

Five Dimensions of Conflict

The five dimensions of conflict below chart a typical conflict, whether it is interpersonal or global.

DIMENSION # 1:

Who or how many parties are involved?

- Internal – a conflict within oneself
- Interpersonal - a conflict between two or more individuals
- Intragroup – a conflict within a group (Groups can be institutions, organizations, or any groups of people who share a specific role or identity.)
- Intergroup – a conflict between two or more groups
- International – a conflict between two or more nations
- Global – a conflict that directly or indirectly has an effect on all people and nations in the world
- Transboundary – a conflict between groups that is based on their positions in relation to a geographical boundary

DIMENSION # 2:

What are the sources of conflict? What is it over?

- Conflicts Over Resources (Human Resources; Things and Capital; Natural Resources; Land and Territory)
 - When people, groups, and nations are competing for the same resources
 - When there is a dispute over who has a right to certain resources
 - When people, groups, or nations want to take someone else's resources or prevent someone from getting needed resources
- Conflicts Over Values (Beliefs, Choices and Perspectives, and Preferences)
 - When people, groups, and nations have relations with each other, but hold different deeply held beliefs about the role of an individual, group or family within their culture, cultural practices, politics, and religion
 - Conflicts over "what is most important"
- Conflicts Over Psychological Needs (Power and Control, Emotional Needs)
 - Conflicts related to an individual's or group's need for respect, love, affirmation, approval, friendship, and power over their own fates
 - Conflicts related to the need of individuals to belong and have the opportunity to develop and achieve
 - Conflicts that arise when psychological needs are not fulfilled
 - Conflicts between an individual and other people or institutions when obstacles prevent someone from having their needs met

DIMENSION #3:

Relationships between/among conflicting parties.

The type of relationship that exists between conflicting parties will often determine the intensity of the conflict and its outcome. Important questions to ask include:

- What kind of climate is present between conflicting parties? How can the

climate change the outcome?

- Trusting or Suspicious
- Friendly or Hostile
- Open or Resistant
- Calm or Emotionally Tense
- Do parties come to the conflict with equal power or a power imbalance?

Does any one party control the resources and decision-making process?

- What is the degree of interdependence between the conflicting parties?

(In other words, do the actions of one person or group seriously impact the others involved in the conflict?)

- How often do the parties see or interact with one another?
- Is a positive relationship valued equally by both parties?
- Does each party need the cooperation of the other to achieve important goals?
- How well do the parties know one another?
- Does the relationship matter to both or one of them? How much?
- Does it matter if conflicting parties come from different cultures and know little about the other?

DIMENSION #4:

What is the history of the conflict?*

Usually the longer a conflict exists, the more intense and complex it becomes, and therefore, the more difficult to resolve. Yet, there is also a point when parties can become so “battle weary” that they finally see resolution as the best strategy.

Factors that complicate a conflict:

- The duration of the conflict.
 - How long has the conflict continued?
 - Are the original parties still actively involved in the conflict?
- The frequency of the conflict.
 - How often has the conflict reemerged?
 - Are there periods when the conflict escalated to severe levels?
 - Did this conflict develop in stages?
- The intensity of the conflict.
 - How life threatening is the conflict?
 - Is the conflict emotionally or ideologically charged?
- The perception of the conflict by both those directly involved and those who witness it but do not feel directly affected by it.
 - Do people “see” the conflict as serious or irrelevant? (Conflicts can remain unresolved when there is little or no pressure to address them – when people from ‘inside’ or ‘outside’ the conflict don’t perceive it to be compelling enough to resolve. Conflicts are not always visible, or easily identifiable. In these situations, the conflict remains, even though it is hidden from view or ignored.

*The historical conflict between Israel and Palestine is a good example for discussing this dimension.

DIMENSION # 5:

The Process: How do we choose to deal with the conflict?

In every conflict, all parties involved make choices to take some action they think will help them get what they want and need. These choices may be spontaneous or calculated, constructive or destructive. Conflicts can develop in stages and consequently may involve many different responses as the conflict proceeds. Some of those choices are:

- Avoidance – deny, ignore, or back off the conflict
- Diffuse the conflict – postpone, wait, gather data, or check it out
- Engage in the conflict – methods might include:
 - Direct Force or Competition
 - Accommodation – to adapt or adjust
 - Compromise
 - Use Collaborative Problem-Solving

Practice Restorative Justice- valuing community continuity and well-being in the solution

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