Working with Conflicts and Double Binds

Robert Dilts

The Structure of Choice

In situations involving free choice, a person selects between more or less equal alternatives according to a particular criterion — i.e., choosing which type of soap to buy at the supermarket, or which television channel to watch. Free choice is almost completely "internally referenced" or "self referenced," meaning that the selection is made totally on the basis of its fit to one's personal criteria or wishes: e.g., A is fun, B is more fun, C is safe, D is both fun and safe, etc.

The Structure of Conflict

Conflicts emerge when there are multiple criteria and constraints which lead to courses of action that are to some degree mutually exclusive. In a standard conflict, one part or party wants to do one thing, while another part or party wants to do something else that is incompatible with the wishes of the first party.

First Person/Part
"Let's do A, because it is more fun."

Second Person/Part
"No, let's do B instead, because it is safer."

Versus

The Structure of Conflict

The issues related to conflict situations are usually stated as injunctions related to some course of action. These injunctions may be stated either positively (i.e., toward something) or negatively (i.e., away from something). Negative injunctions tend to intensify the sense of conflict, because they are against something, as opposed to being for something.

Injunctions can escalate the conflict further by putting the issues in an all-or-nothing framework:

First Person/Part
"You must do A, or you will never have any fun."

Second Person/Part
"You should not do A, or you will never be safe."

Levels of Learning and Change

Conflicts become more intense as the issues move to higher levels of significance.

Resolving Conflicts

Solving a problem through a different level of thinking than is creating the problem is creating the problem.

Consensus in Relation to Intention on Higher Level

Level of Conflict

Complementary Resources on Lower Level

You cannot solve a problem with the same type of thinking that is creating the problem.

– Albert Einstein
Resolving Conflicts

1. Clearly identify the key issues involved in the conflict.
2. Establish an unbiased ‘meta-position’.
3. Find the positive intention and purpose behind the issues of each part or party.
4. Make sure that each part or party recognizes and acknowledges the positive intent of the other.
5. From ‘meta-position’, keep ‘chunking up’ until a common intention on a higher level has been identified that both parts or parties share.
6. Explore other alternatives for achieving the shared intention than the two current choices which are producing the conflict.
7. Identify which choice or combination of choices will most effectively and ecologically satisfy the common intention and the individual positive intentions with the greatest positive impact systemically.

Double Binds

“Schizophrenia --its nature, etiology, and the kind of therapy to use for it--remains one of the most puzzling of the mental illnesses. The theory of schizophrenia presented here is based on communications analysis, and specifically on the Theory of Logical Types. From this theory and from observations of schizophrenic patients is derived a description, and the necessary conditions for, a situation called the "double bind"--a situation in which no matter what a person does, he "can't win." It is hypothesized that a person caught in the double bind may develop schizophrenic symptoms.”

Double Binds

A double bind is a special type of conflict which creates a “no-win” situation; i.e., a situation in which “you are damned if you do, and damned if you don’t.”

Comparison of Choice and Double Bind

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Choice</th>
<th>Double Bind</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Internal Reference</td>
<td>External Reference</td>
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<tr>
<td>Towards</td>
<td>Away From (Avoidance)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Range of Possibilities</td>
<td>All or Nothing Perception</td>
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<td>Assume Positive Intention</td>
<td>Confusion of Levels</td>
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<tr>
<td>Out of Your 'Center'</td>
<td>Tertiary negative injunction</td>
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Bateson’s Ingredients for a Double Bind

1. The individual involved is in an intense relationship in which s/he feels that it is vitally important to discriminate accurately what sort of message is being communicated.
2. The person in the “position of power” is expressing two orders of message and one denies the other. The second message is commonly communicated non-verbally.
3. The “dependent” individual is unable to comment on the messages being expressed in order to correct his or her discrimination of what order of message to respond to; i.e., he or she cannot make a meta-communicative statement.
4. There is a tertiary negative injunction prohibiting escape from the situation, because of survival, love, punishment, etc.
5. It is a repeated experience, not a single traumatic event, so that the double bind becomes a habitual expectation.

Resolving Double Binds

1. Reduce the intensity or shift the nature of the double binding relationship.
2. Sort out the contradictory messages.
3. Make metacommunicative statements.
4. Filter out or neutralize negative identity messages.
5. Find a way to “leave the field”.
6. Keep the situation from being a repeated experience.
Generating a Second Skin

A second skin is a type of energetic insulation that protects us from potential disturbances coming from the various fields around us without disconnecting us from the important knowledge and information contained in those fields.

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Multiple Meta Positions

- Dealing with conflicts and incongruence involves the ability to detach oneself emotionally and step back as if observing oneself (a “meta position”).
- Because of the multi-level nature of some conflicts, addressing them requires that one take multiple meta positions (i.e., watching yourself watch yourself).
- Each new meta position not only distances you further from the emotional intensity of the situation, but also allows you to take a broader and potentially wiser perspective.

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“Cosmic Zoom”

Welcoming Obstacles

1. “That’s interesting”
2. “I’m sure that makes sense”
3. “Something needs to be held / heard / healed”
4. “Welcome....”

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The “Tetra Lemma”

- “X Is True”
- “The Contrary to X Is Also True”
- “Neither Is True”
- “Both Are True”

COACH State

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