



Reflecting on conflict: analysis to provide insight and inform a way forward

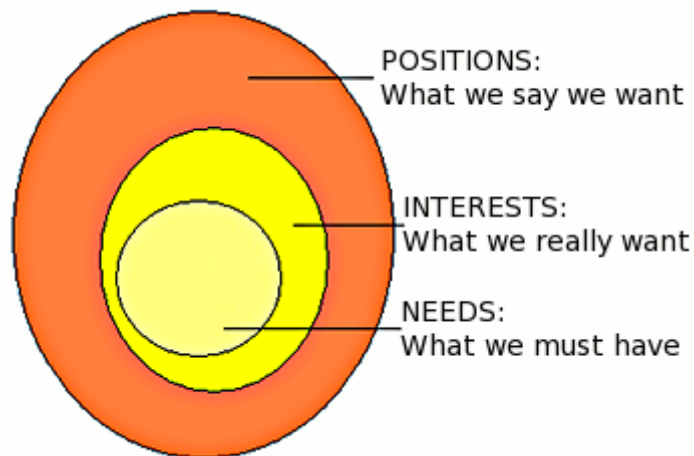
This worksheet introduces some theory and toolkits for participants to use to analyse and seek solutions to conflicts.

It introduces two conflict analysis tools, The Onion and the Conflict Triangle, to use. The idea of using either tool is to really understand a conflict first before trying to solve it. The Onion and the Triangle should be used as you start looking at solutions, in order that a conflict may not be solved properly.

The Onion

The Onion model is based upon the idea that the layers of a conflict are much like that of an onion: there are many dynamics to be considered, but only those on the surface are visible, until we start to peel of the layers to see what lies at the core. It allows a better understanding of the conflicting parties' positions and their real interests and needs. It helps us to distinguish between what the different parties say they want, and what they really want and need.

In peaceful situations people relate and act on the basis of their actual needs. In conflict situations, the lack of access to basic needs, together with the mistrust that often characterises relationships in conflict, alters the basis on which people relate to one another.



It is important to be aware about the distinction between positions and interests:

- **Positions** are what people say they want in a conflict.
- **Interests** refer to what people really want and what motivates them.
- **Needs** are what people must have to feel satisfied with an outcome

The outer layer of the onion represents the positions we allow everyone to see and hear (what we say we want). Underlying these are our interests (what we want), which represent what we wish to achieve in a conflict situation. At the core of the onion are our needs (what we must have), which must be fulfilled in order for the conflicting parties to be truly satisfied

with the outcome. While interests can often be negotiated, needs are non-negotiable. Although it may be difficult to set other dynamics aside, it is critical that conflicting parties understand their own and each other's core needs, so that constructive and satisfying outcomes can be achieved.

When analysing interests we should bear in mind that:

- All parties have interests and needs that are important and valid to them.
- A solution to the problem should meet the maximum number of interests of the maximum number of parties possible.
- There is always more than one acceptable solution to a problem.
- Any conflict involves compatible interests, as well as conflicting ones

When to use it?

The Onion model can be used as part of an analysis to understand the dynamics of a conflict situation, but also in preparation for facilitating dialogue between groups or individuals in a conflict, or as part of a negotiation or mediation process itself – even during the post-conflict reconstruction process.

It can be helpful for those engaged in dialogue, as in order to have a successful negotiation, it is essential to make sure that the needs of each party are fully understood. It is also useful before entering into a negotiation, as a means to better understand the other(s) interests, positions and needs, but also to clarify our own ones and keep them in mind throughout the process. The idea is to carry out the onion analysis for each of the parties involved, including your own.

The Onion model can also bring insight into prolonged conflicts; even raising new hopes for them, as these kinds of conflicts are often seen to result from hiding or distorting actual needs, making the conflict intractable. These needs can be identified by further peeling off the layers of conflict!

The Conflict Triangle: (Attitudes, Behaviours, Context)



The conflict triangle is a tool to help analyse the basic elements of a conflict situation by placing them in a triangular relationship, where each element influences and is influenced by the others. It is a simplified model of Johan Galtung's thinking on the relationship between conflict, violence and peace – helping us analyse factors related to attitudes, behaviour and context for each of the major parties involved.

According to Galtung, conflicts have three structural components, which are related to each other in complex ways. These components are:

- The attitudes and perceptions held by conflicting parties.
- The behaviour of those involved in the conflict.
- The conflict situation or context.

Attitudes refer to the psychological states of people involved in a conflict situation. They include the parties' perceptions and misperceptions of each other and of themselves, which are more likely to be negative, as opposing parties tend to develop negative stereotypes of the others. They include feelings and beliefs, and are often influenced by emotions such as fear, distrust, apathy, anger. Sometimes, attitudes can be regarded as the source of the conflict, or as an exacerbating factor for both conflict situations and conflict behaviour. Fear, prejudice, or assumption can bring about conflict behaviour as a reaction.

Behaviours refer to the actual behaviour of the opposing parties resulting from their (real or perceived) mutually incompatible goals, and from their attempts to achieve those goals. They are the actions undertaken by one party aimed at affecting the opposing party, with the intention of making that opponent abandon or modify their goals.

Context refers to the underlying conflict situation, including the real or perceived incompatibility of goals between the conflicting sides. This may come from the contradiction defined by the parties, their interests.

When to use it

- Early in the process, to gain greater insights into what motivates the different parties.
- Later, to identify what factors might be addressed by an intervention.
- At any time, to reveal how a change in one aspect might affect another.

How to use it

The Conflict Triangle can be used as a tool to analyse a conflict as a dynamic process in which structures/context, attitudes and behavior constantly change and influence each other. Furthermore, since the Conflict Triangle focuses on each party's perceptions separately, it is a highly recommended tool to analyse multiparty conflicts.

The idea of using either tool is to really understand a conflict first before trying to solve it. The Onion and the Triangle can be used to an analysis before you start looking at solutions to that conflict. Without having a clear idea of dynamics and effects, conflict may not be solved properly.