

# Conflict resolution case study



### Incident of past conflict: Financial Problem

A crisis situation arise when one or more triggers creates an unexpected change. Very often we get into inharmonious interactions with people around us due to differing perceptions, nondisclosure of common ground and seeing the past rather than the future as an issue (Wood, 2012).

During a short sharing session with my client, Mr Wilson (not his real name), he shared the difficult experience he went through five years ago. He explained how the birth of his fifth child and retrenchment became a burden to his financial instability. In addition to his financial crisis, Wilson's alcohol addiction deteriorate which lead to martial violence and many major conflicting issues.

As a result, Wilson's health, mental state and personal well-being was affected which led to depression. The crisis situation worsen when the couple began insulting at each other while communicating. The subsequent paragraphs will elaborate further the conflicting issues he faced.

### Causes of conflict

A Multi Causal Model (MCM) is used to analyse and determine the issues and disputes of Wilson's conflict situation. This model addresses the reason (root problem – financial crisis), the targets involved (Wilson's wife), the channels (cramp housing conditions, caring for his sick father and financing a car), the triggers (spending more than what he is earning), the catalyst (retrenchment, alcohol abuse and a large family size) and violence (depression and martial abuse) (Baechler, 2010).

There are four causes of conflict to Wilson's situation. The first cause of conflict is the limitation of resources (Wood, 2012). Despite being retrenched with no fixed income, Wilson's family's spending expenditure exceeds excessively. In addition to the stressors, the birth of his new born child and his father's medical bills adds to his financial burden. Simultaneously, Wilson is also required to finance a car and his wife excessive spending.

As a result, it accumulates a large amount of bad debts that led to countless financial distress. Wilson faces with many overwhelming stressor and responsibilities which increases his anxiety which led to panic attacks and depression.

The second cause of conflict is the cognitive factors. Wilson and his wife has different interpretation and understanding of root problem (Stone, Patton & Heen, 2009). What Wilson sees as a conflict may not be seen as a conflict by his wife. For example, Wilson's wife believes that she earn the right to indulge in luxury goods.

Wilson's wife concluded that since Wilson could afford to finance his alcohol addiction, he should be able to finance her high maintenance lifestyle. Very often the understanding of a person's true intention fail them which creates a barrier to communication (Sen, 2007).

The third cause of conflict is communication styles. Communication plays a big role as it allows individuals to either misinterpret or understand the actual content of the message (Dan & Wiemann, 2011). Wilson's wife, who is a first born child in her family, characterize an authoritarian figure with a

systematic communication style. This type of communication style focus on facts and details and not the big picture (Stone et al., 2009).

Despite knowing the family going through a financial crisis, she demands for a luxury lifestyle without taking into consideration Wilson's financial burden. In contrast, Wilson's sympathetic communication style values and focus on maintaining good relationship with his wife regardless of situation (Sen, 2007). Therefore he was unable to turn down his wife's demands which adds pressure to the financial situation.

The fourth cause of conflict is ineffective listening. Without realising, the couple listen selectively to what we want to hear and therefore miss out on the important messages which creates a blind-spot (Brazier, 2009). Some examples that cause ineffective listening are prejudice, interruption, distractions and misunderstanding (James & Collins, 2008).

Due to cramp housing conditions, there was no private space for the couples to share, deliberate and discuss their issues and concerns (James & Collins, 2008). At other times, the couple either judge, interrupt and condemned each other's thoughts and opinions.

#### Skill and applications in resolving a conflict

There are many ways to resolve a conflict situation. Wilson should come up with negotiating skills to control the situation. It is essential to identify each issue that needs to be negotiated, deliberate each point individually and try to resolve one point before moving on to the next (Stone et al., 2009). After

which, Wilson should deliberate alternatives, make counters offers to review and come to an agreement (Sen, 2007).

There are five skills to resolve a conflict. The first skill to resolve a conflict is communication. In communication, the choice of words must be accurate and clear to each other (Stone et al., 2009). For example, Wilson can applied this skill by getting his wife to repeat the message or ask if she has the same understanding. Perhaps the tone of voice must be pleasant to prevent any misunderstanding. This is because individuals perceived words, language and tone of voice differently.

By communicating assertively, the couples are able to speak up for themselves, while being respectful. With good communication, it demonstrates self-respect and also shows that they are sensitive to the rights of others (Sen, 2007). They need to accept and recognised existing barriers that arise in miscommunication among themselves and work each problem separately (Dan & Wiemann, 2011).

The second skill to resolve a conflict is to listen effectively. Hearing and listening are two different activities (Brazier, 2009). In order to be a better listener, one must practice active listening. Active listening takes place when an individual make a conscious effort to listen and understand the content of the message (Hasen, 2012).

The couples have to learn to listen effectively as it shows respect for one another. When one do not listen, the other person do not feel respected and therefore resulted in anger and resentment. Active listening allows the other to understand the content of message (Hasen, 2012). If the content of the

message is unclear, one may get the other person to repeat. Listening effectively not only means to listen with meaning, it allows the couple to gain information on the message (Sen, 2007).

The third skill to resolve a conflict is to increase self-awareness. Self-awareness allows one to be able to understand one's personality, weakness and strengths, their beliefs and motivations and to accept themselves for who they are (Roessler & Eilan 2003). By having a clear understanding about one self, it will allow the couple to understand each other with the ability to empathize.

This allows the couples to have a clear perception of who they are. Self-awareness creates more honest and genuine relationships which helps them in their crisis situation (Roessler & Eilan 2003). Wilson and his wife may use the Johari window which is a useful tool for understanding and training their self-awareness, personal development and to build trust (West & Turner, 2010).

The fourth skill to resolve a conflict is to manage emotions. Emotions can be powerful in a conflict situation. Very often individuals are not able to express their emotions properly due to self-imagery (West & Turner, 2010). In this crisis situation, Wilson's wife may not be able to express her anger or frustration well therefore her emotions may be expressed wrongly and negatively.

When confronted with difficult situations the couple can manage their own reaction by not becoming defensive or inflamed (West & Turner, 2010). The couple should focus on the issue not each other. When they are unsure,

asking open ended questions for clarification may help them with a solution. This expressed support and reassurance for the other person.

The fifth skill to resolve a conflict is to understand the conflict in the family. It is common to have differences, feelings of irritability and anger towards other family members from time to time (Dan & Wiemann, 2011). However it is important how the couple handle the conflict and the result of the relationship is important.

The couple should spend more time together, show trust and respect, expresses understanding and love. It is important to provide a warmth and supportive environment between themselves as to prevent any form of mental break down or depression and any form of martial abuse from taking place.

### The Challenges

There are three challenges when applying the Multi Causal Model (MCM). MCM differentiates the structure of actor-oriented factors by combining system and actor styles. The root problem have their roots in psychosociological, socioeconomic, political, and international conditions. In addition to that, there is a " syndrome of factors" that result in violence (Baechler, 2010).

The first challenged faced is the organization of the model. In contrast to MCM, the Conflict Perspective Model (CPA) analysed a conflict in a step by step process. It progresses by using mediators in the interpersonal and organizational perspective areas. Unlike MCM, CPA emphasize on the

different perspectives of the involved parties which helps conflict parties to broaden their view. The ulterior motives also develops to be visible and less intimidating.

The second challenged faced is failing to list and clarify options. In contrast to MCM, The Needs-Fears Mapping (TNFM) focus on each person involvement, the issues, expectations, needs and fears. By addressing and understanding one's issues and interests, a person in conflict has some assurance that their point on view has been heard. This therefore allows conflict perspective to change and build a certain degree of trust and understanding.

The third challenged faced is that MCM is unable to prioritized a conflict. Unlike MCM, a Conflict Tree (CM) is a visual tool used to improved and prioritized conflict in terms of its causes. It is a useful tool used for discussions and the need to reach an agreement.

To summarized, there are several types of conflict analysis tools which focused on various aspects of the conflict. In my opinion there are no fixed model that can be applied to all conflicts. It is important to understand the nature of conflict and apply the model accordingly. Therefore each and every conflict model contains their own strengths and weakness.