Types of Conflict

by Sophia Tutorial

	WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, we'll discuss the variety of ways in which conflict can occur by looking at the five different types of conflict:

1. Data-based Conflict
2. Relationship-based Conflict
3. Interest-based Conflict
4. Structural Conflict
5. Values-based Conflict

1. Data-based Conflict

	BEFORE YOU START

There are infinite ways that a conflict can arise between parties, and most conflict feels unique while you are enmeshed in the details of one! But most conflicts can be categorized according to a few types, based on what aspect of the parties' relationship led to the conflict.

Data-based conflict is a conflict based on information, its presence or absence or interpretation. It could arise due to inadequate access to information by one or multiple parties; differing interpretations of information; or differing sets of information altogether. Let's take a look at some examples of where this type of conflict can occur.

⟳ EXAMPLE You are tasked to give a presentation at work about your team's collection of user data. However, when you receive the processed data from your teammates, you don't understand how they organized this data based on what you knew of the raw data; where do these numbers come from? You are interpreting the data differently from your colleagues, and this creates data-based conflict.

⟳ EXAMPLE When the housing market dropped during 2008, many people lost their homes unexpectedly. This is because they had been sold a type of mortgage that is very risky, but they had been misinformed by unscrupulous lenders about the risk of these mortgages. Banks and lenders made a lot of money selling these risky mortgages, which caused thousands of people to lose their homes. The data-based conflict is that the banks and lenders had withheld information from borrowers, or led them to inaccurate interpretations of information, which resulted in these ill-advised loans.

	TERM TO KNOW

Data-Based Conflict

Conflict based on inadequate access to, distribution of, or interpretations of information by parties.

2. Relationship-based Conflict

Relationship-based conflict involves the relational patterns between parties. It could arise from fundamental personality differences, or changing terms of or roles within a relationship, or from differing understandings of the relationship. This type of conflict is a major component of most novels and movies, so it is very familiar to most of us.

⤷ EXAMPLE Jim and Darius are close friends, but they sometimes get frustrated with each other when planning a vacation. Jim likes to plan ahead and make a schedule for each day, so that he knows what is going to happen when. Darius likes spontaneity and figuring things out as he goes. Despite their affection for one another, there is relationship conflict in their friendship whenever they try to plan a vacation.

⤷ EXAMPLE Tina and Bharat share an office, but they don't really get along. They each respect the other professionally and consider their colleague to be a good person, but their personalities have never quite gelled into friendship. Their working relationship is cordial but strained, and sometimes Tina complains about Bharat to her friend in a different office. When Bharat overhears Tina's complaints, their relationship goes from functional to open relationship conflict.

📄 **TERM TO KNOW**

Relationship-Based Conflict

Conflict based in the relational patterns between parties.

3. Interest-based Conflict

Interest-based conflict occurs when there are unmet needs or wants for one or multiple parties, and these needs or wants contradict those of other parties.

⤷ EXAMPLE *Time as a need.* You're a researcher, and you really need more time in order to finish the research and really feel confident about it. However, the company you're working for says, "No. We've got to get to market. You've got to meet this deadline." There are two different needs here around time.

⤷ EXAMPLE *Money as a need.* You would like to save money to plan for a vacation. You've been looking forward to a vacation because you work hard. Your partner wants to save that money in order to buy a new car. The two of you are fighting about exactly what to do with this extra money you have, so this is an interest-based conflict.

🚩 **HINT**

These categories of conflict can overlap. Many conflicts are complicated and can fall into many categories. For instance, a couple arguing over how to spend their savings are experiencing need-based conflict over their different intentions for spending the money, and also experiencing relationship-based conflict over their different ideas about money.

Interest-Based Conflict
Conflict based on unmet needs.

4. Structural Conflict

Structural conflict is conflict that is based on external forces impeding a party's goals or rights.

> ↪ EXAMPLE It is extremely difficult, time-consuming, and expensive to adopt a child in the USA. For anyone looking to adopt, they experience structural conflict when they come up against the challenges of the adoption system. This conflict will be stronger depending on the identity of the potential adoptive parents. Hopeful parents who are not wealthy will experience more structural conflict as they face the high fees of adoption agencies; hopeful parents who are queer will face structural conflict in the possibility of adoption agencies being biased and homophobic.

> ↪ EXAMPLE On a larger scale, structural conflict happens within nations where people feel like their rights are being constricted by government. You could interpret the American Revolution being an instance of structural conflict between the British government and its colonists who wished for greater autonomy.

Structural Conflict
Conflict based on external forces that impede parties' goals or exercise of their rights.

5. Values-based Conflict

Values-based conflict is conflict based on parties' differing or incompatible perceptions of what is morally right or wrong. Typically when you have this type of conflict, the goal is not to try to change someone's values; you want to understand what's beneath them.

> ↪ EXAMPLE Eleanor always arrives fifteen minutes early for any appointment, even if it means watching the clock frequently, because she highly values punctuality. Derrick is often running late, because he values bringing his full attention to whatever he is doing, and sometimes that means he forgets the time. When Eleanor and Derrick have plans, usually Eleanor will arrive early and Derrick will arrive late, and they will each be annoyed at the other because they have different values relating to punctuality and attention.

> ↪ EXAMPLE Saee and Paulo have two children. Saee's parents are from a culture that highly values formal respect towards elders while Paulo's family is very casual and independent. Saee and Paulo have decided to raise their children to be more like Paulo's family, which means they have values-based conflict whenever the children visit Saee's parents and don't exhibit the "proper" manners that her parents expect.

> ↪ EXAMPLE Many political issues are values-based conflicts that give the appearance of being needs-based conflicts. For instance, think of arguments about raising the minimum wage. Supporters of higher minimum wage often talk about the needs element of the minimum wage, such as the cost of living and the

average rent in a city. But this is underpinned by values: the belief that all workers deserve dignity and the ability to afford basic necessities. Opponents of higher minimum wage might talk about the economics aspects from the business perspective, but their position is also underpinned by values: the belief that some jobs are not as worthy of decent pay as other jobs. Ultimately, the argument over raising the minimum wage is a values-based conflict.

📄 **TERM TO KNOW**

Values-Based Conflict
Conflict based on parties' differing or incompatible perceptions of what is morally right or wrong.

⭐ **BIG IDEA**

Using these categories can help decipher the underlying causes of conflict in the world. When we comprehend the basic causes of conflict, we are able to work on formulating effective resolutions in order to move forward.

⚙ **THINK ABOUT IT**

Consider a conflict you experienced recently:

- Which type of conflict was it?
- What caused the conflict?
- What was the result of the conflict?

📋 **SUMMARY**

In this lesson, you learned that there are five different kinds of conflict: **data-based, relationship-based, interest-based, structural, and values-based**.

You now understand that knowing how to identify the type of conflict you're dealing with can help you in formulating the best possible solutions. Good luck!

Source: Adapted from Sophia tutorial by Marlene Johnson.

📄 **TERMS TO KNOW**

Data-Based Conflict
Conflict based on inadequate access to, distribution of, or interpretations of information by parties.

Interest-Based Conflict
Conflict based on unmet needs.

Relationship-Based Conflict
Conflict based in the relational patterns between parties.

Structural Conflict
Conflict based on external forces that impede parties' goals or exercise of their rights.

Values-Based Conflict

Conflict based on parties' differing or incompatible perceptions of what is morally right or wrong.