

Conflict Resolution: Can a “Basic Unit of Conflict” Model Help in Therapy?

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Basic Premises

- A. In every serious conflict there is an inordinate amount of misunderstanding that inflames and complicates the situation beyond the initial exchange. If the conflictants were to be given a diagram that could enhance understanding, they would be more likely to control and mitigate the conflict.
- B. This model allows the participants to simplify an argument initially and then to analyze the conflict more deeply and in more detail for better understanding.
- C. Using this model makes conflict parameters seem more “4th” person or abstract so the conflictants can accept and examine it. To say “Bob’s behavior is innocent” is much harder to accept by a mistrusting spouse than saying “Person A’s behavior is innocent.” The annoyed person is more likely to hear the concept and begin to accept it to the extent that it is true. This is “adopting the meta-mind.”
- D. As the participants look at this model with its emphasis on “egocentric” vs. “altruistic” they will begin to examine how each of their behaviors falls on those two scales. The A Person examines how inconsiderate his behavior may have been and the B Person examines how retributive her behavior may have been.
- E. It is posited that using this model will increase consciousness of “form,” “process,” and “metacommunication.”

25 Postulates for The Conflict Theory

1. In most conflicts, there can be found an initial act or acts which the actor feels is innocent, non-provoking, and non-reactive. Yet, it is the offending act. This is “Person A”
2. In most conflicts there is a person who is bothered by another’s behavior and decides to react in a way that can become a habitual pattern of behavior. This is “Person B.”
3. As conflicts begin the A Person will react in some overt way after being remonstrated with or confronted by the B Person. This is the fifth circle in the diagram or “A3”.
4. Both the B Person and the A Person first have thoughts and feelings about the other’s behavior even if the “thoughts” are unconscious and even if the “feelings” are unfelt. This is located in B1 and A2, respectively.

5. A person's potential for behavior is called the personality. Every living person has a personality. It is made up of genetic influences and the Self System. This potential for behavior can be divided into a "tendency" to behave and a "capacity" to behave.
6. Every person in a conflict carries within him or herself a history of experience. These experiences shape the person's sense of self. The history of experiences is called the Self System. (H. S. Sullivan, Albert Bandura, Ira Gordon). This Self-System shapes most of the conflict-creating reactions that we see in both parties.
7. There are times when the A Person is unconsciously reacting to Person B's past behavior without realizing it. This past behavior is called the "B memory of behavior" or "B MOB."
8. There are times when Person B's behavior is augmented by past behaviors of Person A. This past behavior is called the "A memory of behavior" or "A MOB."
9. Most often Person A will not initially be conscious of and willing to admit to the provoking nature of his/her behavior that has influenced B's response. The behavior is often minimized by The A Person.
10. Even more often, Person B will not be aware of how his or her Self System influences and shapes his or her reaction to Person A's behavior. They will lay complete blame on the behavior of "A" as an explanation for his/her reaction, no matter how exaggerated.
11. In most conflicts, Person A will construe his behavior as being innocent and Person B will construe A's behavior as being willful and morally bankrupt, depending on the personality type.
12. In most conflicts, Person B will construe his/her behavior as being understandable and justified but Person A will construe Person B's behavior as being an overreaction and judgmental.
13. An Memory-of-behavior (MOB) behavior does not have to be the exact same behavior as in the current situation. It could be just in the general ball park. (Pavlov's Generalization and "Dynamic Stereotype", [cortical mosaic])
14. The more Person B is willing and able to examine their self-system as a precursor, the more that person can begin to disconnect the influence of the past experience and become an independent thinker, feeler, and actor (become more differentiated, as in "the Adult" ego state.)
15. The more Person A can examine his self-system as a shaper to his behavior, the more that person can begin to disconnect its influence and become a non-reactive thinker, feeler, and actor (become more differentiated.)
16. The more maldeveloped the A Person is, the more likely the A behavior will be selfish, egocentric, and thoughtless and focused on a egocentric need for pleasure or self-empowerment.

17. The more maldeveloped the B Person is the more likely they will exaggerate, pathologize, and demonize Person A's behavior and the more they will ignore their Self System as a precursor in the conflict.
18. The more maldeveloped the B Person is the more he or she will construe and perceive A's behavior as being selfish, egocentric, thoughtless and focused on an egocentric need for self-satisfaction..
19. As long as an A behavior is unconscious and not reactive it can be considered an A behavior. But when it becomes more overtly conscious as a reaction it can be construed in the analysis as a "B" behavior.
20. As the A's behavior becomes more characterological, or perceived as characterological, the B's behavior will increase in inappropriateness and disregarding of normal moral guidelines.
21. As the B Person's pain increases, the ability to stay calm decreases, the ability to be non-judgmental decreases, and the tendency to "blame" the A Person increases.
22. When the B Person is reacting appropriately, there is no reason to dig into their "personality" or "self-system." That is only necessary when they act aggressively or in a withdrawing manner.
23. The more therapy that Person B has had the more likely his or her "external reaction" will be appropriate, effective, or non-provoking (i.e., differentiated and in the "Adult.")
24. Therapy will not be expected to change the internal feelings that the B Person may experience after the A Person acts. There is no shame in feeling a reaction to an annoying behavior.
25. There are times when the B Person responds appropriately and the A Person reveals an egopathic personality style by a. Getting angry, b. Being defensive and egocentric, c. Showing rigidity and using self-justification to resist changing for the appropriate B Person, or d. Being strangely unsympathetic to the B Person's needs.