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Dilemma elimination for achieving compliance

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Abstract

Drama theory provides a means of modelling pre-play communication: that is the exchanges which take place between parties as they collectively shape the confrontational arena within which they must eventually take decisive action. Participants communicate objects called 'positions' and 'intentions' and share their 'doubts' about each others' declarations. On the basis of this 'communicated common knowledge' those involved, seeking to act rationally, normally experience dilemmas. These prompt them to devise frame-breaking changes that alter the form of the interaction, perhaps placing additional pressure upon some parties whilst relieving that experienced by others. At some point these changes cease and the participants play their actions, possibly using game theory to inform their individual strategies. Within this context, this paper explores the process of dilemma elimination, specifically seeing whether there may be favourable sequences that could be adopted: these would show a commander the most beneficial route for advantageously resolving confrontations with other parties. Such sequences would both reduce or eliminate the commander's own dilemmas, whilst aggravating or otherwise engineering those facing other parties so as to render them more compliant. The paper uses a new version of drama theory (DT2) that offers a simpler but no less powerful formulation of the dilemmas which has as yet not been widely applied in any field.

1. Introduction

Typically the focus of energy for today's commander is in bringing a disparate set of contending (and supporting) parties into compliance with his will. However, the commander's objective itself reflects an interpretation of the wishes of a diffuse amalgam of political forces to which he is ultimately responsible. There is thus a nested hierarchy of arenas in each of which parties seek to achieve their objectives by influencing and changing the intentions of others: at the highest level nation states or alliances engage in diplomacy or commit to war; at strategic and theatre levels commanders engage in confrontations with or campaigns against their counterparts in hostile and alliance forces; and at tactical level warriors engage directly as they challenge or fight with opponents. In every case the purpose of communications and of actions is to shift others' intentions; or if it seems that this cannot be attained, then to destroy their ability to achieve these intentions. On these grounds it has been argued (Smith et al., 2001) that a confrontation perspective enables a unified theory of military operations wherein the effective management of lower-level confrontations and conflicts contribute jointly to reaching desired political ends.

This paper presents an analytical framework for supporting the management of confrontations. Through a simple example the use of this framework is demonstrated. The core concept of dilemma management is further explored and the opportunity for identifying generic pathways for handling confrontations is sketched.

2. Confrontation Analysis

Confrontation analysis is a formal approach for representing, analysing and directing communication and action in confrontations. It captures the *stand* of each party in terms of their opportunities for autonomous choice over the messages that they send or the things that they do. A party's stand comprises its declared *position*, its stated *intentions* and its expressed *doubts*:

- The *position* taken by a party is its proposed solution to the confrontation.
- Having knowledge of all parties' declared positions each party states its *intentions*
- All parties will harbour *doubts* about others' positions or intentions

Taken as a whole the stands adopted by the parties in a situation are likely to present them with problems. If the parties' positions are not in accord then any party may find either that:

- It has no doubt that others will flout its position, or
- Others doubt that it will flout their position(s)

While even if the parties' positions are compatible then some of them may find that:

- They doubt others' commitment to support their own (or a shared) position

The handling of these specific dilemmas is the core of confrontation management.

Taking as an example the standoff (at the time of writing) between Iran and the West over uranium enrichment. Iran has been offered the incentive of support for a peaceful nuclear programme and some lifting of existing trade sanctions if it suspends its enrichment activities and permits international inspections of its installations. The situation is represented by the options board in Table 1 ('options' are the action choices available to a party).

	t	I	W	DI	DW
IRAN halt nuclear programme	((? (none	Perp
WEST impose additional sanctions	? (((none	Rejt

TABLE 1. Options Board for Iraq nuclear issue

Making simplifying assumptions for the sake of illustration, the Iranian position (column headed 'I') is that they do not halt their nuclear programme (signified by '(') and that the West do not impose additional sanctions - rather the latter's should be lifted. The position of the West is that the nuclear programme is halted (signified by '(') and that no additional sanctions should be imposed. Given these incompatible 'solutions', the Iranian intention is not to halt the nuclear programme ('(' against this option in the intentions column headed 't' for 'threatened future'), while the West's intention is that it imposes additional sanctions ('(' for this option in column 't'). Additionally some doubts have been shown, indicated by question marks in relevant cells of the table: the West doubts that Iran could be trusted to halt its nuclear programme; the Iranians doubt that the West would actually impose its threatened sanctions.

Considering now each option in turn the West has no doubt that the Iranians will flout their position on halting the nuclear programme: this gives the West a so-called Persuasion dilemma (on account of the Iranian position) as the West feels powerless to persuade Iran not to do so. And looking at the West's option of imposing additional sanctions, this also causes a dilemma for the West - a so-called Rejection dilemma in threat mode - because the West's threat is not credible in the eyes of Iran. The consequence is that the West faces two dilemmas and Iran faces none. This makes the situation uncomfortable for the West while Iran feels no corresponding pressure.

3. Dilemma Management

There is no unique way of handling each of the generic dilemmas uncovered by confrontation analysis. Figure 1 shows possible pathways for each type of dilemma (the Trust dilemma will be discussed below).

FIGURE 1. Pathways for dilemma elimination.

Returning to the illustrative example, how might the West deal with its two dilemmas? The answer must lie 'outside the box' of the present impasse. So President Obama's offer of an 'extended hand' to Iran (i.e. a proposal of talks between Iran and the so-called P5+1) represents a 'soft' maintenance of the West's position. It could be argued that by offering talks coupled with a declaration that further sanctions will be applied should no progress be made by the end of the year, Obama is actually reinforcing the message that sanctions may be applied: that is, he is removing Iran's doubt about the US determination to impose this penalty - and so is also eliminating the West's Rejection dilemma. This corresponds to the pathway in Figure 1 from 'B has a Rejection Dilemma' through 'B says its Intention is possible': and in the present instance this would give Iran instead a Persuasion dilemma. He is also providing Iran with a new option (to engage in talks with the West) but this alone doesn't introduce any fresh dilemmas, assuming that Iran doesn't declare a view as to whether or not it is prepared to do this. A modified options board is shown in Table 2.

	t	I	W	DI	DW
IRAN					
halt nuclear programme	((? (none	Perp
Engage in talks with West	~	~	(
WEST					
impose additional sanctions	(((Pert	none

TABLE 2. Revised Options Board for Iraq nuclear issue

To remove its own initial Persuasion dilemma the West might try to increase the attraction of its own position to Iran (e.g. by offering strong support for a civilian nuclear programme in Iran) or alternatively make the continuation of the present Iranian enrichment strategy less appealing (e.g. by encouraging Israel to make hawkish gestures). This could alter Iran's position and intention on the halting of its nuclear programme.

4. Beneficial Pathways

Clearly dilemma elimination in any actual confrontation is always an ongoing process, for each party will be seeking, whether intuitively or as the result of analysis to improve its own situation; and possibly to worsen the situation for the others. Needless to say an underwriting of analysis is more likely to succeed. A more rounded appreciation of this interactive process was provided by Howard (1999) who scripted as a play the fictionalized use of confrontation analysis in a peace mission.

Given a commander's aim, stated at the beginning of this paper, of securing the compliance of other parties, the question may be asked as to whether there may be some ideal means of achieving this? Figure 1 provides some clues, but cannot offer general prescriptions because the approach must depend upon the particularities of each situation. For example, it can be seen from the Figure that a party which abandons its position and adopts that of its opponents will normally shed its dilemmas: however what is not shown in the diagram is first the scepticism that this may arouse in the other as to whether this is a genuine change of heart, and second the mood of despair that would likely accompany a genuine withdrawal (this in turn potentially leading to resentment and perhaps a desire for later revenge). More constructively the diagram shows the significance of doubts (or their absence) in the overall process of dilemma creation and elimination, and so shows in a systematic manner the relevance and power of strategic communication as an adjunct to the stating and restating of positions in confrontations.

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