

A Process View of Conflict

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A process view of conflict means that conflict is not just a discrete interaction; rather, it is a series of stages with distinct characteristics. A process is dynamic, ongoing and continuous and changes over time. Similarly, communication is a process even though it comes so natural to us that we don't think about it that way. But any interchange with another human being is a process. When we fail to look at another person's point of view and assume our frame of reference is the only correct one we are not taking a process view of conflict

Patterns and Cycles in Constructive Conflict Processes

According to Ruth Abigail and Dudley Cahn in *Managing Conflict Through Communication (MA Pearson Education, 2011)* successfully resolved conflict moves through the following five distinct steps or phases:

Prelude to conflict: the variables that make conflict possible, i.e., the parties, the environment, the relationship and the presence of others. These are the ingredients of the conflict.

Triggering event: the stimulus, i.e., hurtful remarks, the aggregation of behavior over time or the breach of an agreement or house rule.

Initiation phase: the response when the conflict becomes overt which happens when at least one person makes known to the other that a conflict exists. This would be reacting to the stimulus or pointing out the breach of a house rule or understanding.

Differentiation phase: the stage where the conflict ripens and becomes obvious, such as through open disagreement and various tactics and strategies to escalate and de-escalate the conflict.

Resolution phase: the stage where the participants agree to some outcome. If the agreement satisfies all concerned it is considered a win-win. The resolution could be win lose or lose lose when people enter into destructive conflict cycles.

If you dissect a conflict you have experienced you will probably notice these various phases. Analyzing conflict helps you understand your hot buttons and patterns. If you develop a habit of conflict analysis you may be able to change your patterned responses to more productive ones in the future.

Theory Application Tips

- Recognize that conflict is an opportunity for change and growth
- Identify the specific triggering events that get the conflict ball rolling
- Analyze how the conflict impacts you
- Make a plan for resolving it.
- Communicate with the other person
- Be open to another perspective