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Résumé de l'article

Dans un monde en changement, l'organisation s'ajuste aux besoins de son environnement. Dans le contexte des années 1980, la tangente prise par les entreprises privilégie la fonction ressources humaines en lui conférant un rôle prépondérant dans l'atteinte des objectifs organisationnels. Au cours de la dernière décennie, les chercheurs ont développé de nouvelles approches de gestion des ressources humaines et les praticiens ont vanté les mérites d'une préoccupation accrue de cette ressource dans l'organisation. Cependant, qu'en est-il réellement? Cette étude tente de retracer l'évolution de la fonction ressources humaines entre 1978 et 1989 au Québec et de vérifier si les perceptions qu 'en ont les directeurs généraux et les directeurs des ressources humaines dans des entreprises du secteur secondaire privé ont sensiblement changé au cours de cette même période.

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Mending Fences, Building Bridges
The Effect of Relationship by Objectives on Conflict

ROBERT HEBDON
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This paper evaluates twenty-four Relationships by Objectives (RBO) programs conducted by the Education Relations Commission in Ontario. RBO, a form of preventive mediation, applies problem-solving techniques to attempt to reduce such unnecessary conflict as language disputes over grievances, strikes, and the time in negotiations. Mean conflict scores of the RBO boards are compared, before and after RBO, with those of the education sector and a control group of boards. Some evidence is found of a "half-life" effect for RBO programs since long-run conflict scores returned to pre-RBO levels. However, RBO appears to be effective in reducing conflict as measured by time to reach a settlement and number of grievance arbitrations over language issues. By examining school boards where RBO had a negative impact, some possible causes of failure are identified and appropriate recommendations made.

As a form of third-party intervention in collective bargaining disputes, mediation may fall into two categories. The oldest, most commonly used type is dispute mediation used during the negotiation of a new or renewed agreement. A second kind of mediation, originally developed by the U.S.

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Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service in the early 1970s, is preventive mediation that takes place away from the collective bargaining process (Popular 1976). The purpose of preventive mediation is to devise ways to separate the substantive or distributive issues from the relationship issues that quite often get in the way of the parties reaching agreement. In other words, if a way could be found to ensure that the true differences between the parties were on issues of substance, then the interests of both parties might be better served (Gandz and Beatty 1986). One form of preventive mediation devised for this purpose is Relationship by Objectives (RBO).

This paper evaluates twenty-four RBO programs run by the Education Relations Commission (ERC) in Ontario between 1981 and 1991. A combined quantitative and qualitative methodology is used. First, we attempt to measure the general impact of RBO on workplace conflict. Second, using the results of the first step to inform our analysis, we document some reasons for RBO failures.

RELATIONSHIP BY OBJECTIVES

The general purpose of RBO is to achieve an improvement in the relationship between the parties involved. Normally, RBO will follow some perceived deterioration in the relationship caused by such factors as a recent strike, a changeover of key management or union decision makers, or the threat of closure or shutdown due to poor productivity caused by worsening labour relations. In Ontario, RBO is provided in two jurisdictions: under the Ontario Ministry of Labour which oversees collective bargaining under the main collective bargaining statute, the Ontario Labour Relations Act; and under the Education Relations Commission (ERC) which administers collective bargaining between teachers and school boards. A common feature of these two RBO programs is the requirement that both parties to the collective bargaining process must agree in advance to participate. Since 1981, the RBO program administered by the ERC has followed a practice of accepting all joint requests for preventive mediation in RBO. The ERC does not screen out potential RBO participants so long as there is a mutual agreement to participate and the parties bear the cost of the program.

The general approach to RBO has been to have the key union and management representatives attend a two- or three-day seminar conducted by trained facilitators. RBO programs occur in a location away from the workplace and in a non-collective bargaining year. With guidance and focus provided by the facilitators, the parties set about identifying the problems they believe affect their relationship. From this problem identification stage, specific action plans are developed, and responsibilities assigned for their

resolution. The parties conclude by agreeing to a process and timetable for evaluating progress made toward the implementation of the various commitments contained in the action plans (Gray, Sinicropi and Hughes 1981). Thus, a necessary assumption underlying RBO is the parties' concurrence that it would be mutually advantageous to establish good communications, credibility, and cooperation away from the bargaining table (Ontario Ministry of Labour 1982).

RESEARCH ON RBO

While relationship improvement may be the primary goal of RBO, other purposes can be served such as reestablishing open and frank discussions on matters of mutual concern, heightening the appreciation of each other's point of view, and increasing mutual trust and respect (Step, Baker and Barrett 1982). Gray et al. (1981) point out that while the program is very process-oriented, it can lead to substantial improvements in the relationship through contract changes, alternative organizational arrangements for negotiating contracts, or more effective structural designs for administering labour agreements. In fact they view RBO as an excellent example of a structured and systematic approach to changing the attitudes of the parties as conceptualized in the Walton and McKersie (1965) attitudinal structuring model.

RBO deals with issues that are mostly long-term in nature and distinctly different from those that lend themselves to crisis management or even to a more traditional form of bargaining (Peterson and Tracey 1985). Thus, a five-year span may be needed before the root system, which produced the original animosities, can be replaced by new and healthier procedures (Blake, Mouton and Sloma 1972). As a result, success in RBO will depend on institutionalizing the process of change in the relationship through the establishment of procedures, rules, and structures to channel and process this conflict. However, like many organization development (OD) interventions, RBO assumes that the causes of conflict are interpersonal rather than economic, and that conflict is pathological and needs to be eliminated (Bergman 1988). This problem has prompted some authors to question the appropriateness of applying RBO to collective bargaining disputes since union-management relationships are defined by an inherent conflict of interest and some conflict may even be viewed as desirable (Brett, Goldberg, and Ury 1980).

In fact, Kochan and Dyer (1976) argue that many OD models (such as RBO) are inappropriate for the union-management context because companies are structured hierarchically and the third-party consultant is usually brought in by a superior to deal with conflict between subordinates

or subordinate groups. The consultant's relationship is strictly with the superior. Diagnosis and recommendations for change are made to the superior who has the authority to implement the change. However, Brett et al. (1980) point out that whereas the OD consultant to management has to sell the change strategy to management, the third-party consultant in a union-management relationship has to sell unilateral changes and mediate bilateral change. Also, since the union is not a hierarchical organization, any recommendations which require change in the parties' interaction pattern require joint agreement.

While Kochan and Dyer (1976) characterize the OD consultant's conflict-management goal as the desire to reduce the total amount of conflict in the system, Strauss (1979) says that OD consultants assume that the main impediments to agreement are misunderstandings, personality differences, and immature non-authentic relations. In the latter case, increased trust and authenticity should yield a win-win solution. Brett et al. (1980) point out that while this may be a fair characterization of much of the OD literature, it fails to recognize the organization structure and design subfields within OD. Here conflict is viewed as structural rather than psychological: that is, since conflict is not bad per se, structural rather than behavioral interventions are needed to control conflict.

In their review of the organizational behaviour literature, Brett and Hammer (1982) suggest that intraorganizational conflict (not to mention collective bargaining) tends to be seen as having no legitimate role in organizations that are rationally structured and managed. This prevalent view assumes that conflict adversely affects individual efficiency and organizational performance (Pfeffer 1981). They point out, however, that while a unionized organization is anathema to the functional-rational view of organizations, from the political perspective the union is just another interest group participating in the power struggle. Not only does conflict have a legitimate role in political models of organizations, but conflict and bargaining are considered to be basic aspects of organizational decision making. The presence of conflict does not mean the organization is in the process of destroying itself, but only that there is a heterogeneity of preferences and values within the organization (Weick 1979). From this perspective conflict must be managed, not eliminated. It must be regulated in such a way as to preserve the internal heterogeneity of preferences and values. Thus OD far from trying to eradicate conflict, should be geared toward the preservation of heterogeneity and involved in designing structures and processes within which effective bargaining and problem solving can occur (Brett et al. 1980).

Finally, RBO embodies increased participation from the bottom up by permitting decisions to be influenced from the plant floor. Thus, RBO is

one of the few recent innovations in labour relations that is responsive to the trend toward greater worker involvement and the erosion of top-down labour-management relations at the plant level. Also, this grass roots involvement in implementation is a major reason for its apparent acceptance and success (Young 1982).

In summary, many positive results have been attributed to RBO, including fewer grievances, fewer arbitration cases and wildcat strikes, early and amiable settlement of contracts, shorter negotiations, and general improvements in labour-management relations (ERC 1991; Bergman 1988; Gray et al. 1981). Unfortunately, the current literature on the extent to which RBO programs have contributed to this state of affairs has been inconclusive. While there have been a number of attempts to rectify this deficiency, existing studies have employed relatively small sample sizes, failed to include a control group, or utilized retrospective pretests (Bergman 1988). This latter technique asked post-RBO participants about their perceptions of their relationships in the pre-RBO period. Even where reasonable steps were taken to include measures taken before and after RBO, inadequate measures were taken to control for factors such as differences in industry, organization size, length and quality of the relationship, type of union, and geographic region. Consistent with this critique is the view of some authors that all programs of worker participation constitute organizational interventions, and that any evaluation of their effectiveness therefore requires a before and after experimental design with control groups (Brett and Hammer 1982).

In summary, previous studies attempting to isolate the pure effect of an RBO program on the relationship between the parties have been fraught with many design and statistical problems. This study endeavours to remedy this situation through the use of a unique and comprehensive data set covering collective bargaining in the education sector of the province of Ontario.

THE EDUCATION SECTOR IN ONTARIO

Ontario, with a population of over ten million people, has the largest school system in Canada. All collective bargaining between school boards and their respective teachers' unions is regulated by the School Boards and Teachers Collective Negotiations Act, R.S.O. 1980 (hereinafter, the Act). While the authority for collective bargaining remains at the local or school board level, the Act imposes a certain uniformity of process and procedure that the parties must follow during collective bargaining. For example, all collective agreements must expire on August 31 in the year in which they cease to operate; both parties must have at least one bargaining session

in January during the last year of the collective agreement; and failure to reach agreement before the date of expiry may result in a fact-finder being appointed. Should either party desire to impose sanctions in the form of a strike or lockout, fact-finding must take place and the report of the fact-finder made public.

Beyond setting out the policies and procedures that govern teacher-school board negotiations in Ontario, the Act also established the ERC with a mission to help the parties develop harmonious relations and to make or renew collective agreements. Because of its broad mandate, the ERC has kept detailed information on almost all aspects of the more than 2700 rounds of teacher-school board negotiations since its inception in 1975. This provides a rare opportunity to control for many factors not taken into account in other RBO studies. For example, the Act sets out a common framework for negotiations; many negotiating issues are identical; bargaining units are characterized by occupational and educational level homogeneity; much of the funding is through the same government ministry; and, since 1982, the election of school board trustees takes place on a province-wide basis every three years.

Since 1981, RBO workshops have been among the remedies available to the parties for dealing with conflict. To date, a total of twenty-five RBO workshops have been conducted through the ERC. However, because of insufficient post-RBO data on the most recent case, it was excluded from this study.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Based on previous RBO research we developed the hypothesis that relationship improvement through RBO should reduce overall conflict levels by eliminating unnecessary conflict. Such conflict as petty grievances, bargaining in bad faith charges, overuse of third-party procedures, and strikes may be reduced or eliminated by RBO. The first stage of our research involved the comparison of mean conflict scores (see below) of the twenty-four school boards that had used RBO before and after RBO, with the same scores for the average of the education sector. While the ERC analysis was limited to three contracts or bargaining rounds before and after RBO (ERC 1991), our analysis included both a short-term (three contracts) and a long-term period (all contracts) before and after the RBO program. This approach is based on the assumption that the ultimate test of RBO's success is its ability to reduce conflict both in the short and long run.

Additionally, to overcome one major criticism levelled at previous evaluations of RBO programs, namely, the lack of a control group, we

decided to utilize a version of a true experimental design known as the pre-test, post-test control group. This design was modified by the usage of a non-randomly assigned or matched sample control group (Kervin 1992).[1] We constructed a control group of school boards that had not used an RBO workshop and that most resembled the test group's characteristics in the pre-RBO period. In other words, care was taken in the matching process to ensure, as far as possible, that the only significant difference between the two groups would be the RBO workshops.

Our analysis may be weakened by a self-selection bias since the parties in the RBO boards must choose to participate in the program. Their decision may reflect some unique relationship characteristics not accounted for in our study. The bias means that a positive finding in favour of RBO may be difficult to interpret since it may be due to both the RBO process itself and the readiness of the parties to accept assistance.

However, the bias must be qualified by some practical considerations. It assumes that the relationship has deteriorated in the RBO boards to such a state that, out of sheer desperation, the parties jointly agreed to participate. It is our view that the matched sample boards may have failed to use RBO not because of unreadiness, but because they were simply unaware of the program. Also, agreement to participate can come from a senior level in either union or management. The actual participants may often be unwilling conscripts into the process. Thus, the feeling of desperation giving rise to the RBO may not spill over into the process itself.

Given the nature and purpose of RBO, we decided to look at the degree of conflict that existed for the test group of school boards in all rounds of bargaining which had taken place pre-RBO. To do this we constructed a total conflict measure that could be translated into a point score to form the basis for the selection of the control group. In addition to matching the control group members by test group conflict scores, they were also matched by education panel (secondary or elementary), geographic region, year of bargaining, and whether they were rural or urban.[2]

The major component of the conflict measure used in the analysis was developed by the ERC and is known as a "stage score". The stage score is an attempt to assess how far into the negotiation process the bargaining progressed. The various stages that can be reached in negotiations and their numeric values are listed in Table 1. It should be noted, however,

1. See Barnow (1987) for an evaluation of the matched sample technique as applied to employment and training programs.

2. A table comparing RBO and control group conflict scores is available upon request from the authors.

TABLE 1

Stage Scores and Related Elements of the Bargaining Process

0	No Third Party
1	Fact-finding appointment only (no report written)
2	Mediation Only
3	Pre-fact finding mediation only + fact finding appointment only
4	Fact-finding appointment only + post-fact-finding mediation
5	Pre- and post-fact-finding mediation + fact-finding appointment only
6	Fact-finding appointment + report written (no mediation)
7	Pre-fact-finding mediation only + fact-finding appointment and report written
8	Fact-finding appointment and report written + post-fact-finding mediation
9	Pre- and post-fact-finding mediation + fact-finding appointment and report written
10	Fact-finding appointment, report written and public (no mediation)
11	Pre-fact-finding mediation only + fact-finding appointment, report written and public
12	Fact-finding appointment, report written and public + post-fact-finding mediation only
13	Pre- and post-fact-finding mediation + fact-finding appointment, report written and public
14	Fact-finding with report public and last-offer vote
15	Pre-fact-finding mediation only + fact-finding report public + last-vote offer
16	Post-fact-finding mediation only + fact-finding report public and last-offer vote
17	Pre- and post fact-finding report public + last-offer and strike votes
19	Pre-fact-finding mediation only + fact-finding report public + last-offer and strike votes
20	Post-fact-finding mediation only + fact-finding report public + last-offer and strike votes
21	Pre-fact-finding mediation + fact-finding report public + last-offer and strike votes
22	Pre-and post-fact-finding mediation + fact-finding report public + last-offer and strike votes + strike/lockout

that the assignment by the ERC of equal values to each stage was arbitrary. Thus it should not be inferred that by going to stage eight, for example, a situation went twice as far into the process as a situation that settled at stage four (ERC 1991). Also, the stage score undervalues such events as strikes. For example, a school board that experienced a strike would score only one point more than a board that settled after a strike vote had been taken. Therefore, to construct a *total* conflict score better suited to our study, the following conflict forms with their respective weights in parentheses were added to the above stage score: grievance mediation (2), grievance arbitration (3), bargaining in bad faith charges (4), strike votes (5), voluntary interest arbitration (5), strikes and lockouts (8), and jeopardy advisements[3] (10).[4]

3. Under education sector collective bargaining legislation, the ERC may advise the government if the length of a strike threatens the loss of the year for students.

4. We tried various weighted and unweighted measures of total conflict. Since the general findings of the paper were not affected by the measure chosen, we have not reported them.

A mean conflict score was then calculated for the education sector from 1975 to 1991 that would, in effect, serve as a "normal" conflict rate against which our twenty-four RBO case and the control group could be evaluated.[5] Mean conflict scores for both the RBO and control groups were then compared with those for the education sector in the years before and after the RBO. Additionally, to check for the possibility that RBO may have an effect on specific and general measures of conflict, we extended our analysis by examining pre-and-post-RBO data for both the test and control groups on the following specific conflict items: time to settlement, grievance mediation and arbitration, and total strikes and lockouts.

RESULTS

The short run (up to three contracts) and long run (all contracts) results are set out below in Tables 2 and 3, respectively. The first and second columns of each table show the "before" and "after" comparison of means between the RBO cases and the average for the education sector (1975-91) for the following conflict indicators: time in negotiations, grievance mediation and arbitration, total strikes and lockouts, and total conflict score. Similarly, columns three and four show the same results for the RBO control group. The final two columns reveal the results of comparing the before and after mean conflict scores of the RBO sample with those of the control group. We have shown the results for "time in negotiations" separately because we could not include it in the "total conflict score" due to missing data. Grievances and strikes are also shown separately; the former is used as an indicator of relationship changes during the term of the collective agreement, while the latter shows the impact on collective bargaining. As discussed above, the total conflict score is a composite of all conflict indicators (except "time in negotiations").

Before examining the conflict results by issue as set out in Tables 2 and 3, two general observations are in order. First, as expected, the conflict scores of the RBO test group and the matched sample (control group) are significantly higher than the norm for the education sector as a whole before the RBO program. This confirms our understanding that the parties request RBO because of an abnormally high conflict record. Second, conflict scores before RBO, for both the RBO and control groups, were not significantly different from each other, indicating some success in matching.

5. The sample size is based on 2,716 negotiations for which a conflict score was calculated over the period. Care was taken to assign all conflict to the most appropriate negotiation year. For example, grievance arbitrations that occurred in a year in which there was no negotiations, were assigned to the most recent negotiating year.

TABLE 2

Comparison of Means – RBO and Control Group to Total Sample and RBO to Control Group – Short Run (Up to 3 Contracts Before and After)

	Relations by Objectives (RBO)		*Control Group*		*RBO to Control Group*	
Variable	*Before*	*After*	*Before*	*After*	*Before*	*After*
Time in Negotiations	334.7***	238.6***	324.0***	289.1	334.7	238.6**
	[287.5]	[289.7]	[287.7]	[288.9]	324.0	289.1
	(3.19)	(-2.49)	(2.55)	(.01)	(.47)	(-1.72)
Grievance Mediation and Arbitration	1.049***	.857*	1.047***	.674	1.049	.857
	[.492]	[.502]	[.491]	[.505]	1.047	.674
	(3.30)	(1.63)	(3.35)	(.73)	(.01)	(.40)
Total Strikes and Lockouts	.842***	.327	.377	.000	.842*	.327
	[.209]	[.225]	[.223]	[.231]	.377	.000
	(4.00)	(.50)	(.95)	(.00)	(1.36)	(.00)
Total Score	7.87***	5.39	7.19***	4.84	7.87	5.39
	[4.46]	[4.55]	[4.48]	[4.56]	7.19	4.84
	(4.70)	(.90)	(3.80)	(.28)	(.49)	(.38)

* P < .10 (critical t = 1.28 - one-tailed test)
** P < .05 (critical t = 1.65 - one-tailed test)
*** P < .01 (critical t = 2.33 - one-tailed test)

("t" statistics in parentheses)
[total sample mean in brackets]

TABLE 3

Comparison of Means — RBO and Control Group to Total Sample and RBO to Control Group — Long Run (All Contracts Before and After)

	Relations by Objectives (RBO)		*Control Group*		*RBO to Control Group*	
Variable	*Before*	*After*	*Before*	*After*	*RBO with Sample (Before to Before)*	*RBO with Sample (After to After)*
Time in Negotiations	302.8*	252.0**	300.4*	280.4	302.8	252.0
	[287.8]	[289.7]	[287.9]	[289.1]	300.4	280.4
	(1.56)	(-2.14)	(1.35)	(-.47)	(.17)	(-1.10)
Grievance Mediation and Arbitration	.595	.899**	.616	.810*	.595	.899
	[.501]	[.498]	[.499]	[.502]	.616	.810
	(.87)	(2.18)	(1.09)	(1.54)	(-.13)	(.22)
Total Strikes and Lockouts	.529***	.348	.454***	.000	.529	.348
	[.203]	[.224]	[.208]	[.232]	.454	.000
	(3.22)	(.72)	(2.45)	(.00)	(.37)	(.00)
Total Score	5.87***	5.88**	6.01***	5.50	5.87	5.88
	[4.46]	[4.53]	[4.44]	[4.54]	6.01	5.50
	(3.04)	(1.72)	(3.42)	(1.11)	(-.19)	(.31)

* P < .10 (critical t = 1.28 - one-tailed test)
** P < .05 (critical t = 1.65 - one-tailed test)
*** P < .01 (critical t = 2.33 - one-tailed test)

("t" statistics in parentheses)
[total sample mean in brackets]

However, due to the small number of strikes,[6] it was not possible to perfectly match the control group and RBO test group on strikes, at least in the short run. This potential problem is shown in Table 2 (last two columns) by the significant difference between the short-term strike means of the RBO (.842) and control group (.327). This could pose a problem in interpreting the short-term impact of RBO since the fact of a recent strike is clearly a major reason for undertaking an RBO program (eight out of the twenty-four cases had such a strike). However, there were no significant differences between RBO and control group total conflict scores (either in the short or long run) and strikes in the long run (see Table 3, last two columns).

Time to Settlement

RBO had a significant impact in reducing the time spent in negotiations (measured from the notice of intent to bargain through to the settlement). In the short run (Table 2), the average time to settlement decreased from 334.7 days (a significant number above the average for the education system) to 238.6 days (a significant number below the system average). Over the long run, the RBO average increased to 252.0 days but remained significantly less than the average for the education system of 289.7 days (Table 3). The average number of days in negotiations for the control group also decreased both in the short and long runs, but to a level that was not significantly different from the system mean. Thus, RBO appears to have a positive effect on the relationship by reducing the time spent in achieving a settlement.

Grievance Mediation and Arbitration

Third-party involvement with grievances dropped from 1.049 to .857 (Table 2), however this decrease was not statistically significant. Moreover, the drop in the control group was even greater, from 1.047 to .674 (also not significant). In the long run, grievance mediation and arbitration increased for both RBO and control groups (both significantly higher than the education sector mean). Thus, RBO appears to have no significant impact on reducing third-party involvement in grievance resolution. This result is puzzling since an improved relationship ought to reduce the propensity of the parties to mediate or arbitrate grievances. However, this may lend support to the view expressed by Brett, Goldberg, and Ury (1980), that collective bargaining relationships may be defined by an

6. There have been only 71 strikes and lockouts since the School Boards and Teachers Collective Negotiations Act came into effect in 1975.

inherent conflict of interest. Also, we note that RBO, as practiced by the ERC, does not directly focus on grievance resolution; the parties decide the issues to be jointly addressed in the RBO process.

While RBO appears to have no discernible impact on reducing the *volume* of grievance arbitrations, we wanted to examine the possibility that RBO could affect the nature of the grievances going forward to arbitration. In testing for this, we assumed that RBO is more likely to affect grievances that occur over matters of contract interpretation (language disputes) than those emanating from economic or disciplinary subjects. This assumption is based on the expectation that RBO programs will have no significant impact on economic or disciplinary disputes.[7] It should be declared, however, that this dichotomy is somewhat arbitrary since all grievances have some element of contract interpretation about them. For example, grievances over the application of the benefit package have economic and language elements.

Tables 4 and 5 show the breakdown of grievance arbitrations before and after RBO for the RBO boards and control group boards respectively. To create the dichotomy, we have assumed that grievances over working conditions, job security, and arbitrability are primarily language disputes. On the other hand, grievances concerning benefits, salaries, allowances, and discipline are more likely determined by factors external to the union-school board relationship.

First, we confirm our earlier result that RBO has no apparent effect in reducing the volume of grievance arbitrations in relation to the control group. Grievance arbitrations decreased from 37 to 20 for the RBO boards and from 41 to just 14 for the control group boards.[8] Next, Table 4 reveals a significant decrease in the proportion of arbitrations over language issues after RBO (from 56.7% to 20%). On the other hand, Table 5 shows a substantial increase in these language arbitrations for the control group of school boards (34.1% to 71.4%). Thus, RBO would appear to have a significant impact on reducing grievance arbitrations over language issues; that is, the matters most likely to be affected by relationship improvement.

7. Note that in an education setting where teachers are not closely supervised, discipline grievances are relatively uncommon. We assume, therefore, that it is unlikely that a relationship problem would produce more discipline grievances. This assumption, of course, would not apply in plant or office bargaining units.

8. Note that the absolute drop in grievance arbitrations depends on the size of the before and after time periods. Thus, the smaller number of grievance arbitrations after RBO is due in part to the shorter time period (relative to the before interval).

TABLE 4

Grievance Arbitrations Before and After RBO (RBO Sample)

	Before RBO		*After RBO*	
Arbitration Subject	#	%	#	%
Language Grievances				
working conditions	8	21.6	1	5.0
job security	10	27.0	3	15.0
arbitrability	3	8.1	0	0.0
Sub-total	21	56.7	4	20.0
Economic and Discipline				
benefits	9	24.3	8	40.0
salary and allowances	2	5.4	5	25.0
discipline	4	10.8	2	10.0
Sub-total	15	40.5	15	75.0
Other	1	2.8	1	5.0
Totals	37	100.0	20	100.0

TABLE 5

Grievance Arbitrations Before and After Simulated RBO (Control Group)

	Before Control RBO		*After Control RBO*	
Arbitration Subject	#	%	#	%
Language Grievances				
working conditions	6	14.6	5	35.7
job security	5	12.2	3	21.4
arbitrability	3	7.3	2	14.3
Sub-total	14	34.1	10	71.4
Economic and Discipline				
benefits	9	22.0	1	7.1
salary and allowances	7	17.1	0	0.0
discipline	5	12.2	3	21.5
Sub-total	21	51.3	4	28.6
Other	6	14.6	0	0.0
Totals	41	100.0	14	100.0

Strikes and Lockouts

RBO appears to perform very well in reducing strikes and lockouts whatever the period chosen. Strikes also appeared to decline for the control group, but this may be due to the difficulty, discussed above, of matching the RBO group in the short term because of the small number of strikes. Thus, while the control group's behaviour appears to cast doubt on the RBO effect by suggesting that factors other than RBO may have caused the decline in strikes, the poor short-term match makes it impossible to draw firm conclusions.

Total Conflict Score

As indicated, the RBO cases demonstrated significantly higher conflict scores before jointly agreeing to preventive mediation. This seems to affirm the ability of our conflict indexes to capture the unique characteristics of these RBO cases. RBO has a robust and statistically significant effect in reducing conflict over the short-term period of three rounds of contract bargaining (Table 2 shows that the total conflict score fell from 7.87 to 5.39 after RBO). However, over the longer period, the total conflict score rose to 5.88 from 5.39 that was statistically significant ($P<.05$ level in a one-tailed test) suggesting a "half-life" effect. Moreover, this increase to 5.88 reflects a reversion back to the long-run average for the RBO group of 5.87. This suggests that the RBO boards have certain inherent conflict characteristics (higher than average) that RBO appears unable to change over the long run.

The significant decline in short-term total conflict scores for the control group (from 7.19 to 4.84 – see Table 2) casts into some doubt the idea that RBO is the principal element accounting for the drop. Additionally, while the long-run conflict score of the control group also increased (to 5.50 – see Table 3), it was not significantly different from the sector average. Thus, our control group matched the performance of the RBO group in the short run and surpassed it in the long run. Again, we emphasize that this result must be qualified by the inability to match the RBO group strike record in the short run.

One interpretation of the results that we obtained might be that there is a "half-life" effect on the long-term relationship between the parties. However, before coming to that conclusion, we wanted to make sure that the result we were observing was not an artifact of the particular measures used, principally the mean score. We therefore looked at the total conflict measure for each of the RBO school boards separately and compared them to the sector score. In so doing, we discovered that eight of these twenty-four school boards accounted for the long-term rise in conflict. To discover

why the long-term conflict scores of these eight non-conforming boards increased following RBO, we examined the ERC files on each of these "problem" boards. We also inspected the files of eight boards which had achieved a significant long-term decrease in conflict. Finally, we interviewed ERC staff members who had been involved in all eight problem board RBO workshops. The results of our investigation are presented below.[9]

ANALYSIS OF CASES

In two cases, even when the parties had very high expectations of RBO, several community-wide issues weakened the credibility of the parties. In one case, for example, recent teacher settlements providing for significant wage increases occurred just when the major employer in the community announced a restructuring that resulted in substantial layoffs. As a result, the trustees decided to get tough with the teachers during the remainder of the collective agreement period and at the bargaining table. To make matters worse, a community language dispute prevented certain members of the school board from attending the RBO workshop.

In two other cases, an RBO workshop was held jointly with the secondary and elementary teachers and the school board. While the rest of the Ontario economy was mired in a recession, major employers in this area were experiencing a boom. With the teachers insisting that any gains were to be based on this boom, it was inevitable that a major clash would soon develop between them and some newly-elected trustees committed to cutting costs. To avoid a confrontation in future negotiations, the administration of the secondary board requested an RBO. The elementary teachers, fearing that this might give the secondary teachers an advantage with the board, insisted that they be invited to participate. Despite the objections of the ERC to holding a joint session, the workshop went ahead. Another problem concerned the lack of full-time administrative staff of the board attending the RBO. This absence of key decision makers hampered the board's ability to commit to any actions that might have been agreed to by the parties.

In a parallel case, the elementary teachers had again felt left out of the consultative process with the school board since the secondary teachers in the area had participated in an RBO workshop following a strike. The trustees were concerned with maintaining good relations between the elementary teachers and board staff, in light of a significant turnover of the board's administrative staff including the director of

9. To protect the identity of individuals, we have chosen not to identify the eight high-conflict boards.

education. Consequently, the trustees required all new staff to participate in the RBO despite their objections.

In a further case, conflict increased after the RBO workshop due to an externally imposed change in pay policy. The board was forced to break its longstanding practice of maintaining wage and benefit parity with Board A in favour of Board B with inferior conditions. This change was not anticipated when the RBO workshop took place. The result was a dramatic increase in conflict following the RBO, highlighted by bad faith bargaining charges by the union.

Another case involved a board with an historically high level of conflict. Although the RBO workshop was described as enjoyable, the major factor maintaining the high level of conflict turned out to be an influential member of the management team, described as "very emotional, a person who would blow up at anything". Unfortunately, this person did not attend the RBO workshop.

Finally, in a model case, an RBO was requested by the parties after a lengthy strike. Although the first round of bargaining following the RBO went quite well, the board hired a new employee with a history of taking a hard line on most labour relations matters with teachers. This contributed to an escalation in the level of conflict in the period following the RBO.

In summary, an RBO is less likely to result in a long-term reduction of conflict if: elementary and secondary panels are combined; RBO is used as a preventive measure in anticipation of problems developing; the community economy is out of step with the provincial economy; either through election or hiring, a hard-line approach is taken in labour relations; there is deliberate or inadvertant absence of key decision makers; there is a fundamental alteration of comparison boards; attendance is coerced; or there is a spillover of community language issues.

CONCLUSION

The results of this study provide some support to those who suggest that RBO techniques may be less effective in a union-management setting due to the inherent conflict of interest between the parties (Brett, Goldberg, and Ury 1980). Using mean conflict scores, some evidence was found of a "half-life effect" for RBO programs since conflict scores after RBO returned to the pre-RBO average for the RBO group in the long run, whereas the control group experienced no similar increase. However, in our view the purpose of RBO programs ought to be to minimize or eliminate "unnecessary" conflict, that is, conflict that may be due to such factors as poor communication, personality differences or immature

relationships (Strauss 1979). If RBO has this more limited goal (as opposed to a significant long-term reduction in strikes, grievances, or other forms of conflict), then we should not be too surprised to see a return to higher levels of conflict in the long run as the cast of characters changes and new relationships emerge. More research is needed to examine the impact on conflict of turnover of key labour relations personnel.

On the other hand, this study shows that RBO is effective in reducing conflict as measured by the time taken to reach a settlement and the number of grievance-arbitration cases over language issues. Thus, we found some support for those who argue that RBO positively affects the relationship by creating new structural arrangements for contract negotiations and grievances (Gray et al. 1981).

There is also qualified support for RBO as a means of effecting both a short- and long-term reduction in the *overall* levels of conflict in sixteen of the RBO boards. Through an investigation of the eight "problem" boards, some circumstances were brought to light where an RBO workshop may be less effective or even inappropriate. Although we have identified several situations where RBO techniques are unlikely to be successful, we need to know more about the elements contributing to an effective RBO. For example, such factors could include whether follow-up sessions with the parties had taken place, the nature of the issues agreed to in the action plan, the degree to which the parties institutionalized the RBO process in their collective agreement, the degree of turnover among the original RBO participants, or inconsistencies in the delivery of the RBO program. These have not been considered in our analysis.

Despite these omissions, we believe that some tentative recommendations are possible. Clearly, where economic issues are a direct contributing cause of conflict, RBO will be less effective in the long run. However, it will be almost impossible for the ERC to determine these economic causes of conflict in advance of RBO. For example, the election or hiring of "hard-line" key decision makers may be caused by such underlying economic issues as the divergence between local and provincial economies. Evidence indicates that the chances of a successful RBO would increase if the ERC, where feasible, took stronger measures to discourage the combining of elementary and secondary panels. Similarly, RBO might be more effective if the ERC were to make the attendance of the key decision makers a condition of holding the program.

This paper makes a contribution to the question of appropriate research methodology. In our view, the extensive qualitative research on RBO needs to be supplemented with more work on its general impact on industrial conflict. To the best of our knowledge, this paper is the first attempt to quantify the impact of RBO on conflict. Clearly, more research

needs to be done in this area. For example, multivariate analysis with proper controls for various bargaining unit characteristics and environmental conditions should enable a more rigorous analysis of the independent effect of RBO on industrial conflict. Without a quantitative approach we could not have identified a possible "half-life effect", nor could we have so easily identified the eight "problem" boards where conflict increased after RBO.

However, the study also underlines the danger in relying solely on quantitative results as the basis for policy recommendations. For a more thorough assessment of RBO programs we found it necessary to go beyond our general quantitative findings to examine the RBO cases. Thus, our main conclusion regarding methodology is that a comprehensive evaluation of RBO as a conflict resolution technique ideally requires a combined quantitative and qualitative approach.

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RÉSUMÉ

Le rapprochement des parties : les effets d'un programme de relations par objectifs sur les conflits

Alors que la médiation la plus souvent utilisée survient dans le cadre de la négociation d'une première convention collective ou d'un renouvellement

de convention, des programmes de médiation préventive tels celui des relations par objectifs (RPO) se situent en dehors du contexte de la négociation collective. Après avoir séparer les sujets d'ordre distributif des sujets de relations, les seules différences demeurant entre les parties sont celles des questions de fond.

Cet article évalue 24 programmes de RPO menés par la Education Relations Commission d'Ontario entre 1981 et 1991. Nous avons utilisé une méthodologie combinée, quantitative et qualitative, pour mesurer l'impact général des RPO sur les conflits en milieu de travail et pour fournir quelques raisons de leurs échecs.

L'approche générale des RPO est de réunir des représentants clefs de l'employeur et du syndicat dans un séminaire de deux ou trois jours dirigé par des animateurs qualifiés, en dehors des heures de travail et pendant une année de non-négociation. Les parties tentent alors d'identifier les problèmes qui affectent leurs relations, développant des plans spécifiques d'action, désignant des responsabilités pour leur implantation. Les parties établissent en outre un processus et un échéancier pour mesurer les progrès réalisés dans l'implantation des différents engagements contenus au plan d'action.

Plusieurs résultats positifs sont attribuables aux RPO : une réduction du nombre de griefs, moins d'arbitrages et de grèves sauvages, des ententes rapides et faciles pour le renouvellement de la convention collective et une amélioration générale dans les relations du travail. Cependant, les recherches visant mesurer la part des RPO dans l'atteinte de ces résultats sont non concluantes. Même lorsque des démarches raisonnables ont été prises pour inclure des mesures pré- et post-RPO, des moyens inadéquats furent retenus pour contrôler des facteurs tels les différences entre industries, entre tailles d'organisation, entre durée et qualité des relations, entre types de syndicat et entre régions. De plus, on a fait aucun effort pour inclure un groupe contrôle.

Pour compenser cela, nous avons comparé les résultats moyens de conflits des 24 conseils de RPO, avant et après les RPO, avec le résultat moyen de conflits dans les secteurs de l'éducation. Nous avons construit un groupe contrôle à partir de commissions scolaires qui n'ont pas eu recours à l'approche RPO et qui ressemblaient le plus au groupe qui a expérimenté les RPO.

Les membres du groupe contrôle ont été jumelés selon les résultats de conflits (incluant la médiation des griefs, les arbitrages de griefs, les plaintes pour négociation de mauvaise foi, les votes de grèves, l'arbitrage volontaire des différends, les grèves, les lock-out et les avertissements au gouvernement que l'année scolaire peut être compromise), le niveau

scolaire (secondaire ou élémentaire), la région géographique (rurale ou urbaine) et l'année de négociation. Notre analyse inclut une courte période (trois conventions) et une longue période (toutes les conventions) avant et après l'expérience RPO pour le groupe RPO et pour le groupe contrôle.

Il y a certaines preuves de l'effet à court terme pour les programmes RPO vu que les résultats des conflits après l'expérience RPO reviennent au même niveau que la moyenne avant l'expérience RPO pour le groupe RPO. Les commissions scolaires de notre groupe contrôle n'ont pas connu une croissance similaire. Cependant, les RPO semblent efficaces pour réduire les conflits si on mesure le temps pour atteindre une entente et le nombre d'arbitrages de griefs portant sur des questions de langue. Nos résultats confirment l'utilisation des RPO comme moyen de réduire à court et à long termes le niveau global de conflits dans 16 des 24 cas. Pour les huit autres cas, on note un certain nombre de circonstances faisant en sorte que les RPO sont peu ou pas du tout efficaces : les commissions scolaires élémentaires et secondaires sont fusionnées, les RPO sont utilisés à titre préventif dans l'anticipation de problèmes à venir, l'économie locale ne suit pas l'économie provinciale, une approche dure en relations du travail, l'absence de véritables processus de décisions, le fait de forcer des gens qui ne le veulent pas à participer aux programmes de RPO, les querelles sur les questions de langue.

Finalement, nous concluons qu'une évaluation des RPO comme technique de résolution de conflits requiert une approche combinée quantitative et qualitative.