

## Identifying Problems and Generating Solutions under Conditions of Conflict

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***Abstract:** Discussion is sometimes poorly suited for solving problems, e.g., when it exacerbates rather than moderates conflict and reduces the likelihood of locating promising solutions. It is proposed that relatively unguided interviews in tandem with Q methodology optimize the possibility of pinpointing problems and locating whatever consensus may exist concerning solutions. A case study is presented of a middle school faculty locked in disagreement about how best to deal with accelerating levels of student misconduct. Interviews with teachers, staff, and administration produced a concourse of problem statements, the Q sorting and factor analysis of which revealed two groups: The Resentful regarded misconduct in the context of a community-wide disrespect for teachers, whereas the Differentiating distinguished between good vs. bad students, and effective vs. ineffective teachers. A consensus on discipline as a central problem led to a second round of interviews and Q sorts focused on possible solutions. The revealed consensus among the three solution factors provided a basis for policy formulation designed to alleviate the problem. Concluding comments address the utility of the procedures employed for problem solving more generally.*

Democracy is premised on reasoned discussion about the most prudent course of action, but prudence becomes less likely as wills come into conflict, anxieties are stimulated, and the conditions for discourse diminish. As Lasswell (1930) long ago pointed out, "Discussion frequently complicates social difficulties, for the discussion by far-flung interests arouses a psychology of conflict..." (p. 196-197). He therefore proposed a "politics of prevention" designed to replace sole reliance on discussion with a more comprehensive program aimed at anticipating sources of strain, so that they could be addressed prior to their developing into contentiousness. But just as medicine has had to develop a range of strategies between the prevention of illness and emergency treatment, so it is that the policy sciences have had to develop strategies between calm discussion at one end of the continuum and

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*Operant Subjectivity, 1999 (October), 23 (1), 31-51.*

all-out war at the other, i.e., for those situations in which incipient animosities have developed but diplomatic relations have not as yet been broken off and voices of good will are still audible.

As collegial relations within groups deteriorate into contests and animosities, third-party consultation is sometimes sought, but by the time the consultant arrives on the scene, it is not always clear what "the problem" actually is, much less what possible solutions might contribute to its resolution. What typically greets the diplomat is X's litany about Y's deeds (and vice versa), or X's complaints about events in which Y's alleged irresponsibility or lack of ethics are implicated. This dialectic is ubiquitous whether X and Y are elementary school children appealing to a teacher, distraught lovers seeking counseling, leaders of urban ethnic groups turning to a judge, or leaders of nation states deferring to NATO commanders.

Two important features of conflict with which any consultant must contend are its stability and its instability. By the time a consultant is called in, sides have often ossified to the point of representing a new equilibrium state in which parties in contention have vested interest and will collaborate to maintain — akin to what Van Eeten (1998) has referred to as "dialogues of the deaf." It is this chronic stability that the consultant must circumvent and eventually weaken if peace is to be restored. Within this stability, however, there is the instability of strategic thrusts and parries as the contending parties try to maximize advantage. This frequently bewildering array of moves and clever counter-moves can constitute the biggest threat to intuition, the consultant's main weapon in performing the task. These considerations apply not only to consultants, but also to parents, managers, and any other individuals intervening in the conflict, for which the term "consultant" will be adopted as a functional designation.

It in no way diminishes the central importance of experience and intuition to suggest that the consultant should welcome collateral procedures and devices which offer promise of significantly supplementing intuition by helping identify central issues in contention and revealing possible directions for concerted action. It is the purpose of the remainder of this paper to illustrate such a procedure and, based upon two case studies, to suggest that Q sorting coupled with interview and negotiation can be useful in situations of any magnitude, from the playground to the battlefield.

## **Problem Identification**

### **Setting**

The participants under consideration consisted of the faculty and administration of a suburban middle school (grades 6 through 8), which will

be referred to as Sommerset School, where the services of the senior author were requested in a problem of faculty discord about student discipline. The middle school had been created a decade earlier, and it brought together under one roof the child-oriented faculty of an elementary school with the content-oriented faculty of a junior high school. Many of the current problems could be traced to that only partially successful implementation.

Neither had faculty been effectively involved in the decision-making surrounding this change in policy, nor were effective steps taken to assure its understanding and acceptance. This contributed to ambiguity about the criteria to employ when students misbehave and to the philosophical clash that the faculty experienced: Were the students to be disciplined as relatively-mature junior high schoolers or as more immature elementary school children? This is not a problem with which the rational-legal tradition of administration can easily cope, for it concerns conduct, both teacher and student, and inequalities in power — hence, there is a moral dimension at its roots (Wagenaar, 1995).

Whereas the administration and teachers at Sommerset had previously met to discuss discipline, a great deal of confusion and disagreement continued to exist regarding the nature of the problem as well as how to address it. A previous survey initiated by the Principal had generated some data on the group as a whole, but had never really delineated the points of agreement and disagreement in a clear manner; several teachers therefore continued to feel that their points of view had been lost in the process. While the survey data produced a composite of the group, expressed as a statistical average, it was not reflective of any specific individual's point of view. This loss of individual perspective significantly reduced the teachers' level of confidence that "the real problem" had actually been identified and named.

### **Method**

Interviews were conducted with members of the faculty, staff, and administration concerning the problems they perceived besetting the school. These interviews were deliberately qualitative, open-ended, and client-centered so as to prejudge nothing, to maximize the opportunity for participants to express themselves as openly as possible, and to build confidence in the fairness and integrity of the consultative process. Interviews took place individually as well as in groups in an effort to accommodate work schedules and to provide for confidentiality where requested. Interviewees were naturally asked what they saw as the discipline problems, and their responses were transcribed as field notes. Careful attention was paid to recording statements as spoken in order not to confuse their meaning by inadvertently subjecting them to interpretations of researchers. Clarification of confusing statements was sought at the time of each interview: The researcher read the notes back and asked for elucidation of any points that were unclear.

The initial focus of the problem identification phase of this intervention consisted of collecting as many problems as the faculty and administration were prepared to acknowledge, and a sense of the discipline problem that the school faced can be inferred from this collection, examples of which follow (in the teachers' own words):

- Too many office detentions are given.
- The kids don't want to put in the effort.
- Teachers don't know how to punish kids effectively.
- The parents don't respect the teachers.
- Kids have too many rights.
- There is fear of retaliation.

And many others, making a total of 44. Phrases such as these constitute the raw materials of a culture at Sommerset and in other institutions. They form the basis of solidarity within subgroups and serve to distinguish groups from one another. In so doing they provide individuals with identity in terms of their contributions to the various discourses. Within this concourse the problem besetting the group will be found, as well as the key to its solution, if such a solution is possible.<sup>1</sup>

In an effort to gain greater clarity into the perspectives at issue and to identify natural fault lines in problem identification within the organization, the faculty and staff were asked to represent their individual views in the form of a Q sort. All 44 statements generated by the teachers, administration, and staff of Sommerset were used; i.e., the usual practice of structuring the Q sample was not followed since the entire concourse was of manageable size.

Each faculty and staff member was provided with a set of the 44 problem statements and instructed to Q sort them according to the distribution in Figure 1, i.e., to prioritize the problems from *important* (+4) to *unimportant* (-4), as has been done in a variety of other decision-making, value-laden, and conflict-management arenas.<sup>2</sup> Thirty responses were obtained. In order to reveal differences among the participants, their Q sorts were intercorrelated and two centroid factors were rotated (varimax) using the QMethod program (Schmolck and Atkinson 1998).

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<sup>1</sup> It is to be expected that different items would be generated in different settings, and even in different middle schools: What is of importance is not the items themselves, therefore, but the process for generating them in specific settings, and for analyzing them.

<sup>2</sup> For recent applications, see Barry and Proops (1999), Brown (1998), Brown, Durning, and Selden (1999), Durning (1999), Maxwell (1999a, 1999b), Pelletier, Kraak, McCullum, Uusitalo, and Rich (1999), Steelman and Maguire (1999), and Van Eeten (1999, pp. 113-142); see also Stephenson (1973, 1987). In recommending inclusion of Q methodology and conflict management training in all U.S. public policy doctoral programs, deLeon and Steelman (1999) have noted Q's particular strength in incorporating values and perspectives into the decisional process.

Figure 1. Q sort distribution

-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4	Score
4	5	5	5	6	5	5	5	4	Frequency

Information about demographics and other variables was forgone in exchange for confidentiality, so it is not possible to reach firm conclusions about any connections between demographics and the factors. Some participants provided their names, however, and some made comments on their score sheets that revealed their identity. This self-identification, coupled with the qualitative interview notes, allowed some participant identification.

Before turning to a consideration of the factors, it is worth appraising the leverage that the procedures employed to this point have managed to achieve. The concourse of problems volunteered by the teachers was obtained under interview conditions that were as permissive and encouraging as possible under the circumstances, and every effort was made to insure anonymity. The Q sample may, therefore, be considered a close approximation to the naturalistic ideal, i.e., a collection of pristine events that are indigenous to the group from which they were drawn. The individual Q sorts were subjective expressions specific to the individuals providing them; hence they retain closeness to the reality they represent. Finally, the two factors that have emerged from the individual operations are inherent in number, structure, and form to the perspectives of the group that has produced them, hence their characterization as dimensions of *operant subjectivity* (Stephenson 1977).

### Interpretation of Factors

The factor loadings indicate in which of the two factors each of the 30 participants belongs. As Table 1 shows, Factor A is numerically larger, hence probably represents the dominant position within the school; however, Factor B is also well defined.

Respondents R2 and R3, for instance, are in Factor A, which means that they ranked the problems in essentially the same order. R9 and R11, on the other hand, are in Factor B, which means that they rank-ordered the problems similarly to one another but in a way different from those individuals in Factor A. Some individuals, such as R10 and R24, had mixed viewpoints; i.e., those individuals with significant loadings in both groups viewed the school's problems in a way similar to Factor A and to some extent like those in Factor B. Some individuals (R5, R27, R30, whose factor loadings carry asterisks) were not as strongly associated with the two groups. One person (R27) was negatively related to Factor B. Three others (Rs 12, 19, 28) demonstrated somewhat unique views unrelated to either A or B, yet not constituting a third factor. These individual perspectives, therefore, remain somewhat obscure.

**Table 1: Factor Matrix for Problem Identification**

Respondent	Factor		Respondent	Factor	
	A	B		A	B
1	-60	40	16		79
2	45		17	46	
3	55		18		70
4	74		19		
5	35*		20	76	
6	55		21	71	
7	55		22	55	
8	47		23	44	
9		63	24	59	43
10	41	45	25	68	
11		60	26	45	49
12			27		-35*
13	52		28		
14	61		29		45
15	65		30	32*	67

***The Resentful Factor A***

Those persons comprising Factor A feel themselves caught between two groups, the students and the administration, neither of which is viewed as having much sympathy for the teacher's plight. On the one hand, the students are seen as virtually untouchable and as having leeway to do as they please, as the following factor scores indicate.

A	B	Statement
+4	0	(28) Discipline is a big problem at Sommerset.
+3	-2	(25) Faculty cannot touch kids without running the risk of being written up.
+2	-4	(14) Kids have too many rights.

Hence, especially in contrast to Factor B, those persons comprising Factor A view discipline as a big problem (+4), regard students as having all kinds of protected rights (+2), and see faculty as being unable to touch them for fear of reprisals (+3). To compound matters, the administration and school board are viewed as equally unsympathetic.

A	B	Statement
+4	-3	(18) There is an attitude that middle school doesn't count for anything.
+3	-4	(11) There's no support from the Administration.
+3	0	(24) The School Board makes decisions that affect the school, but they never come around to see what's going on.

Scheler (1961, 48) wrote that "*ressentiment* is ... chiefly confined to those who *serve* and are dominated at the moment, who fruitlessly resent the sting of authority," and this diagnosis comes close to describing this group of individuals, who do serve under the dominating hand of an authority structure. What keeps Factor A from full-blown *ressentiment*, however, at least as described by Scheler,<sup>3</sup> is the fact that the tributaries of rancor and vengefulness which flow into it are not yet fruitless in the sense that the social setting still provides outlets for expression; i.e., these feelings do not as yet have to be repressed but can still find verbal and behavioral outlet, as they did (for example) not only in the participants' Q sorts, but also in some of the comments which they jotted down on their score sheets, such as the following:

The kids sense that there is an attitude that Sommerset is the ugly stepchild!  
 ... By telling teachers that they are not allowed to give any more office detentions, you are telling the misbehaving students that their rights are more important than the teacher's right to teach and the good kids' rights to learn.  
 ... The Central Office rarely checks on staff, and much of the feedback received from them is negative. ... Parents so often feel their child can do no wrong. I feel parents don't back the teachers and school. ... The upper Administration's lack of communication with the staff along with the feeling of little or no support is a critical factor in our school problems.

And so forth in the same vein, and this spirit of resentment is absent in comments found on the score sheets provided by faculty members comprising Factor B. Finally, coupled with Factor A's resentfulness is a denial that the group with which it identifies is in any way complicit in the discipline situation that exists, as shown in the statements which these participants reject.

<sup>3</sup> According to Scheler, for *ressentiment* to occur, all characteristics connected to it — such as spitefulness, embitterment, desire to detract, greed and envy, competitive jealousy, vengefulness, etc. — must undergo repression, as must any recollection of having had these feelings. As he says, "When it is repressed, vindictiveness leads to *ressentiment*, a process which is intensified when the *imagination* of vengeance, too, is repressed — and finally the very emotion of revenge itself" (p. 49). Factor A is therefore perhaps best characterized as *resentful* in a conventional sense because the rancor which it expresses is too near the surface to be *ressentiment*; on the other hand, that Factor A is more apt to mete out punishment (see statements 10, 30, and 31, *infra*), yet not feel vindictive while doing so, would indicate that *ressentiment* is not far away.

<i>A</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>Statement</i>
-3	0	(10) Too many office detentions are given.
-3	+1	(30) Some teachers too often act disrespectfully toward kids.
-3	+3	(31) Teachers don't know how to punish kids effectively.

In sum, Factor A strongly identifies with teachers and staff in general, and registers complaints against students, Administration, School Board, and parents, all of whom are experienced as lacking understanding and appreciation of teachers, and as placing them in an untenable position. The consequence is resentment and an organizational culture of complaint.

### ***The Differentiating Factor B***

If Factor A can be thought of as being preoccupied with intergroup relations (teachers vs. unappreciative others), those teachers and staff comprising Factor B can be thought of as being concerned with intragroup relations, and especially with discriminating among helpful and harmful elements within Sommerset School itself. As noted in statement 30 above, for instance, Factor B is much more receptive than A to the view that "Some teachers [not all] too often act disrespectfully toward kids." It is this difference, in part, that had contributed to faculty tensions that preceded the request for consultation.

This tendency to discriminate is revealed in the way in which Factor B thinks about discipline in general (as well as in relation to the nature of the students who would be subjected to it). This issue is brought into focus in terms of the factor scores associated with the following statements.

<i>A</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>Statement</i>
0	+4	( 2) Middle school kids still need a lot of guidance.
+4	0	(28) Discipline is a big problem at Sommerset.
0	-4	(39) There's too much concern about self-esteem and a feeling that "little Joey can't feel bad."

Far more than Factor A, Factor B considers middle school kids still in need of a degree of sheltering: They continue to require a lot of guidance (2) and protection against threats to their self-esteem (39). Consequently, B is reticent to go along with the view, strongly embraced by A, that "discipline is a big problem" (28), and this reticence is likely due to B's concern about the way in which discipline might be administered, as expressed in writing on the score sheet of one of the Factor B respondents (11, see Table 1): "I think we need to be very concerned about self-esteem. Too many teachers think to discipline



means to ‘belittle’ students. More effort needs to be put into consequences and choices without harming students’ self-esteem.” Teachers such as these are concerned not only with Sommerset’s discipline problem, but also that any disciplinary measures be administered with due consideration to what are seen as the special needs and relative fragility of this age group.

Factor B, as noted, does not respond to “students” as a general class, but distinguishes among subgroups, as indicated in the following statements.

<i>A</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>Statement</i>
-1	+3	(12) Good kids are put down and made fun of.
+1	+3	(36) Kids who misbehave set the tone for everyone else.

This explains why Factor B is reluctant to embrace the idea of discipline in general (statement 28), since these participants want to make distinctions between subgroups and tailor punishment to fit crimes. Similarly, Factor B makes distinctions within the faculty that are of less salience to Factor A.

<i>A</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>Statement</i>
+1	+4	(27) Some teachers follow and enforce the rules; some do not.
-3	+3	(31) Teachers don’t know how to punish kids effectively.
-1	+2	(17) There are too many grey areas at Sommerset regarding teacher conduct.

In the same way that Factor B distinguishes among subgroups of students, these respondents also make distinctions among the faculty — e.g., between those who enforce the rules and those who do not (27), and between those who can punish effectively and those who cannot (31). This is not to say that B necessarily blames only teachers for not enforcing rules since there are “many grey areas” concerning teacher conduct (17), an encoded criticism of the Principal for allegedly not supporting faculty in a consistent fashion.

**Consensus: The Basis for Moving Forward**

Factors A and B represent two different perspectives, two different philosophies, two different approaches to students; and yet within the two patterns of response can be found areas of agreement and mutual concern, and it is within this consensus that the potential is to be found for cooperative efforts involving administrators, faculty, and staff. The consensus is located among those problems which both A and B agreed are important.

The above issues are aimed directly at student conduct: Kids seem unconcerned with consequences (22) and do not want to be bothered (35), with

<i>A</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>Statement</i>
+4	+4	(22) The kids are not concerned with consequences.
+4	+4	(32) Some kids don't even know what behavior is inappropriate.
+3	+3	(7) It's not the kids so much: it's the lack of standards. Teachers have no standard set of rules that they can apply to everyone.
+3	+3	(35) The kids don't want to put in the effort.
+2	+2	(13) Students intimidate other students.
+2	+2	(29) The chance of getting kids into SBH* class is practically nil, and there's nowhere else to put kids with behavior problems.

\* [SBH=severely behaviorally handicapped]

some not even knowing the difference between appropriate and unacceptable behavior (32), which perhaps contributes to some students intimidating others (13). The system cannot get rid of the main offenders (29) and lacks the necessary tools for dealing with them within the system (7) — hence the frustration and “caught in the middle” sentiment implicit in both factors.

In summary, the application of focused interviewing plus Q methodology has brought the consultation to a clearer vision of the Resentful and Differentiating vectors permeating Sommerset's culture. The concourse of problems which has been identified as existing within the school, the degree of importance attached to each (as recorded in the 30 Q sorts), the points of divergence between the two major perspectives, and finally the points of convergence (the consensus toward which this first study was aimed) all became clearer in the light of this analysis. With the exception of the interpretations provided (for which the authors alone are responsible), all else from start to finish emanated from the participants themselves: the problems, the Q sorts, the two factors — all came from the minds and mouths of the client group. The presentation of the above results, therefore, amounted to holding a mirror up to the teachers and staff of Sommerset so that they might see themselves and co-workers more clearly. In particular, so that they could be made aware that amidst their centrifugal differences, which had led to bickering and declining morale, there were also points of agreement that might provide a centripetal basis for cooperative action.

### **The Search for Solutions**

Despite their obvious differences, a clear consensus emerged across Factors A and B that student discipline is a major problem, and that the issue is of the highest importance. Agreement was also reached on some of the specific manifestations of the problem — student unconcern with consequences, ignorance about the appropriateness of certain behaviors student intimidation

of other students, lack of standard rules, and so forth. The question can, therefore, be asked: Is there a way that the administration, faculty, and staff of Sommerset, despite their demonstrated differences in doctrine and perception, can find common ground in terms of possible solutions to the problem of student discipline? In Van Eeten's (1999) terms, can we fashion a "crosswalk" or "zone of entanglement" between factions A and B?

### Method

A second study was suggested by the authors (and agreed to by the Sommerset personnel) that was structured similarly to the first study, but focused on possible solutions to the problems that had now been identified. As previously, a beginning was made by interviewing the same participants and asking them to suggest possible solutions, the result being the nomination of 35 potential solutions, of which the following are illustrative:

- Assign a grade of F for work not done by any student during a period of suspension.
- Have the Principal clarify existing discipline policies.
- Send unruly kids directly to in-school [i.e., in-school suspension].

Also as in the previous study, the administration, faculty, and staff were asked to prioritize the 35 solutions, i.e., to Q sort them from what they would judge to be the *most effective* solutions to the discipline problems (+4) to the *most ineffective* solutions (-4). This time, 28 return-mail responses were available for analysis. The  $28 \times 28$  correlation matrix was factor analyzed, as previously. This time three factors emerged from the data, indicating that the participants held three different attitudes concerning which solutions would be most effective. As before, concern was with identifying any possible consensus that might receive sufficient support to be translated into school policy.

### Factor Interpretations

Table 2 shows the three groups, labeled X, Y, and Z, found in this study. Given limited foreknowledge, these factors were rotated judgmentally in an effort to bring into focus the same two groups of participants found in the previous study. No correlation between respondent numbers in the two studies was found.

**Factor X (Punishment)** is very likely comprised mainly of the Resentful Factor A participants of the previous study, and their solution to the discipline problem is to punish. Although participants had the option of keeping their identities confidential, the majority of those defining this factor identified themselves. Several of the Resentful included their names in both studies, thereby lending credence to this inference, and the statement scores show a marked preference for the kind of uncompromising (and, in some cases,

Table 2: Factor Matrix for Solution Search

Respondent	Factor			Respondent	Factor		
	X	Y	Z		X	Y	Z
1			72	16		62	
2		67		17		75	
3			49	18	46		
4		36*		19	74		
5	46	53		20		72	
6		55		21	43*	37*	37*
7		45		22	37*	39*	
8	68			23	52	36*	
9	48	37*		24	46		73
10		81		25			
11	65			26			52
12			58	27			37*
13		70		28	42*		36*
14			41*	29	Duplicate of no. 13		
15		70	-34*	30	Blank score sheet		

\* [Individuals not strongly associated with a factor.]

punitive) solutions one might have expected of this group. The following factor scores are those that X considers effective, a view not shared by Y or Z.

X	Y	Z	Statement
+4	-2	+1	( 5) Reconsider, revise, and then enforce a dress code.
+4	+2	-1	( 6) Administer multiple punishments for multiple offenses. (A student who is punished for showing disrespect to one teacher shouldn't be exempt from additional punishments if, later in the day, he or she also shows disrespect to other teachers.)
+3	-3	+1	(12) Incorporate Applied Arts grades into students' grade averages so that students will take these classes more seriously. [Applied Arts included skills such as chorus, painting, woodworking, etc.] <sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> With regard to statement 12, it is important to note that much of the resentment expressed emanated from the Applied Arts faculty; and they had further reason to feel unappreciated inasmuch as grades from these classes were not included in students' overall grade averages. The situation gave way to feelings among this sub-faculty that the courses were somehow second-class.

Factor X favored standardization and, was less willing to compromise on matters of student conduct than Y or Z. In this and other statements, X made clear that rules should be followed explicitly and infractions should be dealt with immediately and without exception. Elsewhere in the Factor X array, proposed solutions that this group judged ineffective — creating special programs for those with behavior problems, creating a procedure for early detection of children with behavior problems, creating extended services for IEP (Individual Educational Plan) children, etc. — were assigned scores of -4 and -3, indicating X's unwillingness to make allowances for anyone. If rules are broken, X favors immediate, inescapable, uncompromising punishment.

Factor Y (Quarantine) advocates a strategy of quarantine and eagerly embraces many of the proposed solutions that X rejects, viz. (scores for Factors X, Y, Z, respectively).

X	Y	Z	Statement
-4	+4	0	( 9) Create a special program for those kids (say, 30 to 40 of them) who are primary behavior problems.
-3	+4	-2	(14) Hire a person to be in charge of in-school suspension.
0	+3	-3	( 2) Establish a process so that teachers who send students to the Office aren't subjected to the third-degree.
-3	+2	-1	(10) Address the problem of IEP* kids, e.g., creating extended services for them, opening another class, etc.

\* [IEP=Individual Educational Plan]

Like X, Factor Y is willing to take a relatively hard stand against discipline problems, but whereas X opposes special programs because they are associated with coddling, Y supports them as a strategy designed to isolate certain problem areas — e.g., by hiring a special person to supervise in-school suspensions, creating a separate location for problem cases, etc. — so that faculty can get on with the task of teaching. Factor Y also displays more sensitivity than the other two factors to the way in which faculty are greeted by the Principal when they refer problem students to the Office. As shown in statement 2, Y loaders feel the Principal is too prone to question faculty decisions rather than support them, and they place resolution of this issue high on their list of effective solutions to the discipline problem.

Factor Z (Coordination) is different from X and Y, both of which adopt different strategies for dealing with the same problem, that of troublesome students. Z's strategy focuses more on the teaching staff, and its solution is to upgrade the command and control capacity of the staff, primarily through cooperation and coordination. Note, for example, the following two proposed solutions that Group Z considers as most effective.

<i>X</i>	<i>Y</i>	<i>Z</i>	<i>Statement</i>
-1	0	+4	(16) Encourage teachers to support one another so that they will be unified and strong enough to enforce the rules.
-1	-3	+4	(18) Standardize teacher monitoring of hall behavior so that teachers have to enforce existing rules (e.g., about running in the hall).

Factor Z's solution, in part, is to bring the staff together into a more effective and coordinated unit. Support for one another (16) and standardization of hall monitoring (18) constitute the leading edge of Z's three-pronged strategy. The other two prongs consist of enforcing already-existing rules (13, 18) and transmitting clear messages to the students (24). In addition, Group Z wishes to establish its own version of Lasswell's "politics of prevention," i.e., to devote a certain portion of energy to early detection so problems can be anticipated rather than simply reacted to after the fact (21).

<i>X</i>	<i>Y</i>	<i>Z</i>	<i>Statement</i>
0	-3	+3	(13) Enforce the current rule about lockers, i.e., that students cannot go to their lockers between or during classes.
-3	-2	+3	(21) Create a process for the early identification of kids who will have behavior problems.
-2	0	+3	(24) Set up procedures and processes for explaining the rules to students so that they really "get it."

Examination of proposals which Factor Z considered ineffective also indicated that this group did not favor giving faculty more power over students: Z's strategy was not to increase fire power, but to reduce ambiguities through clarification of policy and standardization of application.

The school personnel, while in general agreement on problem identification, were divided along XYZ lines concerning implementation of solutions. However, as in the prior study, there was evidence within the diversity of some commonly agreed-upon courses of action. Close examination of the most promising opportunities for collaboration reveals why they emerged as consensual. Consider proposals 25 and 30 in particular. Faculty and staff comprising Factor X (punishment) are anxious to apply swift punishment for infractions and to leave misbehaving students with no alternative but to comply, and proposals 25 and 30 are naturally appealing from this vantage point. Factor Y (quarantine) displays a desire to isolate problem students and to insure that those in authority support one another, and

<i>X</i>	<i>Y</i>	<i>Z</i>	<i>Statement</i>
+3	+3	+3	(25) Establish a procedure for parents to sign an agreement about the rules of conduct and the consequences for misconduct that will apply to their child.
+2	+3	+4	(30) Consistently follow rules and regulations already in existence, such as the Student Conduct Code.
+3	+2	+1	(27) Establish standard consequences for specific behaviors, regardless of the student's prior record.
+2	+1	+2	(20) Apply rules consistently rather than situationally.

so these same proposals would be appealing from this perspective. Finally, Factor Z's theory (coordination) is that if rules are clarified and the adults (including parents) work in concert, many of the problems will disappear, hence the appeal of these two proposals from this angle as well. In short, there was a common desire for consistency in the application of rules and regulations (solutions 20 and 30), as well as for closing the loophole between faculty and parents (25), and for standardizing consequences (27).<sup>5</sup>

The consultants sought to widen the consensual base in this particular intervention by pointing out opportunities for "policy bartering" among the three factors, as in the following two proposed solutions (scores for Factors X, Y, and Z, respectively).

<i>X</i>	<i>Y</i>	<i>Z</i>	<i>Statement</i>
+4	+2	-1	( 6) Administer multiple punishments for multiple offenses. (A student who is punished for showing disrespect to one teacher shouldn't be exempt from additional punishments if, later in the day, he or she also shows disrespect to other
-1	0	+4	(16) Encourage teachers to support one another so that they will be unified and strong enough to enforce the rules.

Proposal 6 is obviously of central concern to Factor X (and to a lesser extent Y), but no less than 16 is to Factor Z, yet neither factor is strongly opposed to the other's proposal. Would it be possible for those faculty comprising X, Y, and Z to enter into a compact to support one another's proposals? Based on the

<sup>5</sup> Evidence of consensus was also apparent at the negative end of the three factor arrays. The proposal to "seek parental permission to paddle specific students," for example, received scores of -4 across the board, indicating its universal unacceptability. Other rejections received no further consideration, given the search for positive suggestions that might be enacted as policies designed to deal with the discipline problem.

results of the data analysis, this and other possibilities for negotiation were highlighted for consideration by the faculty, staff, and administration.

### **Implementation, Outcome, and Implications**

These two sequential studies have demonstrated the possibility of achieving some semblance of policy direction from among participants who were somewhat at odds at the time of consultation, and the procedures employed are of general applicability. While in conflict, participants are typically preoccupied with differences and often less aware of possible sources of agreement which procedures such as the above can uncover and bring to their attention. Information of this sort is inherent in the group and can provide an accurate self-reflection, thereby presenting contending parties with the rare opportunity to work together on matters about which no one disagrees.

Implementation is that phase of the decision making process in which particular preferences are sanctioned by converting them into concrete rules, regulations, and procedures. The main consensual solutions revealed above — consistent applications of regulations, standardization of consequences, and cooperation with parents — point in a clear direction. However, they are too abstract as written and would require translation into more specific terms to be useful as codes of conduct. One possibility suggested to the school was to take advantage of study results to constitute a working committee of representatives from Factors X, Y, and Z, to serve as a microcosm of the school (Brown 1974; Gargan and Brown 1993) with the task of converting the consensus into proposed procedures for consideration by the entire faculty and staff.

Something akin to this recommendation was, in fact, pursued. Within a month of the study conclusion, the Principal convened a committee on discipline comprised of representatives from Factors X, Y, and Z, many of whom were by then known to each other and to the Principal. Various concerns were aired and proposals advanced. A major source of disruption in the school had consisted of aggression and intimidation in the hallways. One successful policy that emerged and was applied required problem students to remain in their classrooms until all other students had traversed the hallways to their next classes. However, Applied Arts faculty members, who had been the primary source of resentment and complaint about student misconduct, now began expressing displeasure that this policy was causing delays in starting classes, since problem students were invariably late. A modification was then proposed to excuse problem students early so that they could be in their next classrooms before the other students were released, but this, too, proved unacceptable to the Applied Arts faculty. Problem students had already begun to express dislike for the new arrangement and were altering their conduct to be allowed to go to classes at the same time as their fellow students. The new



policy was, therefore, at least partially successful insofar as behavior was voluntarily adjusted in light of experienced sanctions (Reisman 1999). The policy was consequently declared a success and was terminated. By the next autumn term (six months after the intervention), all prior initiatives had been abandoned and the Principal announced that the new school year's emphasis would not be on the negative issue of discipline, but on the more positive issue of learning. The social system had come full circle.

Our conclusion is that this particular intervention was only marginally successful at best and inconsequential at worst. Despite having been presented with new leverage and shown a possible way out of the difficulty, participants failed to take full advantage of this opportunity and appeared to slide back to a more emotionally satisfying pre-intervention position.

This specific consultation had no lasting impact beyond the short run. This does not detract from the potential benefit that the conflict resolution procedures can offer to proactive change agents working with groups and organizations under conditions of conflict. The use of open-ended interviewing for gathering problem statements and proposed solutions pays respect to participants and strengthens the belief that within themselves will be found one of the keys to unlock the door to new development and growth.

Unlike surveys or other item testing procedures that rely on group averages, Q methodology neither masks the reality of conflict nor obscures points of contention. It clearly articulates differences in a manner that allows them to be considered openly rather than as underground currents of resentment and distrust. More importantly, it illuminates areas of consensus, thereby providing a basis for working together to design mutually acceptable solutions. In tandem, these techniques are particularly valuable in settings where, in spite of disagreements, individuals must continue to work in close proximity and cooperate toward the accomplishment of group and organizational tasks.

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## Appendix

### Problems Q Sample (N=44)

<i>No.</i>	<i>Statement</i>
1	There are no opportunities for kids to achieve in ways that are important to them.
2	Middle school kids still need a lot of guidance.
3	Not enough is done to let parents know kids are doing well.
4	Teachers only stick themselves and their friends when they give in-school suspension.
5	The Administration seems to believe that if we had better instruction, discipline problems would go away.
6	A lot of the issues facing Sommerset are communication issues.
7	It's not the kids so much; it's the lack of standards. Teachers have no standard set of rules that they can apply to everyone.
8	Teachers are not rewarded or patted on the back.
9	LD kids are held to a different standard and are excused for the same misbehavior that other kids do.
10	Too many office detentions are given.
11	There's no support from the Administration.
12	Good kids are put down and made fun of.
13	Students intimidate other students.
14	Kids have too many rights.
15	The parents don't respect the teachers.
16	Kids are uncontrollable in the halls.
17	There are too many grey areas at Sommerset regarding teacher conduct.
18	There is an attitude that middle school doesn't count for anything.
19	The Principal has to spend too much time with discipline problems.
20	The LD class is used as a dumping ground.
21	The kids don't believe in themselves.
22	The kids are not concerned with consequences.
23	The school gets no support from home.
24	The School Board makes decisions that affect the school, but they never come around to see what's going on.
25	Faculty cannot touch kids without running the risk of being written up.
26	There is a problem with working with kids during DSP.
27	Some teachers follow and enforce the rules; some do not.
28	Discipline is a big problem at Sommerset.
29	The chance of getting kids into SBH class is practically nil, and there's nowhere else to put kids with behavior problems.
30	Some teachers too often act disrespectfully toward kids.
31	Teachers don't know how to punish kids effectively.

<i>No.</i>	<i>Statement</i>
32	Some kids don't even know what behavior is inappropriate.
33	Some parents can't afford to keep their kids on medication.
34	The School Board displays a lack of interest in extracurricular programs
35	The kids don't want to put in the effort.
36	Kids who misbehave set the tone for everyone else.
37	Some faculty are unwilling to do their part with in-school suspension.
38	The community does not support education.
39	There's too much concern about self-esteem and a feeling that "little Joey can't feel bad."
40	Teachers are segregated in teams and don't communicate with one another.
41	Teachers don't have a sense of what parents think.
42	The attitude of "obey me or else" undermines the credibility of the faculty.
43	Even the bright kids have no direction, no guidance, don't feel like they can succeed.
44	There is fear of retaliation.

### *Policies Q Sample (N=35)*

<i>No.</i>	<i>Statement</i>
1	Even if parents must be called, make sure that students still serve Office detention.
2	Establish a process so that teachers who send students to the Office aren't subjected to the third-degree.
3	Assign a grade of F for work not done by any student during a period of suspension.
4	Seek parental permission to paddle specific students.
5	Reconsider, revise, and then enforce a dress code.
6	Administer multiple punishments for multiple offenses. (A student who is punished for showing disrespect to one teacher shouldn't be exempt from additional punishments if, later in the day, he or she also shows disrespect to other teachers.)
7	Give instant consequences to students for disrespectful behavior toward teachers—e.g., teacher detention, Office detention, in-school suspension, etc.
8	Disallow gum-chewing in the building during school hours.
9	Create a special program for those kids (say, 30 to 40 of them) who are primary behavior problems.
10	Address the problem of IEP kids, e.g., creating extended services for them, opening another class, etc.
11	Have the Principal clarify existing discipline policies.
12	Incorporate Unified arts grades into students' grade averages so that students will take these classes more seriously.

<i>No.</i>	<i>Statement</i>
13	Enforce the current rule about lockers, i.e., that students cannot go to their lockers between or during classes.
14	Hire a person to be in charge of in-school suspension.
15	Authorize teachers to remove specific troublesome students from a class for a one- or two-day period.
16	Encourage teachers to support one another so that they will be unified and strong enough to enforce the rules.
17	Make in-school suspension less "fun," e.g., by having students pick up their own work and sit quietly in their seats.
18	Standardize teacher monitoring of hall behavior so that teachers have to enforce existing rules (e.g., about running in the hall).
19	Draw up a list of "most troublesome behaviors" and their consequences which all students and staff would be expected to know.
20	Apply rules consistently rather than situationally.
21	Create a process for the early identification of kids that will have behavior problems.
22	Do not permit students to call home during school hours for discipline-related matters.
23	Establish mechanisms for teachers to register their concerns with the Principal on an on-going basis—e.g., suggestion box, meetings set aside as gripe sessions, etc.
24	Set up procedures and processes for explaining the rules to students so that they really "get it."
25	Establish a procedure for parents to sign an agreement about the rules of conduct and the consequences for misconduct that will apply to their child.
26	To cut down on movement in the hallways, have students remain in their seventh period classrooms.
27	Establish standard consequences for specific behaviors, regardless of the student's prior record.
28	For students who are in detention or have been suspended, do not give time-off for good behavior.
29	Relate punishment to misbehavior—e.g., have a student who has been rude write a report on rudeness.
30	Consistently follow rules and regulations already in existence, such as the Student Conduct Code.
31	Send unruly kids directly to in-school.
32	Work toward standardization of the conditions under which faculty should refer students to the Office, so as to reduce the variability in number of Office referrals.
33	Encourage the Principal to take seriously (i.e., not to question) a teacher who refers a student to the Office.
34	Insure that Unified Arts are represented, or at least notified, when teams meet with parents.
35	Establish a rule that damage to school property will be paid for by kids who create the damage.