

Identifying the Third Side and Making It Relevant to Parties

by Sophia Tutorial



WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, we'll discuss how to implement the third side approach when attempting to resolve a conflict. The particular areas of focus include:

1. Purpose of the Third Side Approach
2. Third Side Roles and Functions
 - a. Containment
 - b. Resolution
 - c. Prevention
3. The Third Side Approach in Action

1. Purpose of the Third Side Approach

The impacts of conflict are often felt by the wider community, not just the parties who are directly involved in the conflict.

As you learned in a previous lesson, the **Third Side** approach to conflict was started by the Harvard Negotiation Project at Harvard University. The goal of the Harvard Negotiation Project is to better understand the theory and practice of conflict resolution and negotiation by working in real world conflicts, and then spread this knowledge through writing and teaching.

The Third Side approach really works to take into consideration the interests and perspectives of everyone in the wider community who may be affected by a conflict. These people are brought into the discussion, as the idea is that their interests and influence can help resolve the conflict.



TERM TO KNOW

Third Side

An approach to conflict resolution developed by the Harvard Negotiation Project, which takes into account the perspectives and interests of those affected by a conflict as well as the conflict's parties.

2. Third Side Roles and Functions

Within the Third Side approach, the three basic functions in relation to conflict are:

- Containment
- Resolution
- Prevention

In other words, when it comes to conflict, the Third Side approach aims to contain if necessary, resolve if possible, and best of all, prevent. The model is organized around these three functions.

The Third Side has also identified 10 different roles that anyone who is part of the Third Side can play, and these roles are all organized under the functions of **conflict containment, resolution, and prevention**.

Functions	Roles
Containment	<i>Witness</i> , who sees what is happening in a community, and tries to prevent further escalation. <i>Referee</i> , who sets limits. <i>Peacekeeper</i> , who will be protecting going forward, even if conflict is already happening.
Resolution	<i>Mediator</i> , who sits down with the parties and helps to actually reconcile the conflict. <i>Arbitrator</i> , who also sits down with the parties and helps to actually reconcile the conflict. <i>Equalizer</i> , who aims to find a way to equalize the power between the parties. <i>Healer</i> , who can come and repair the damage that has been done.
Prevention	<i>Provider</i> , who helps to meet the needs of others in the community, particularly if the conflict is arising out of an unmet need. <i>Teacher</i> , who provides the skills that are needed to prevent future conflict. <i>Bridge Builder</i> , who forges relationships and other connections that can be made between the people involved.



THINK ABOUT IT

As you learn about these roles, think about:

- Your own role and the skills with which you feel most comfortable
- What you might bring to a conflict resolution situation
- How you might step into any of these roles to contain, resolve, or prevent



TERM TO KNOW

Conflict Containment, Resolution, and Prevention

The three broad functions affected by a conflict as well as the conflict's parties outlined in the Third Side approach to conflict resolution.

3. The Third Side Approach in Action

Identifying those roles and actually making them work all depends on the nature of the conflict; the stage the conflict has reached will determine which roles might be most relevant.

IN CONTEXT


In Billings, Montana, in 1993, a movement was started called, "Not in Our Town." The Ku Klux Klan came to Billings, and began distributing fliers. They desecrated the Jewish cemetery, they threw a brick through the window of a six-year-old boy because he had a menorah set up for Hanukkah, and they painted swastikas on the home of a Native American family. Their violent activities were beginning to escalate.

The town stood up against this, and different members of the community played different roles in response to this violence. The police chief, who of course witnessed the escalation of violence, made the actions public and urged citizens to get involved. The town's different churches and religious denominations reached out to one another to hold marches and candlelight vigils. The local painters union came together to paint over all the racist graffiti, including the swastikas on the home of the Native American family.

The local labor council passed a resolution against racism, anti-semitism, and homophobia. Finally, the local newspaper printed full-page menorahs, and 10,000 of them were displayed in homes and businesses around town.

As a community, the people of Billings made an unmistakable declaration that this was not going to happen in their town. Different members of the community took on different roles under the function of the Third Side approach. Religious organizations, the police, the labor union, the painters union, and the media all played a part in containing and repairing the effects of the violence and taking steps to prevent it from ever happening again.

This is one example of how, at an escalated stage of conflict, the emergent will of the community can still transform the dynamics of the conflict. As a member of a larger community, you can use whichever of these roles is appropriate at any stage of conflict.

 **EXAMPLE** If you're in a school, and you witness the beginnings of a bullying situation in the hall, you can consider how you might step in to prevent the situation from escalating. As a provider, you might try to meet some of the parties' needs by bringing in a program to teach the students some skills. As a bridge builder, you can forge some connections that might be helpful in preventing further escalation of the conflict.



BIG IDEA

Because we are all affected by conflict when it happens around us in our communities or organizations, the Third Side approach urges us to think about these roles, and how we can use them to help transform the conflict.



SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned that the **purpose of the Third Side approach** to conflict is to consider the interests and influence of the larger community in addition to the needs of the parties directly involved in the dispute. The three basic **functions of the Third Side approach** are **conflict containment, resolution, and prevention**. The Third Side also identifies ten **roles** that are organized under those functions: the witness, referee, and peacekeeper under the containment function; the mediator, arbiter, equalizer, and healer under the resolution function; and the provider, teacher, and bridge builder under the prevention function.

You now understand **what the Third Side approach looks like in action**: anyone affected by the conflict can step into whichever role may be appropriate at a given stage. The role you choose to play will depend on the dynamics of the specific conflict, but understanding how each of these roles functions is a great first step toward becoming a positive influence on the outcome of the conflict. Good luck!

Source: Adapted from Sophia tutorial by Marlene Johnson.



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