

Common Features of Conflict

by Sophia Tutorial



WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, we'll discuss the common features of conflict by looking at the following concepts:

1. Perceived Incompatibility
2. Latent Conflict
3. Power

1. Perceived Incompatibility

Conflict usually involves a perceived incompatibility over one or more of the following:

- *Goals*: One party wants to build a community garden on some land, but another party would like to come in and bulldoze that land to build a high rise.
- *Needs*: One person works the night shift and needs to sleep during the day, but their neighbor's dog keeps barking.
- *Beliefs*: One religious group believes that a certain group of people should have more power in society than other groups of people; people who do not share this religious belief think that all groups of people deserve equal access to power.
- *Actions*: One person always cleans the kitchen, and their housemates frequently leave a dirty kitchen after meals without cleaning up after themselves.
- *Relationships*: You have a friend who you love spending time with, but she's always late. You're annoyed because it feels to you like their tardiness means she doesn't value your friendship, whether or not this is the case.



DID YOU KNOW

In this course we are focused on conflict involving two or more parties, but it is also possible to have **intrapersonal conflict**, which is a state of conflict between parts or aspects of a single individual. You might feel this type of conflict when you feel tension between your ambition and your laziness, for instance, or when you are struggling with an addiction or striving to grow a skill.



TERM TO KNOW

Intrapersonal Conflict

A state of conflict between parts or aspects of a single individual.

2. Latent Conflict

Sometimes, it can take a while for a conflict over a perceived incompatibility to come to the surface, and this brings us to the concept of **latent conflict**.

A latent conflict is a state in which parties have differences that bother one or the other, but do not consider those differences significant enough to act on them.

➦ **EXAMPLE** John and Mary are at a party. John jokes around and says something that hurts Mary's feelings. Mary thinks, "That really made me feel bad, but you know John—he's like that, and people know he's always joking around. He never means anything by it, so I think I'll just let it pass."

This happens two more times, and by the third time, Mary is thinking, "I'm not going to put up with this anymore because it really hurts my feelings. I don't want to hang out with him if their going to continue to joke around like this at my expense."

Because it's happened enough times that she feels like it has come to the surface, Mary is now annoyed enough to do something about it. Once a latent conflict is out in the open, the parties have the power to resolve it.



TERM TO KNOW

Latent Conflict

A state in which parties have differences that bother one or the other, but do not consider those differences significant enough to act on them.

3. Power

Now that the conflict has come to the surface, **power** becomes involved. Power is the ability to control an individual or group through influence, force, coercion, or manipulation to get the individual or group to do something that he/she/it would not otherwise do. Power can thus take many forms.

➦ **EXAMPLE** Let's return to John and Mary. Mary's annoyed because John jokes around all the time. He thinks he's being funny, but he's gone a little over the top a few times, and Mary is now annoyed enough that she would like to talk with him about it. She wants to use her power, and there are a couple of ways they can do this:

- **Social power:** Mary might invoke social power by talking about John's mean remarks with their mutual friends, who she knows like her better than John, and see if anyone else will join her in confronting John or keeping distance from him going forward.
- **Self-protective power:** Mary might stop spending time with John altogether, using her power to separate herself from the source of potential conflict.
- **Rhetorical power:** Mary might confront John, knowing that if she prepares herself with specific examples of mean things John has said, she is likelier to out-match him in the conversation and convince him to behave better.

- Force: Mary could punch John in the nose next time he says something they don't like.
- Coercion: Mary could offer an ultimatum to John, wherein she tells him that next time he says something she doesn't like, she will tell the entire friend group and ensure that he doesn't get invited to other parties.

While we clearly might view some of these methods as positive and some of them as negative, they are all ways of using power in a relationship.



TERM TO KNOW

Power

The ability to influence or control people or events, with or without resistance, through various means.



SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned that conflict is always between two or more parties over a real or **perceived incompatibility**. You also learned that a **conflict can remain latent**, or under the surface, for some time before a party decides to take action, using **power** to influence the outcome.

You now understand that it is only once a conflict has been brought to light that the parties involved can begin working toward a solution. Good luck!

Source: Adapted from Sophia tutorial by Marlene Johnson.



TERMS TO KNOW

Intrapersonal Conflict

A state of conflict between "parts" or "aspects" of a single individual.

Latent Conflict

A state in which parties have differences that bother one or the other, but do not consider those differences significant enough to act on them.

Power

The ability to influence or control people or events, with or without resistance, through various means.