

ASSIGNMENT 3 - CHAPTER 5

1. Give an example of how the same person might use different conflict styles in different relationships.

One person can easily use different conflict styles in different relationships, as each relationship requires the person to adapt. In the case of a middle-aged man, who is married, has children and grandchildren, works full time, and has lifelong friends, the utilization of more than one conflict style is necessary to a healthy life. This man must play the role of husband, father, grandfather, employee and manager, and friend. He may also be a long-standing member of his church. Each role could make it possible for this man to use more than one conflict style. For example, he may try to cooperate with his coworkers, yet compete with his friends at a game of tennis. At work, there are times when cooperation is the best conflict style, especially if it means providing the product or service for the customer. There may be other situations, however, where this man may need to be competitive at work, especially if he is in sales. He would be able to bring new clients in with a competitive conflict style. (Wilmot, 2007, 131) With his family, this man could be accommodating to his wife or he could be avoiding her. If she also works, the ability to accommodate her career demands will be of benefit for the couple's marriage in the long run. The ability to accommodate shows consideration for this man's wife. If this man and his wife have just had a fight, temporary avoidance may be helpful to allow emotional wounds to heal. However, prolonged avoidance could prove to be damaging to the couple's relationship. With his children, he might be assertive about what he wants them to do. As long as the assertiveness does not lead to aggression, this man can use it as a means to instill discipline

in his children. When they are teenagers, he may find a conflict style of compromise to be beneficial to maintaining a positive relationship with his children. (Wilmot, 2007, 131) For instance, if they agree to be home at a certain time, this man will allow them to drive his car for their night out. As a member of his church, this man might be collaborative if he is involved in any groups. This conflict style allows him to be of great benefit to his group as they arrange for meetings.

2. Why would a person use different conflict styles at work and at home?

Work and home could easily require a person to use different conflict styles, as the situations between these two locales are unique. A competitive conflict style might be necessary for a person to be successful in her job. At home, she would not be competitive, but more likely cooperative and non-confrontational. (Wilmot, 2007, 131) If she welcomes it, a competitive conflict style can allow her to improve her effort at work. In turn, she is more able to keep her job and continue along her career path. There's no necessity for competition at home, even during simple family games. Likewise, there are times when a non-confrontational conflict style would not be the best choice at work but is beneficial to maintaining a peaceful home setting. If a coworker is attempting to steal from the company, a person may want to use a confrontational style to alert her boss about her coworker's nefarious activities. Then again, situations at work also call for a cooperative conflict style, especially when a person is engaged in teamwork. In the home, non-confrontational conflict style promotes a loving environment where family members feel welcome.

3. Do you tend to be an avoider or an engager? When has it worked for you and not worked?

At times, I have been an engager, but mostly I tend to be an avoider, which has worked sometimes, but not always. Early on in life, many things seem important, but as time passes, I have realized that most things are not worth worrying about, as I am only in control of myself. With this philosophy on life, avoidance has been a useful policy at times. For instance, it has been sound personal policy all the times I have avoided engaging in road rage with other drivers. On the road, I have found it is better to be an avoider and let other drivers get as far away from me as possible. Another situation where being an avoider has worked out is in choosing not to pursue certain relationships with the opposite sex. If a potential dating partner gave me cause for concern, it has been preferable to avoid them. Choosing the wrong partner can have long-range damaging effects on people's lives. A specific instance where being an avoider paid off was when I avoided becoming friends with a former high school classmate in college, back during my full-time student days. He was in a fraternity, drank a lot, partied, and abused illegal drugs. During the spring semester, he asked if I wanted to party at his fraternity's house, but I declined. Later that summer, he was involved in a fatal automobile accident where he died and others died or were injured for life. In these cases, being an avoider worked out for me.

In some cases, being an avoider has not worked out as well for me. When I was in high school, I was shy, felt awkward and avoided girls and trying out for sports teams. Instead, I focused solely on my academic studies. Avoiding these experiences caused me to miss out on opportunities that my fellow classmates enjoyed. Later on, however, in college, I was in a relationship for a few months where we both avoided talking about the obvious issues between us. Rather than engaging each other in a discussion, we prolonged a relationship that should have been ended. Another time where avoidance has not worked out was with a roommate in college. After being

roommates for a year in a dorm, we decided to continue being roommates in an apartment through the following summer. The only problem was that I had grown tired of having him as a roommate but did not want to tell him. During the summer, I worked and wanted to have friends over late at night. My roommate worked and took a class. He always wanted to get to bed at a certain time. Although my friends were not loud when they were over, my roommate wanted the apartment to be perfectly quiet. We avoided discussion and, instead, we continued to antagonize each other throughout the summer. The following semester we were not even on speaking terms. In this case engagement would have been preferable to avoidance, as we got into Avoidance Cycle #2. (Wilmot, 2007, 136)

4. Analyze each of the avoidance tactics listed in this chapter as to its effectiveness and appropriateness.

The avoidance tactic, denial and equivocation, is not typically an effective or appropriate method of conflict. Instead of solving a problem and saving valuable time, denial and equivocation more than likely will prolong the problem. (Wilmot, 2007, 143) Such is the case if both people involved in the conflict deny the reality of the situation. For example, a husband has a drinking problem that causes conflict in his marriage, but both he and his wife deny that there is a conflict. Rather, they each separately rationalize that exceptional drinking is normal, because their parents all enjoyed doing it. It is part of their family culture. The husband does not engage in physical abuse, at least not that often; he is more prone to be verbally abusive. Growing up in a similar environment, his wife thinks this behavior is acceptable and tolerates it because of her familiarity with it. This acceptance is actually a direct denial when she talks to her friends about it. (Wilmot, 2007, 143) The wife also engages in implicit denial when she rationalizes that it's just the way her husband

talks when he is liquored up. (Wilmot, 2007, 143) She thinks to herself that her husband is bearable when he is not drinking. Obviously, this tactic is not an effective way to deal with the ongoing conflict.

Topic management, another avoidance tactic, happens either through topic shifts or topic avoidance. (Wilmot, 2007, 143) Instead of completely addressing a conflict, the parties end the conflict or move on to a new topic. Although parties to the conflict may not be finished airing their grievances, the tactic of topic management is done to deliberately avoid a full conflict. In doing so, topic management delays the final resolution and quite possibly prevents the conflict from being completely resolved. For instance, topic management is a common theme in international politics. When world leaders meet or gather in groups to discuss wide-ranging issues such as economic policy, nuclear disarmament, or the environment, very little tends to get accomplished in the way of resolving any conflicts. The recently finished G8 summit in Italy allowed leaders to make promises that might or might not be kept. (Telegraph) Much may be said, but with precious little time to actually discuss issues in detail, world leaders focus more on maintaining goodwill as opposed to resolving conflicts where two sides are very far apart. Leaders probably think that they did not get a full opportunity to present their country's stance on an issue, which is topic management. It is neither an effective nor an appropriate avoidance tactic.

The ideas of noncommittal remarks and irreverent remarks may be appropriate in that they can be non-offensive, but they are another avoidance tactic that is very ineffective. In the form of noncommittal statements, noncommittal questions, abstract remarks, or procedural remarks, noncommittal remarks are a weak attempt at pushing away a conflict rather than confronting it. (Wilmot, 2007, 143) As well, an attempt to make a joking remark is a tactic used to avoid conflict. People may think that they can talk their way out of a conflict by making statements or questions

that take attention away from the heart of the conflict. Attempts to avoid conflict can actually prolong it. In the middle of a discussion related to a conflict, one party may decide that they are losing the argument. They may decide to compliment the other party to deter their attention. They may also ask the other person what they think about recent news events. Any question or statement that avoids the conflict by disarming the other party is an available tactic. However, if the other party is focused on the conflict, then noncommittal and irreverent remarks are mostly ineffective.

5. Which conflict style or combination of styles do you tend to choose? When has that benefited you? Cost you?

I have tended to use several conflict styles in the past, some of which have benefited me, while others have been a detriment, depending on the circumstances of the situation. Certain times, I have been cooperative and accommodating with people, especially at work. In truth, I have been overly accommodating with coworkers, as I have often felt a certain sense of vulnerability with my job. In the early years of this decade, I worked as a programmer for three small dot-com companies and was laid off from each one. Once I became employed by a more traditional manufacturing company, I felt the need to do what I could to keep my job, especially because I had accumulated a sizable amount of debt in a short amount of time. No matter what programming changes someone asked me to make, I was eager to be cooperative and accommodate their requests. My conflict style did not pose hazard to anyone, at least I thought at the time. (Wilmot, 2007, 131) As far as this style being a benefit, I demonstrated a willingness to do my job and an attempt to work cohesively with my coworkers. Unfortunately, trying to be accommodating to everyone can be costly, as coworkers develop expectations as to what they want done. They begin to expect that their

requests will be met at their whim instead of realizing that businesses have priorities.

Over the years, I have also tended to use the conflict style of avoidance to steer clear of potential trouble. Sometimes, however, the avoidance style has worked against me, as I missed out on opportunities. In the past, some friends have asked me to start businesses with them, but I turned them down. With the thoughts of potential conflict in the future, I thought it would be better to keep my job. Sometimes when friends go into business together, they end up forsaking their friendship due to control issues or greediness. By avoiding such a personal catastrophe, I have saved myself from experiencing personal anguish. However, a couple of friends did start a business and have been successful. Although they asked me to work with them early on, I declined. If I hadn't been of the mindset of avoidance, perhaps I would have joined in their success. The conflict style of avoidance can be a safeguard or a hindrance depending on the circumstances.

Compromise is a conflict style that I have used in the past that has been either beneficial or costly for me. In a past relationship, I learned to compromise in regard to vacation, and it worked out for both my girlfriend at the time and myself. When we discussed potential vacation destinations, she preferred tropical places that involved a lot of relaxation on the beach and lounging by the pool. I was of the preference to select a place that allowed visitors to conduct much site-seeing of historical and architectural landmarks. After arguing about it for some time, we decided to compromise instead of allowing the conflict to get any worse. We decided to select a location that offered both relaxation and tourist attractions. Using the conflict style of compromise made me realize that I really did need to relax on vacation. Unfortunately, compromise has not always been of benefit. For example, at the airport, I was scheduled to

board a very over-booked flight. The airline began announcing that deals for passengers to give up their seats in exchange for money and a future flight. Although I very much wanted to get home for family reasons, the offers got to a point of several hundred dollars plus a later flight. I compromised my principles and traded my ticket for the described offer. This choice ended up being costly in that I missed an important family event and was stuck in the airport longer than I originally anticipated. When used wisely, compromise can be a powerful conflict style.

6. Create a conflict scenario and show how collaboration can be used effectively.

A conflict scenario where collaboration can be used effectively is in the negotiation between two divorcing parents for parental rights and responsibilities. Both parents want the best for their children, but they also want their fair share of time with their children. By using collaboration, the two parents can maintain focus on individual concerns, the other party's concerns, as well as the welfare of the child. (Wilmot, 2007, 162) They might need a mediator to help them work through the negotiation, but the fact that they collaborate to bring about a peaceful and acceptable solution means they are making strides. Instead of engaging in verbal warfare, the parents can work out a schedule that is favorable for both of them. It guarantees that they both get time with the children and also allows for them time to move on and find happiness in their lives with a new romantic interest or other worthwhile pursuits. Collaboration helps both parents to realize that they will be interdependent. (Wilmot, 2007, 164) It bodes well for a peaceful future if they can both collaborate in a non-hostile manner in the immediate future.

7. List three positive and three negative qualities of the competitive style.

Three positive qualities of the competitive style include both parties improving themselves if they welcome competition, encouraging the conflict to be resolved sooner, and demonstration of importance of the conflict to one or both parties. (Wilmot, 2007, 145) If both parties are competitive, they can improve themselves as a response to conflict. Out of frustration from the conflict, one party may decide to start exercising and improving their health. In response, the other party begins working out as well so that they look and feel better as well. If a party is competitive, they will often want to resolve the conflict sooner, because they want to think they are the winners. When both parties are receptive to ending the conflict, the competitive feeling gets the conflict closer to being resolved. When a competitive person is involved in a conflict, they make it obvious that the nature of the conflict is important to them. (Wilmot, 2007, 145) The conflict can take on a greater significance, and both parties have the opportunity to express sincerity over the heart of the conflict.

The negative qualities of the competitive style are potential nefarious activity, damage to the relationship, and domination by one party. A competitive person involved in a conflict may undermine any negotiations by seeking outside help to cause harm to the other person. Such a response may cause the conflict to take a dangerous turn for the worse. If the conflict takes this dangerous turn or even causes less damage, it can harm a relationship. The conflict then becomes very detrimental to the parties involved. Another negative quality of the competitive style is domination by one person. Negotiation of the conflict can prove to be difficult or even impossible if one party is more concerned with winning most or all arguments. Instead of resolving the conflict, the dominating party can needlessly prolong it well beyond when it should have been resolved.

8. Describe a scenario in which the compromising style would be effective.

A scenario in which the compromising style would be effective involves teenagers getting new clothes for the upcoming school year. The parents have a limited amount of money to spend, but the clothes that the teenagers want are very expensive. The teenagers explain to their parents that their friends and classmates will be wearing new clothes. It is imperative that the kids fit in with their peers. The parents are not against their teenagers fitting in, but money is tight this year. The teenagers plead with their parents to no avail. The parents come to a compromise with their teenagers that they will allow the purchase of a couple of expensive clothing items. If the teenagers want more of the expensive clothes, they will have to maintain honor roll status with their grades as well as stay out of trouble by joining a team or working a part-time job. This way, the parents reason the kids will have incentive to earn the things that they want. In addition, the expensive clothes may go out of fashion and a different expensive item will be on the market. Rather than throwing a lot of money at clothes right away, making the teenagers wait will save money in the long run. In this manner, compromise is effective. The teenagers are able to get what they want, and the parents are able to mind their budgets.

9. Why is accommodation often harmful to the accommodator?

Accommodation is often harmful to the accommodator, because he or she does not heed concern for their own welfare. It can become easier for the other party in the conflict to take advantage of the accommodator. This conflict style allows one party to dominate the other and disrupts fairness instead of promoting it. The accommodator may want to simply bring an end to a conflict instead of truly resolving it. Thus, the conflict might not

actually be resolved. Such behavior can pose harm to the future relationship of the people involved in the conflict. (Wilmot, 2007, 159) It may cause one party to think that they have the upper-hand in any given situation in the future. The other party may become complacent and simply accept their diminished role in the relationship. The relationship will be less healthy than it was in the past. The person of lesser power in the relationship may even convince themselves that they are dependent on the other person rather than interdependent. For example, if a married couple fails to find relative equality in their relationship, the wife may just decide to accommodate her husband's wants for the sake of the marriage. She will simply forego the things she wants. If she does not speak up, then the couple will live together in peace but not necessarily happiness.

CHAPTER 6

1. How can systems theory help one understand conflict?

Systems theory can help one understand conflict by looking at the entire conflict just like systems theory is aimed at understanding the whole system. For instance, systems have a cause-effect nature, which can also be described as a chain reaction. (Wilmot, 2007, 180) Similarly, conflict consists of consequences that happened as a result of certain actions that took place. Within a system are parts that together make up the workings of the system. Parties in a conflict are the parts of the conflict, and as the parts, they are fit into specific roles. With this knowledge, people involved in a conflict would be able to maintain a better understanding of their situation and not necessarily pigeonhole each other into specific roles. (Wilmot, 2007, 180) In a system, each part must function together in order for the entire system to work properly. Likewise, to resolve a conflict, it helps if the parties involved cooperate with one another. If

they refuse to cooperate, then the conflict will continue, much like a system that malfunctions. Furthermore, change must occur in the conflict if it stalls, which is the same that must be done to a system that gets stuck. (Wilmot, 2007, 181) Another way that systems theory helps one understand conflict is that complications can happen. In a conflict, complications can be due to unknown facts or an outside person becoming involved. A system can be complicated if its operations are not fully understood. Additionally, both systems and conflict tends to have rules that help dictate how either one works. (Wilmot, 2007, 181) A system has rules embedded within it that help it to operate effectively. In a conflict, rules may not be as straightforward. As the conflict unfolds, rules can be created that were not evident beforehand.

2. What are conflict triangles and why do they form? List a workplace example or a home example where one would expect to see a triangle formed.

Conflict triangles are when the conflict takes on a new direction when a third party becomes part of the conflict. The third party is in support of one party over the other party in the conflict. The conflict triangle can become toxic if the third party has a prior relationship with both people. (Wilmot, 2007, 181) These conflict triangles form because one of the parties engaged in conflict feels at a disadvantage or powerless to contend with the other party. They need the support and perhaps advantage of a partner in the conflict. Long-term damage and even destruction of the relationship between the two people engaged in conflict can happen if the triangle causes unacceptable behavior. (Wilmot, 2007, 181) A workplace example of a conflict triangle would be if an employee and an executive got into a heated discussion about a decision made by the board of directors. Because the employee might feel powerless in the argument, he might seek help from his supervisor, whose boss is the executive. The supervisor, who

is actually friends with the employee will feel pressure to agree with his boss, the executive. He will also feel an obligation to help his employee, especially if he agrees with the employee's opinion of the decision made by the board of directors. Whatever position the supervisor takes, he could jeopardize his career or his friendship, or both. This interlocking conflict triangle is dangerous for all parties involved.

3. Systems do develop rules for conflict. Give three rules present in the systems of which you are a part.

In my job, there is a system in place in which programming changes get moved into production so that other employees in the company can utilize the updated applications. The system is also a process for ensuring that the changes are applied correctly and do not backfire on the programmers or cause any harm. One rule present in the release to production system is to make sure the programming changes work in a test environment. The changes have to be signed off as working as expected by a stakeholder within the company. This rule applies to all programmers. Another rule that is present in the release to production system is to write a plan for moving changes into production. The administrators who are responsible for the moves will not allow the release without a well-documented plan. This rule separates the programmers from the production environment so that changes are not made to systems during business hours. The plan is meant to facilitate communication between the programmers and the administrators. A third rule associated with the release to production system is that the programming manager must sign off on the changes after they have been successfully released to production. The changes are not completed until this final action takes place. The reason for it is to ensure that everyone is aware of the state of changes and the given system.

Another system in which I am a part is the United States of America. My part is the system involves several rules, one of which is that I must pay income taxes. The income taxes are used to fund the government's many functions in the United States. The penalty for not obeying this rule is a fine or even imprisonment. Another rule in the United States of America system is for the federal government to provide a military to protect the citizens. This rule has provided Americans freedom for a long time to live the lives they choose. If not for this rule, Americans would live in constant fear of foreign aggressors. A third rule in this system called the United States of America is for citizens to choose those who govern by voting for them. This rule is sacred although not everyone recognizes it. Without the rule of voting individuals into office, a tyrant could assume control of the federal, state, or local government.

4. List three specific examples of how understanding microevents can be helpful in conflict.

One specific example of how understanding microevents can be helpful in conflict is the idea of closing an office door when communication has either ended or has begun. Sometimes people close their office doors so that they will not be disturbed while they work. It is helpful to understand this microevent to avoid disturbing them and avoiding a conflict. When a meeting begins, the office door is close so that people inside may communicate without disruption. People outside the door understand that the closed door is a barrier to envelope the conversation. When the door is opened, it is a sign that the previous communication has been completed. This microevent makes it easy for everyone involved to avoid unnecessary conflict.

Another example of understanding microevents that can be helpful in conflict is praying before a meal begins. If a family is accustomed to praying immediately prior to eating, then it would be unusual to forget this

microevent. Praying before a meal involves everyone sitting down. Once everyone is sitting, they glance at each other and begin their prayers. An outside may not understand this microevent, and she may begin eating just as everyone is praying. Such misunderstanding can cause unnecessary conflict. If the misunderstanding is unintentional, then almost no conflict should result. However, if the guest does not believe in prayer, then she is showing disrespect to the family by not engaging in their ritual. Understanding this microevent is helpful in a conflict.

A third example of how understanding microevents can be helpful in a conflict can be seen in sports. For example, acknowledgement of a teammate's accomplishment can be in the form of something as simple as a high-five or a pat on the rear end. If a team member neglects to engage in this microevent, then his behavior could be perceived as negative. It could be the result of a previous or ongoing conflict, or it could be the beginning of a new conflict. It is important for teammates to understand these subtle gestures, or microevents, in order to avoid conflict.

References

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