

# Causes and Consequences

by Sophia Tutorial



## WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, we'll discuss how to identify and distinguish between the causes and consequences of a conflict. The particular areas of focus include:

1. Causes vs. Consequences
2. Conflict Spiral
3. Mapping Causes and Consequences

## 1. Causes vs. Consequences

When conflicts are particularly tense, involve multiple parties, or are long-term, the conflict-intervener is going to analyze the conflict by gathering information from each party before bringing the parties together.

After identifying the parties involved and understanding the context of the conflict, the intervener will want to look at the **causes and consequences of the conflict**.

Distinguishing between a consequence and a cause can be very difficult because they can blend together when a conflict reaches a certain stage.

A cause is an initial event that, by occurring, initiated part of the conflict. A consequence is something that happens in response to that initial event, or cause. In other words, a conflict can become the next layer of a cause.

🔗 **EXAMPLE** Say the initial cause or event is one party behaving in a certain way. The consequence would be the other party reacting negatively to this behavior, thus escalating the conflict.



### TERM TO KNOW

#### Cause/Consequence of Conflict

Events within conflict which either initiate (a part of) the conflict or occur in response to another event; after the first cause of a conflict, consequences become the next layer of the cause as the conflict escalates.

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## 2. Conflict Spiral

Once there has been a series of causes and consequences, what can then happen is something called a

**conflict spiral**, which is a pattern of escalation in which consequences of behavior at one stage of a conflict become the cause at the next stage.

This is another reason why it can be so hard to distinguish between a cause and a consequence; depending on which party you're speaking to, the interpretation can be different.

Conflict spiraling is a common occurrence in conflicts involving war.

🔗 **EXAMPLE** In countries where there's violence, each side is quick to blame its retaliation on something that the other side did, which blurs the line between causes and consequences.

However, any conflict can begin to escalate when each party is participating in this spiral.

## IN CONTEXT

Let's say there's a proposed company policy that's been very unpopular in a particular organization. The company goes ahead with this policy anyway, and the workers become disgruntled. The quality of the work then falls, and the production is not as good; the company is not doing as well as a result.

Because of the decrease in quality and productivity, the company decides it will not give out raises this year, and there will be layoffs. The disgruntled workers complain. When they feel their complaints are not heard, they go on strike. The conflict spiral here began after management instituted that policy. If you, as an intervener, were to sit down and map out the conflict, you would need to identify the causes and consequences. In doing this, you might find that the way each side talks about those issues is different.

Management says that the cause was that the quality of work and level of productivity plummeted, and the consequences were layoffs and lack of raises. Conversely, the workers say that the cause was that management put out a policy with negative impacts on the workers. Then there were layoffs, and no one received raises. So each side is seeing the event from its own perspective and seeing the cause as an event originating from the other side.



### TERM TO KNOW

#### Conflict Spiral

A pattern of escalation in a conflict in which consequences of behaviors at one stage of conflict become causes of behaviors at the next stage of conflict.

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## 3. Mapping Causes and Consequences

As you learned in an earlier lesson, creating a conflict map can be a helpful way to represent the information gathered during the conflict analysis process.

This is especially true when trying to distinguish between causes and consequences. Making a chart with causes on one side, and consequences on the other, with arrows drawn back and forth can help visually show the parties what the causes and consequences truly are.

Part of the mapping process is to get each side to take a look at the information regarding the causes and consequences in order to understand the relationship there.



#### TRY IT

You can practice conflict mapping and mapping causes and consequences by mapping conflict in a movie or book that you like. For instance, you might map the conflict in "Romeo and Juliet" by listing the Montagues and Capulets on opposite sides of a piece of paper and indicating all the causes and consequences of the conflict between the families by the end of the play. (Tybalt, on the Capulet side, kills Mercutio, on the Mercutio side, and then Romeo, on the Mercutio side, kills Tybalt in revenge, and then, etc) You'll find it's not simple to map all the different elements, even for a fictional work!



#### SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned that the difference between **causes and consequences** in conflict is that a cause is an initial event that occurs, while a consequence is a response to that event. However, causes and consequences can become blurred in a **conflict spiral**, or a pattern of escalation in which the consequences at one stage of a conflict become the causes in the next stage.

You now understand that a major part of the conflict mapping process is **mapping the causes consequences** themselves, in order to better understand the relationship between them. Then, when you, as the intervener, meet with the parties, they will have a visual explaining how the causes and consequences are related. Good luck!

Source: Adapted from Sophia tutorial by Marlene Johnson.



#### TERMS TO KNOW

##### **Cause/Consequence of Conflict**

Events within conflict which either initiate (a part of) the conflict or occur in response to another event; after the first cause of a conflict, consequences become the next layer of the cause as the conflict escalates.

##### **Conflict Spiral**

A pattern of escalation in a conflict in which consequences of behaviors at one stage of conflict become causes of behaviors at the next stage of conflict.