

Do Siblings Impact Views
and
Ability When Dealing With Conflict?

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EDUC 5440-01

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December 16, 2020

Introduction

Conflict is inevitable. Every day as humans we encounter conflicts that we are expected to navigate. Some conflicts are minor, some are major. I have found that when many people think of conflict, arguments and major emotional eruptions are what come to mind. Although these escalated interactions are part of conflict, so are the small disagreements. When a disagreement has become visible, it's likely that conflict resolution and management have broken down. Opportunities to avoid escalation were miss managed by those involved. A person cutting in line at the bank is a conflict, deciding where to eat dinner can be a conflict, a co-worker not doing their share of the work is a conflict. We are all unique, with unique perspectives. Any time we have an idea that is different from someone else, there is conflict.

I believe each individual has a unique way in which conflict is handled. Where do we learn how to handle conflict? And how do we view conflict? Is conflict seen as an opportunity to get to the bottom of our differences? Or is conflict seen as a nuisance that gets people's emotions out of order, making decisions harder to make? These are questions that have come up for me throughout this course. Although social sciences are hard to study and provide proof given the countless variables that simply cannot be controlled, I enjoy drawing connections and investigating the why's of whom I'm as an individual, but also how others have been impacted. The concept of nature vs nurture research has shown that there is a large part of our personality that is influenced by our environment(Kelsie). Is conflict something that is largely controlled by nature or by nurture?

In this essay, I'm going to examine the potential influences siblings have on creating positive, healthy and productive views on conflict and resolution. Having grown up with five siblings myself, I'm going to investigate my upbringing and that

of my siblings as it relates to conflict. I believe that having siblings helps develop positive views on conflict while creating a well-rounded variety of ways to handle disputes. I believe this is achieved not only through direct conflict and the subsequent resolutions but also by observing conflicts between other siblings and between siblings and parents.

Conflict

Conflict is a commonality among humans. How it is dealt with may vary by culture, age or environment. The types of conflict can be categorized into three broad groups as described in the textbook *Organizational Behavior*. The three types of conflicts the textbook outlines are intrapersonal conflict, interpersonal conflict and Intergroup conflict. Intrapersonal conflict is ambiguity that arises from within ourselves. In psychology, this is known as cognitive dissonance (Tavris, 2020). In intrapersonal conflict, our actions are in disagreement with our morals or values. This can be brought up in a variety of situations. The textbook *Organizational Behaviour* talks about situations between managers and subordinates leading to a potential source of intrapersonal conflict. "A manager may want to oversee a subordinate's work, believing that such oversight is a necessary part of the job. The subordinate, on the other hand, may consider such extensive oversight to be micromanagement or evidence of a lack of trust." (Robins & Judge, 2007) Intrapersonal conflict can often be crippling, distracting and lead to needless suffering if not handled correctly. I think of intrapersonal conflict as a large factor in self-confidence and one's ability to be happy in one's skin. A common inner conflict I see people struggle with is that inner voice people call their conscience or voice of reason. The conscience is always there to question what we are doing and if it aligns with our values. Sometimes the little voice is telling us we aren't good enough and should quit. Intrapersonal conflict

although internal and harder to visualize, follows many of the same rules of external conflicts. How we view these conflicts and choose to deal with them impacts the outcome. Do we avoid them? Do we rationalize them? Do we have a heated argument with ourselves and engage in destructive behaviour trying to get away from the problem? Although I have yet to see self-esteem related to conflict perhaps those who are better at dealing with conflict might also be better at dealing with intrapersonal conflict.

Interpersonal conflict is what most people would identify as conflict.

Interpersonal conflict is the differences between one or more individuals (Robins & Judge, 2007). Interpersonal conflicts could arise between roommates over who does the dishes, or coworkers and who's responsible to clean the coffee pot. Interpersonal conflict can be major or minor. Improper inter-personal conflict resolution can have devastating effects, from losing a job to losing a spouse to impulsive decision making that sends ripples through one's life. In observing the world I see a lack of ability to handle conflict in a helpful way. "The cost of conflict in the workplace is high. Some of the ways that unresolved conflict affect" the workplace go unnoticed and others are obvious (Harper, 2004)

The third style of conflict as described by Johnson is intergroup conflict.

Intergroup conflict is the conflict between groups. In many ways, this could be looked at as a group of interpersonal conflicts, but since each group is generally going to be focusing on the same thing and acting as one unit it is Intergroup conflict. This could show up as religious groups disagreeing with each other on faith or at work.

"Departments may conflict over budget allocations; unions and management may disagree over work rules"(Robins & Judge, 2007). The general rules of conflict apply

to intergroup conflict as well. A healthy mindset and conflict management skills will lead to preferred outcomes.

Conflict can make or break a person's day. Why is then, that there is not more focus on developing skills for such a daily occurrence? Does conflict have to be bad? I find that often conflict is viewed as a negative thing that many people are uncomfortable with. What if we all viewed conflict as a necessity for change? Conflict can be a way to productively discuss differences and better our understanding and scope of someone or something. I believe that conflict is a good thing when everyone involved is made aware of the benefits and can act with a growth mindset, engaging in active listening and problem solving, rather than ego and right vs wrong. A study looking at Task Versus Relationship Conflict, Team Performance, and Team Member Satisfaction found that “Consistent with past theorizing, results revealed strong and negative correlations between relationship conflict, team performance, and team member satisfaction”(Drea & Weingart, 2003).

According to (Amason, 1996) it was found that good leaders are excellent at conflict negotiation. I would go so far as to suggest that many leaders become leaders because of their conflict handling skills. One who is in possession of the ability to handle conflict with grace is likely going to be easy to get along with. Such a person will hold their ground and have set boundaries that convey confidence. The aforementioned type of person is someone who would be seen as capable and strong under pressure, someone whom one would want to have control of the hard decisions when things become tough, as is a leader's responsibility. A study examining the convergent validity of conflict management and leadership stated that “Conflict management strategies can be used to better understand leader behaviour within the leadership grid.” A noteworthy caveat being that “Although the two leadership

theories analyzed appear to be incompatible, it was observed that training programs based on the theories are both directed at improving conflict management”(Lewis & Jobs, 1993). Where do leaders' skills for managing conflict come from? Can it all be learned and implemented at the time the decision is made to pursue leadership? Or is there an innate ability that has been nurtured from childhood and moulded through observation and experimentation?

What does it look like to have a healthy outlook on conflict? Although there are a variety of ways conflict can be utilized, the biggest indicator would be that conflict leads to improvement both internally and externally. One way to view conflict is outlined by Gary Harper, using what he calls the drama triangle. In conflict, we often take one of three roles heroes, villains, or victims. Successful conflict management is found in the middle of all three as a resolutionary. A hero, strolls into conflict thinking they have all the solutions and will save the situation ". The hero ventures forth to do what must be done—justice will be its own reward."(Harper, 2004) Although noble in cause, the hero views himself above the law in many ways and it justifies what they do because it's for the right reason. In fact "Based on actions alone, a hero is simply a self-righteous villain" (Harper, 2004). The victim has a sense of helplessness and can lead to avoidance in conflict and a feeling of not being heard. A victim mentality often leads to blaming in conflict and creates a villain (Harper, 2004). The villain is similar to the hero, with the big exception that what they do is viewed as wrong for the cause. A villain is confident in their ability to fix conflict and do things their way, but their way often goes against popular opinion. A resolutionary views conflict as progress. No one is right or wrong, there are only differences that need to be discussed and a meaningful resolution can be found. To make the leap from the drama triangle to resolutionary Gary Harper suggests recasting the triad. The passive

victim becomes assertion through taking responsibility for our actions and views in conflict. The hero takes on a new role as a problem solver. By removing ego and self-righteousness from the conflict, the hero can begin to problem solve by removing the need to be right. The Villain can begin to collaborate with those involved in a conflict. By removing the need to control the situation villains can lean towards helpful resolution.

Another way to look at conflict is through the following five ways of handling conflict known as the Thomas Killmann Model. The five ways of handling conflict in the Thomas Killmann Model are Yielding, Compromising, Forcing, Problem Solving and Avoiding.

Sibling Conflict

Given the importance of healthy conflict to being a successful leader and navigating everyday life, are those growing up without siblings at a disadvantage? Growing up with two sisters and three brothers I thought it might be helpful to look at how my siblings and I view and handle conflict. To do this I used a couple of questionnaires, one is based on Gary Harpers Drama Triangle mentioned earlier and the other is the Dutch Conflict Handling Test based on the Thomas Killmann Model. All of my siblings except for my youngest brother would be considered successful in their given fields. I would consider all to have productive conflict management, with my younger sister being a police officer and my older brother being a property mogul. Both of these jobs require above average conflict management in my opinion. Except for my younger brother, all my siblings and I scored at least one point for resolutionary on the drama triangle when it came to how conflict was viewed. The highest being four (twice) and the lowest being one. Surprisingly to me, it was my sister who is the police officer who scored the lowest on resolutionary. My middle

brother and I scored high on resolutionary with none of the hero, victim or villain types. The only other type to show up more than once was villain, with the highest being two (twice). All of my siblings are about two years apart, until my youngest brother who is about five years younger than the nearest sibling. He views conflict and how he manages conflict differently from everyone else. He views himself as a hero in conflict and had no resolutionary points on the test. Although many reasons are accounting for this, I believe this is because my youngest brother was so much younger than the rest of us, his upbringing was similar to that of an only child and was not able to gain the benefits the rest of us had from being siblings.

I believe that my views on conflict and that of my siblings are not solely based on genetics. As siblings, we had the ability to observe how conflict was handled by each other and witness the result. In addition, we had more opportunities to encounter conflict as we all had to live in the same space. If a person has only one sibling, there is not as much opportunity to observe conflict. Such people will have an opportunity to have conflict, but perhaps not as much incentive to change conflict styles to come to a resolution. With many siblings it's important to have a resolution in conflict, otherwise, one sibling may get the other siblings and gang up. Although each of my siblings would take different roles in conflict, I was often the peacekeeper, my older brother the instigator, and my sisters the followers. We were all able to observe and through trial and error perfect a variety of ways to deal with conflict. I feel that all of us except for my little brother, view conflict in a healthy productive way and as something that is inevitable but can lead to a better understanding of something or someone. Due to the variety of personalities and likes and dislikes, I again state that my siblings and I were given a leg up when it came to dealing with conflict in the world. In addition to the tests showing a positive view on conflict, the tests showed

positively from the data on the Dutch Conflict Handling Test. Among my siblings and me (minus my youngest brother) was a tendency to score high on Forcing, Problem Solving, and Compromising. The lowest scores were on avoiding. For my youngest brother, he scored mid-range equally among all five styles including avoiding. These scores on the Dutch conflict-handling style supports my feelings that there is a healthy respect and ability when it comes to conflict. The low score on avoidance indicates that similar to what the Joy of Conflict mentioned conflict is a good thing and when someone has a healthy respect for conflict they do not fear it. The high scores on the conflict styles of Forcing, Problem Solving, and Compromising show there is an ability to analyze the type of conflict and work from within a variety of styles to resolve the conflict. For my youngest brother having mid-range scores across all styles, I interpret it as a lack of confidence and ability in conflict. The scores support his actions when dealing with conflict in his life. He often tries to avoid conflict and when he cannot, he is often not successful in coming to a resolution that he is comfortable with.

Conclusion

The importance of confidently and efficiently handling conflict day in and day out should not be underestimated. Given its importance, it would then follow that it would be beneficial to understand as much as possible how children can reach adulthood with confidence and appreciation for conflict. Although far from scientific and full of variables, my own experience and supporting data on healthy conflicts indicate a strong connection to having siblings and learning positive views on conflict. It would be fascinating to investigate the upbringing of leaders or others who excel at interpersonal conflict management. If by chance they were not surrounded by siblings, is there another explanation? Would close friends, cousins or enemies provide a

similar experience and practice when it comes to conflict? Siblings are forced to live together and resolve conflict, often without being able to completely remove themselves from the situation. A child can remove themselves from a situation with friends and other acquaintances. Because of the ability to remove themselves from the situation, I do not believe other relationships would impact a child the same way as siblings do. Similar to a friend, only having one sibling likely would not have the same benefits. Not only would a child be unable to observe conflict between two siblings, the effect of the third member and taking sides would be nullified. I believe that qualities such as patience, introspection and the desire for harmony can all be indicators of successful conflict managers. Some of these traits are likely to be largely genetic, but it would surprise me to discover that the majority of people skilled at conflict were only children.

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Appendix A

Peer Review

My sisters reviewed the essay. Some of the feedback was focused on grammar and structure, with obvious mistakes being corrected. There was some general feedback given on the type of essay. It was felt that there wasn't any kind of strong argument being supported. I took this as good feedback, however, that is what I was trying to accomplish. This essay is a personal narrative essay full of my opinions and ideas about why. Although there is scholarly articles to support my ideas they are not the main focus. There was also a feeling that although the essay flowed nicely all the questions being asked of the reader left a bit of a disjointed feeling. Despite this being a very good point I did not alter the questions. To me the questions are an important part of the essay. This essay to me is about getting the reader to think about their own life and how it relates to conflict, and what sources have influenced them. I m not trying to convince anyone of anything, but rather get the reader thinking about possibilities. There were a multitude of changes I made based on suggestions surrounding the order of which some sections came, that seemed to increase the flow of one section to another.

Overall many of the comments and suggestions did not alter the way the essay was written. I was however reminded of the importance of having different view points. Each person has their own writing style. What I might feel is making sense and has good flow and information, may not be what someone else might think.