Sources of Conflict

by Sophia Tutorial

≔ WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, we'll discuss how conflicts over unmet needs can come from the following types of sources:

1. External Needs
2. Internal Needs
3. Both External and Internal Needs

1. External Needs

To review, there is a range of factors that can lead to conflict, including:

- Unmet needs (interest-based conflict)
- Lack of information/different interpretations of data (data-based conflict)
- Clashing or contradictory beliefs (values-based conflict)
- Relational patterns (relationship-based conflict)
- External forces (structural conflict)

As you learned in a previous lesson, a **need or interest** is an action, belief, or physical item that a party perceives as important or essential to their satisfaction or happiness.
Every conflict includes parties who have needs and interests. The conflict occurs because one party feels that its need or interest is incompatible with the other party's.

An **external need** could be a physical, tangible object, or a situation that has tangible impacts. Let's look at some examples of conflicts involving external needs.

⤷ EXAMPLE *Interest-based*: A family is dividing up the inheritance after a death, and a feud develops over some of the objects. Tangible objects are at the center of this conflict.

⤷ EXAMPLE *Structural*: Diego has to drive to work every day, and it takes him two hours to commute. That long commute eats up a lot of their free time, so it creates a structural conflict.

⤷ EXAMPLE *Data-based*: Anita is signing up for health insurance, but she has questions about some of her options. She has been on hold with the health insurance representative for hours and she still hasn't gotten through, and she can't complete her health insurance enrollment until she understands more about

her options. Anita is experiencing data-based conflict.

Need/Interest
An action, belief, or physical item that a party perceives as important or essential to his/her satisfaction.

External/Physical Need
A need that is a physical, tangible object.

---

2. Internal Needs

An **internal need** is an emotion, mental state, or general satisfaction. Let's look at some examples of conflicts involving internal needs.

⤳ EXAMPLE *Values-based*: You enjoy the music of a particular performer, but you learn that the performer holds a political position that you find deeply unethical. The performer has recently begun integrating their politics more into their music. Whether you continue to listen to this performer's music, or to patronage their work with your money, is a values-based internal conflict.

⤳ EXAMPLE *Relationship-based*: Your friend really likes to spend time talking things out, but you just like to get the job done without a lot of conversation. These are relational types that could find themselves in conflict because of different internal needs.

Internal Need
A need that is an emotion or other internal phenomenon.

---

3. Both External and Internal Needs

It's important to realize that in a conflict, internal and external needs are not mutually exclusive.

⤳ EXAMPLE Let's return to the example of the family feud over heirlooms. When you get to the root of the conflict, you might find that the fight isn't just about a piece of artwork; perhaps it's also about:

- *Relational patterns*: Maybe the sister feels that her younger brother always gets his way. The sister feels that nobody listens to her.
- *Values*: The brother is very nostalgic and would like to keep things. His sister thinks, "No, why don't we sell this off and get the money. We'll divide the money up."

These issues can manifest themselves in different ways depending on the real source of the conflict.

⤳ EXAMPLE The same thing could be true of a data conflict. Anita's lack of information about her health insurance is a data-based conflict that is getting in the way of her ability to enroll in health insurance, but it might also be other types of conflict:

- *Internal values* Maybe Anita feels embarrassed that she can't understand the health insurance information without assistance.
- *Structural* Anita is likely anxious about the data she needs because if she makes the wrong selection, her health conditions might not be covered. This is a structural conflict because the health insurance system is set up in a way that makes it possible for her to make a selection that would put her into medical debt.

You would then discover that the issue here is external in the form of data and structure and internal in the form of values.

☑ SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned that conflicts can arise from two types of unmet needs: **external needs** (physical, tangible object) and **internal needs**(emotion, or other internal phenomenon).

You now understand that a conflict rarely comes from just one thing; when you get to the bottom of a conflict, you'll often find that it may have been caused by **both types of needs** being unmet. Good luck!

Source: Adapted from Sophia tutorial by Marlene Johnson.

📄 TERMS TO KNOW

External/Physical Need
A need that is a physical, tangible object.

Internal Need
A need that is an emotion or other internal phenomenon.

Need/Interest
An action, belief, or physical item that a party perceives as important or essential to his/her satisfaction or happiness.