

Parties and Context

by Sophia Tutorial



WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, we'll discuss identifying parties and context as the first steps toward resolving a conflict. The specific areas of focus include:

1. Direct and Indirect Parties
2. Understanding Context

1. Direct and Indirect Parties

As you learned in a previous lesson, conflicts that are complex or involve multiple parties often need the extra step of conflict analysis, during which the intervener meets with each party separately to gather information before a joint meeting.

The first step for the intervener in this type of resolution process is to identify all the parties, both direct and indirect, that are involved in the conflict.

- **Direct parties** are those that are directly and actively involved in the conflict.

➞ **EXAMPLE** Say there's a conflict within a neighborhood over the construction of a high-rise building. The neighbors are in conflict with the developers because they feel that the high-rise will block their view of the neighborhood, as well as bring in a lot of traffic. Thus, the people who live in the neighborhood are direct parties in this conflict, as are the developers.

- **Indirect parties** are people or groups that are not directly involved in the conflict but are still affected by its outcome.

➞ **EXAMPLE** In the scenario with the high-rise construction, say the neighborhood also has a park and a lake. People who don't live in the neighborhood often come to swim in the lake or take their children to the park. These people are indirectly involved in this conflict because the outcome will affect their visits to this neighborhood.

In a complex conflict such as this, the direct parties may not even be aware of the indirect parties; however, it's also possible the direct parties may reach out to the indirect parties for support.

➞ **EXAMPLE** A coalition within the neighborhood decides to become actively involved in this dispute. The members of this coalition begin to reach out to the indirect parties to talk to them about how the

planned changes to the neighborhood will affect them.

The people who use the lake and park become allies of the neighbors, seeking to influence the outcome. Because of this, the indirect parties have now become direct parties in the conflict; the developers on the other side of the issue will now be aware of these new parties that they didn't know about before.



BIG IDEA

The first step for an intervener is to identify everyone involved in a conflict. This includes understanding the involvement of both direct parties and indirect parties.



TERMS TO KNOW

Direct Party

A person actively involved in a conflict.

Indirect Party

A person not actively involved in a conflict, but affected by the outcome of that conflict.

2. Understanding Context

After identifying the parties involved, the intervener needs to understand the **context of conflict**, or the history or timeline of sequential events that have occurred in the dispute.

In some conflicts, particularly those involving war, this history can be quite extensive with a complicated timeline of events that could still be influencing the conflict in the present.

Therefore, the intervener needs to take into account not only the timeline of events but the responses to the events as well. This includes the changes in the parties' attitudes or perceptions.

All of these factors are considered part of the context of a conflict. Many times, when mapping the conflict, the intervener may realize that the dispute at hand is simply an aspect of a larger conflict.

This is particularly true in larger international conflicts or conflicts within countries that have different groups at war.



EXAMPLE Say you're examining a conflict between two ethnic groups who have been fighting over cultural and religious differences. As you begin to map that conflict, you realize that this is really part of a larger conflict over land resources. The conflict actually started over land and has now come to focus on ethnicity because of the built-up animosity.



TERM TO KNOW

Context of Conflict

The history of sequential events that make up a conflict.



SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned that the very first step for a conflict intervener is to identify the parties involved in the conflict. Especially in a more complex conflict, there can be both **direct parties** and

indirect parties. Indirect parties can become actively involved in a conflict if they identify themselves as allies of one of the direct parties.

You now understand that after identifying the parties involved, the intervener needs to **understand the context** of the conflict. This involves learning about the history of events that took place in the conflict, as well as the attitudes and perceptions of the parties regarding those events. Many times, particularly in very intense conflicts, mapping the conflict can allow you, as an intervener, to discover that the dispute at hand is actually a smaller issue stemming from a larger conflict. Good luck!

Source: Adapted from Sophia tutorial by Marlene Johnson.



TERMS TO KNOW

Context of Conflict

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Indirect Party

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