1.2: Defining a Conflict

Conflict is a natural occurrence in everyday life. Try as we may, there is really no effective way of avoiding it. In fact, we should not avoid conflict. It is through the process of argument that we can begin to deal with and work out differences of opinion. In a recent survey, avoiding conflict was rated by adults, 18 and over, as one of their top goals with respect to their interpersonal relationships.

There are a number factors that can influence conflict avoidance, such as self-doubt, lack of assertiveness, inadequate communication skills, fear of rejection, disapproval, criticism, loss of security and more. In other words, people avoid conflict in order to minimize perceived threats to their self-esteem and sense of well-being.

Overcoming the fear of discomfort due to conflict is important for three primary reasons:

First, conflict avoidance often leads to emotional suppression. When we bury our emotions we always “bury them alive” which means they can fester and show up when we least expect it, often causing us and others unnecessary pain...
The second reason is that avoidance of conflict reinforces irrational fear. For example, “If I address this concern I’ll be rejected, hurt, or criticized,” or, “I’ll look foolish and feel humiliated if I speak up.” Although you can experience hurt feelings or embarrassment, the truth is they won’t destroy or devastate you like you fear they may...

The Third reason is that by avoiding conflict you miss out on opportunities for growth. Growth always involves change, and even positive changes often involve some level of tension and discomfort. To choose to avoid conflict is to choose personal stagnation – the opposite of growth. ¹

One goal of any good critical thinker should be to deal with, handle, and effectively resolve conflict.

Conflict occurs anytime there is opposition between people over ideas or interests and exists when there is a divergence of goals, objectives or expectations. Conflict can occur between individuals, groups, organizations, nations, and even within you.

I like the explanation of conflict given by the Institute of Management and Development in Cambodia.

- Conflict is a state of opposition, disagreement or incompatibility between two or more people or groups of people.
- Conflict is a state of opposition between persons or ideas or interests.
- Conflict is usually based upon a difference over goals objectives, or expectations between individuals or groups.
- Conflict also occurs when two or more people, or groups, compete over limited resources and/or perceived, or actual, incompatible goals.² (Cambodia, 2017)

The word conflict actually derives from the Latin word ‘conflictus’ which means ‘strike two things together’ and this seems like a realistic look at conflict. When we are in conflict there are at least two opposing outlooks that are colliding.

Conflict is everywhere. Every relationship has conflict. It exists inside us and around us. It is a natural and inevitable part
of all human and social relationships. Conflict occurs at all levels of society - intra-psychic, interpersonal, intragroup, intergroup, intra-national, and international.  

Reference

