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CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND MANAGEMENT  
IN CONTEMPORARY WORK ORGANIZATIONS:  
THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES  
AND EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE

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ORGANIZATIONS: THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES AND EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE**

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## CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND MANAGEMENT IN CONTEMPORARY WORK ORGANIZATIONS: THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES AND EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE

This symposium is one of several recent initiatives undertaken by scholars from a variety of disciplines and fields to integrate organizational behavior (OB) and industrial relations (IR) research (Lewin and Feuille, 1983; Lewin and Strauss, 1988; Kochan, 1980; Kochan and Verma, 1983). Ironically, (OB) and (IR) were once closely connected, perhaps even integrated, within academic units of U.S. (and other) universities (Lewin, 1987b, 1987c). In about 1960, however, OB and IR began to move in separate research directions, which led to the restructuring and realignment of numerous OBIR academic units (Lewin, 1989).

Despite these developments, or possibly because of them, some OB and IR scholars have detected certain points of actual or potential convergence between the two fields. One point of convergence, which forms the centerpiece of this symposium, is the research on conflict management and resolution. Notable streams of recent research on this topic can be found in both the OB and IR literatures (Lewicki, Weiss, and Lewin, 1992). For those interested in the integration (or reintegration) of this research, the challenge is to assess the extent to which conflict management/resolution theories, concepts, evidence, and methods employed by OB and IR scholars converge or diverge.

In this regard, the present paper analyzes the uses and consequences of formal dispute resolution systems in five large, nonunion publicly-held, U.S.-based companies. Section I of the paper provides a brief review of recent leading theories and concepts of conflict management and resolution; Section II draws on the organizational justice, exit-voice-loyalty, and organizational discipline literatures to establish the analytical framework for the study; Section III describes the data base used in and presents the main empirical findings of the study; and Section IV contains a discussion of findings, conclusions, and implications of the study, especially with respect to the integration of OB and IR research on conflict management and resolution.

### MODELS OF CONFLICT

Underlying all models of conflict are certain approaches to or perspectives on this social phenomenon. Within the eclectic literature on conflict research, it is possible to identify (at least) six major approaches, each of which subsumes certain theories and models. Three of these approaches stem from academic disciplines. The micro-level or psychological approach concentrates on conflict within and among human beings as individuals,

specifically on intrapersonal, interpersonal, and small group behavior variables that affect conflict causes, dynamics, and outcomes (Nye, 1973). The macro-level or sociological approach focuses on groups, departments, divisions and even whole organizations as units of analysis for understanding conflict dynamics (March and Simon, 1958; Pondy, 1967). Further, some macro-level researchers concentrate on the functions and dysfunctions of social conflict as well as the analysis of conflict at the societal level (Dahrendorf, 1959; Marx, 1906). The third approach employs economic analysis and, in particular, applies models of economic rationality to individual decision-making and even to complex social behavior (Becker, 1981). One example of this approach is game theory, which abstracts from situations of interdependence, the parties' alternative courses of action, the parties' preferences, and possible outcomes, and then prescribes rational choice behavior (Luce and Raiffa, 1957; Shubik, 1964). Another example of economic analysis in this regard is the work on exit, voice, and loyalty, which offers a "rational" explanation of why some consumers who are dissatisfied--in conflict--with companies stay and "fight" rather than switch to other companies--producers (Hirschman, 1970). More recently, the exit-voice-loyalty model has been applied to the study of labor unions in their efforts to resolve conflicts with employers (Freeman and Medoff, 1984).

In addition to the three research approaches closely tied to disciplines, there are three approaches to conflict which owe their origins to specific problem area applications. The labor relations (or fourth) approach originated from an interest in understanding and influencing the practice of U.S. industrial relations. (It has also drawn heavily from the disciplines of economics and psychology, however). As Kochan and Verma (1983) observe, industrial relations research "...has maintained a coherent and consistent set of assumptions about the nature and role of conflict within organizations around issues pertaining to the determination and administration of the employment relationship" (p. 17). (Also see Barbash, 1964; Commons, 1928, 1934; Kerr, Dunlop, Harbison, and Myers, 1964). Recent research has focused more heavily on the determinants and consequences of workplace conflict resolution mechanisms and techniques (Kochan, Katz, and McKersie, 1986; Lewin, 1987a; Lewin and Peterson, 1988).

A fifth approach to the study of conflict is bargaining and negotiation, which arose from the frequent use of these processes in labor relations and international relations. Early researchers in these areas enumerated sets of principles for effective negotiations (Chamberlain, 1955; Dunlop and Healy, 1953; Ikle, 1964; Schelling, 1960), while others borrowed from game theory to model the bargaining process (Nash, 1950; Zeuthen, 1930). Social psychologists have created an entire subdiscipline of research on the interpersonal aspects of these processes (Druckman, 1977).

More contemporary researchers have blended or cross-pollinated the discipline-based models or focused on specific applications, such as to labor relations (Siegel and Fouraker, 1960; Stevens, 1963; Walton and McKersie, 1965).

Third party dispute resolution represents a sixth approach to the study of conflict. Like the two previous approaches, this research was stimulated by concerns about more effective resolution of labor and international disputes, and emphasizes the actions taken by parties external to a conflict to resolve it or to restore effective negotiations (Jackson, 1952). Early studies focused on third party style and effectiveness in arbitration (Kagel, 1961), mediation (Stevens, 1963), and process consultation (Walton, 1969), while more contemporary approaches have sought to integrate third party intervention into a broad understanding of the causes and dynamics of conflict itself (Sheppard, 1984).

Other academic disciplines and fields that have contributed to conflict research, such as social psychology and organizational behavior, have borrowed from two or more of the aforementioned approaches. Indeed, considerable cross-fertilization has taken place among the six approaches themselves. Although these efforts have been beneficial in many ways, they have also resulted in the neglect of some of the premises and fundamental assumptions of the original approaches and paradigms for the study of conflict. It is not possible here to assess the benefits and limitations of these six approaches to the study of conflict. However, a recent paper by Lewicki, Weiss, and Lewin (1992) provides such an assessment, though it is confined to the micro-level (psychological), bargaining and negotiations, and third party dispute resolution approaches to the study of conflict. For the interested reader, Tables 1-3 summarize the dominant models associated with each of these three approaches, and Table 4 identifies the leading assumptions underlying models of conflict, negotiation, and third party behavior.

#### **ORGANIZATIONAL JUSTICE, EXIT-VOICE-LOYALTY, AND ORGANIZATIONAL PUNISHMENT THEORIES**

Models of organizational justice have come to play a prominent role in the literature on third party dispute resolution, and these models place major emphasis on the distinction between procedural justice and distributive justice (Folger and Greenberg, 1985; Lind and Tyler, 1988; Sheppard, Lewicki, and Minton, 1992). Procedural justice focuses on the mechanisms or processes through which resource allocation decisions are made, while distributive justice focuses on the outcomes of such resource allocation decisions and the criteria used to make them (Feuille and Delaney, 1992). Stated another way, procedural justice refers to the perceived fairness of

the procedures used to make intraorganizational decisions, and distributive justice refers to the perceived fairness of the substance and consequences of these decisions.

The concept of organizational justice appears to be supported by a body of scholarly work which indicates that fairness is a major contributor to the effective functioning of organizations. To illustrate, fairness apparently is a desirable "good" in that people want to be treated fairly and to be perceived by others as being fair (Greenberg, 1990). That this preference may be especially strong within organizational settings is suggested by the work of Kahneman, Knetsch, and Thaler (1986a, 1986b), whose respondents to a telephone survey judged numerous decisions of companies to raise prices and reduce wages to be unfair. These economists concluded that norms of fairness do indeed impose substantial constraints on the market-oriented behavior of companies.

Relatedly, individual perceptions of the fairness of resource allocation decisions depend on both the procedures used to make these decisions and the outcomes of the decisions--that is, on procedural justice and distributive justice. For example, several studies have shown that the citizens of some nations strongly prefer an adversarial to an inquisitorial system for resolving legal conflicts, apparently because the former (but not the latter) allows the disputants to control the collection and presentation of evidence (Folger and Greenberg, 1985; Lind, 1982; Thibaut and Walker, 1975). Research also shows that organizational members more readily accept organizational decisions which affect them when the processes used to make such decisions are perceived to be fair (Greenberg, 1990; Sheppard, Lewicki, and Minton, 1992). Perceptions of organizational fairness, in turn, significantly influence employee attitudes toward numerous organizational characteristics and processes, for example, performance appraisals and grievance systems (Folger and Greenberg, 1985; Fryxell and Gordon, 1989).

Concerning the adoption and use by companies of grievance (or appeal, complaint, and dispute resolution) systems, the organizational justice literature implies that norms of fairness are of paramount importance. By providing a procedure for resolving intraorganizational and workplace conflicts, an employer signals to employees that conflict is "acceptable," that conflicts will be treated in a "standard format," that conflicts not resolved at lower levels will be solved at higher levels, and that the outcomes of conflict resolution will not be "unfair" to organizational members in the sense that those who grieve will not be punished for filing grievances. Indeed, one of the key conceptual underpinnings of formal grievance systems in organizations is that conflicts should be surfaced and expressed in writing, rather than being

repressed or expressed only verbally. With respect to the grievance systems studied in this paper, organizational justice theory leads to the propositions that these systems will be used, that intraorganizational and workplace conflicts will be resolved, and that organizational members will not be punished for using the grievance system--that is, for filing grievances.

The exit-voice-loyalty model (Hirschman, 1970) clearly leads to the proposition that employees who file grievances will be less likely to leave their employers than employees who do not file grievance. In the intraorganizational employment context, grievance filing represents the exercise of the voice option and quitting represents the exercise of the exit option. Hence, exit and voice are posed as tradeoffs and exit should be negatively correlated with voice. While, as noted earlier, the exit-voice-loyalty model was evoked to explain why some consumers who are dissatisfied with a company's products or processes choose not to switch to another company (and, instead, choose the voice option by engaging in letter writing, returning defective products, and occasionally conducting boycotts of a company's products), this model has often been used to analyze the behavior of labor unions (Freeman and Medoff, 1984; Freeman, 1980).

The dominant finding that emerges from this work is that, by providing employees with a voice mechanism, unions reduce voluntary employee turnover, that is, quits. Other, related outcomes associated with unionism in this research include increased job tenure (experience), training (human capital), and productivity. However, only a small portion of this work treats grievance procedures (as distinct from unionism) as a voice mechanism, little conceptual attention is given to the distinction between grievance procedure coverage (availability) and usage (Ichniowski and Lewin, 1987), and none of the work tests for the effects of grievance procedure usage, issues, settlement levels, or decisions on employee quits.

Even more fundamental, perhaps, are two other limitations of the exit-voice-loyalty model. First, most of the conceptual development and exposition of the model is devoted to exit and voice; loyalty is given much shorter shrift, and this may help to explain both the conceptual confusion about the relationships among exit, voice, and loyalty (Barry, 1974; Birch, 1975), and the lack of empirical attention to the operationalization and measurement of the loyalty construct (but see Lewin and Boroff, 1991; Boroff, 1990). Second, and of particular relevance for the present paper, the exit-voice-loyalty model has not been tested in nonunion settings. In other words, even if the findings of an exit-voice tradeoff in unionized settings are accepted as valid (but see Lewin and Peterson, 1988), the model lacks generalizability in terms of providing a theoretical and empirical explanation of the dynamics and

consequences of conflict management and resolution in an intraorganizational context. The empirical work undertaken below provides one of the few explorations of the relationship between exit and voice in nonunion settings (see Lewin, 1986, 1987a, 1991b). Based on the exit-voice-loyalty model, however, this exploration will yield evidence about the proposition that the exercise of voice through grievance procedures is negatively correlated with employee turnover. Note that this proposition dovetails closely with and, in a limited sense, extends one of the propositions derived from organizational justice theory, namely, that organizational members will not be punished for filing grievances. Framed from the perspective of the exit-voice-loyalty framework, organizational justice theory leads to the more specific proposition that grievance filers will not have significantly different involuntary turnover rates from those who do not file grievances.

Organizational punishment (and industrial discipline) theory provides a substantially different perspective on intraorganizational conflict generally and grievance procedures specifically from those offered by the organizational justice and exit-voice-loyalty models. Organizational punishment theory calls attention to the violations of organizational and work rules committed by organization members (Scott, 1965). When such violations or infractions are committed, the organization must take appropriate disciplinary action so as to "correct" the behavior in question and reaffirm the policies and practices which were violated.

Invoking this analytical framework, grievance filers may be viewed as typically reacting against discipline initially imposed by the organization, so that the filing of a grievance is essentially an attempt to get the organization to modify or reverse the action originally taken. Empirical research using organizational punishment theory has concluded that grievance filers impose additional costs on organizations (Arvey and Jones, 1985), but also that such sanctions as warnings and dismissals can be used as "positive" management tools (O'Reilly and Weitz, 1980) in the sense that they help to define appropriate and inappropriate employee behaviors. In fact, one study found that managerial performance in retail food establishments was positively correlated with the frequency and severity of use of such disciplinary measures as warnings and dismissals (O'Reilly and Weitz, 1980).

Another strand of organizational discipline theory and research has "gone further" than the aforementioned studies in concluding that grievance filers are likely to be viewed as complainers, trouble-makers, problem employees, or dissidents who may therefore be subject not only to organizational discipline, but to retribution (Selznick, 1969; Brinker, 1984). Further, not only may grievance

filers be viewed and treated negatively by organizations, so too may supervisors against whom grievances are filed (Jennings, 1974). This perspective is given some support by recent empirical studies (Lewin, 1987, 1991b; Boroff, 1991), by internal company surveys which find that "fear of reprisal" is the most frequently cited reason for the failure of managerial and nonmanagerial employees to file written grievances in nonunion organizations that maintain formal grievance systems (Lewin, 1987), and by popular works which call attention to the retaliation meted out to organizational "whistle-blowers" (Ewing, 1989).

In essence, the organizational punishment literature leads to the proposition that grievance filing will be positively associated with employee turnover--and perhaps with other intraorganizational consequences as well. This is a markedly different proposition from those derived from organizational justice and exit-voice-loyalty theories of conflict management and resolution. Note, however, that organizational punishment theory may have more in common with the exit-voice-loyalty theory than with organizational justice theory in its emphasis on distributive justice (outcomes) and de-emphasis of procedural justice.

In sum, organizational justice, exit-voice-loyalty, and organizational punishment theories are used to guide the present study of conflict management and resolution in nonunion organizations. The guidance drawn from these theories takes the form of a set of propositions, rather than formal hypotheses, about the relationship between grievance filing and the consequences (outcomes) of filing. The decision not to specify formal hypotheses stems from the judgment that the aforementioned theories lead to different expectations about the relationships between grievance filing and the consequences of filing, and because the empirical evidence about this area of conflict management and resolution is insufficiently robust to warrant the specification of expected, or a priori, relationships.

#### DATA AND EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

The data base for this study consists of grievance and personnel records drawn from five large, nonunion, publicly-held, U.S.-based companies, each of which maintains a formal, multi-step, written grievance procedure. Grievance and personnel file data were obtained for the 1984-88 period and were converted to a single master data tape. Of central importance to this study, samples of grievance filers and nonfilers were drawn from each of the five cooperating companies. Grievance data were then extracted and collated for the samples of grievance filers, and personnel file data were extracted and collated for the samples of grievance filers and nonfilers. The grievance data were limited to grievances

filed and settled in calendar 1986; in conjunction with the personnel data for 1984-88, the grievance data enabled us to employ a quasi-experimental research design in which 1984-85 serves as the "pre-test" period, 1986 as the "treatment" or "experimental" period, and 1987-88 as the "post-test" period. Four measures of post-grievance settlement outcomes are used in this study: annual job performance, measured on a five-point rating scale, with 1 = low and 5 = high; annual promotion rate, measured as the percent of grievance filers and nonfilers in year x promoted to higher-ranking jobs in year x+1; annual work attendance, measured as the percent of work days absent from work and late in reporting to work; and annual turnover, measured as the percent of grievance filers and nonfilers voluntarily and involuntarily separated from work (in 1987 and 1988 only).

To what extent are the grievance procedures in these five nonunion companies actually used to resolve intraorganizational and workplace conflicts? The data in Table 5 indicate that the annual grievance rate per 100 employees averaged 5.1 over the 1984-88 period, and ranged between 3.8 and 6.2 among the individual companies studied. This overall grievance rate is about 40 percent lower than the average annual grievance rate recently reported for unionized employees in steel manufacturing, retail trade, nonprofit hospital, and local public school organizations (Lewin and Peterson, 1988). Nevertheless, these data can be interpreted to support the proposition, derived from organizational justice theory, that nonunion grievance procedures will be used by employees.

Additionally, the data presented in Tables 5 and 6 indicate that most nonunion employees' grievances are settled at the lower steps of grievance procedures, and that, on average, about one of every 500 grievances initially filed eventually proceeds to the last step of the grievance procedure. Observe from Table 5 that this "ascension rate" was highest in the one company included in this study which provided for arbitration as the final step of the grievance procedure. This evidence can be interpreted to support the proposition, also drawn from organizational justice theory, that intraorganizational and workplace conflicts in the form of written grievances are actually resolved, as well as the normative dictum, drawn from the industrial relations literature, that grievances should be settled as close as possible to their sources of origin (Lewin and Peterson, 1991).

Table 7 presents evidence relevant to the propositions drawn from organizational justice, exit-voice-loyalty, and organizational punishment theories about the relationship between grievance filing and post-grievance settlement outcomes, especially employee turnover; these data suggest several key conclusions. First, grievance filers and nonfilers do not differ (statistically)

significantly with respect to job performance ratings and promotion rates during the pre-grievance filing period (1984-85) or during the grievance filing period (1986). The work attendance of grievance filers was slightly but not (statistically) significantly higher than that of nonfilers during both the pre-grievance and grievance filing periods. In other words, two groups of employees in five nonunion companies--subsequent grievance filers and nonfilers--appear to be and, on a statistical basis, are virtually identical along several personnel utilization and assessment dimensions during a two-year pre-grievance filing period and a one-year grievance filing period.

Second, grievance filers and nonfilers display significantly different job performance ratings, promotion rates, and turnover rates during the two-year post-grievance filing and settlement period, 1987-88. Specifically, grievance filers have significantly higher average voluntary and involuntary turnover rates and significantly lower average job performance ratings and promotion rates than nonfilers in the post-grievance settlement period. Moreover, though not statistically significant, the average work attendance rates of grievance filers are lower than those of nonfilers during the post-grievance settlement period, whereas the opposite relationship prevailed during the pre-grievance and grievance filing periods.

Third, the differences between grievance filers and nonfilers along several personnel utilization and assessment measures widen between the first and second years (1987 and 1988, respectively) of the post-grievance resolution and settlement period. Turnover differences between grievance filers and nonfilers are significantly higher in 1988 than in 1987, while differences in performance ratings, promotion rates, and work attendance rates are insignificantly higher in 1988 than in 1987. These data appear to confirm a deterioration in the organizational positions of grievance filers relative to nonfilers in the period following the filing and settlement of written grievances. Taken as a whole, this evidence appears to support propositions about intraorganizational and workplace conflict resolution drawn from organizational punishment theory, rather than those drawn from organizational justice theory. Further, this evidence appears to disconfirm propositions about intraorganizational and workplace conflict resolution drawn from exit-voice-loyalty theory. In particular, the exercise of voice by employees in the five nonunion companies studied here is significantly positively associated with both voluntary and involuntary employee exit--a finding which accords closely with the results of other recent studies of unionized and nonunion dispute resolution systems (Lewin and Peterson, 1988, 1991; Peterson and Lewin, 1991a, 1991b; Boroff, 1990; Lewin and Boroff, 1991).

These conclusions are further strengthened by the results of analyses of post-grievance settlement outcomes for samples of supervisors of grievance filers and supervisors of nonfilers in the five aforementioned nonunion companies. These samples were drawn in a manner similar to the drawing of the employee grievance filer and nonfiler samples, and personnel file data were once again extracted and merged with grievance file data. Table 8 presents the findings from this portion of the research.

As with nonsupervisory personnel, the supervisors of (subsequent) grievance filers do not differ significantly from the supervisors of (subsequent) nonfilers with respect to performance ratings, promotion rates, and work attendance during the pre-grievance and grievance filing periods. In the immediate post-grievance settlement period (1987), however, the supervisors of grievance filers have significantly lower average performance ratings and promotion rates than the supervisors of nonfilers. The former also have a poorer average work attendance record than the latter, though this difference is not statistically significant. With respect to turnover, supervisors of grievance filers have significantly higher average voluntary and (especially) involuntary turnover rates than the supervisors of nonfilers in the first year following the settlement of grievances. Further, the differences in performance ratings and (especially) turnover rates between these two groups widen during the second year (1988) of the post-grievance settlement period. Thus, as before, these findings appear to support propositions about intraorganizational and workplace conflict resolution drawn from organizational punishment theory, rather than organizational justice theory, and to disconfirm propositions drawn from exit-voice-loyalty theory.

## DISCUSSION

The findings from this study of grievance system usage, settlement, and post-settlement outcomes in five nonunion companies have several implications for the continued development of theories of intraorganizational and workplace conflict. Perhaps foremost, the findings provide support for organizational punishment theory. Matched samples of grievance filers and nonfilers and of supervisors of filers and nonfilers showed no statistically significant differences on several measures of personnel activity, either in the period preceding grievance filing or in the grievance filing and settlement period itself. In the post-grievance settlement period, by contrast, the "organizational position" of those directly associated with grievance activity, that is, grievance filers and the supervisors of grievance filers, deteriorated in relation to the organizational position of those not associated with grievance activity, that is, grievance nonfilers and the supervisors of nonfilers.

One is tempted, when reviewing these findings, to quickly conclude that they tell a "reprisal" story. In other words, employees who file written grievances suffer reprisals--incur punishment--for doing so, and this phenomenon extends to the supervisors of grievance filers. Perhaps this is why managerial personnel, who are typically also eligible to file written grievances where nonunion grievance systems are in place, rarely do so (Lewin, 1991b). Indeed, recent studies of the determinants of grievance filing in nonunion organizations show that occupation is the single strongest predictor of filing, with managers being substantially and significantly less likely to file written grievance than members of all other occupational groups (Lewin, 1991b; Boroff, 1990). In addition, managers are more likely than all other organizational personnel to express fear of reprisal when responding to anonymous surveys about grievance filing and nonfiling in nonunion organizations (Boroff, 1991; Lewin, 1987, 1991b).

It is unlikely that the designers of nonunion grievance systems intend these systems to result in reprisals when they are used or to generate fear of use by organizational members. In fact, nonunion companies often celebrate and publicize their grievance systems, and appear to regard them as a positive conflict resolution, employee relations, and communications mechanisms ((McCabe, 1988; Westin and Feliu, 1988). But an organizational punishment perspective suggests that the findings of this paper are not necessarily inconsistent with the "positive" conflict resolution properties of nonunion grievance systems.

In particular, consider that the post-grievance settlement differences between grievance filers and nonfilers, and between the supervisors of grievance filers and nonfilers, with respect to job performance ratings, promotion rates, (nonsignificant) work attendance rates, and turnover rates may reflect true "performance" differences. That is, grievance filers (and supervisors of filers) may be systematically poorer performers (and, more broadly, employees) than nonfilers (and supervisors of nonfilers), and these "differences" are accurately reflected in the post-grievance resolution and settlement personnel data. For such an explanation to be valid, it must be the case that the act of grievance filing and settlement of grievances "shocks" the organization into conducting more careful personnel assessments than those which prevailed during the pre-grievance filing and grievance filing periods. Ironically, this explanation receives some indirect support from court decisions rendered in employment discrimination and wrongful discharge cases. In several such cases, the performance appraisal systems used by companies have been judged invalid and unreliable, and these judgments often spur company initiatives to improve the validity and reliability of performance appraisal (and other personnel) systems (Dertouzos, Holland, and Ebener, 1988; Player, Shoben, and Lieberwitz, 1990). This reasoning

is also supported by reference to the "shock" theory of unionism, whereby unions are said to spur improvements in companies' utilization of personnel, technology, and management systems (Rees, 1977). If this is a valid explanation of the findings from this paper, it squares more closely with propositions drawn from organizational punishment theory than does the reprisal for use and fear of reprisal explanation discussed previously. In this regard, recall that involuntary turnover--organizationally rather than individually-initiated separations--was significantly higher among grievance filers (and supervisors of filers) than among nonfilers (and supervisors of nonfilers) in the post-grievance settlement period.

Concerning exit-voice-loyalty theory of intraorganizational and workplace conflict resolution, the findings from this study run counter to the propositions derived from that theory. Across samples of thousands of employees and supervisors drawn from five large nonunion companies over a five-year period, grievance filing--the exercise of voice--is consistently and significantly positively associated with employee turnover--the exercise of exit. This result is directly counter to the central proposition of exit-voice-loyalty theory, and also contrasts strongly with the findings of studies on unionized grievance procedures conducted by labor economists (Freeman and Medoff, 1984). Note, in particular, that voluntary employee turnover (quitting) is significantly higher among grievance filers (and supervisors of grievance filers) than among nonfilers (and supervisors of nonfilers) in the post-grievance settlement period--the type of turnover which exit-voice-loyalty theory and research explicitly claims will be negatively related to the use of voice.

Another proposition derived from exit-voice-loyalty theory is that loyalty will be positively associated with voice and negatively associated with exit. Unfortunately, the framers and users of exit-voice-loyalty theory give such short shrift to loyalty that they seem never to have operationalized or measured the construct (Hirschman, 1970; Freeman and Medoff, 1984). While the present study design did not provide for the collection of perceptual data by which to construct a loyalty measure, a related study of 1100 employees and managerial personnel in a nonunion company that maintains a well-known written grievance system found that loyalty to the company was significantly negatively associated with both grievance filing (voice) and intent to leave the company (exit) (Lewin and Boroff, 1991). Thus, a body of new evidence about nonunion grievance systems casts considerable doubt on the validity of propositions about intraorganizational and workplace conflict resolution and management derived from exit-voice-loyalty theory.

As to organizational justice theory, the study design and evidence presented in this paper do not constitute a direct test of

propositions about intraorganizational and workplace conflict drawn from this theory. The data pertaining to the use of the grievance systems and the settlement of grievances in the five nonunion companies included in this study provide some indirect support for organizational justice-based propositions about procedural justice. In fact, the very existence of these systems, both in the companies studied here and in almost one-half of all publicly-held U.S. companies more broadly (Delaney, Lewin, and Ichniowski, 1989), in itself provides strong support for notions of procedural justice in work organizations.

With respect to distributive justice, it was proposed earlier that for this type of justice to prevail organization members should not be punished for using the grievance system. Here again, perceptual data were not obtained, but the post-grievance settlement data presented in Tables 7 and 8 provide indirect evidence about the presence of distributive justice in these five nonunion companies. Returning to the two alternative explanations of these findings, the reprisal or punishment explanation suggests that distributive injustice, rather than justice, prevails in these organizations. Further from this perspective, organizational members who choose not to use these grievance systems, even if and when they believe that they have been unfairly treated at work, are acting rationally because they expect injustice to result from grievance filing and settlement--and they can observe such injustice operating in the cases of grievance filers and supervisors of filers.

In contrast, the "true performance" explanation may be consistent with the presence of distributive justice in these organizations, especially if performance is regarded by organizational members as a suitable, even preferred, criterion for making employee retention and separation decisions. Indeed, organizations and organizational members who strongly favor meritocracy may be likely to regard the failure to separate "poor" performers as a classic case of distributive injustice. This interpretation receives some additional support from studies of the effects of organizational work force layoffs on those who survive. One such effect is improved individual job performance among survivors in the post-layoff period, and one mechanism for the transmission of this effect is the notion expressed by survivors that they deserved--merited--retention (Brockner and Ichniowski, 1992). Thus, although the evidence presented in this paper is perhaps more salient for assessing propositions about intraorganizational and workplace conflict resolution and management derived from organizational punishment theory, it is also relevant for assessing such propositions derived from organizational justice theory. As with other areas of organizational behavior and industrial relations research, however, the evidence presented here is subject to competing explanations and interpretations, and does not fully confirm or disconfirm any of the aforementioned propositions. All

the more reason, then, for OB and IR scholars to continue their efforts to integrate theory and research on conflict resolution and management in contemporary work organizations.

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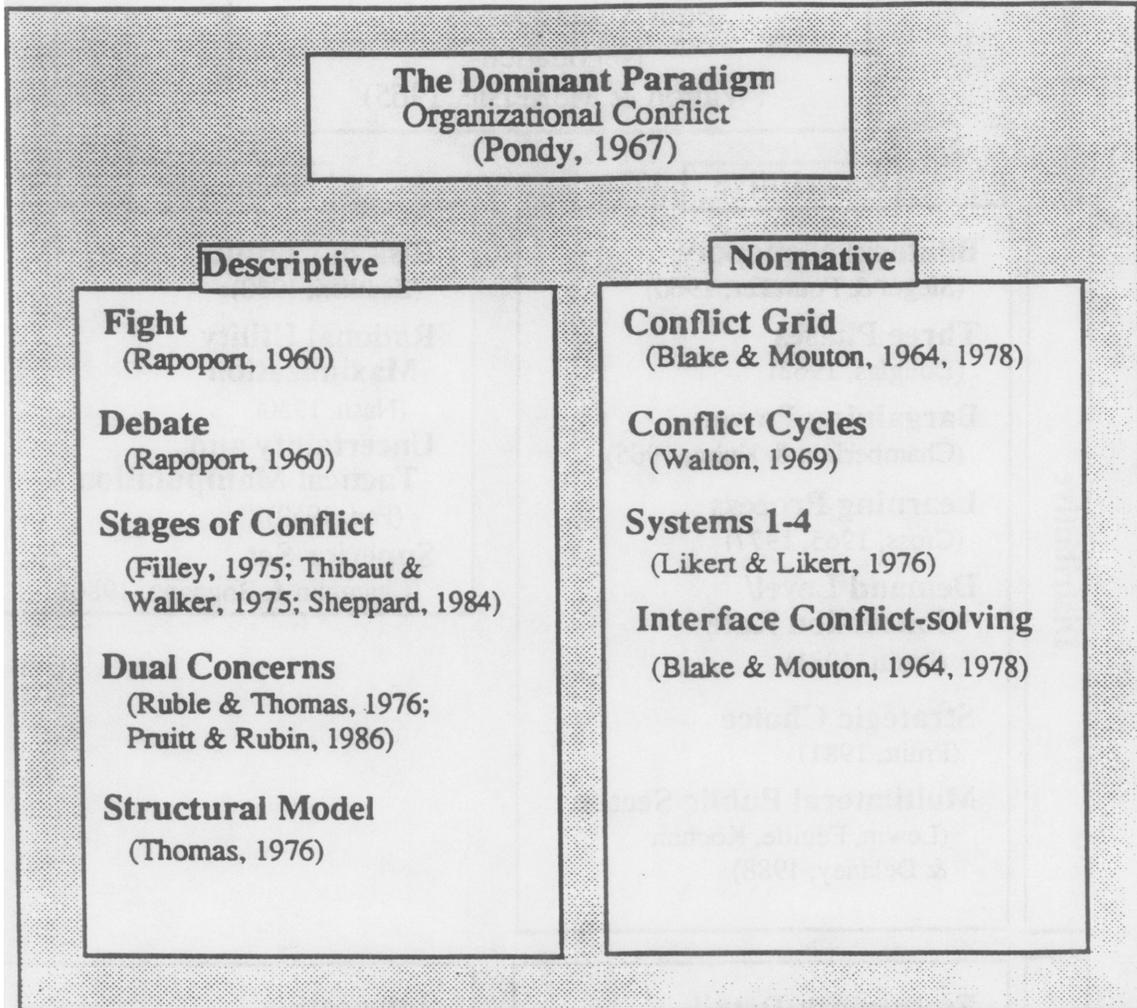
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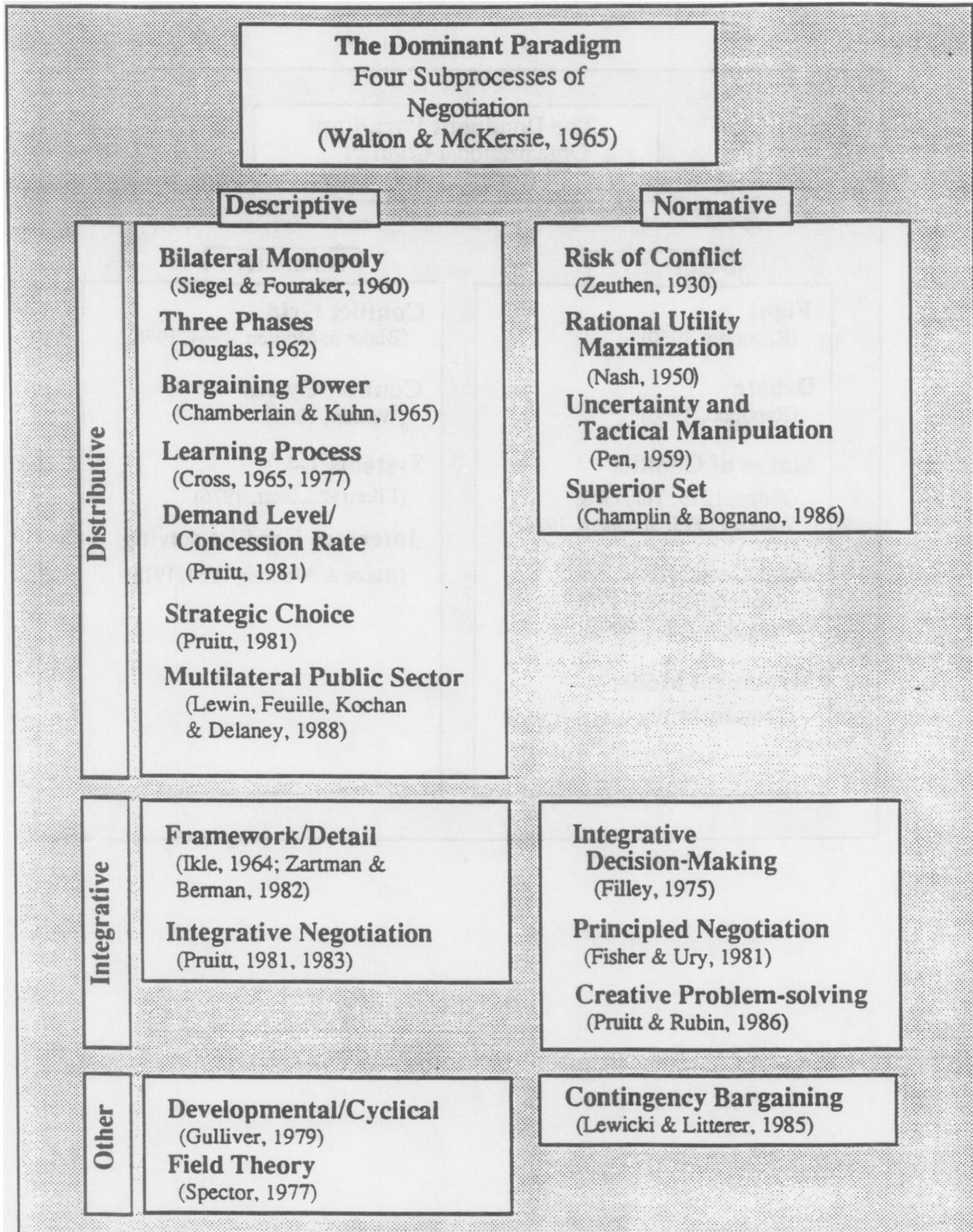
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**Table 1**  
**Models of Conflict**



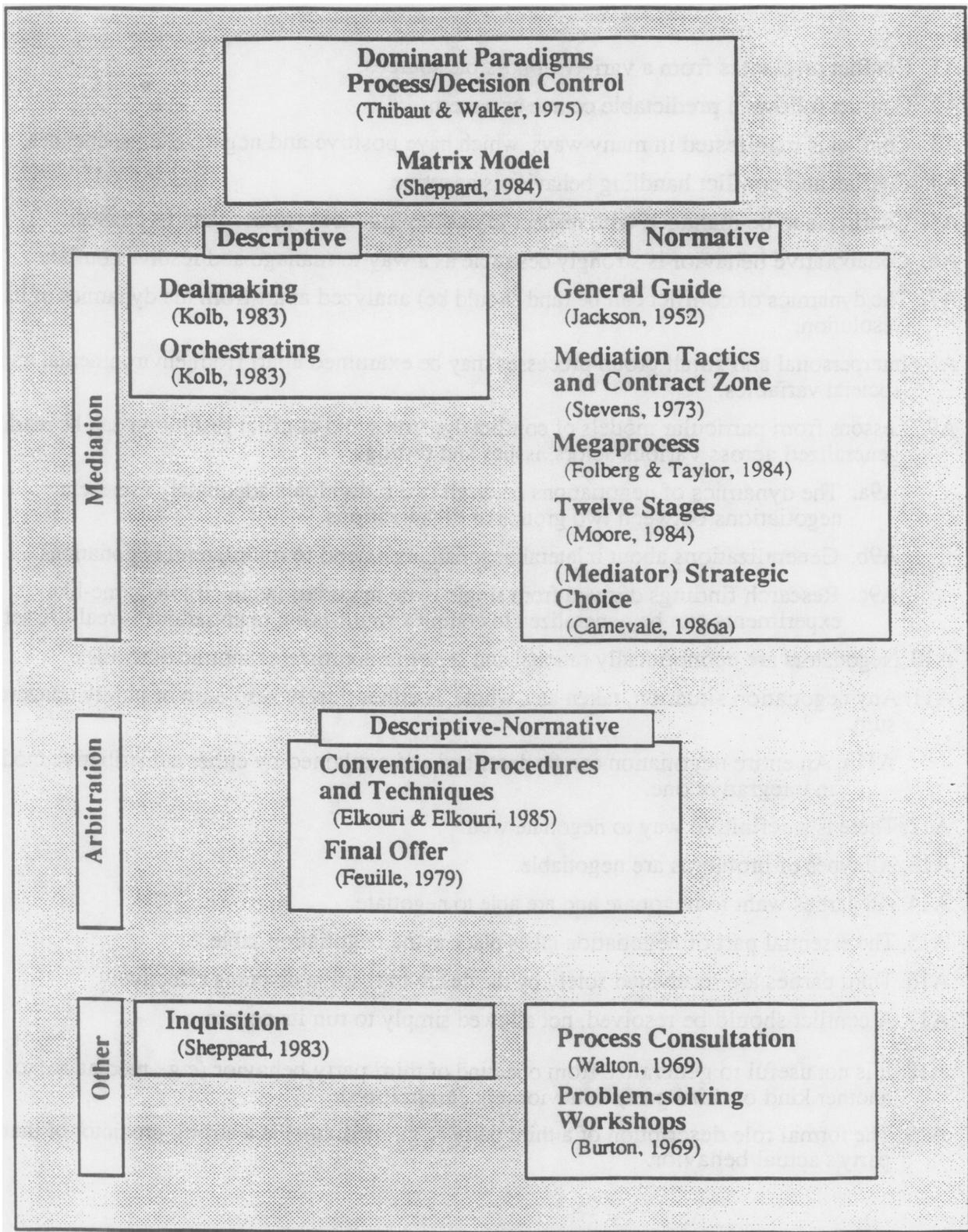
**Table 2**

**Models of Negotiation and Bargaining**



**Table 3**

**Models of Third Party Processes**



**Table 4**  
**Assumptions Underlying Models of**  
**Conflict, Negotiation and Third Party Behavior**

- A1. Conflict originates from a variety of possible sources.
- A2. Conflict follows a predictable course or pattern.
- A3. Conflict is manifested in many ways, which have positive and negative consequences.
- A4. Conflict and conflict handling behavior is adaptive.
- A5. Conflict is to be managed with respect to its consequences (rather than its causes).
- A6. Collaborative behavior is strongly desirable as a way to manage and resolve conflict.
- A7. The dynamics of conflict can be (and should be) analyzed apart from the dynamics of its resolution.
- A8. Interpersonal and small group processes may be examined apart from environmental and societal variables.
- A9. Lessons from particular models of conflict dynamics and conflict resolution can be readily generalized across various actors, issues and settings.
  - A9a. The dynamics of negotiations between two individuals adequately represent negotiations between two groups or organizations.
  - A9b. Generalizations about bilateral negotiations extend to multilateral negotiations.
  - A9c. Research findings derived from single issue negotiations in simple game-like experiments can be generalized to complex multi-issue negotiations in real-life settings.
- A10. Negotiators are economically rational and seek to maximize economic outcomes.
- A11. Any negotiation situation, taken as a whole, is either purely zero-sum or purely nonzero-sum.
  - A11a. An entire negotiation can be described and explained by either a distributive model or an integrative one.
- A12. There is a definitive way to negotiate well.
- A13. All types of problems are negotiable.
- A14. All parties want to negotiate and are able to negotiate.
- A15. The essential part of negotiation takes place at the negotiation table.
- A16. Third parties are motivated solely by the desire to resolve disputes effectively.
- A17. A conflict should be resolved, not allowed simply to run its course.
- A18. It is not useful to generalize from one kind of third party behavior (e.g., mediation) to another kind of third party behavior (e.g., arbitration).
- A19. The formal role description of a third party (e.g., mediator) is a strong predictor of that party's actual behavior.

**Table 5**

**Annual Average Grievance Filing Rates in Five  
Nonunion Businesses, 1985-1988  
(per 100 employees)**

	Firm A	Firm B	Firm C	Firm D	Firm E	Total
	Annual Average, 1985- 1988	Annual Average, 1985- 1988	Annual Average, 1985- 1988	Annual Average, 1985- 1988	Annual Average, 1985- 1988	Annual Average, 1985- 1988
Grievance Step	4.1	3.8	4.7	6.2	5.4	5.1
Grievance Rate Per 100 Employees	1.6	1.3	2.1	2.5	2.2	1.9
Second Step Grievance Rate Per 100 Employees	0.5	0.5	1.0	0.4	1.3	0.8
Third Step Grievance Rate Per 100 Employees	0.1					0.2
• CEO						
• Senior Vice President, Human Resources		0.2				
• Chief Administrative Officer			0.1			
• General Manager				0.2		
• Arbitration Panel					0.3	

**Table 6**

**Level of Grievance Settlement By Issue,  
In Five Nonunion Businesses, 1985-1988  
(in percent of written grievances filed)**

Grievance Issue	<u>Firm A</u> Level				<u>Firm B</u> Level				<u>Firm C</u> Level				<u>Firm D</u> Level				<u>Firm E</u> Level			
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Pay and Work	61	29	9	1	62	30	6	2	58	27	13	2	59	26	12	3	62	26	10	2
Benefits	73	21	5	1	70	24	4	2	68	25	5	2	67	24	8	1	69	21	9	1
Performance & Mobility	51	33	12	4	49	32	14	5	53	25	9	3	52	30	13	5	57	24	16	3
Discipline	56	29	12	3	55	29	12	4	56	26	16	2	54	29	14	3	52	29	13	6
Discrimination	48	31	16	5	49	32	15	4	50	27	19	6	51	24	19	6	50	30	15	5
Supervisory Relations	72	23	3	2	70	24	5	1	72	22	5	1	74	20	6	0	69	23	7	1
Average	62	26	9	3	60	27	10	3	59	27	12	2	59	26	12	3	63	22	12	3

Table 7

Measures of Personnel Activity for Grievance Filers and Nonfilers in Five Nonunion Companies, 1984-1988  
(in annual averages)

Personnel Activity Measure	YEAR				
	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988
<b>Filers</b>					
Performance rating (1 = low, 5 = high)	3.6	3.5	3.6	3.2 <sup>a</sup>	3.0 <sup>e</sup>
Promotion Rate (in %)	4.3	4.1	4.0	1.9 <sup>b</sup>	1.5 <sup>f</sup>
Work Attendance (% of days absent and late)	7.7	7.9	8.2	8.4	8.6
<b>Turnover Rate</b>					
Voluntary	---	---	---	7.7 <sup>c</sup>	8.29
Involuntary	---	---	---	5.9 <sup>d</sup>	6.3 <sup>h</sup>
<b>Nonfilers</b>					
Performance Rating (1 = low, 5 = high)	3.5	3.4	3.6	3.9 <sup>a</sup>	3.8 <sup>e</sup>
Promotion Rate (in %)	4.2	4.2	4.3	3.9 <sup>b</sup>	3.7 <sup>f</sup>
Work Attendance (% of days absent and late)	7.9	8.1	8.3	8.1	8.2
<b>Turnover Rate</b>					
Voluntary	---	---	---	5.8 <sup>c</sup>	6.09
Involuntary	---	---	---	2.3 <sup>d</sup>	2.4 <sup>h</sup>
<b>Total N =</b>	2050	2114	2032	1946	1834

a,b,c,d,e,f,g,h = Differences in rates are significant at  $p < .05$ , according to chi-square tests

Source: David Lewin, "Grievance Procedures in Nonunion Workplaces: An Empirical Analysis of Usage, Dynamics, and Outcomes," in Martin H. Malin, ed., *Labor Arbitration Thirty Years After the Steelworkers Trilogy*, Chicago *Kent Law Review*, Vol. 67, No. 3 (1991), in press.

Table 8

Measures of Personnel Activity for Supervisors of Grievance Filers and Nonfilers in Five Nonunion Companies, 1984-1988  
(in annual averages)

Personnel Activity Measure	YEAR				
	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988
Supervisors of Filers Performance rating (1 = low, 5 = high)	3.8	3.8	3.7	3.4 <sup>a</sup>	3.2 <sup>e</sup>
Promotion Rate (In %)	2.1	2.0	2.1	0.9 <sup>b</sup>	0.8 <sup>f</sup>
Work Attendance (% of days absent and late)	6.4	6.7	6.6	6.9	7.0
Turnover Rate					
Voluntary				4.2 <sup>c</sup>	4.69
Involuntary				3.7 <sup>d</sup>	4.0 <sup>h</sup>
Supervisors of Nonfilers Performance Rating (1 = low, 5 = high)	3.9	3.9	3.9	4.2 <sup>a</sup>	4.1 <sup>e</sup>
Promotion Rate (in %)	2.2	2.1	2.1	2.6 <sup>b</sup>	2.3 <sup>f</sup>
Work Attendance (% of days absent and late)	6.6	6.8	6.7	6.6	6.7
Turnover Rate					
Voluntary				2.9 <sup>c</sup>	3.09
Involuntary				1.2 <sup>d</sup>	1.1 <sup>h</sup>
Total N =	342	321	306	284	259

a,b,c,d,e,f,g,h = Differences in rates are significant at  $p < .05$ , according to chi-square tests.

David Lewin, "Nonunion Grievance Procedures: An Empirical Study of Supervisory Roles and Consequences" working paper, Institute of Industrial Relations, UCLA, February 1991.