Theories Based on Power, Relationships, and Rights

by Sophia Tutorial

WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, we'll discuss the theories of conflict, and how they have evolved over time. These three areas of focus include:

1. Power-based Theory
2. Relationship-based Theory
3. Rights-based Theory

1. Power-based Theory

As you learned in a previous lesson, **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 they would otherwise not do.

While all theories of conflict are based on some form of power, **power-based theory** sees conflict as a struggle to be won by a single party through the use of power.

Thus, this particular theory sees power mostly as force or coercion; it's really based on a win-lose situation where there's one side that's the clear winner and another side that's the loser.

⤳ **EXAMPLE** A lobbyist who has a lot of money might use it for coercion or manipulation when lobbying for a particular political agenda. This person has the power because they have the money, so it's a win-lose equation.

TERMS TO KNOW

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

Power-Based Theory
A theory of conflict that sees conflict as a power-based struggle to be won by one side or another through the use of power.

2. Relationship-based Theory

In recent times, conflict resolution has moved away from power-based theory, and toward **relationship-based theory**, which looks at things in a more win-win manner.

Relationship-based theory is an approach to conflict resolution that sees conflict as an opportunity to address the fundamental human needs of the parties involved.

The concept of fundamental human needs is key here because it pertains to the relational aspects of the conflict.

> ⤳ EXAMPLE You could see this with a landlord and a tenant. The landlord needs the rent, and the tenant hasn't been able to pay. The landlord could take this to court, but perhaps they have a good relationship with the tenant, and something happened that prevented the tenant from paying exactly on time.
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> In this case, the two of them could have a mediation to resolve the conflict in a way that both allows the landlord to get the rent and gives the tenant a little more time to pay. Regardless of how they choose to resolve it, the conflict is relationship-based because the focus is on the needs of both parties.
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> ⤳ EXAMPLE Let's say there's a town that has some planned road repair going right through the heart of the community. In sitting down to plan this construction, those in charge want to look at the relationships between everyone involved:
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> What businesses will be affected by the tearing up of roads? How many residents in the neighborhood will have to take detours? By looking at these relationships, those planning the construction can bring all the parties together and see if there's a way to move forward while still taking all the relationships into account.

📄 **TERM TO KNOW**

Relationship-based Theory
An approach to conflict resolution that sees conflict as an opportunity to address fundamental human needs of the parties.

3. Rights-based Theory

The last approach we'll discuss is **rights-based theory,** which approaches conflict resolution by looking at conflict as a perceived or actual incompatibility of the parties' rights.

> ⤳ EXAMPLE We most often see rights-based conflicts play out in courts, as they have to do with legal issues, entitlements, or human rights. You might find a group, or party, filing a case because the group feels its human rights have been violated. Or perhaps an individual brings a case regarding a breach of contract. This case goes to court to enforce the contract-holder's rights.

📄 **TERM TO KNOW**

Rights-based Theory

An approach to conflict resolution looking at conflict as a perceived or actual incompatibility of parties' rights.

☑ SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned the three broad approaches to conflict resolution: **power-based theory, relationship-based theory, and rights-based theory**. You now understand how and when each of these theories is used. Good luck!

Source: Adapted from Sophia tutorial by Marlene Johnson.

🗎 TERMS TO KNOW

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

Power-Based Theory
A theory of conflict that sees conflict as a power-based struggle to be won by one side or another through the use of power.

Relationship-Based Theory
An approach to conflict resolution that sees conflict as an opportunity to address fundamental human needs of the parties.

Rights-Based Theory
An approach to conflict resolution looking at conflict as a perceived or actual incompatibility of parties' rights.