

ASSIGNMENT 1 - CHAPTER 1

1. What words do you typically associate with the word "conflict"? What emotions are generally coupled with the concept of conflict?

Words associated with the word "conflict" include fighting, arguing, gridlock, bickering, debating, disagreement, mediating, and pain. Emotions coupled with the concept of conflict include anger, sadness, and disappointment, among others. If a conflict is resolved peacefully, then emotions, such as happiness, relief, and contentment, can be achieved. Resolution of a conflict might also mean people experience melancholy, depending on the outcome of the conflict.

2. In a paragraph, describe what your family of origin taught you about conflict and how this has effected your approach to conflict.

From my family of origin, I mostly learned to avoid conflict rather than confronting it directly. Before my parents divorced, the few times that they argued it was relatively peaceful. They tended to avoid conflict and let things slide. My dad was quiet and reserved. My mom always tried to remain positive. They didn't clash very often while married. My older brother, who is my only sibling, dealt with conflict by generally isolating himself from those situations. When my parents went through their divorce, the conflict was quick and mostly legal. They had never really learned to deal with conflict between themselves. It wasn't until after I left home that I only began to learn how to deal with conflict.

3. Describe five negative metaphors associated with conflict and discuss what you would expect from a person who views conflict accordingly.

One negative metaphor associated with conflict can be described as two parties throwing insults at each other. People aren't actually throwing anything at one another. Rather, they are engaging in verbal abuse. A person who views conflict in a manner of throwing insults may be quick-tempered. They may be overly critical of other people, especially those they are around often.

A second negative metaphor for conflict is the Cold War. The Cold War was never a reference to weather conditions. Instead, it was named such, because the conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union never escalated to full conflict. It was mostly an arms race that included verbal threats from time to time and also spying. It was more about potential conflict. People in both countries viewed each other with suspicion for decades.

A third negative metaphor associated with conflict can be seen when people riot in the streets. The reasons for rioting are many. They can range from political issues to sports teams winning championships. Rioting can lead to violence and property damage. People who get involved in rioting are acting irrationally. It can be expected for them to engage in conflict that might otherwise not happen.

A fourth negative metaphor associated with conflict is jealousy. Jealousy, in many cases, can lead to conflict between parties that are normally on good terms with each other. Jealousy is caused when

one party has certain expectations of another party that are not met. Conflict can ensue when the slighted party expresses their discontent with a given situation.

A fifth negative metaphor associated with conflict is vandalism. Conflict between two parties can lead to vandalism happening. One party could destroy property owned by the other party even if it leads to them paying a fine or going to jail. A person who perceives vandalism as an outlet to conflict is likely destructive by nature. They may not see that conflict can be managed peacefully. Rather, they may see destroying someone's property as a form of revenge.

4. In one paragraph each, describe three positive metaphors dealing with conflict.

One positive metaphor dealing with conflict is collaboration. When people work together to resolve conflict, they are collaborating on the problem at hand. Teamwork is another way to describe this metaphor of dealing with conflict. A team atmosphere facilitates collaboration that can allow problems to be solved effectively. Such a situation creates a positive feeling among the people involved in collaborating to resolve the conflict.

A second positive metaphor dealing with conflict is compromise. When two parties come into conflict about issues, they can choose to compromise on them. Doing so means that the parties will not get everything they want. Instead, a reasonable negotiation is had to allow both parties to obtain things they want in agreement. This

situation yields a positive result from potentially damaging situation. Conflict turns out positive as a result of people compromising on issues.

A third positive metaphor dealing with conflict is communication. Lack of communication can cause negative conflict in many situations. However, if communication is effective, then it can be a positive metaphor for dealing with conflict. Strong relationships depend on effective communication to resolve conflict. Married couples oftentimes need to work on their communication issues in order to overcome any conflict they might be experiencing.

5. Describe a low context culture. What are its strengths and weaknesses? How would conflict be handled?

A low context culture is a culture in which words are necessary to communicate, as members of the culture do not necessarily share similar experiences. (Wikipedia) The lack of common experiences denies members of a culture a backdrop for facilitating communication. This lack of context requires information to be exchanged with much more explanation in order to convey the intended message. One strength of a low context culture is that outsiders can more easily communicate with those in the culture. For example, someone from another country can enter into the United States and communicate effectively with Americans provided that they understand English. Conversely, a weakness of the low context culture is that it can slow down communication between parties within the culture. They might need to add meaning to specific words or phrases that are communicated

in order to convey the intended meaning. The low context culture shows its strength in the business world in countries like the United States where it helps to more formally show products and services that are for sale. With the goal of the business being to make a profit, it has to be concerned with selling goods to many customers. Of course, in some countries, the goal of the business is to establish long-term relationships with clients, where the features of the low context culture are less effective. (Niemeier) Conflict would be handled by a fairly formal procedure of parties sitting down to discuss the issues involved in the conflict. A mediator would likely be present to help resolve the issues. The parties would come to an agreement that would be binding.

6. Describe a high context culture. What are its strengths and weaknesses? How would conflict be handled?

A high context culture is a culture in which communication contains understandings that people within that culture already know. These understandings do not require communication among members of the culture, because they are implied through experiences shared by members of a group. (Wikipedia) This context provides a background for advancing communication among group members. One strength of a high context culture is that communication is expedited among the people within the culture. When people know the unwritten rules for communication, they can exchange messages more efficiently. The drawback to this high context cultural advantage is that people on the outside of the culture are not keen to the methods of communicating. Outsiders must learn about the experiences of those within the culture

if they seek to become part of that culture. The strength of the high context cultures can be witnessed in the long-term business relationships with customers in certain countries. Less effort is placed on selling to as many customers as possible. Rather, the goal is to maintain existing business relationships for many years.

(Niemeier) Conflict, in a high context culture, could be handled in a less formal manner. With both parties aware of the unspoken rules, they could come to a consensus faster than parties would in a low context culture. Fewer words would need to be spoken.

7. Briefly describe gender differences in conflict.

Gender differences play a major role in conflict between varying parties. While both men and women can be emotional due to conflict, women tend to be governed by emotions at times. Being emotional may cause women to react to conflict without rationally considering the situation. However, some women are capable of maintaining a sense of calmness and are able to consider the conflict at hand. Men tend to be more rational when thinking through a problem. Rather than simply reacting based on how they feel, men will think about the logical steps to take with a conflict. However, sometimes men can allow their emotions to get the better of them when confronted with conflict. Of course, the nature of the conflict can dictate how the different genders react. If the conflict is violence, then both men and women might act irrationally rather than calmly thinking through the situation.

CHAPTER 2

1. Conflict involves an expressed struggle. Discuss two negative ways one can express a struggle and two positive ways one can express a struggle.

Negative ways one can express a struggle include referring to the struggle as an uphill battle or calling the struggle a no-win situation. The struggle at the heart of the conflict is not literally an uphill battle. Rather, the metaphor means that one or more parties see the struggle as difficult to overcome. They might even perceive it to be impossible to overcome. The phrase "uphill battle" conjures up images of war and fighting. The struggle may be a verbal conflict between two parties, but it seems to be a real battle. To describe the struggle as a no-win situation is to think of the struggle as a hopeless endeavor. It could be hopeless for one or both parties. One party might see the struggle as a wasted effort while the other party might consider the struggle a worthwhile cause.

Positive ways one can express a struggle are referring to the struggle as a tough but successful outcome or calling the result of the struggle a learning experience. In the pursuit of a goal, many people struggle in order to achieve it. The goal may be graduating from college, winning a championship, or working toward retirement from the military. At the end of the struggle, the person may look back and consider that the struggle was tough but that it had a successful outcome. Another way to think of a struggle positively is to call it a learning experience. This way of thinking makes the struggle seem to be a meaningful endeavor. A learning experience can serve a person to prevent them from making similar mistakes in the

future. Even if the experience is negative, the lesson can be a positive message for the future.

2. What role do you believe communication has in conflict?

Communication has a very pivotal role in conflict to the degree that it can even be used to dictate the conflict. Proper communication between two parties might even prevent conflicts from happening in the first place. If both sides listen carefully and convey messages clearly and succinctly, then it's possible that communication can be used to effectively resolve conflicts. Lack of communication or miscommunication can actually lead to conflict. If a statement is made and the listener takes the intended message in a different direction, then conflict may ensue.

3. What role does interdependence play in conflict?

Interdependence is an essential element in conflict, as those who are dependent on one another are capable of engaging in conflict. Oppositely, people who are not dependent on one another have no reason to engage in conflict with each other. Indeed, people engaged in conflict are dependent on each other in order to keep a conflict going. Parties who voluntarily participate in conflict may consciously decide to keep the conflict going. (Wilmot, 2007, 11)

4. Conflict involves perceived incompatible goals. How do these goals work? Why is the word "perceived" emphasized?

When people experience conflict with one another, it is because they have goals that appear to be incompatible. These goals may not

appear to work together at first. The main reason for the incompatibility is the perception that the goals will not work together. In reality, people may be able to negotiate to resolve the perception of incompatibility. Perhaps timing is a factor. They could discuss the different times that events need to happen and create a feasible schedule.

5. What is a resource? Describe two examples of resources in the workplace and two examples of resources in the home.

A resource can be a person or a thing that satisfies the needs of a given situation. In a project management situation, resources are plugged into tasks that must be accomplished. It could be that a skilled employee must be committed for a certain amount of hours. It could also be that a particular piece of equipment must be applied to a task in order to accomplish the goals of the project. A resource can also be a source of information. Two examples of resources in the workplace include a computer and a senior scientist. A computer is a major resource in the workplace, as many people spend their entire days working on one. Computers, especially when connected to the workplace's network and the Internet, provide information necessary to complete tasks. They also provide means for communication among employees whether they work in the same building or on different continents. A senior scientist is a resource because of his or her knowledge and skills. If a company is working on a research project and must budget for it, they will include the time and money required to put the senior scientist in place to work. Two examples of resources in the home are the phone book and the television. The

phone book provides contact information for residences and businesses in a given geographical area. It is a necessary resource for people to contact local people that may not have a presence on the Internet. The television is a resource, because it offers channels that telecast the news, documentaries, and government proceedings. It is a valuable and oftentimes timely source of information

6. In a couple of paragraphs, discuss the concept of interference.

The concept of interference is strongly related with conflict in that it can be the cause of conflict or it can happen during conflict. When a person is working towards his or her goal and that pursuit is interrupted, interference has taken place. This interference causes the person to experience conflict. They can become unsettled and upset and possibly emotionally distressed. Interference is a disturbance, and it may cause a person to rethink their pursuit of a goal.

In some instances, interference itself can be the conflict that people experience. For instance, a college student may be studying late at night in her dorm room. Her neighbors might be intent on being loud and having a good time. Their party could interfere with the student's efforts to achieve a good grade. She may get upset and ask her neighbors to be more considerate. They may not care and continue to carry on with their party. Conflict can ensue from these events. At this point, the student can decide to fight with her neighbors or get the residential advisor to deal with the situation.

7. Create a scenario that depicts a negative escalatory conflict spiral.

A scenario that depicts a negative escalatory conflict spiral would be a situation at work where coworkers present ideas for a project. This situation could be competitive as each coworker vies to have their proposals accepted. This competition could escalate to a negative conflict. Some coworkers could sabotage other coworkers' proposals in order to give their own proposals a better chance of being accepted. Workers could get reprimanded and even fired for negative behavior towards their coworkers.

References

Wilmot, William W., Hocker Joyce L. Interpersonal Conflict. 7th ed. 2007.

"Low context culture." Wikipedia.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Low_context_culture.

"High context culture." Wikipedia.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/High_context_culture

Niemeier, Suzanne. Campbell, Charles P. Dirven, Rene. "The Cultural Context in Business Communication." Entrepreneur. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1998.

<http://www.entrepreneur.com/tradejournals/article/65175427.html>