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Hurt, Upset, Angry, Frustrated?



**SURPRISING WAYS TO UNDERSTAND
AND DEAL WITH YOUR CONFLICTS**

JOYCE ODIDISON | MA, PCC, CTD

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I wish you peace, and wellness.

Disclaimer

This book is written to provide readers with another set of tools to respond to conflicts in work and life. The scenarios and names of parties in this book represents a depiction of the nature of conflicts that I have addressed, but does not replicate any one conflict scenario. All names and characters in this book are fictitious and not based on any client or organizations I have served.

Chapter 3

Why Is This Conflict Progressing?

How Conflict Escalates and Expands

In the presence of certain dynamics, an exchange can progress from a misunderstanding to a full-blown conflict in very little time. Knowing the phases of conflict progression and how it relates to a conflict escalation is critical, so you can assess if a situation or problem you are facing, is progressing or escalating. In this chapter, we will look at the “*conflict progression model*” first introduced in a previous book, *Getting Ready for Mediation* (Odidison, 2004). We will also make a clear distinction between the conflict phases and conflict escalation.

Conflict Progression vs Escalation

While conflict may progress from one phase to the next, a conflict can escalate in any of the phases, before or without progressing to the next phase. The conflict progression model introduces three distinct phases that a conflict can

move into and provide a framework of how to determine what phase your conflict may be in. While the expansive and evolutionary nature of conflict determines the conflict phases; conflict escalation is determined by the level of activity, and intensity of a conflict in any of the phases.

Conflict Escalation

A conflict may remain at an impasse for quite some time between periods of escalation. Conflict escalation occurs when the conflict generates activities in varying levels of intensity; such as when people disagree, quarrel, or engage in a dispute over issues relating to the ongoing conflict. Escalation can vary in intensity, from name calling, to destructive acts meant to hurt or destroy each other. Actions such as propaganda, rumours, vicious attacks and other violent or destructive acts meant to cause harm. While a conflict can be ongoing for decades or in some cases centuries; escalation ebbs and flows in intensity, making the conflict unpredictable and stressful causing fear and unrest for those affected. Escalation also serves to fuel the entrenchment and protracted nature of a conflict. As a

conflict escalates, it is likely to affect more people, who by default will become engaged in the conflict dynamics. Thus, the conflict becomes much more complicated with the addition of their energy, rage, or personal vendettas.

Disputes or Conflicts?

Disputes, when not addressed can lead to larger conflicts. Disputes can also result from an ongoing conflict that has created the right atmosphere for its occurrence. While a conflict may be ongoing due to deep seated value differences, positions, injustices, or power imbalances; disputes arise from the deep dislike, intolerance, and culture of enmity created by a conflict. Disputes may take the form of arguments, disagreements, clashes, or quarrels that arise due to the ongoing larger conflict. Frequent disputes serve to intensify and escalate the conflict and may serve to confirm key differences between the disputing sides. Disputes may also cause the conflict to affect more people, thus they are likely to lengthen and expand the conflict to another phase.

The Conflict Progression Model

The *Conflict Progression Model* depicts three distinct conflict phases in which a conflict can escalate, lengthen, and expand. The model will show that conflict takes on a sequence that begins with discernment in the conceptual phase, moves on to alignment in the central phase, and then to the protracted phase, where a pattern of retaliations and cycle of vengeance persists. Thus, enabling a conflict to go on indefinitely.

Let's discuss the phases of conflict and the behaviours and escalating actions that are likely to occur in the presence of conflict, through either of the three conflict progression phases.

Conceptual Conflict: Phase I - (Discernment) - You Make Me Feel Horrible

In this phase, one or both parties will experience strong emotions towards the other person. These feelings may be due to an outright disagreement, misunderstanding or covert behaviour. The signs of conflict in this phase usually reflect emotions such as:

- *Anger*
- *Suspicion*
- *Resentment*
- *Hurt*
- *Anxiety*
- *Frustration*
- *High Stress*

The Conceptual Phase is where a conflict is comprehended and begins to manifest, through negative thoughts, discomforting feelings, and the like. The conflict is no longer latent but it is obscure enough to be overlooked. Feelings and emotions such as anxiety, blame, anger, impatience, misunderstandings, and miscommunication become common, leading to disagreements that further cause hurt feelings, and escalate the conflict.

Escalation of a conflict in this phase could present as an argument that is overheard by others, name calling that is hurtful and demeaning, harassing, or bullying behaviour towards a person. An overly negative performance review and embarrassing a person in the presence of others are also examples of escalating conflicts. Any of these escalating incidents can attract the sympathy of others or affect

bystanders who may be outraged or disturbed by what they have witnessed. Thus, affecting others, which in turn will result in alignment and expansion of the conflict into the central phase.

Central Conflict: Phase II - (Alignment) - I'll Tell My Friends

In this phase, one or both parties will begin sharing their stories about the other with friends, families, or co-workers; sharing their frustration, upset feelings, as well as their perspective on the situation. The signs of conflict in this phase usually show up as:

- *Outrage*
- *Alignment*
- *Distrust*
- *Discord*
- *Miscommunication*
- *Gossip*
- *Rumours*
- *Stereotypes*
- *Discrimination*
- *Work disruption*
- *Distractions*
- *Allegiances*

The Central Phase of progression is where the attitudes and behaviours of the individuals involved have expanded to include their friends and those in their close personal networks, allowing for alignment to take place. In this phase, the person who is hurt and upset will share their views of the conflict situation, talk about their upset feelings and suspicions with their friends to garner sympathy, thus, alignment occurs. Conflict alignment may show up as the forming of separate camps, bands or groups that are upset about the same issue.

This expansion of the conflict will result in added dynamics and more opportunities for dispute and disharmony between the sides. With more people involved in the conflict, there is a greater chance for hurtful acts to take place. It is important to attempt to resolve the conflict in this phase, to prevent entrenchment and further progression.

Conflict escalation in this phase will manifest as a group of people agreeing to be upset with another in dispute. At this point, blaming, labelling, and differentiation

from the other may start. Gossips, stereotypes, and rumours about the other side may circulate. Disputes and confrontation of the other person or side may also occur. Display of strong dislike and outrage is another sign of escalation. Scrutiny of the other side and their actions may intensify, and discord resulting from arguments with the other person may ensue.

As intensity and escalation of the conflict occur in this phase, it may lead to further expansion of the conflict and a cementing of conflict attitudes and mindset. A conflict in this phase can prolong and expand in size and entrenchment, which will move it into the protracted phase.

Protracted Conflict: Phase III - (Cycle of Vengeance) We Will Make You Pay

In this phase, the conflict often includes groups, camps, or sides, with clearly defined outrage against the other. It may be seen with entire teams, groups, departments, neighbourhoods, or organizations. It can also be seen within tribes, ethnic groups, or regions. In larger scale conflicts, this can escalate into international conflicts.

These usually date back to protracted issues, which are intertwined with the group identity. These very destructive and intractable, long-term conflicts, often continue to expand, with activity levels that vary in intensity.

Both sides will have their supporters who also support their positions and interests. Some of the signs of conflict in this phase usually involve:

- *Destructiveness*
- *Dehumanizing*
- *Negative Competition*
- *Sabotage*
- *Hate Crimes*
- *Historical and Cyclical Disputes*
- *Circle of Revenge*
- *Violence*
- *Desire to Cause Harm*

The Protracted Phase of the conflict is the third and most destructive phase of progression where the conflict defines every aspect of interactions between the group. It also depicts a cycle of vengeance with an established culture and clearly define rules of engagement on opposing sides. In this phase, the reasons or issues of the conflict become

secondary to outmaneuvering the opposing side. Open hostility for certain members of the opposing sides replaces any affection previously held for them. Assumptions and fear of attacks are perceived as real, while distrust, threats, anger, violence, and mayhem persists.

In this phase, the conflict takes on new meaning. The cycle of vengeance and retaliation becomes more important than ending the conflict. Small victories against the opposing side become celebrated occurrences. Wrongdoings against the groups are shared as justification and celebrated victories, or celebrated injuries are shared to maintain solidarity. These chosen moments are relived in the minds of the group as often as possible, to promote enmity and further fuel the conflict.

Conflict escalation in this phase will look like public attacks, violence towards each other, and harmful acts that are meant to destroy the other. They may include the destruction of infrastructure to prevent access to the other; or vengeance against the other for a perceived attack. It will

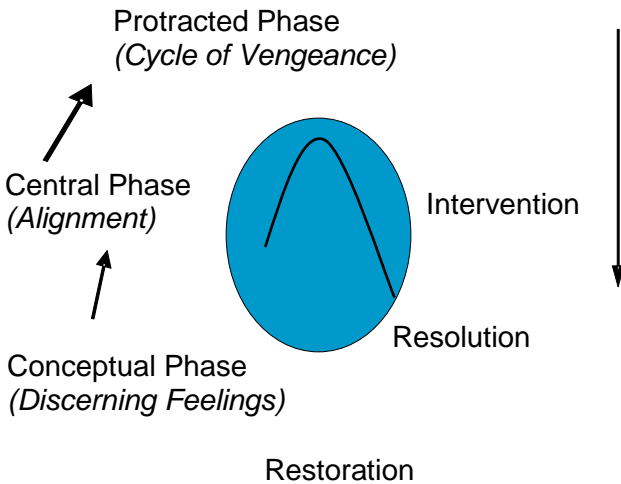
include dehumanizing communication, and propaganda about the other will be shared.

The Conflict Progression Cycle

The diagram below depicts the cycle of progression as depicted in the conflict progression model. It depicts a sequence of discernment, alignment, and the cycle of vengeance that can go on indefinitely if it is not managed, reversed, or stopped.

Table 1

The Conflict Progression Cycle



How Conflict Progresses

Conflict progresses through three main phases. Some conflict situations progress slowly from phase to phase, while others move quite rapidly through the phases. Some conflicts may skip an entire phase, while others linger slowly in each phase. There are many variables that impact the progression of a conflict such as: “alignment and escalation”, which has already been discussed in this chapter. Culture and values; the importance of the relationship, a desire for resolution; and access to resources are discussed below.

Culture and Values

The culture, values, and practices of the parties in conflict will impact the conflict existence. Variables such as, whether their culture encourages them to address the conflict or to ignore it, whether they value a conflict free relationship or not will determine the life of a conflict.

Importance of the Relationship

The dynamics at play between the parties will also impact the progression of the conflict. The importance of the

relationship, the need to continue working, living, or interacting with each other will all impact the progression. A conflict with your neighbour or co-worker is more important to resolve than a conflict with someone in the aisle at the grocery store. If the relationship is important enough, the parties will invest the time to seek out a resolution and to preserve the relationship.

Desire for Resolution

The desire for resolution by both parties will also impact the progression of the conflict. If one party wants resolution and the other does not care to participate, it will take longer to manage the conflict.

Access to Resources

Access to resources such as: how accessible and attainable are resources to the parties in conflict. Access to intervention techniques such as coaching, mediation and the resources that are required to meet the mutual needs of the parties will also determine the progression of the conflict.

Why Conflict Alignment?

People identify with, sympathize, and take sides or align themselves with others who share similar perspectives with them. People want to feel safe with those around them. Thus, it is a natural act to support them when they are upset or hurt, as in the case of conflict. Unfortunately, alignment also provides a support system for the negative behaviours and attitudes that arise from the conflict; making it a group conflict, rather than an individual conflict.

In such cases, the group will develop a culture of conflict. The group members will celebrate certain incidents or grievances to foster dissonance amongst the other side and increase cohesiveness among their group. As the conflict becomes more entrenched, “group think”, a situation where those of a group think similarly, will set in. This thinking will continue to foster a culture of enmity; to the degree that members of the group will come to believe that the other side is deserving of whatever violence or destruction they render.

Understanding Conflict Progression


When you understand the phases of progression, it allows you to see the variables that can contribute to the escalation and expansion of a conflict. With this information, you will be better equipped to make decisions about how to respond to a conflict appropriately. Not knowing how to respond should is a common excuse to do nothing or to avoid handling a conflict situation. As we discussed in chapter one, conflict is inevitable in our relationships and it is therefore our responsibility to do our part to ensure that we not contributing to the expansion and escalation of conflict.

NEED A NEW WAY TO DEAL WITH A CONFLICT AT WORK, OR IN YOUR LIFE?

Tired of the negative emotions, drain on your energy, and time spent dealing with a current conflict? Get ready to:


- Stop the hurt, anger and frustration
- Stop arguing and fighting
- Have a productive conversation
- Resolve and end your conflict

This book provides some surprising ways to understand and deal with conflict in any phase.




JOYCE ODIDISON is the founder of Interpersonal Wellness Services Inc. She has spent the last 20 years helping organizations and groups respond to and resolve conflicts, so people can laugh again at work. Joyce has worked in the private and public sectors with Provincial and Federal Governments, post secondary institutions like University of Manitoba and Red River College, with not-for-profit boards, and with associations like Sport Manitoba, and others. Joyce and her team provides leadership coaching and training globally, in the US, Canada, and ASEAN Countries, to help professionals enhance harmony, peace, productivity, and well-being, at work and in life.

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