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INTERPERSONAL CONFLICT

The Nature of Interpersonal Conflict

Interpersonal conflict is an expressed struggle between at least two interdependent parties who perceive incompatible goals, scarce resources, and interference from the other party in achieving their goals.

The Nature of Interpersonal Conflict

» Points to remember:

- Conflict is an expressed struggle; however it is more than just disagreeing with someone. Conflict is a behavior because in conflict you must make people aware of your feelings.
- It occurs between two or more interdependent parties. In order to have conflict, you must depend on the other in some way.
- It is about goals that the parties perceive to be incompatible
- It arises over perceived scarce resources. People rarely have conflict over having too much money.
- It includes interference and an attempt to change the conflict.

Conflict in Personal Relationships

» In relationships, conflict . . .

- Is natural
- Has content, relational, and procedural dimensions
- Can be direct or indirect
- Can be harmful
- Can be beneficial

Conflict in Personal Relationships

» Common topics of conflict in marriage

- Personal criticisms
- Finances
- Chores
- Children
- Employment
- In-laws
- Sex
- Use of time

Conflict in Personal Relationships

» What else affects conflict?

- **Sex and gender:** Research shows that men are more likely to engage in direct conflict which sometimes includes being physically aggressive, while women are more likely to be passive-aggressive and spend money instead.
- **Cultural messages:** Individualist cultures teach people to stand up for themselves, while collectivistic cultures teach people to maintain harmony by avoiding conflict.
- **Conflict Online:** We tend to say or do things online that one would not say or do in other environments.

Power and Conflict

- » Power is the ability to influence or control other people or events
 - **Power is context-specific:** Your boss is in charge at work, but he isn't in charge of you at home.
 - **Power is always present:** In every interaction, someone has the power and overtime, this power can shift back and forth and compliment one another.
 - **Power influences communication:** One-up (commands), one-down (passive decision making responses) and one-across messages (statements of fact).

Power and Conflict

- **Reward power:** when one party has the ability to reward the other in some way.
- **Coercive power:** power that derives from the ability to punish. A judge, an employer, and a parent has coercive power.
- **Referent power:** the idea that the power of attraction plays a part in how you might comply to a request
- **Legitimate power:** When status and position gives them the right to make requests.
- **Expert power:** power that derives from one's expertise, talent, training, specialized knowledge, or experience.

Power and Conflict

» Sex and gender influence power

- Patriarchy is a common organizing principle
- Several nations have female heads of state
- Masculinity and femininity express different messages about power

» Culture influences power

- People in high-power-distance cultures accept power differences as normal, even desirable
- People in low-power-distance cultures often question power differences

Managing Interpersonal Conflict

» Problematic behaviors during conflict:

- **Criticism:** The expression of complaints about another party. Criticism isn't always bad, but it becomes counter productive when it focuses on a person's personality, rather than on their behavior.
- **Contempt:** The expression of insults and attacks on another's self-worth.
- **Defensiveness:** The tendency to deny the validity of criticisms directed at the self. It means seeing oneself as a victim and not taking responsibility.
- **Stonewalling:** Withdrawing from a conversation or an interaction.

Managing Interpersonal Conflict

- » Strategies for managing conflict
 - **Competing:** managing conflict in which one's goal is to win while the other part loses.
 - **Avoiding:** ignoring or failing to deal with conflict.
 - **Accommodating:** involves giving in to the other party's needs and desires, and sacrificing their own.
 - **Compromising:** where both parties give up something they want so that both can receive something they want.
 - **Collaborating:** involves working toward a solution that meets both parties needs.