

Intra-Organizational Mechanism and Conflict Behavior¹

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Introduction

The citizens of South Korea have not had opportunities to be involved in the government decision-making process. The Korean government has made almost all decisions alone (Su, 1994: 40). Yet even under these circumstances, the Committee for Metropolitan Landfill (CML), a nonprofit organization (or, resident organization), whose mission is to fight for the interest of the residents on Metropolitan Landfill issues has been called “the most powerful grassroots organization in South Korea (CML, 1996).” The CML even takes part in the relationship among the related government agencies, firms, and local governments by using its authority on the Metropolitan Landfill (CML, 1996: 259-60). This study analyzes how the CML became so powerful and defines what makes the CML so different from the other nonprofit organizations in South Korea. The reason of the CML’s strong power lies within the organization rather than outside, and its ability to manage conflict with a positive-sum game. Other nonprofit organizations in similar circumstances do not have such strong power against government agencies.

This study is important because it attempts to shed empirical light on potential sources of an organization’s shift to a positive-sum game (an integrative dimension) in the process of conflict from inside of organizations, namely, intra-organizational mechanisms. In the positive-sum game, every party seeks an alternative proposal to maximize their portion of the pie – a collaborative strategy. As a result, the strategy benefits all of them (Stevens, 1993: 97). In contrast, one’s gain would be the other’s

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loss in a zero-sum game – a competitive strategy (Stevens, 1993: 98). This paper focuses on the members within the organization as well as the relationships among the conflicting parties.² What kind of influences does the intra-organizational mechanism give to the conflict among parties? In particular, which of the intra-organizational mechanism help to solve the conflict among the parties? In the beginning, the case of this study, the Metropolitan Landfill in South Korea is introduced. Then, the research method and theory is addressed. Finally, four conflict aspects are analyzed respectively divided by the issues.

Background: the Metropolitan Landfill

The Metropolitan Landfill was built in 1991 for the deposit of all the trash from the Kyeonggi province including the city of Seoul. The Metropolitan Landfill is an hour drive from the city of Seoul, and a total of 37,426 people live around it (Management Association of Metropolitan Landfill, 1993: 4). Thirty billions m^3 of trash, about twenty-five years of trash for the Kyeonggi province, is planned to be deposited in the ground (Sunjin Engineering, 1993). The facilities are set up in accordance with national sanitary treatment regulations. However, unexpected pollution, such as the offensive odor, noise, and traffic jams due to the excessive transportation of trash, provoked dwellers' complaints. The residents around the area organized the Committee for Metropolitan Landfill (CML), a nonprofit organization, to address the problems in 1992. The CML possesses strong authority in regard to the management of the Metropolitan Landfill. The CML takes the place of the government organization to supervise the entry of trash as well as to decide the kinds of trash and the specific location of trash deposition in the Metropolitan Landfill.

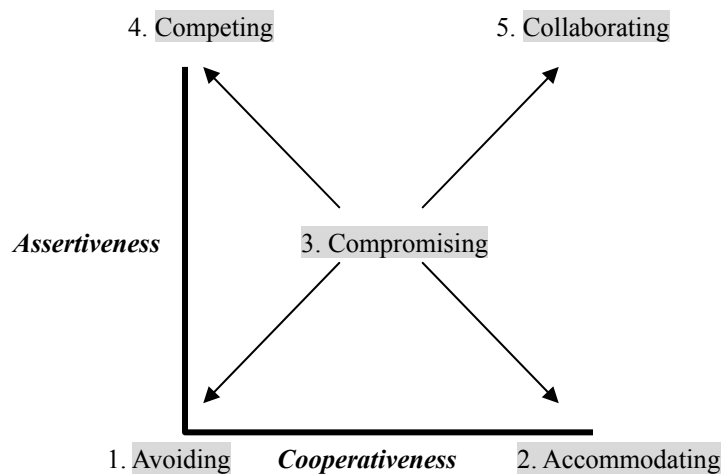
Methodology

“Conflict behavior” is the conflicting parties' decision to solve the conflict (Thomas, 1979).³ Kenneth W. Thomas (1979: 155-160) suggests a two-dimensional model of conflict behavior to categorize the response of parties to conflict. He (1979:

² Numerous prior studies show that the factors inside of an organization have much influence on the aspect of conflict (Minnery, 1985: 6).

³ The conflict behavior has been used to show the result of conflict, because the behavior is easy to understand (Thomas, 1979: 155-160).

156) explains that conflict behavior is measured by the degree of the effort to get benefit for oneself (assertiveness) and to give others benefit (cooperativeness). Classified by these two dimensions, five conflict behaviors are suggested: avoiding, accommodating, compromising, competing, and collaborating (Thomas, 1979: 160). Among the five conflict behaviors, “competing (zero-sum game)” is the behavior intended to get benefit for oneself by sacrificing the other party.⁴ In contrast, “collaborating (positive-sum game)” is the behavior that tries to resolve conflict by satisfying the other party. In this study, Thomas’ two-dimensional model of conflict behavior (1979) is used to classify conflict behaviors. The following Figure 1 shows the model.



Assertiveness (y-axis): effort to get own benefit

Cooperation (x-axis): effort to give others benefit

1. Avoiding (non-assertive & non-cooperative): Disregard of each other’s benefit
2. Accommodating (non-assertive & cooperative): Intention to give others benefit at the sacrifice of oneself
3. Compromising (middle of assertive & cooperative): Partial concession
4. Competing (assertive and non-cooperative): Intention to get own benefit at the sacrifice of others
5. Collaborating (assertive & cooperative): Satisfaction of each part

Figure 1. Two-dimensional model of conflict behavior (Kenneth W. Thomas, 1979)

Furthermore, four variables to explain the conflict behavior are analyzed: intra-cohesion of an organization, communication networks, association of organizations, and

⁴ Similarly, Blake and Mouton introduce win-lose and win-win (Bercovitch, 1984: 145).

trust among conflicting parties in a third party. On the one hand, intra-cohesion of an organization explains the relationship among the members within a party. On the other hand, the latter three variables explain the relationship among conflicting parties. Numerous prior studies on conflict among groups suggest external variables explaining conflict (Dahrendorf, 1959: 299-30; Sandole and Sandole, 1987: 48; Morton, 1973: 67-93). The following Figure 2 shows the model of this study.

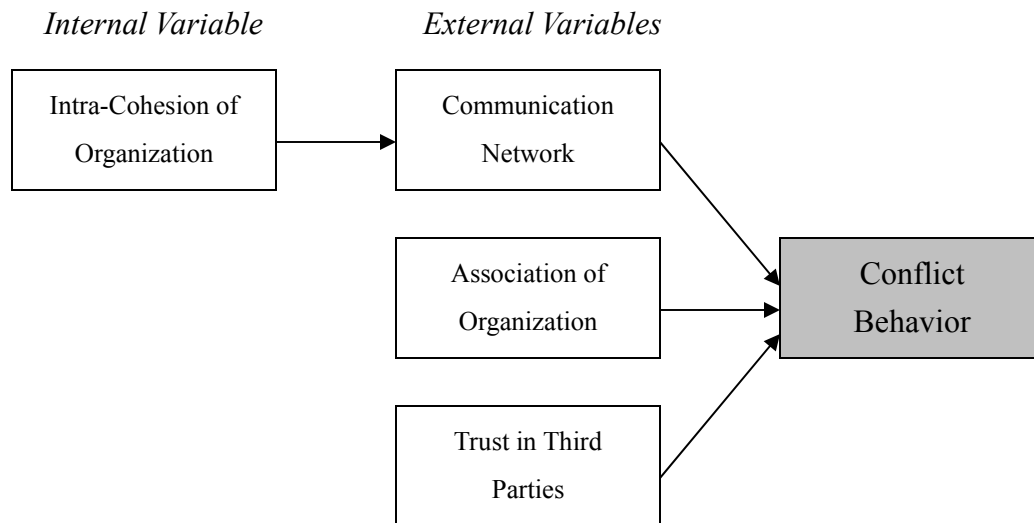


Figure 2. The Four Variables Affecting Conflict Behavior

The intra-cohesion in an organization helps the members to reach an agreement and to make a fixed rule (Coser, 1956: 165). Then, the fixed rule helps the communication among the conflicting parties again. Therefore, the intra-cohesion is hypothesized to have positive influence on the communication. I apply four working hypotheses to estimate the strength of the intra-cohesion. First, the perception of outer threat increases intra-cohesion (Rabe, 1990; Pross, 1986: 176-177; Duke, 1976). Campbell shows that the other organizations' threat causes the hostility of the members in an organization against it (Morton, 1973: 73). Second, the agreement among the members that the organization is worthy to be preserved is important to the intra-cohesion (Coser, 1959: 116-117). Third, the well-structured organization having legitimacy reduces the intensity of conflict, and helps to enhance the intra-cohesion (Dahrendorf, 1959: 94). Finally, monetary rewards keep members in the organization, and increase the intra-cohesion (Yun, 1977: 265-66). Based on these assumptions, the first

hypothesis of this study is the following:

Hypothesis 1: A stronger intra-cohesion in an organization is likely to be associated with a better communication among conflicting parties.

Working Hypothesis 1.1: A stronger perception of outer threat is likely to be associated with a stronger intra-cohesion in an organization.

Working Hypothesis 1.2: A stronger agreement on the value of organization is likely to be associated with a stronger intra-cohesion in an organization.

Working Hypothesis 1.3: A better-structured organization is likely to be associated with a stronger intra-cohesion in an organization.

Working Hypothesis 1.4: Monetary rewards are likely to be associated with a stronger intra-cohesion in an organization.

Usually communication among conflicting parties is reduced because each party considers the others as enemies. Then violent behavior is increased again because of this lack of communication (Holsti, 1977: 468). In this point of view, a communication network is a prerequisite to manage conflict (Kim, 1994: 55). The repeated contacts based on a communication network decide the success of the relationship among conflicting parties (Axelrod, 1983: 13). Therefore, I apply the three working hypotheses to assess the better communication network. First, regular meetings should be guaranteed for a better communication network. Conflicting parties develop a dependent relationship when there have been regular meetings (Axelrod, 1986: 1095-1111). Second, there should be secure procedures for communication. Assael (1969: 580) found that “productive conflict” is based on secure procedures. For instance, the negotiators, time, and the process after failing negotiations should be clear to all parties (Rabe, 1990; Holsti, 1977: 468). Finally, there should be an open-forum for better communication. Communication without distortion avoids potential conflict among the parties (Assael, 1969: 578-9). The open-forum gives the participants the opportunity to reveal their intentions. Based on these assumptions, the second hypothesis of this study is the following:

Hypothesis 2: A better communication network is likely to be associated with the shift toward a positive-sum game in conflict.

Working Hypothesis 2.1: Better-structured regular meetings are likely to be associated

with a better communication network.

Working Hypothesis 2.2: Better-secured procedures for communication are likely to be associated with a better communication network.

Working Hypothesis 2.3: Open-forums are likely to be associated with a better communication network.

For their interest, the groups are willing to change their position and make an association (Coser, 1956: 183). Under this circumstance, conflict against a common enemy helps foster an association between opponents (Coser, 1956: 159). After the groups forms an association, a representative group acts on behalf of all groups in the association (Sandole and Sandole, 1987:163-164). Therefore, an association develops a common interest, and it can lead to an integrative dimension in conflict. Based on these assumptions, the third hypothesis in this study is the following:

Hypothesis 3: An association of organizations is likely to be associated with the shift toward a positive-sum game in conflict.

When the conflict is severe, a third party can play a critical role in easing it (Colosi, 1987; Sandole and Sandole, 1987: 86-99). For this, the trust of the conflicting parties in the third party is indispensable. Without the conflicting parties' trust in fairness of the third party, it cannot play a role as a mediator in the conflict (Minnery, 1985: 43; Folger and Poole, 1984; 191). Based on these assumptions, the fourth hypothesis of this study is the following:

Hypothesis 4: More trust in a third party by conflicting parties is likely to be associated with the shift toward a positive-sum game in conflict.

In this study, the conflict behavior is applied to estimate the result of these four variables. This study suggests that the conflict behavior shifts toward the positive-sum game (along an integrative dimension) when the four variables are satisfied. In contrast, it moves to the zero-sum game (along a distributive dimension) when the four variables are not satisfied. Based on these assumptions, the final hypothesis of this study is the following:

Hypothesis 5: The presence of the four previous hypotheses is likely to be associated with

the shift toward a positive-sum game in conflict.

Analysis

In this section, four cases (arranged chronologically) are analyzed: incoming industrial trash, environmental effect assessment, water pollution, and construction of a trash incineration facility in Sanbon City. The analysis covers the period from April 10, 1992 to December 30, 1995.

Case 1. Conflict relating to “incoming industrial trash” (April 10 – June 15, 1992)

In April 1992, the Ministry of Environment announced a plan by which industrial trash would be taken into the Metropolitan Landfill (The Ministry of Environment, 1992). This statement was directly against the government’s original promise that only common trash would be deposited in the landfill. In turn, the new plan provoked the resistance of residents.⁵ Almost all residents were discontent with the government’s policy. As a result, the residents organized a nonprofit organization, the Committee for Metropolitan Landfill (CML), and thousands of them went on a street demonstration against the policy (CML, 1996: 86).

First, the case shows that the intra-cohesion in the organization was strong. Almost all the residents understood that the Metropolitan Landfill was going to cause serious pollution before long (MAML, 1993: 24). The residents took the problem very seriously and considered the industrial trash a threat to their right to live in a healthy environment. For that reason, laying aside their work, the residents participated in a street demonstration against the government’s decision.⁶ The CML, the representative organization of the residents, was composed of the members of a previous existing autonomous organization.⁷ The CML got legitimacy with the aid of frequent meetings among residents and the local assembly of Kyeonggi province (Joo, 1995). Second, the communication network was formed. Facing the possibility of prolonged conflict, not only the residents but also the government wanted to establish formal and long-term

⁵ Interview with the chairman of the CML, March 24, 1997.

⁶ A thousand of residents were participated in the first demonstration on April 20, 1992. Two thousands of residents were participated in the second one on May 1, 1992.

⁷ Interview with the chairman of the CML, March 24, 1997.

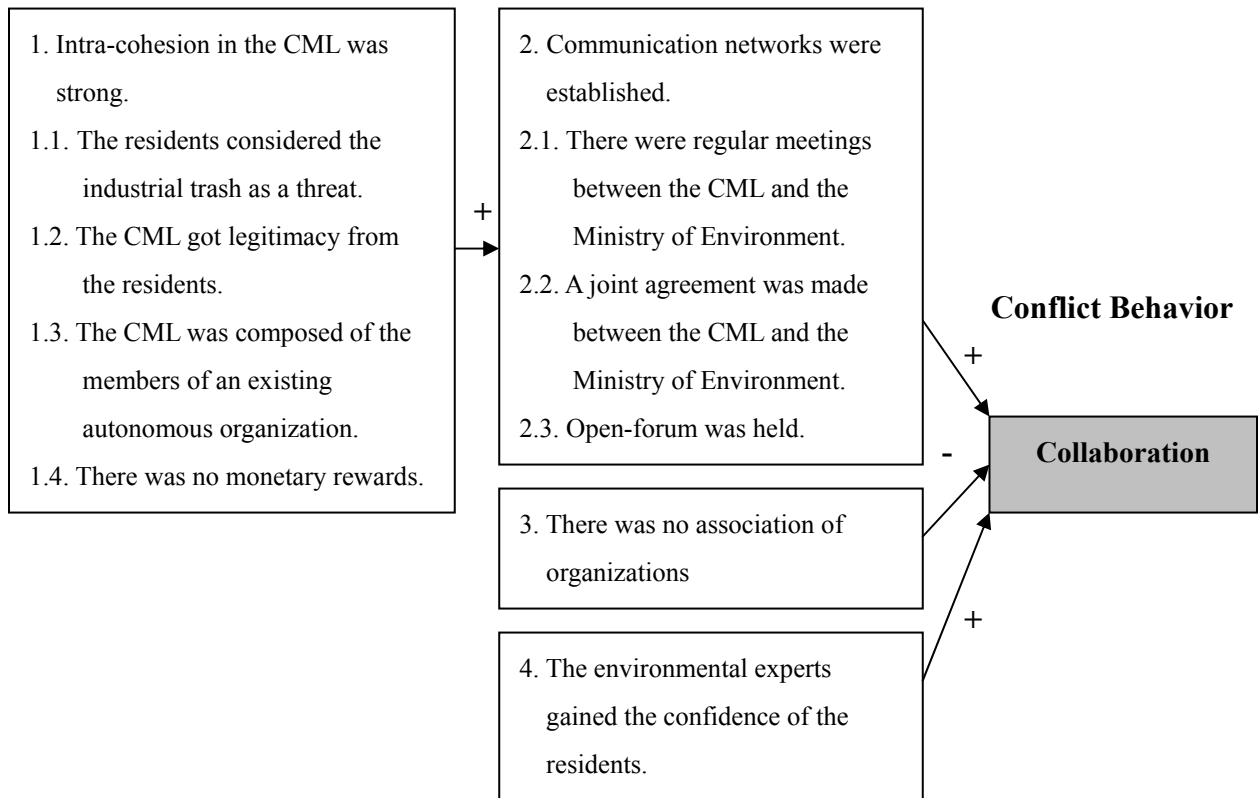
communication channels.⁸ Therefore, a joint agreement was made between the CML and the Ministry of Environment. They used working-level talks as regular meetings (CML, 1993: 32). At the same time, an open-forum was held on a regular basis (CML, 1993). Third, the CML did not align itself with other organizations. The CML stood against the Ministry of Environment without help from other organizations such as environmental interest groups. Finally, the conflicting parties trusted a third party. The residents voluntarily selected environmental experts, a group of professors, from various national universities. As a result, the environmental experts gained the confidence of the residents.⁹

Collaboration occurs when each side gets satisfaction through concession (Thomas, 1979). The conflict over “incoming industrial trash” evolved into collaboration with the assistance of mediation from the environmental experts. The results of the mediation permitted industrial trash, on the one hand, and on the other hand, restricted toxic trash for five months (MAML, 1995). During that time, environmental experts would perform an environmental effect assessment. Both parties agreed to make a final decision upon receiving the results five month later (Ministry of Environment, 1995; CML, 1993). The following Figure 3 shows the relationship.

⁸ Interview with the staff of the CML, June 16, 1997.

⁹ Interview with the chairman of the CML, June 17, 1997.

Four variables of conflict



+: Help to shift along the integrative dimension
 -: Help to shift along the distributive dimension

Figure 3. The relationship between four variables of conflict and conflict behavior in “incoming industrial trash”

Case 2. Conflict relating to “environmental effect assessment” (April 13 – May 14, 1993)

In April 1993, an environmental forum was held (CML, 1993: 17). At the forum, the environmental experts suggested that the Metropolitan Landfill was not suitable for depositing industrial wastes. The assessment grades of the Metropolitan Landfill, from A (the highest) to F (the lowest), was E. However, the government did not accept the environmental effect assessment (Paedal Institute, 1992). The Ministry of Environment questioned the method of assessment. As a result, the residents blamed and resisted the government’s response.

The intra-cohesion in organization was still strong in this case. The CML

thoroughly announced the results from a working-level meeting with the Ministry of Environment to the residents. In addition, the CML carefully sought the consent of all residents and developed a response to the results of the environmental effect assessment (Environment Report, 1993: 195). As a result of the negotiation with the Ministry of Environment, the residents got a monetary reward (Environment and Society, 1994).¹⁰ The CML could maintain strong intra-cohesion thanks to these activities. Second, there was a communication network between the conflicting parties. There was frequent communication between the CML and the Ministry of Environment, such as open meetings, and stating their positions on TV and radio broadcasts.¹¹ At the same time, a regular communication channel between them had been formed in the working-level meetings (CML, 1996: 24).

Third, there was association with the other organizations. The Management Association of the Metropolitan Landfill (MAML) played a very interesting role in this conflict issue. The MAML is a government agency which manages the landfill and is used to working for the interest of the Ministry of Environment (Inspection of Administration, 1995). However, the MAML voluntarily banned the incoming trash when the residents' resistance to it became severe because the MAML had its own interest in securely maintaining the Metropolitan Landfill (Environment Report, 1993: 195). Through the aid of the MAML, the conflict between the residents and the government did not develop into a street demonstration. Finally, the CML trusted a third party. The environmental effect assessment endowed legitimacy to the claim of the residents. Taking a step forward, the environmental experts demanded that the government reconsider its decision (Paedal Institute, 1992). In contrast, the Ministry of Environment questioned the specialty and legitimacy of the environmental experts (The Ministry of Environment, 1994). As a result, a conflict developed to the state that the environmental experts spoke on behalf of the CML.¹²

In the conflict of "environmental effect assessment," the conflict behavior was the collaboration through joint agreement between the CML and the Ministry of Environment. The joint agreement was that trash judged as non-toxic was taken in, but

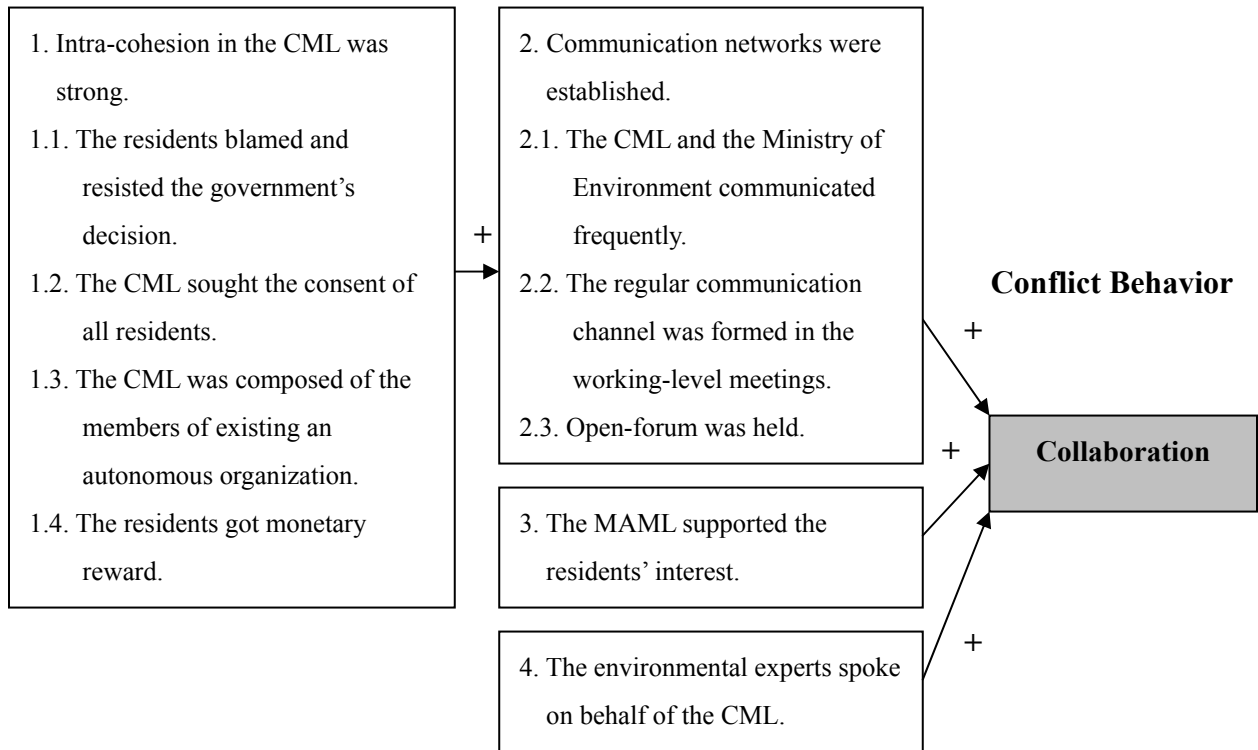
¹⁰ The residents earned about \$6,000 in compensation per person.

¹¹ Bulkyo Network. "Is the Metropolitan Trash Ground OK?" April 16, 1993; Kyeonggi-ilbo. "What is the problem of the Metropolitan Landfill?" April 13, 1993.

¹² Only eight percent of government officers thought that the environment experts look after government's interest (MAML, 1993: 44-45).

toxic waste was banned (Ministry of Environment, 1993), and this agreement satisfied each side. The following Figure 4 shows the relationship.

Four variables of conflict



+: Help to shift along the integrative dimension
 -: Help to shift along the distributive dimension

Figure 4. The relationship between four variables of conflict and conflict behavior in “environmental effect assessment”

Case 3. Conflict relating to “water pollution” (October 18, 1993 – July 20, 1995)

In October 1993, water pollution appeared as a main issue between the conflicting parties (Society and Environment, 1994: 44). The Committee for Metropolitan Landfill (CML) brought up the problem in the working-level talks (CML, 1995). The specific issues in the talks were the problems of offensive odor, health of residents, and especially, the degree of pollution in the purified water (Environmental Committee, 1995).

Strong intra-cohesion in the CML had not been formed, unlike the previous

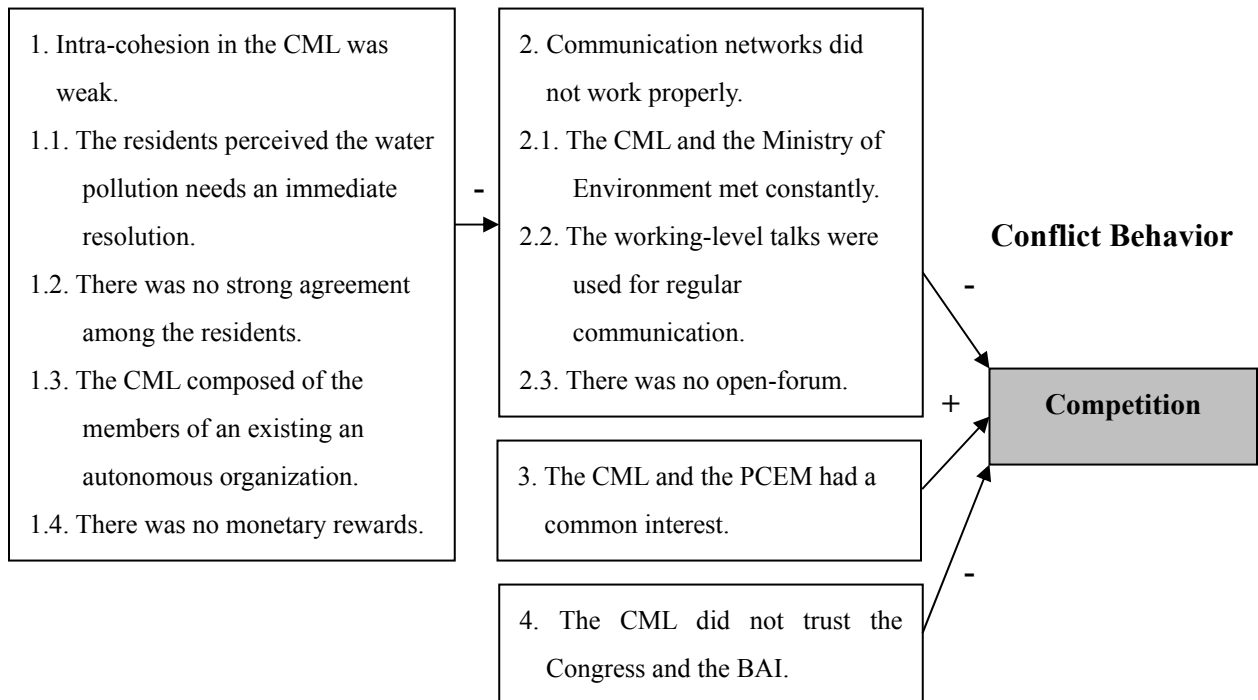
conflict issues. The water pollution was not considered an issue that needed an immediate resolution. Namely, the residents had somewhat anticipated the water pollution from the time that the Metropolitan Landfill was constructed. The attitude that “nothing can be done about it” was in the air (CML, 1995). As a result, the communication network did not work properly. The Ministry of Environment and the CML met constantly to solve the water pollution problem through the working-level talks. Yet, the problem could not be solved without major decisions such as enormous investments, and unification of the Management Association of Metropolitan Landfill (MAML) and the Public Corporation of Environmental Management (PCEM) (CML, 1996). Therefore a reasonable solution could not be achieved through the meetings. Third, an association of organizations existed. The Metropolitan Landfill consisted of two levels of managerial structure. The first level was the MAML, which attended to overall management. The second level was the PCEM, which tested and managed the polluted water. The PCEM did not want the water pollution to become a problem because it would have been their responsibility to clean the water (Society and Environment, 1994: 46). In addition, the PCEM wanted the government to solve the water pollution with more investment to the Metropolitan Landfill (CML, 1995). In this respect, there was a common interest between the CML and the PCEM.¹³ Finally, the CML did not trust a third party. The Congress and the Board of Audit and Inspection (BAI) tried to play an important role, but their activities were more aligned with “doing a kindness” or “making a good impression.”¹⁴ They could not make a fundamental counter-plan or mediation for the issue. As a result, the Congress and the BAI have not built trust with the CML.

In the conflict over “water pollution,” the conflict behavior was the competition (zero-sum game). The CML banned the trash being taken in by a street demonstration because it did not believe the government’s policy (CML, 1996). Facing the street demonstration, the Ministry of Environment admitted the mismanagement and apologized to the residents. They made promises for the installation of a new facility and banned trash being taken in during the rainy season (Hankyore21, 1995). The following Figure 5 shows the relationship.

¹³ According to a survey by the CML (1993: 32-3), all the public officers of the PCEM thought that the Ministry of Environment is not cooperated with the PCEM.

¹⁴ Interview with the staff of the CML, June 17, 1997.

Four variables of conflict



+: Help to shift along the integrative dimension
 -: Help to shift along the distributive dimension

Figure 5. The relationship between four variables of conflict and conflict behavior in “water pollution”

Case 4. Conflict relating to “construction of a trash incineration facility in Sanbon City” (October 7, 1995 – December 30, 1995)

To reduce trash taken in the Metropolitan Landfill, the construction of a trash incineration facility in every district of the Kyeonggi province became a requirement in 1995. Yet, the construction of the trash incineration facilities did not proceed well because it created numerous of conflict among the residents (Lee, 1995: 1). In a word, no one wanted the facility near his or her neighborhood.¹⁵ The new mayor of Sanbon City was elected under the slogan that he would not construct a trash incineration facility

¹⁵ It is also called the not-in-my-backyard syndrome, pursuit of narrow self-interest (Rabe, 1994: 2).

in the area.¹⁶ After the election, the new mayor announced that he put off the construction of the trash incineration facility due to the many problems in the choice of the site (Cho, 1995: 25). The announcement provoked resentment from the Committee for Metropolitan Landfill (CML; Lee, 1995: 1).

First, the intra-cohesion in organization was not strong again in this issue. The CML believed that the construction of the trash incineration facilities in each district would serve as a solution to their environmental problems, especially the offensive odor.¹⁷ Therefore, the announcement of Sanbon City was understood as a threat to them (CML, 1996). In a way, the CML seems to intentionally make the threat for keeping its legitimacy as a representative of the residents. The CML could not resolve the offensive odor problem coming from water pollution because it was caused by the defect of the facilities' design. For this reason, the CML focused on the trash incineration facilities in other districts instead of the facilities of the Metropolitan Landfill (Environment Movement, 1995). In reality, the ash produced after the process from the trash incineration facility is much more toxic, and lots of the residents realized that.¹⁸ As a result, some of the residents challenge the CML's plan (CML, 1996). Consequently, there was no formal communication between the CML and Sanbon City.¹⁹

On the one hand, the CML treated Sanbon City as an enemy, so they thought they did not need to communicate with Sanbon City. On the other hand, the new mayor of Sanbon City could not suggest any solution to the CML because of his pre-election announcement (Goonpo City, 1995). In this case, the CML associated with the Ministry of Environment. The Ministry of Environment pushed forward the policy of regional incineration because they believed the trash incineration facility is a fundamental solution to the trash problem (Ministry of Environment, 1992). Therefore the CML's disciplinary response regarding Sanbon City was in accordance with the government's interest (Environment Report, 1995; Environmental Committee of the National Assembly, 1995). In sum, the CML ended up representing the benefits of the government's side. Finally, the possible third parties, such as environmental experts, were not interfering with the conflict because of the unfriendly public opinion. The public interpreted Sanbon City as a bad example of 'Not in My Backyard (NiMBY)' (Environment

¹⁶ Interview with the chairman of the CML, November 22, 1996.

¹⁷ Interview with the chairman of the CML, March 24, 1997.

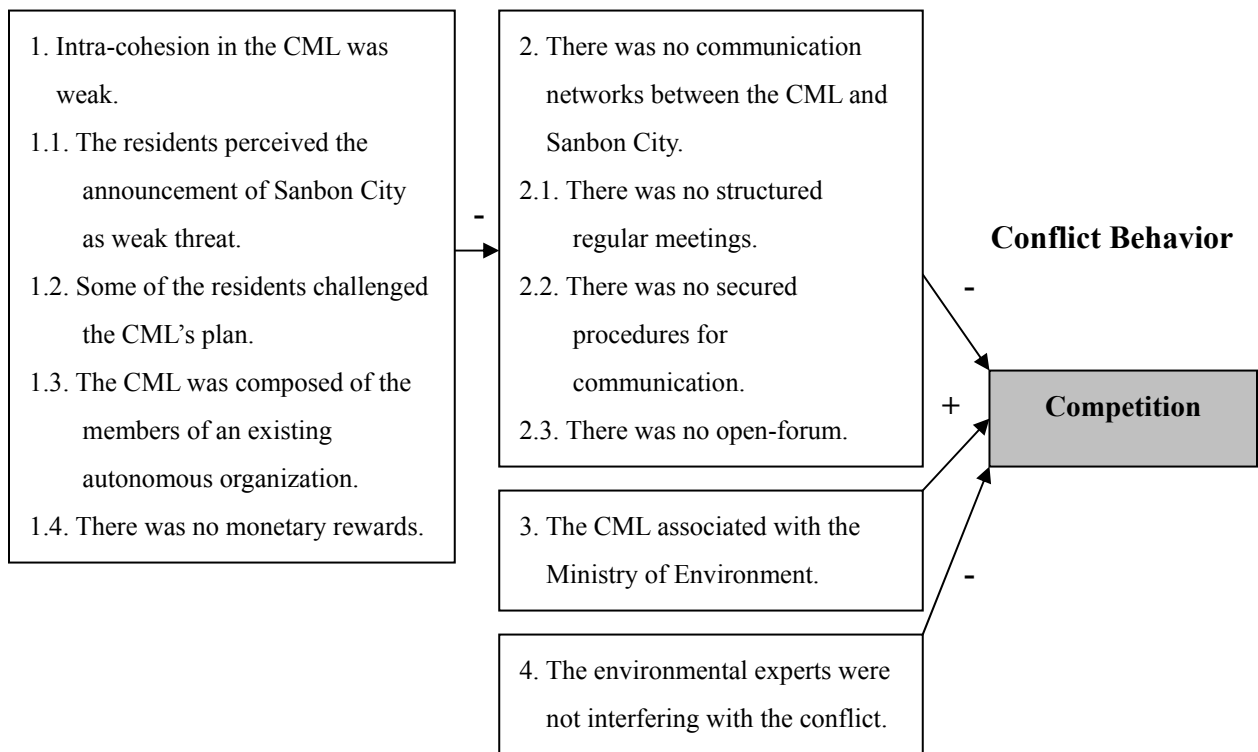
¹⁸ With the help of the environmental experts, the residents had lots of knowledge on the environmental issue.

¹⁹ Interview with the chairman of the CML, March 24, 1997.

Movement, 1995).

The conflict of “construction of a trash incineration facility in Sanbon City” was zero-sum game. The CML had already won the conflict with the government, and then it gained a stronger self-confidence and power. The CML with this strong power could force its claim. The nonprofit organization banned the trash coming in until Sanbon City announced a specific construction plan of a trash incineration facility (Environment and Life, 1995: 76-7). As a result, the trash piled up, the new mayor broke his campaign promise and then promised the construction of a trash incineration facility to the CML (Environment and Life, 1995). The following Figure 6 shows the relationship.

Four variables of conflict



+: Help to shift along the integrative dimension
 -: Help to shift along the distributive dimension

Figure 6. The relationship between four variables of conflict and conflict behavior in “construction of a trash incineration facility in Sanbon City”

On the one hand, as seen in Figure 3, 4, 5, and 6, the CML transformed the conflict behavior from collaboration to competition (collaboration → collaboration →

competition → competition). On the other hand, when we are looking into the conflict behavior between the CML and the Ministry of Environment, the CML experienced the transition from collaboration to competition and to collaboration again (collaboration → collaboration → competition → collaboration). The incidents among actors make “conflict episodes,” which is the impact that earlier episodes have on the later ones (Pondy, 1967; Folger and Poole, 1984: 132). The strong power of the CML was formed through the conflict episodes. The CML won in the conflict with the Ministry of Environment on the issue of water pollution. Hence they obtained enough legitimacy to use their power without restraint. This power provided the CML more strength to join (collaboration) with the Ministry of Environment against Sanbon City.

Conclusion

Adam Smith and Herbert Spencer suggested conflict as normal and natural phenomena (Schellenberg, 1982: 19-38). As implied in their discussion, conflict is not something bad nor can it be suppressed. Consequently, the important thing is bringing about “lively controversy,” instead of “deadly quarrels” (Sandole and Sandole, 1987: 38). Before the Committee for Metropolitan Landfill (CML), every conflict in South Korea resulted in “deadly quarrels” – a zero-sum game. This study shows the internal factors that can explain the exceptional conflict behavior of the CML.

According to this study, the intra-mechanism of organization is one of the important factors leading to the lively controversy and then to a positive-sum game. The intra-cohesion is not a sufficient condition but a necessary condition of the positive-sum game. The intra-cohesion implies that the conflict could have a positive effect when an organization controls its intra-organizational mechanism properly. The intra-cohesion of organization is always positively associated with the communication network. The CML shifts toward the positive-sum game when it maintains a communication network with the conflicting parties, and the intra-cohesion of organization helps to maintain that communication. This study shows that the conflicts always ended up as competition (a zero-sum game) when there were no communication networks between the conflicting parties. The association of organizations does not always lead to the positive-sum game. Therefore, it can be concluded that the association of organizations is not clearly associated with the positive-sum game. Finally, according to this study, the trust of conflicting parties in a third party has a positive effect on the positive-sum game. When it is combined with the communication network, they are always

positively associated with the positive-sum game in conflict. In sum, the association of organization and the trust of conflicting parties in a third party have effect on the positive-sum game in conflict when they are combined with the communication network.

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