

When Interests are Values

by Sophia Tutorial



WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, we'll continue our discussion of positions and interests by taking a closer look at a specific kind of interest that may arise in conflict. In particular, we'll discuss:

1. Interests as Values
2. Value-Based Interests in Conflict Resolution

1. Interests as Values

As you learned in an earlier lesson, parties that come into conflict typically come in with **position**, or what they think they need. This position represents the solution they already have in their mind for getting an interest met.

The **interest**, however, is what they really need; it's the outcome that's necessary in order for the parties to truly feel satisfied.

In other words, the interest is the reason why the parties are really there, while the position is what they are thinking of as the solution.

Oftentimes, people will engage in positional bargaining when they have different stances over an unmet need because they see their position as the way to satisfy it.

This can become a competition between positions that leaves neither party very satisfied at the end. It's best to move away from positions, and ask the questions that get at the underlying interests.

When you do this, there are times when you might uncover an interest that is really a **value**, or a very deeply held belief that someone has about what is moral, ethical, or right.

When two parties are in conflict, they can bargain for any number of things, such as:

- Actions
- Situations
- Events

Conversely, basic values can not be bargained, and it's not the goal of conflict resolution to change values. When someone holds a value, that is his or her value and we're not out to change that.

**Position**

A particular way of getting an interest met, but not necessarily the only way of getting that interest met.

Interest

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

Value

A deeply held belief about what is right, proper, or moral or ethical.

2. Value-Based Interests in Conflict Resolution

While conflict resolution does not attempt to change parties' values, one of the goals of the process is to create better relationships.

Thus, if people holding opposing values can come to some understanding of one another, it will create better behavior and communication between them.

➡ **EXAMPLE** Let's say there's a couple that has some financial issues that are really causing a conflict. One party takes the position that they need to start using coupons to shop for groceries. She says, "We're spending way too much money on groceries. We have to use coupons, and we have look for the best bargains at various stores."

However, the other party says, "Absolutely not. When it comes to shopping for groceries, I want to buy local. I want to buy organic, and that's a value that I hold. I won't shop elsewhere, even for cheaper prices, unless the food is local and organic."

Instead of trying to change that value, the first party needs to respect that value so that they can explore other options that will allow them to save money, which is an interest they both share.

There might be other areas in which they can save money, but in terms of food, they could brainstorm about ways they might be able to buy local, organic food while still spending less. The belief in, or value of, organic food is not going to be mediated or bargained here.

**BIG IDEA**

The challenge in conflict resolution when you uncover a value-based interest is to put positions aside and look for other ways to come to some mutual agreements. There might also be non-value interests that both parties share and can work with to come up with a solution.

➡ **EXAMPLE** Values can come up in a conflict over child care. A couple has children that are spending time with relatives, and this is a family in which some of the members are very religious while others are not.

The couple, who believe strongly in particular religious values, such as going to church every Sunday, is in conflict with other relatives about letting the children spend time at their home because they don't hold

those same values.

However, there may be some options for working this conflict out: perhaps the kids don't spend Sundays with their relatives because Sundays are the days that they're going to be in church and involved in religious activities. Or perhaps, another family member, even though she doesn't hold the same values, will agree to take the children to church or to a Sunday school on that day if they happen to be there for a visit.

The goal of the resolution here is to work out the relationship between the children and their relatives while still respecting the values of the parents, who have religious beliefs that are not on the table for bargaining.



SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned that while we tend to engage in positional bargaining in conflict, it's important to uncover the underlying interests at the heart of the positions. However, when an **interest is a value**, it cannot be mediated. You now understand that while you may not agree with a particular value that a party holds, it's important to remember that the goal of **conflict resolution is not to change value-based interests**; rather, the goal is to improve relationships between parties, and you can often do this by finding a solution based on mutual, non-value interests. Good luck!

Source: Adapted from Sophia tutorial by Marlene Johnson.



TERMS TO KNOW

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