However, recognition is expressed toward the

individual member while cohesion involves the group as a whole.

Because values are expressed through agency, values require structure for their reproduction. Table 2 summarizes which observed structures were reproduced for each value.

Table 2: Structures Reproduce Values

Autonomy	Authority	Recognition	Cohesion
Self-referencing	Referencing institutional agency	Constructing group identity	Constructing group identity
Recollections of history	Recollections of history		

As Table 2 shows, the group reproduced primarily four structures that relate to the four values. Those structures are self-referencing, referencing institutional agency, constructing group identity, and recollection of history. The value for group autonomy is expressed through the agents' *self-references* (or lack of recognition of their role within the larger organization) and recollection of history. Student government members generally do not use legitimizing structures from the organizational level. The structure of self-referencing becomes most evident when categorizing the messages according to their sub-domain (institution, group, or position) within Giddens' three domains of legitimation, domination, and signification. Very few messages fall into the institution sub-domain whereby the student government members express agency by calling upon structure or agency of the larger institution. Nevertheless, the following quote provides an example of a specific self-reference: ". . . the bottom line of $209,000 has been approved, but it wasn't past [sic] through the Student Government . . ." (Transcripts, 2004). The statement was an attempt to legitimize the student government's autonomy over S&A funds and could have easily included a reference to the administration or the Board of Regents in the approval of

the original budget, but it did not. The second example of self-referencing suggests the perception of the environment in which the student government functions without outside influences: "I feel like we are trying to operate in a vacuum . . ."

In contrast to self-references, the one time in which administrators attended a meeting, comments from the administrators (which consisted of the DDP Director and the university's Associate Budget Director) contained numerous references to the university or DDP for the legitimacy of their actions. As an example, the former student-government advisor who was attending the August 11 meeting at the request of the DDP Director, and who constructed the budget, made the following statement: "DDP had to develop some type of budget to support programs & services for students" (Transcript, 2004). As another example, the Director stated, "The students do not need to send the budget back to the Regents because the bottom line total has been approved. What we do need to do, though, is to ensure that we work within the $209,000 to provide the programs and services for the students." These statements are examples of how the administrators referred to the larger institution or to the constituency for credibility and authority. In the same meeting, the student government members did not refer to the larger organization except to state that they had the agency to call for an audit of DDP financial records. Nor did the student government refer to their student constituents for legitimizing their actions and complaints. Consequently, the student government failed to legitimize the comments and actions of the administrators or signify any role of the student government within the institution other than requesting an audit. In Table 2, then, self-referencing appears under the value column for autonomy because the self-referencing structure reproduces that value. Moreover, the institutional structure that provides the student government with the agency to request an

audit also provides them with a legitimate source for the reproduction of authority. The following quote, "We request an outside audit. (To have a full accounting of everything)" gives a clear example for applying that structure (Transcripts, 2004). 'Institution' appears in Table 2 under the value column labeled 'authority' because the institutional structure reproduces the value for authority.

Table 2 also shows that structures related to the reproduction of historic information signify the student government's value for autonomy and authority. This attempt to legitimize power through university institutions (the call for an audit) appears to be reproduced through the leaders' perception of the creation of the budget in previous years. The leaders state that in past years the student government created and approved the entire S&A budget. For fiscal year 2004-2005, however, the budget was split into two parts to reflect what the student government actually had control over and what was allocated to salaries and benefits, and to preexisting programs that the student government was never meant to control according to university policy (Guidelines, 2004). The leaders believed that, because they did not approve the budget that contained salaries and preexisting programs, they had lost control over a major portion of the budget. Table 2, therefore, reflects the reproduction of autonomy and authority values through the recollection of past events.

Furthermore, the student government values recognition, which is reproduced through the construction of group identity. For example, in October 2004, the student government members attempted to distinguish themselves from the rest of the student body at graduation commencement ceremonies by requesting that the leaders be allowed to wear sashes marking their service in the student government. When told they could not wear

distinguishing attire, they requested and received special permission to wear lapel pins. This value for recognition becomes evident through other goals as well, such as mutual recognition. Statements like "that's the spirit," or "way to go" that are not sanctioned by the meeting protocol occur frequently and without critical or constructive comments of the original posting. At one level then, the student government's existence, its identity, is for the recognition of its members. Table 2 shows that group identity construction reproduces the value for recognition.

The value for group cohesion has been expressed in at least two ways. One way is the manner in which measures are passed by the senate. Proposals made in senate meetings are nearly always passed without a 'no' vote; only once in the period from May to December 2004 did a 'no' vote occur. The measure passed anyway. In four situations, an abstention was entered rather than voting against the issue. In another example, during the 2003-2004 term, a disagreement arose between the senate and the president. The president objected to a particular measure and attempted to stop the measure from senate action. However, once the senate approved the measure, the president did not use presidential veto power. No veto has occurred during the three years that this researcher has been involved with the group. The second indication of cohesion involves an increase in meetings. In May 2004, the senate elected to hold more meetings during summer months than has been the practice, increasing to two meetings per month from one (two meetings are the norm during the university's fall and spring semesters), although the senate is regarded to be not in session during summer break according to its constitution. Accordingly, Table 2 shows that group identity construction reproduces values for cohesion and recognition.

Recognition and cohesion are attempts to legitimize the agency of the student government, and they signify the environment in which the agents believe strong unity is required.

Of course, in any given instance, a number of values can be expressed. For instance, during the August 11 meeting, the senate chair stated that the student government was asking for "respectful disclosure of what has been done and what the plan is for the money we have." This single message shows the application of a number of values. In the context of the particular meeting, the statement suggests the autonomy of the group by suggesting the money belongs to the student government. It suggests a need for recognition with the use of the word 'respectful.' In addition, the message expresses the leaders' desire for authority over the S&A fees. Furthermore, the message suggests cohesiveness in membership in its use of the plural pronoun, *we*. This single sentence also parses into the domains of domination, legitimation, and signification: domination by suggesting that the money belongs to the student government, legitimation by requesting respect, and signification through membership cohesion.

In review, the values that are identified to answer RQ1 expose the structures that reproduce them. These structures are listed beneath the corresponding value in Table 2. The next table, Table 3, lists the structures that are described above, self-referencing, referencing institutional agency, constructing group identity, referencing history, and two other structures that will be described when answering RQ2.

Table 3 lists indications of structure according to their domain. In Table 3, 'institutional role' appears in the row for self-referencing and under the domain for legitimation because the student government agents (the members) rely on self-references for legitimation of their actions rather than on their role within the larger institution. Self-

referencing is not just a structure of legitimation; it also surfaces as a property of signification concerning the perception of autonomy of the student government. Table 3 reflects this characteristic with a second entry for 'institutional role' under the domain of signification. This internal lack of recognition for their role within the larger organization carries across time and membership of the student government. Reproduction of self-referencing practices, such as the lack of 'no' votes, is traceable at least as far back as January 2004 and was passed across membership as new officers were elected in April 2004. Therefore, student government history signifies that the group works autonomously to the organization. Table 3 reflects this characteristic of the group through the label of 'institutional role' appearing in the row labeled history under the signification domain. Belief in how the budget was constructed in the past (described previously) also signifies historic structure.

Table 3 also reflects the agents' ability to call for an audit. This structural indicator falls into the row for referencing institutional agency and under the domination and legitimation domain because use of the structure manifested an attempt to control the budget and the student government members perceive it as a legitimate source of authority.

Lastly, voting unity concerning the budget reflects the group's perception of their identity and their desire to dominate control of the S&A funds. Once again, Table 3 reflects the characteristic with the entry of 'voting unity' in the row for the construction of group identity and the column for the domain of domination. As explained when discussing group cohesion and recognition, voting unity indicates efforts of signification and legitimation.

Table 3 also summarizes the structures uncovered when answering RQ2. These structures are mediating factors in the conflict. They are structures that influence the group's legitimacy and authority from the group's perspective of the conflict.

Table 3: Structures and Their Domains

Structure	Domination	Legitimation	Signification
Self-referencing		• Institutional role • Communication with DDP (negative effect)	• Institutional role • Member recognition • Draft budget
Recollections of history			• Institutional role • Budget construction
Referencing institutional agency	• Audit process	• Audit process	
Constructing group identity	• Voting unity	• Graduation recognition • Member recognition • Voting unity	• Graduation recognition • Member recognition • Voting unity
Using online communication medium	• Online structures (negative effect)	• Communication with DDP (negative effect)	• Online structures • Goal attainment • Communication with DDP
Following meeting procedures	• Meeting protocol • Positional authority		

RQ2: Mediating structures

The key mediating structures that are discussed in this report are the use of the online communication medium, following meeting procedures (such as meeting protocol), which are also listed in Table 3, and self-referencing, which already appears on the table. Possibly the most important recurring social structure that mediates group interactions involves the medium of communication, as suggested earlier. The habit of depending upon the internet

and typed messages for communication decreases the richness of the agents' communications. This leanness is evidenced by various discussions involving frustrations, particularly over the slow progress of taking action as with the development of an 'orientation packet' for new DDP students and the inability to initiate an audit even after passing a resolution to do so. In another instance, the proposal to create an S&A committee passed by unanimous vote in the August 11, 2004 meeting; however, the committee was not formed until the end of 2004. Thus, the nature of online communication has a negative effect on authority. In addition, slow goal attainment and online communication processes signify the nature of the online environment. Furthermore, because DDP administrators do not communicate in online forums, the student government's reliance on the online medium limits interactions between the two groups.

Indications of mediating structures include the attempt to draft a new budget. Because of the leanness of the communication medium, the student government attempted to make arbitrary changes to the budget. The treasurer drafted a budget proposal although this officer could not open the spreadsheets to view the budget under dispute. The treasurer developed a "working draft" that included pay increases for the leaders, but did not provide full funding for preexisting programs. The "working draft" passed a vote of the senate with no 'no' votes, but two leaders including the draft's author abstained. At least some leaders assumed that because the senate had voted for it, this budget was the operating budget despite no other entity approving the student government's allocation of funds. Online communications affected the construction of the budget and the agents' understanding of processes in constructing a budget. Therefore, Table 3 lists the draft budget in the column of signification for the structure of communication medium.

Factors that mediate social structures of domination include meeting protocol and positional authority. Procedural structures of the senate meetings reproduce the most frequently used domination structures, particularly from the chair position. Therefore, for procedural structures, meeting protocol is listed in the domination column. However, during the discussions concerning the budget, institutional sources of power were called upon by a number of leaders in the attempt to make the administration give control of the S&A funds to the student government. The primary source of power for this effort stems from the previously discussed threat to call for an audit. Interestingly, because of the structural properties of the communication medium, starting the audit process was difficult and had not started by the end of 2004. Student government agents expressed frustration over the slow progress, thus decreasing their sense of power.

Mediating structures of legitimation include the formerly mentioned attributes of self-referencing. Reproduction of self-reference structures supports autonomy. The communications that rarely recognize the role of the student government within the larger organization likely limit the student government's use of the DDP administration as a resource. A major mediating factor of signification structures also involves self-referencing. The volume of communications that do not involve outside sources indicate that the agents make decisions principally in an autonomous nature. Attempts to rewrite the budget and implement that version suggest the autonomous nature of their actions. Table 3 summarizes these findings as well.

RQ3: Reproducing conflict

Through the interpretative analysis, then, rules and resources account for at least certain activities conducted by the agents. Next, a description of system integration between

DDP and the student government provides evidence of the source of the contradiction. The contradiction is itself reproduced. After the description of system integration, reproduced structural properties are listed and explained.

Giddens' (1984) explanation of system integration defines the relationship between the student government and the administration. Each group, the DDP administration and the spatially absent student government, is dependent upon the other for funding from student paid services and activities fees. Because of stated university policy, without a student government, DDP would lose those funds. Without those funds, the student government could not function and DDP could not provide many services currently in place. The student government is reliant upon DDP and the administration for its existence as well because the DDP must sanction the student government. The forces that bring the social system together (the need for services and activities fees) expose the contradiction in which each group has a different agenda for budgeting the S&A funds. The conflict results from the expression of these differences. According to Giddens (1984), structural properties reproduce the conflict. The properties, or institutionalized features that produce inflexibility over time and space, include the structures of online communications, self-referencing, and group identity construction.

Structural properties of online communication (leanness of the medium) influence the agents' activities concerning the conflict. Reliance upon this medium led to the construction of an inadequate budget proposal and assumptions of authority and autonomy concerning the budget, discussion points of the conflict. Dependence on online communication also limits the agents' interactions with DDP administration to just one person, the student-government advisor. Except in the rare instance of the August 11 meeting, no DDP administrator has

attended a meeting to the knowledge of this researcher. These limitations have negatively affected the ability to resolve the conflict.

The institutionalized features of self-referencing and group identity construction also reproduce the conflict. The properties of these two structures reinforce the core values of autonomy and authority over S&A fees allocations. Self-referencing provides a system of beliefs that place the student government in authority over the S&A funds and their allocation. Attempts to distinguish the members from the general student body reflect the autonomous nature of these beliefs. The practice of group unity in voting and the leanness of the communication medium produced an inadequate budget proposal that agents perceived to be a legitimate creation of their agency.

While the student government's history shows that reproduction of certain structures has taken place, history plays a role in the reproduction of the conflict as well. Formal (such as meeting records and web pages) recollection of history reproduces beliefs that the officers hold the responsibility to create the budget and allocate S&A funds. Recollection of history also reproduces the accepted norms of the group, such as self-referencing, group identity, habits of communication, and meeting procedures; they create rigidity in the system, thereby making change in beliefs and actions less likely. In other words, through the recollection of history, the contradiction reproduces the norms that in turn reproduce the conflict.

Table 4 lists structural properties and reproduced actions that perpetuate the conflict. In detail, the leanness of the communication medium and the reliance upon it manifests itself through a lack of interaction with the DDP administrators. The lack of interaction results in slow, inaccurate, or nonexistent communication with DDP administration, thus perpetuating the conflict. Reinforcement of the student government's values through the norms of self-

referencing and group identity results in the belief that the student government has agency

over the S&A funds. Furthermore, recollection of history results in the reproduction of

group norms that make it difficult to break the cyclical nature of the conflict.

Table 4: Structural Properties that Reproduce Conflict

Structure	Structural properties	Enduring Reproductions
Using online communication medium	• Leanness of medium • Reliance on the medium	Lack of interaction with administrators
Self-referencing	Reinforcement of values	Expressions of authority and autonomy
Constructing group identity	Reinforcement of values	Expressions of authority and autonomy
Recollections of history	Rigidity	Beliefs, opinions, and values Group norms of • self-referencing • group identity habits • procedures

Succinctly, the student government exists in part for the recognition of its members and

for the acquisition of S&A funds. Reproduced structures occur in the three domains. They arise

as power to act (domination, or control of resources); as the right or obligation to act, which may

or may not include the power to act, (legitimation, or norms and values that distinguish

appropriate action); and as indications of how to act (signification, or communications and

environmental indications that some action can or should be taken). Reproduced structures give

the student government its agency. Structural properties, which are enduring characteristics of

structure, explain why specific, reproduced structures perpetuate the conflict. Thus, conclusions

can be reached as to how the conflict can be managed.

SECTION FIVE

CONCLUSIONS

The study analyzed recurring social practices of 'knowledgeable' student government members to locate the structures and agency relevant to the conflict with the DDP administration. The conflict occurs through the agency of the student government members, who are influenced by the communication of structure. Structures of the group reflect the goals and values that are reproduced over time. Goals and values of the student government reproduce the relationship with DDP administrators. This relationship contains contradictions, which are inherent to interdependent groups. Those contradictions are the result of contravening structural principles such as the student government's belief in its own authority and autonomy. The student government's structural contradictions are exposed through the categorization of structures according to their nature – legitimation, signification, or domination. Conflict arises due to contradictions in the relationship.

The conflict has not had entirely negative effects, however. As Desanctis and Monge (1998) explain, conflict has positive and negative aspects. The student government still functions despite the exposure of weaknesses. One positive aspect of the conflict that has already occurred involves the institution of the S&A fees committee. Although the committee had not been established until the end of 2004, it is now functioning to allocate funds for the next fiscal year. Negative aspects of the conflict are that it affects the relationship between the student government and the DDP administration. The negative stimulus breeds distrust of the administrators, which feeds the student government's desire for autonomy and authority. This, in turn, feeds the conflict.

To break the cyclical nature of the conflict, the student government should attempt to recognize the structures under which it operates, such as the reproduced structures of legitimation that promote the belief in the autonomy of the group. The group should attempt to restructure its

internal communications so that it acknowledges its position within the university. Physical

aspects of communication structures will also need restructuring. Restructuring of

communications can involve more telephone calls to one another and more contact with DDP

administrators. Increased communication can also be geared toward acknowledging the role of the

student government within the organization. While domination is relevant to any source of

agency, both parties involved in the conflict should define the power of the student government.

The process could open doors of communication between both groups for mutually satisfying

cooperation.

The information obtained from this research project show that groups, whether online or

face-to-face, need to avoid isolative communication tactics. Values, particularly informal values,

and reproduced structures that segregate the group should be identified and modified. Groups

should structure their communications to avoid heavy reliance on self-references. Self-referencing

may result in the construction of a group that believes itself to be a separate entity with exaggerated

beliefs in its own autonomy and authority. Group identity should focus on the larger role of the

group rather than on the needs of the individual members. Furthermore, causes of rigidity in its

belief system need to be identified and controlled. Groups should also structure themselves to

depend on the richest communication medium available, preferably face-to-face, secondly

teleconferencing, thirdly multimedia chatrooms (including webcams and voice communication),

fourthly teleconferences, and so on.

Aside from practical applications for this study, theoretical value also exists. This research

project supports other research that, although Giddens focuses on sociological and macroscopic

applications of structuration theory, structuration applies to small group communication; and his

explanation of structure as rules and resources applies to group interaction. This study also

demonstrates that structuration is relevant to researching and explaining intergroup conflict in

small groups. While Giddens applies structuration to sociological research and conflict at a macro level, this research shows its applicability for micro-level investigation.

Giddens' detailed and sometimes hard to follow description of the theory becomes clearer and more relevant when applied, as does any theory. Few reports describe the practical application of Giddens' methods in detail. This report does just that by describing the three elements for analysis and constructing the research questions from them. This report demonstrates the logical progression of research that first determines why a group exists; secondly, it finds the group's source of authority and legitimacy, and thirdly determines what properties reproduce structure. Because it demonstrates the logical progression of Giddens' method of research, this paper also provides evidence of the theory's strength. Furthermore, few studies have detailed the role of the domains – signification, legitimation, and domination – as does this study. Consequently, the analysis provides a model for future research concerning the application of research methods and structural domains.

The current project shows that particular structural properties such as the leanness of and reliance upon a particular communication medium, the reinforcement of values, and the recollection of history can reproduce conflict. Thus, the student government's own practices work to either exacerbate or assuage the conflict. The student government can work to resolve the conflict rather than expect the administrators to work toward resolution, as can other groups or individuals involved in conflict. In theory, then, the causes of conflict are exposed through structural properties that can be amended by agents, which will lead to a reduction of conflict.

The results show that rules and resources shape communication processes. For example, in this instance, rules include interactions that rely on self-referencing by which the group suggests its desire for authority and autonomy over the S&A funds. Reproduced rules of communication promoted belief in the appropriateness of this goal, which perpetuated the contradiction between

the student government's role within the institution and the DDP administration. In addition, the research project supports conflict theory's argument that, in order for a conflict to exist, interdependence is required. Moreover, the research project suggests structuration's applicability to intergroup conflict and small group communication, and it exposes the relevance of structural domains to conflict. Thus, this report adds to conflict theory a method in which conflict can be investigated to expose the contradictions and on which actions to resolve or assuage the conflict can be based.

Limitations

A number of limitations exist with this research. Primary among them is the lack of investigation into the administrators' perception of the conflict. Indeed, many administrators may not perceive a conflict at all. However, it seems likely that they would have knowledge of the contradictions between the two groups. Better understanding of the conflict, even if the conflict exists on one side only, can undoubtedly be gained through the study of the administrators' perspective.

Another limitation involves the lack of comparison with a group that functions face-to-face. Such a comparison can investigate which factors that are relevant to online communication aggravate the conflict and which factors are common among both types of group interaction. Furthermore, the level of self-referencing and the lack of acknowledgement of their role within the larger institution are not based on indicators from other sources. The study merely describes the student government's infrequent expression of their ancillary role. Levels of self-referencing are not measured.

Future research, therefore, is strongly suggested. A study revealing the perspective of the DDP administration should receive priority. Other research can include interviews of the student government members to obtain insight into the emotional issues and their structural influences

upon the conflict. Reproduction of emotions may act as a resource for the perpetuation of the conflict. In addition, research into the application of structuration theory to conflict in online groups can confirm or deny findings of this research project. Quantitative studies can show whether groups with low percentages of messages that call upon organizational legitimation are more or less prone to conflict. The applicability of structuration research in face-to-face communications of conflict is only sparingly researched; therefore, even outside the context of online communication, the topic of this research project needs further investigation.

For future study of the influences of technology on communication, this research project suggests possible sources of differentiation from face-to-face interactions. To keep communications relevant, messages transported through the relatively lean, online medium may be shorter than richer forms of communication. Shortened messages may produce a sense of group cohesion. For instance, debates over motions may be shorter before coming to a vote. Shorter discussions may lead to more frequent favorable votes, which, in turn, lead to the appearance of cohesiveness as a group norm.

In conclusion, although many areas of structure and conflict in online groups remain to be researched, structuration has proven to be a useful theory for describing intergroup conflict in an online association. The research project supports the applicability of structuration theory to communication, conflict, and online interaction processes. Application of the theory exposes the structural properties that do not allow for quick resolution, and it provides indications for ways to progress toward resolution.

REFERENCES

Abel, M. J. (1990). Experiences in an exploratory distributed organization. In J. Galagher, R. Kraut, C. Egido, (Eds.). *Intellectual teamwork* (pp. 489-510). Norwood, NJ: Erlbaum.

Baert, P. (1998). *Social theory in the twentieth century.* New York: New York University Press.

Berends, H., Boersma, K., & Weggeman, M. (2003). The structuration of organizational learning. *Human Relations, 56*(9), 1035-1056.

Cassell, P. (1993). Introduction. In P. Cassell (Ed.), *The Giddens reader* (pp. 1-37). Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Cohen, I. J. (1989). *Structuration theory: Anthony Giddens and the constitution of social life*. New York: St. Martins Press.

Craib, I. (1992). *Anthony Giddens*. New York: Routledge.

Desanctis, G. & Monge, P. (1998). Communication processes for virtual organizations. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 3*(4). Retrieved December 8, 2004 from http://www.ascusc.org/jcmc/vol3/issue4/desanctis.html.

Dollar, N. J. & Merrigan, G. M. (2002). Ethnographic practices in group communication research. In L. R. Frey (Ed.). *New directions in group communication* (pp. 59-78). Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Flynn, D. & Hussain Z. (2001). *Using structuration theory to explain information systems development and use in a public health organization.* The 9th European conference on information systems. Bled, Slovenia. Retrieved February 2, 2005 from http://is.lse.ac.uk/Support/ECIS2001/pdf/116_Flynn.pdf

Folger, J. P. & Poole, M. S. (1984). *Working through conflict: A communication perspective*. Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman and Company.

Frey, L. (2002). Introduction. In L. Frey (Ed.). *New directions in group communication.* (ix-xviii.). Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Frost, J. & Wilmot, W. (1978). *Interpersonal conflict.* Dubuque: W. C. Brown.

Gallupe, R. B. & McKeen, J. D. (1990). Enhancing computer-mediated communication: An experimental investigation into the use of a group decision support system for face-to-face versus remote meetings. *Inform and Management, 18*(1), 1-13.

Giddens, A. (1976). *New rules of sociological method.* London: Hutchison.

Giddens, A. (1979). *Central problems in social theory: action, structure, and contradiction in social analysis.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Giddens, A. (1981). *A contemporary critique of historical materialism.* London: Macmillan.

Giddens, A. (1982). *Profiles and critiques in social theory.* London: Macmillan.

Giddens, A. (1984). *The constitution of society.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Giddens, A. (1993). *Sociology.* Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

Guidelines (2004). *General guidelines for establishing and allocating services and activities fees.* Retrieved April 3, 2005 from http://www.aswsu-ddp.wsu.edu/SenateMeetings/2004-2005/Aug25/SAFeePolicy2004DRAFT.pdf.

Hightower, RT., Sayeed, L., Warkentin, M.E. & McHaney, R. (1997). Information exchange in virtual work groups. In Igbaria, M. and Tan, M. (Eds.), *The virtual workplace* (pp. 199-216). Hershey, PA: Idea Group Publishing.

History (2004). *A brief history.* Retrieved November 27, 2004 from http://www.aswsu-ddp.wsu.edu/structure/History.asp

Kilminster, R. (1998). *The sociological revolution: From the enlightenment to the global age.* New York: Routledge.

Kornblum, W. (1997). *Sociology in a changing world* (4th ed.). In collaboration with Carolyn D. Smith. Fort Worth, San Diego, New York, Orlando, Austin, San Antonio: Harcourt Brace College Publishers.

Macintosh, N. B. (1994). *Management accounting and control systems: An organizational and behavioral approach.* New York: Wiley.

Neuendorf, K. (2002). *The content analysis guidebook*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Robbins, S. P. (2000). *Essentials of organizational behavior* (6th ed.). Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall.

Seyfarth, B. (2000). Structuration theory in small group communication: A review and agenda for future research. In M. E. Roloff (Ed.) *Communication yearbook 23*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Simmel, G. (1955). *Conflict, translated by Kurt H. Wolff. The web of group-affiliations, translated by Reinhold Bendix.* New York: Free Press.

Silverman, D. (1993). *Interpreting qualitative data: Methods for analyzing talk, text and interaction.* Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Sproull, L., and Kiesler, S. (1986). Reducing social context cues: Electronic mail in organizational communication. *Management Science*, *32*(11), 1492-1512.

Straus, S. G. 1996. Getting a clue: The effects of communication media and information distribution on participation and performance in computer-mediated and face-to-face groups. *Small Group Research, 27*(1), 115-142.

Transcripts (2004). *2004 - 2005 Senate meetings*. Retrieved February 5, 2005 from http://www.aswsu-ddp.wsu.edu/SenateMeetings/senate-meetings2003-2004.asp.

Yuthas, K., Dillard, J. F., & Rogers, R. K. (2004). Beyond agency and structure: Triple-loop learning. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 51(2), 229-243.