

ASSIGNMENT 2 - CHAPTER 3

1. Give an example of a conflict that is built on the assumption of incompatible goals.

An example of a conflict that is built on the assumption of incompatible goals is the fight for custody of children by parents who are no longer married. Both parents may want full custody of the children so that they may spend the most time with them and have the most influence on the lives of their children. Both parents may also want what is in the best interest of their children. However, they may each see that best interest in a different light. The mother may think that the children need her nurturing attention more. The father may think that the children will benefit from a more disciplined environment. The mother and father may see their goals as incompatible to the point that they cannot agree on anything. They each contend that the other parent is interfering with their individual parenting goals. (Wilmot, 2007, 62) In reality, the children would benefit from the influence of both parents. The children need both nurturing and discipline to help them grow. The idea that quantity of time is most important is not always the case. Both parents can have an enormous influence on the children even in limited amounts of quality time.

2. Why do goals shift or adjust during conflict?

Goals adjust during conflict for different reasons. If the conflict happens over an extended period of time, then circumstances could cause goals to change. A conflict that lasts for years could actually be a series of smaller conflicts leading to one more profound argument. If the conflict is very emotional, then people likely may change their position in the conflict. The emotional aspect of the conflict could take its toll on people, causing

them to become more demanding in negotiations. If participants in a conflict negotiation are able to calm down and logically think through the situation, then goals may experience a more positive shift. The parties being defended could change during the conflict, causing the goals being fought for to be adapted. (Wilmot, 2007, 63)

3. Give an example of a content goal at work and an example of a content goal at home. Describe how each of these might be hiding a relational goal.

An example of a content goal at work would be the pursuit of training or education by employees. Certain employees might decide that specific courses or certifications or degrees would help them in their daily work. This additional education would also improve their general knowledge and make them more marketable. This content goal might be hiding the relational goal of how well the additional training benefits the coworkers' working relationships.

An example of a content goal at home would be a high school student's decision on what college to attend. She might want to attend a high-priced, prestigious college that would require her to move far from home. Her alternative would be a state university that costs less and is closer to home. This topic goal could be hiding a relational goal that involves how beneficial it might be for the young student to choose a place to study where she would be closer to her family and friends. Her parents would like her to choose the state university but would be supportive of her decision to choose the more expensive option.

4. Why is it important in conflict that each person clarify goals?

In conflict it is very important that each person clarifies goals. Each person involved in the conflict must know what they hope to achieve by

engaging in the conflict. It may take a while to gain a full understanding of the goals to be achieved due to emotional issues or misunderstanding. By clarifying goals, a person gains or reaffirms their sense of self-identity, and it helps them to save their own face or the other person's face. (Wilmot, 2007, 69) Such a sense of self can help make a person become more self-aware for the ensuing conflict. It is also helpful for parties to understand what the goals are for each other. Doing so will help them to resolve the conflict in a more timely fashion. Indeed, ambiguous goals can actually cause more conflict between the parties involved. (Wilmot, 2007, 88) Without identification and clarification of goals, two parties may argue about issues that are not really part of their particular conflict. Lacking goals can cause people to bicker about politics or other family issues instead of focusing on the heart of the matter.

5. List three examples of process goals.

One example of a process goal is avoiding interruptions. Parties engaged in conflict might postpone the resolution of the conflict unintentionally by constantly interrupting each other. The conflict may become greater if communication becomes disjointed and more unfriendly. Eventually, the two parties may realize that if they avoid interrupting each other, they will be able to come to a resolution sooner and stop wasting precious time.

Another example of a process goal is honestly communicating feelings. Two people in conflict may not be willing to acknowledge to one another their true feelings about the matter of the conflict. They may be hiding their true feelings, because of guilt, anger, or bitterness, among other reasons. When the two people can truthfully accept and explain their feelings, they can gain a better understanding for each other's perspective in the conflict. They might even be able to secretly empathize with the other party's plight.

A third example of a process goal is listening carefully to the other party's concerns. People typically act in their own self-interest, which can make it difficult to consider the other person's side in a conflict. Indeed, it makes listening to the other person more difficult when both people are concentrating on their own thoughts. If people engaged in conflict made an effort to listen carefully to each other, they might be able to resolve the conflict sooner. It could save time and grief. Perhaps the two sides might see that they are not as far apart on resolving the conflict as they thought.

6. In what sense can transactive goals be productive?
Destructive?

Transactive goals can be productive in the sense that they might be necessary and the person did not realize it before stumbling upon them. They can cause a person to move in a better direction in a conflict. They could help to resolve the conflict sooner than what was originally thought. If a transactive goal had not been discovered, the parties may have ended the conflict without knowing the full truth.

Transactive goals can be destructive in the sense that if they are discovered, they could completely disrupt the entire resolution to a conflict. The parties might have been close to ending a dispute. If some unknown fact is realized, then it could make matters worse, let alone continuing the conflict. A transactive goal could create an entirely new conflict that neither party was expecting.

7. Why might a person perform a "goal shift"? Give an example of a positive goal shift and a negative goal shift.

A person might perform a goal shift for different reasons because a conflict allows people to think about and talk about the things they want. (Wilmot, 2007, 84) As the conflict ensues, people might realize that what

they wanted before is not necessarily what they want now. If the two people engaged in conflict agree to talk through their issues, they may come to the conclusion that their previous goals were based more on emotion than logic. They might have disliked what a person said or did, and it caused them to impulsively create individual goals. If the people involved in the conflict realize that they are interdependent, then they might lower their defenses and their goals will likely shift.

An example of a positive goal shift can be witnessed in free agent negotiations in professional sports. Although many free agent athletes agree to contracts with franchises that can pay them the most money, sometimes athletes will forego the most lucrative contract in favor of the better overall situation. This goal shift is positive in that the professional athlete still receives handsome compensation in return for staying with the same team where he experienced great success.

An example of a negative goal shift is when nations discuss nuclear arms treaties. Certain nations like the United States want nations like Iran and North Korea to eliminate their nuclear arsenal (if they have any) and stop attempting to make such weapons. Nations like Iran and North Korea want to keep their nuclear arsenal and make more. At worst, these nations want to use the elimination of nuclear arsenal as leverage for further negotiations. If they do not achieve their goals, then it is likely that they will pull out of treaty talks altogether. This negative goal shift will result in their continuing nuclear weapons programs.

CHAPTER 4

1. Describe what you believe the book is saying about power.

In regard to power, the book is saying that power is a force that people have the capacity to use wisely if they choose to do so. Sometimes

people choose to exercise power in a manner that is not beneficial to others and sometimes to themselves. Power can be used in different ways to achieve desired results. It can be used to manipulate other people or to compel them to do what one person wants. Indeed, power can be seen in a different light depending on the situation. Power could be seen as a struggle between two people in a marriage, a work situation, or in politics. They may see a situation that only one person can aspire to achieve. Other people may see power as an opportunity to share a responsibility of enjoyment in a mutual way. Another method of looking at power is in terms of designating or delegating it to a different time or to other people. (Wilmot 2007, 101)

Then, there are people who prefer to be in denial when it comes to power. They would prefer to let others assume power and would rather not even talk about power. For some people, power is not derived from their advantage over others. Rather, it comes from their relationships with others and their environments, in what is termed the relational theory of power. (Wilmot, 2007, 104) A strong relationship can be a powerful mechanism for people to achieve goals together. Within these relationships, people are able to leverage power currencies, which are how people value each other's contributions to the relationship.

2. Using your definition, how would a person be "empowered" at work and at home?

At work, a person would be empowered in different ways. One way is if they get promoted to a managerial or executive position in their company. In such a role, a person is empowered to make decisions and assign tasks to employees that they manage. They can feel empowered by delegating power to those they manage as well. Another way that a person can be empowered at work is through the assignment of projects. If the projects are critical to the operations and success of the employer, then the employee can feel

empowered. If they are successful in completing these projects, then he or she may be able to leverage these successes to gain further empowerment, as in a promotion, a raise, or even more critical project assignments.

At home, a person would be empowered by their relationship with their family and their role in the family. Mothers and fathers form the leaders of a household, which means they are empowered the most of any members of the family. Teenagers can be empowered by their growth as people and also by their parents allowing them more freedom. However, those same freedoms warrant responsibility from teenagers. Teenagers can feel empowered to make more decisions for themselves. Even younger children can be empowered in the family household. Chores and responsibilities can be delegated to them. Parents can also grant their younger children the opportunities to make decisions about restaurants, toys, and school activities.

3. By writing brief conversations, give three examples of how people can deny power.

Conversation #1: A Parent grounds her son for lying.

Parent: "You lied to me about your report card. Your grades are much worse than what you told me. Now I have to ground you."

Child: "Aw, do I have to be grounded?"

Parent: "Yes. Not only did you get D's and F's, but you also lied to me about it. I'm restricting you to the house until the next report card. If your next report card has good grades, you may go outside again."

Child: "Aw, Mom! I can't go outside?"

Parent: "Not until your grades improve. Also, no video games."

Child: "That's no fair! I won't have any fun."

Conversation #2: A school principal penalizes a student for fighting.

Principal: "Do you know why you had to come to my office?"

Student: "No, why?"

Principal: "Don't be a smart aleck. You were fighting with others.

Fighting is automatic grounds for suspension. Now I'll have to call your parents and let them know that you're suspended from school."

Student: "Please don't call my mom! She'll kill me if she finds out!"

Principal: "I think it's highly unlikely she'll kill you. This is what I have to do. Of course it also means you won't be able to play on the football team until your suspension ends."

Student: "No way! The team needs me!"

Principal: "Perhaps you'll think before getting in a fight next time."

Conversation #3: A manager is stripped of responsibilities that are given to another manager.

Executive: "Bill, the board of directors has discussed it, and we think it's best that Dave assumes responsibility for budgeting in your department."

Manager: "Dave? Does he even know how to spell 'budget'? I think this is uncalled for."

Executive: "Bill, your department's overhead costs have risen significantly every quarter for the past year. Just this past quarter alone, costs are 15% higher. As for Dave, he has been with the company a long time and the board believes he is quite capable of handling the budget."

Manager: "I can explain the increased costs for each quarter. The board is making a big mistake. How about giving me another quarter to prove I can manage the budget."

Executive: "I'm sorry, Bill, but the board has made its decision. Please arrange with Dave to go over the most recent budget and actual numbers."

4. Relational theory says that power is the product of the relationship rather than a quality of an individual. In other words, power must be granted. Do you agree or disagree? Why?

I disagree with the idea that power must be granted according to the relational theory. In some cases, it is true that power must be granted. In an interdependent relationship, people must allow one another to take the reins of power depending on the particular situation. However, in many cases power is assumed by a person without it being granted. For instance, the United States federal government assumes much more power than it was ever granted. Senators, the House of Representatives, and the President are all granted power by the citizens who vote them into office. However, once in office, government officials pass laws that the Constitution never gave them the authority to pass. In recent times, President Obama's administration and Congress have nationalized General Motors, and they appear to want to nationalize more businesses. Clearly, the power to do such things was never granted by the Constitution. Some voters might want the government to nationalize businesses, but the office of the President does not possess these powers. In other words, power can be taken by force and not necessarily be granted. One person can threaten another person and thereby assume power over them if the second person is intimidated the threat.

5. What are power currencies and how do they operate? Do the currencies listed in your book guarantee power in your workplace? Home? Why or why not?

Power currencies give people credibility in relationships, because they are the resources a person possesses that may or may not be needed in given situations. (Wilmot, 2007, 106) If people need an individual's skills or knowledge, then that individual has power. It's the need in the relationship that defines how powerful the currency is.

In regard to work, the currencies listed in the book do guarantee power for individuals. Resource control obviously grants power to managers and executives who are responsible for employees working within their departments. Because of their important roles in their respective companies, those who supervise and manage employees control the rewards that employees receive. (Wilmot, 2007, 107) This power gives them the ability to motivate or possibly threaten employees to improve their work effort. The currency of interpersonal linkage can allot power to certain individuals who possess information that needs to be shared between different departments. In one way, however, this power currency is lessening in importance. Because of the increased use of information technology, employees can now access information via electronics systems in place and are in less need of humans providing that information. Where individuals maintain power in the interpersonal linkage power currency is through their ability to be a communication liaison between different work groups in order to accomplish tasks. (Wilmot, 2007, 107) Perhaps these work groups speak different languages or possess a completely separate array of technical skills. Thus, communication skills, another power currency, can also guarantee employees power. Good communicators prevent misunderstandings and mistakes from happening; they save companies money and prevent trouble. They can convey a message from executives to employees effectively. Of course, another power currency, expertise, can guarantee employees power for their valuable skills that they bring to their employers. These skills could be technical or business-related in nature, but as long as an employee is competent and completes assigned work, they can maintain power. Expertise, however, might be rendered obsolete by advances in technology. Employees can lose their power currency through no fault of their own, and it become incumbent on them to either find a new employer or to educate themselves on the new technology in order to maintain their power.

In regard to home, the power currencies listed in the book do not necessarily guarantee power. Obviously, parents hold the power currency of resource control, but for a limited time. After their children become adults and are capable of taking care of themselves, parents lose control of resources related to money and protection. If a marriage contains an unequal balance of power, then the spouse that controls the money is guaranteed power over the other spouse. Such is the case when one marriage partner has maintained the home while the other has worked outside the home for their married years. In the home setting, interpersonal linkages can grant power, but do not guarantee power. Many families are small enough to allow conversation between individual members. In many cases, the mother may be the bridge for communication between parents and children, especially when they are there for the children before and after school. The power currency of communication skills can be seen in a family unit. This power currency could also guarantee mothers power if they are effective communicators with their children and their husbands. The abilities to listen and provide warmth are communication powers that the children need. (Wilmot, 2007, 107) It's possible that expertise can play a role in guaranteeing power in the home. If parents are skillful in some aspect, they may be able to pass on their knowledge to their children. If the children are eager to learn, then this guarantees parents power in the relationship.

6. Give an example of someone using passive-aggressive power in the workplace.

An example of someone using passive-aggressive power in the workplace is an employee attempting to exert control in ways that do not contribute to their actual work. For example, the employee may be late frequently, which is a subconscious (or sometimes conscious) effort to demonstrate that they are in control of their own employment. (Wikipedia) The employee may think

that he can get away with being late, but doing so will create a poor reputation for him that could ultimately lead to his termination. Another way in which the employee can demonstrate passive-aggressive power through their attempt at control is not sharing in the duties at the coffee station. If several employees drink coffee, eventually they will each have an opportunity to put a new pot of coffee on the coffeemaker and/or clean up any spills. The employee with passive-aggressive power tendencies will likely make a mess and never clean it up. He may also never make a fresh pot of coffee. Instead, if he desires a cup of coffee, he will wait for others to make it, or he may hint to other employees that it's unfair for people to drink coffee without making a fresh pot. All the while, the employee is consciously neglectful of making the pot himself. A further example of an employee using passive-aggressive power in the workplace is by being constantly afraid of losing his job. He may be afraid that other coworkers are trying to win over his job, thus showing his fear of competition.

(Wikipedia) If the economy is showing signs of weakness or is in a recession, the employee may be fearful of losing his job due to economic reasons.

7. Describe the role of metacommunication in conflict and power balancing.

The role of metacommunication in conflict and power balancing can allow people involved in a conflict to more effectively resolve them by discussing how the matter will be decided. It is a means of talking about the communication itself in order to bring peace to the situation.

Metacommunication helps the parties involved in a conflict to understand that communication is essential to clearing up a struggle. (Wilmot, 2007, 126)

Instead of continuing to fight or ignoring one another during a conflict, metacommunication can help to encourage people to begin the process of

healing wounds. When two parties are unable to agree on the matter, it can be helpful to bring in third party professional counselors. (Wilmot, 2007, 126) These professionals have the experience and knowledge to help people negotiate their grievances. When power is especially out of balance, metacommunication can be used to recognize that partners in a relationship can both benefit from sharing power in particular ways.

References

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