

Conflict and the Evaporating Cloud

Introduction

In order for students to learn more and do more they must be able to take charge of their learning, analyze conflicts and decisions, and solve their own problems. The Evaporating Cloud provides a simple graphic structure for questions to check the necessary conditions in any conflict.

Where do we find conflicts?

- In our daily life; day-to-day, difficult, life changing
- In the classroom
- In student lives
- In the curriculum; literature, history, government, technology, science, mathematics, etc.

Conflicts are everywhere.

What is the Purpose of the Cloud?

The cloud provides a way for both sides of a conflict to do something not usually done—look at the needs of both sides. When both sides are ready, able, and willing to look at both sides of a conflict it turns the conflict from one side against the other to both sides against the problem. Resolving conflicts is one of the most important problem solving skills we can provide our students.

Contents

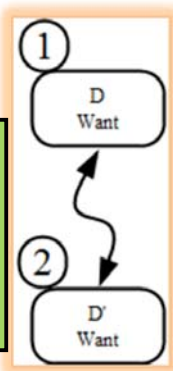
Evaporating Cloud

- Purpose
- Structure
- Models/Examples
- Evaluation

What is the structure of the cloud?

The cloud is the structure of conflict.

We label them D and D' for convenience and to make it easier to talk about them. The two headed arrow indicates that they are in conflict

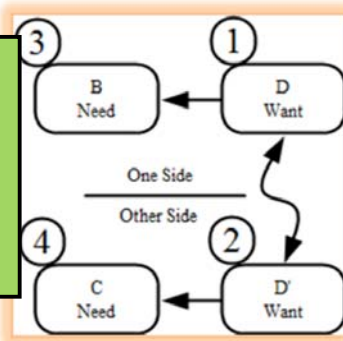


Conflicts have a structure that can be represented by a graphic diagram called the Evaporating Cloud. Let's build it a step at a time and explain the value of each step and piece of the cloud.

Conflicts are generally between two sides; at least most can be boiled down to a conflict between two sides. Each side wants something they think is important to them. So we have a conflict

between two "wants." This helps us get the conflict in the open and check to see if the wants are really what we are fighting about

We label them B and C for convenience and the arrows indicate that the entity at the tail is necessary in order to have the entity at the head.

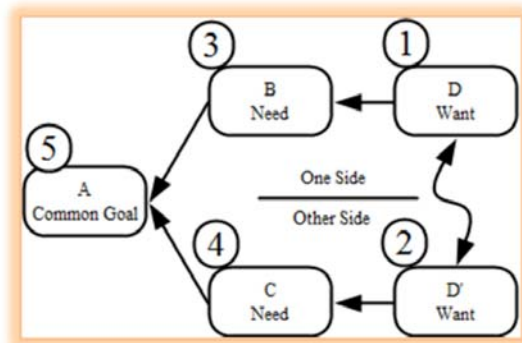


People do things for a reason and the things they want are thought to be necessary to fulfill their needs.

Needs are very important to people and everyone has their basic needs. The basic needs must be met for both sides of a conflict.

Identifying the needs helps us understand “where the sides are coming from.” It leads to better understanding of the conflict.

People in conflict generally have a common goal. That is, they have a large goal they both wish to achieve. It’s a goal they hold in common, but they are not necessarily seeking it for the other person. The common goal holds the conflict together. The goal helps the sides understand that they have something in common.



The cloud can be read as follows: In order to have A, I must have B. In order to have B, I must have D. And, in order to have A, the other side must have C. In order to have C, the other side must have D’.

D’ is read as D-Prime.

Five Important Questions

In order to fill the boxes we call entities, we ask five simple questions:

- What does one side want for D?
- What does the other side want for D’?
- What does one side Need (B) that requires D?
- What does the other side Need (C) that requires D’?
- What goal (A) do both sides have in common?

Generally D and D’ are thought to be opposites and unable to co-exist as in D wants something and D’ wants the same thing. Or D wants something and D’ doesn’t want D to have it.

Answering these five questions almost completes the initial cloud. We must check the logic by reading the cloud aloud.

Reading aloud is important as our ears are tuned to the logic of our native language and we will catch ourselves changing the wording if it doesn’t sound right and the logic is wrong.



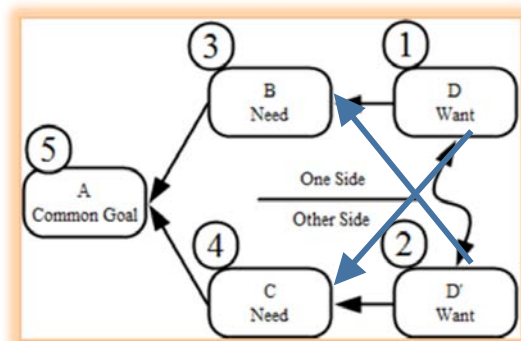
What do we do with the cloud when it is complete and sounds right?

Remember that the objective is to resolve the conflict between D and D'.

With simple day-to-day conflicts sometimes just writing the cloud brings one or both sides to see that they don't really have to have their want in order to meet their need and the conflict is resolved.

Sometimes simple day-to-day conflicts are not so simple and writing them doesn't resolve anything other than bring both sides to see the problem with "fresh eyes."

Two more Questions



Two additional questions can be asked before digging deeper into the cloud.

- Does Want D block Need C?
- Does Want D' block Need B?

If the responses to those questions do not lead to a resolution, you may go to the next set of questions and dig more deeply into the conflict.

The next step is to check the assumptions being made by both sides in the conflict. Assumptions support the logic of the cloud. Every arrow is supported by one or more assumptions. Most people don't check the assumptions they are making, even though we are always making them.

More Questions

You can check assumptions under every arrow on the Cloud. Usually it's enough to check assumptions only between BD and CD'.

- Ask “why is Want D necessary to fulfill Need B? Or complete the statement, In order to have Need B, I must have Want D because...”

This exercise should generate one or more assumptions that justify the existence of Want D.

Repeat the exercise for Need C and Want D'.

Check the validity of the assumptions

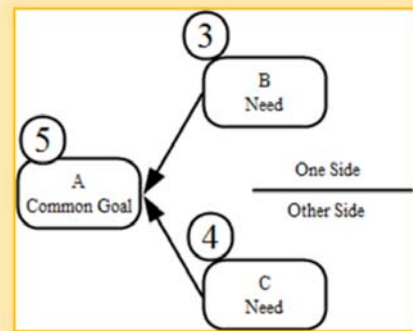
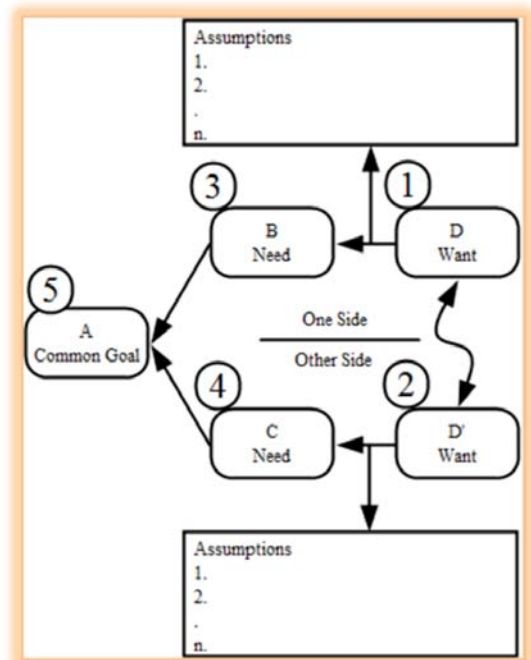
Sometimes examining the assumptions is enough to resolve the conflict, because they are obviously not valid.

If some assumption doesn't “hit us over the head,” we may need to consider the validity of all of them on both sides. If we find an assumption that is not valid, it provides a route to changing what we want or “finding a third alternative.”

If we don't find an invalid assumption, we may need to find one that we can make invalid and it will lead us to changing the situation in some way.

In either case we are searching for a way to break the link between BD and CD'. If we can break one of those links by finding a third alternative we will change the situation, solve the problem, and resolve the conflict.

If we are able to resolve the conflict and preserve the goal and the needs of both sides, we will have achieved a true WIN—WIN solution.



A Win—Win preserves the goal and the needs of both sides.

Day-to-day Personal Example

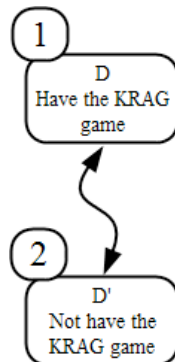
Day-to-day conflicts may sometimes seem too trivial to bother with thinking about, let alone writing about them. Actually they may be some of your most important conflicts. Small conflicts unresolved often grow into major and even chronic conflicts that can ruin relationships and damage productivity in a classroom, school, or business. Even if they are easily resolved they provide necessary practice for the larger and sometimes chronic conflicts in life.

The “**Story Line**” does not need to long, but should be written to identify the essence of the conflict.

Story Line: Twelve year old son John wants a new and violent video game called Krag* and his mother doesn't want him to have it. They have been arguing about it for a week and neither is budging. The conflict is spilling over into other parts of their lives.

Wants

Let's imagine that John learned the cloud in class and that we are watching him use the Cloud to think through the conflict. John's first step is to identify the wants for each side. He writes them on a sheet of paper as in the diagram.



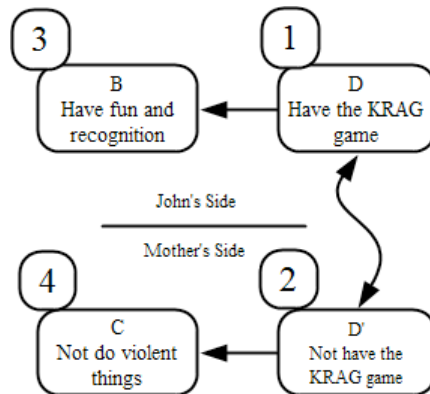
John draws two rectangles and labels them D and D'. In D he writes what he wants, "Have the Krag game. In D' he writes what he thinks his mother wants, "Not have the Krag game.

Needs

Next John must identify his need that the game satisfies and his mother's need that makes her insist he not have the game.

His need is easy. He needs to have fun and none of his friends have the game so he can be the first and maybe the only one in his group to have it.

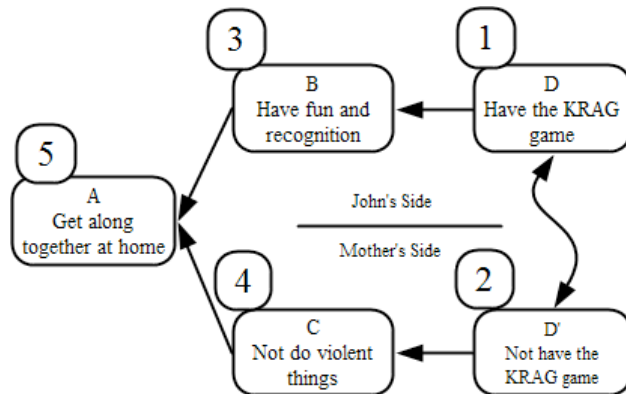
His mother's need seems more obvious than his own. She's always saying "It's too violent, it's too violent." Well I know better. Video games are not violent. I can't get hurt and I can't hurt anyone with the game. Why doesn't she understand that? So he writes her need as "I not do violent things."



Common Goal

A common goal, what could that be?

John thinks awhile. "It's been like a war zone at home for the last week and I don't like it. I don't think Mom likes it either. Maybe that's it. "We get along together at home."





(*Krag is a fictitious name for a fictitious game.)

Read the Cloud aloud

Now John reads the cloud aloud to check the logic.

His side first:

“In order to get along together at home, I must have fun and recognition. In order to have fun and recognition, I must have the Krag game.”

Then Mother’s side:

“In order to get along together at home, I must not do violent things. In order to not do violent things, I must not have the Krag game.”

John is thinking

Now what do I do with it? Mr. A (John’s History teacher) didn’t tell us what to do with it yet. He says we are going to solve some historical problems with it.

“I’ll go share it with Muutthher and see what she thinks. I’ll talk about her side first. That will catch her off guard.”

John to Mother

“Mom, Mr. Antion, my History teacher, has been showing us a different way to look at conflicts. I thought since we’ve been fighting about that video game, maybe we could use it.”

John lays the paper in front of his mother and begins explaining.

“I know we both want to get along here at home and in order to do that, you don’t want me doing violent things.”

And in order to not do violent things, you say I shouldn't have the Krag game?

Mother doesn't say anything while John takes a breath. Then John plows on.

"And in order for us to get along here at home, I must have fun and recognition by my friends that I've something special. In order for me to have fun and recognition, I must have the Krag video game."

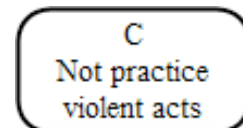
Mother responds, "What do we do now, John? You seem to have stated our positions correctly."

"Mom, don't you see that I'm trying to solve this, but you keep insisting that you can't have me doing violent things when the game isn't violent."

"John, I respect you and appreciate your effort to solve our disagreement. Of course I don't want you doing violent things. Do you want to do violent things?"

"No, but the game isn't violent! I can't hurt myself or anyone else by playing it."

Mother: "I know that the game itself is not violent, but you will be practicing violent acts, and I don't think it's healthy to practice doing things that are violent, illegal, and could hurt yourself and other people. So let's change this little box to read: Not practice violent acts. Now what do we do?"



John: "I'm not sure. Mr. A. couldn't finish in a class period and he said he'd explain more tomorrow."

Mother: "I'm looking forward to hearing about it. We're talking about the problem instead of ..."

John interrupts: "It's a little better isn't it."

The next evening

Mother: “What did you learn from your History teacher today?”

“It doesn’t matter.”

“I thought he was going to finish that diagram you showed me yesterday.”

“He did.”

“Come on, let’s talk about it. It gave us a good description of our problem. Get it out and show me what’s next. I think I can use it with a little conflict at work if I know more about it.”

John slowly pulls the diagram out of his notebook and lays it on the kitchen table. “Mr. A. showed us a bunch of questions to ask about the diagram. He said that with some conflicts, just writing the diagram is enough. Even just writing a part of the diagram is sometimes enough to resolve some conflicts, because people seldom look at their conflicts this way. It’s like seeing something for the first time that you thought you knew.”

“Then he pointed out that people usually resolve conflicts in just a few different ways and that we already know all of them. So we brainstormed a list:

- One side gives up because they don’t want to deal with the problem
- One side forces the other side to give up
- The sides negotiate a compromise
- One or both sides ignore the problem

Then he pointed out that:

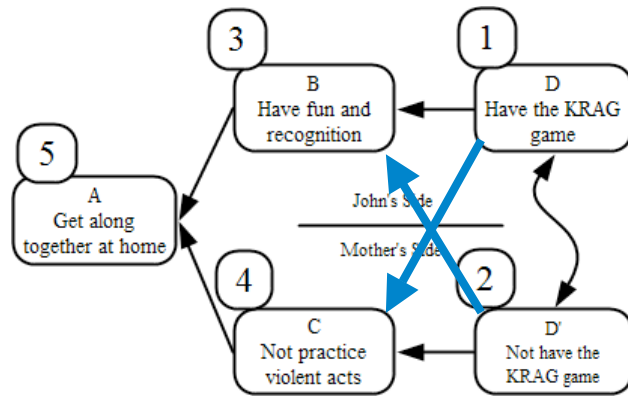
- One side giving up looks like win—lose
- One side forcing the other to give up looks like win—lose
- Compromising looks like lose—lose and

- Both sides ignoring the problem is a lose—lose.

Mother: “But what about the diagram? Just writing it didn’t seem to solve our problem.”

John: “I’m getting to it.”

“He gave us two more questions to ask about the wants and needs.” John pulled out a marker and drew an arrow from D to C and from D’ to B. “Mr. A. asked ‘Does want D block Need C and Does want D’ block need B?’ When I saw that; I thought before changing C, the game didn’t block your need, but now it does. And, not having the game also blocked my need for fun.”



Mother: “So we’re back to where we started?”

John: “Oh, there is more and I don’t think I’m happy about it.”

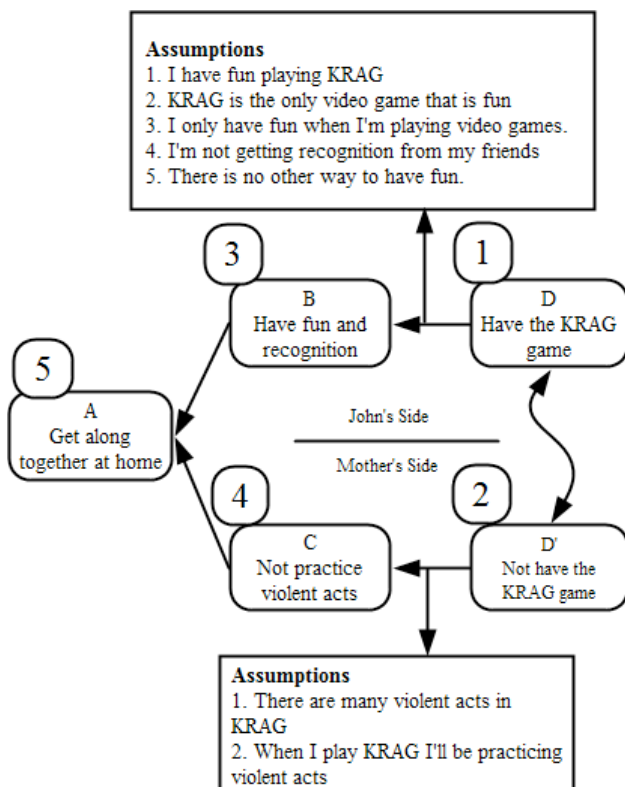
Mother: “I’m all ears.”

John: “Mr. A said that the logic arrows in the diagram are like bridges and that bridges need support. The things that support the arrows are the assumptions we make. To really understand the conflict, we have to examine our assumptions. If we find valid assumptions they provide strong support for the logic. If the assumptions aren’t valid it’s like a faulty support for the bridge and the logic, like a bridge, collapses. If the logic collapses the cloud is broken and there is a way to resolve the conflict.”

Mother: “I’m listening.”

John: "Well, we can examine the assumptions under all of the arrows, but we usually look first at the connections between the wants and the needs.

So I looked for the assumptions we are making and here is what I found." John unfolds another paper with the Cloud and the assumptions he had identified for his side and his mother's side.



"Look at your assumptions first. Even I think they are valid and support your logic."

Mother: "I think so too."

John continues: "But when I look at the assumptions on my side, I'm not happy. All, but the first one, are obviously not valid and I'm not sure about the first one."

"Why is that?"

"I've never played KRAG so I don't know if I'd really like it. I've only seen the advertising and it gives the impression it's exciting."

"So what do we do now?" Mother asked.

"Well, Mr. A said there are a couple of alternatives:

- I could give up my D because the logic is lousy or
- I could find an alternative way to meet my need

Mother: "I know you never like to give up anything, so what is your alternative?"

"There's a new adventure game called CONSTRAINTS* that I'd like to get. There's no violence, but lots of obstacles to overcome and it claims to teach you logical thinking skills."

“It sounds interesting, let me think about it.” Mother replied.

“In the meantime, I’ve got this little conflict at work. Would you think through it with me after dinner and we can practice using this, what did your History teacher call it?”

“An Evaporating Cloud”

*(*CONSTRAINTS is a fictitious name for a fictitious game.)*

A Second Day-to-Day Personal Example

John, and his mother and father are sitting at the table after dinner. John’s mother has suggested that his father might like to see what John is learning at school. After all, they’ve used it to settle their squabble over the video game.

Father: “So what did you decide?”

John: “That I’d like a different game that has no violence and Mom said she’d think about it.”

Father: “I could have told you that in the first place and we could have avoided all the bickering this week.”

Mother: “We’ve resolved that situation and I want to see if this thing, what did you call it again, If this thing will help with my conflict with the new V.P of Sales.

Father: “I told you, you should have taken that job when they offered it to you. Now you’ve got to train a new V.P. with half your skills and he’s probably going to make things difficult for you because you’ve been the star in the division.”

John starts to leave for his room.

Mother: "Please sit down John. Your father and I will settle this later. In fact this thing might help settle it."

Mother to Father: "Please just listen in and watch what happens."

Mother: "John, bring your father up to date and explain what your History teacher is doing."

John: "Mr. A has been showing us a tool that he wants us to use during the school year to analyze historical conflicts. He says it can also be used to work on our own conflicts and that's what we used to settle the video game dispute."

Mother: "Explain how it works."

John: "The first thing is to get the essence of the conflict by writing a short story line. So tell us the story about the conflict you're having at work?"

Mother' Story Line: "I've had a meeting scheduled with my biggest client for tomorrow at 10 AM. They scheduled it a month ago to introduce me to some of their suppliers and there is a very good chance that I can double the sales I already make to them. Last Friday the new V.P. of Sales sent out an e-mail and called a mandatory meeting of all sales personnel for 10 AM tomorrow. Yesterday, I told him I couldn't be there because of the meeting with the client, but he told me to reschedule the client and he was expecting see me at his meeting. My client worked hard to schedule the meeting with some very busy people and I don't want to jeopardize my relationship with them. At the same time, I don't want to get off on the wrong foot with the new V.P."

Father: "That's simple, I'd just get in his face and explain the facts of life that he doesn't have a job without sales, that you turned down his new job, and that you are going to the client meeting."

Mother: "Please give us a chance to get John's method on the table before you pass judgment."

"John, go ahead, what's next."

John: "After the story line, you identify what each side wants. You want to go to the client meeting and he wants you to go to his meeting. And the meetings are at the same time."

Father: "Shouldn't you put in the time of the meetings? It seems to be an important point."

Mother throws him a "look." Father responds: "I'm just trying to make a contribution."

John: "Let's add the time."

"Now we identify the needs of both sides"

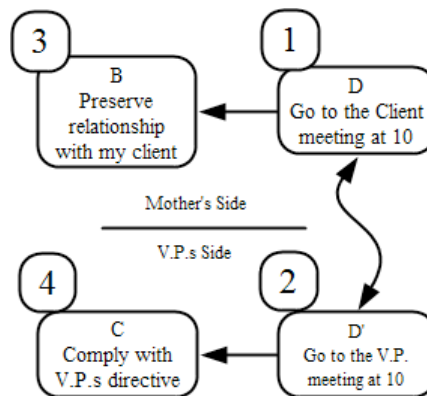
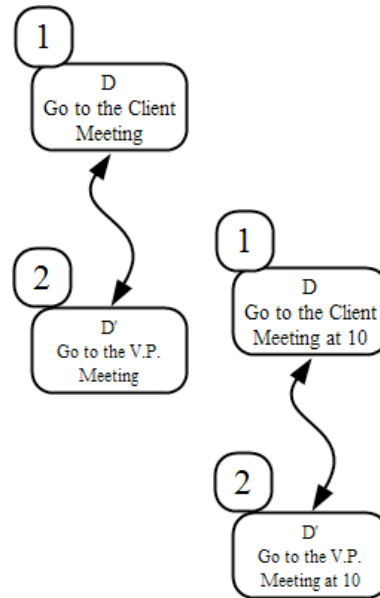
Mother: "My needs are pretty clear. I need to preserve my relationship with my client and I need to increase my sales dramatically."

John: "Let's just use one of them."

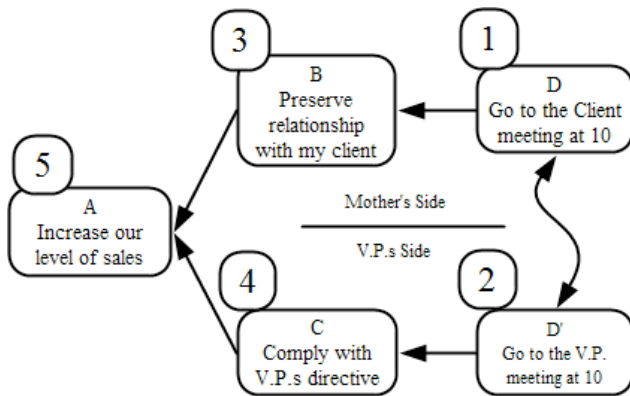
Mother: "Okay, let's preserve the current relationship as the other one is not certain yet."

John: "What's the V.P.s need?"

Oh, I think that's pretty clear also. He wants me to comply with his directive. He's establishing himself in a new place and like all Alpha males he's marking his territory." Mother says as she glances at her husband.



Mother: "Isn't the next thing the common goal. That should be clear to everyone that we all want to increase sales."



John: "Now that we have a cloud, read it aloud."

Mother: "In order to increase our level of sales, I must preserve the relationship with my client. In order to preserve the relationship with my client, I must go to the client meeting at 10."

"Now the V.P.s side"

"In order to increase sales, I must comply with the V.P.s directive. In order to comply with the V.P.s directive, I must go to the V.P. meeting at 10."

Mother: "That sounds right, but it doesn't feel right. It doesn't make any sense to me that complying with a directive increases sales when it puts my sales in jeopardy."

Father: "John, you've been participating in sports and other school activities. Do your coaches sometimes have mandatory meetings?"

John: "Yes"

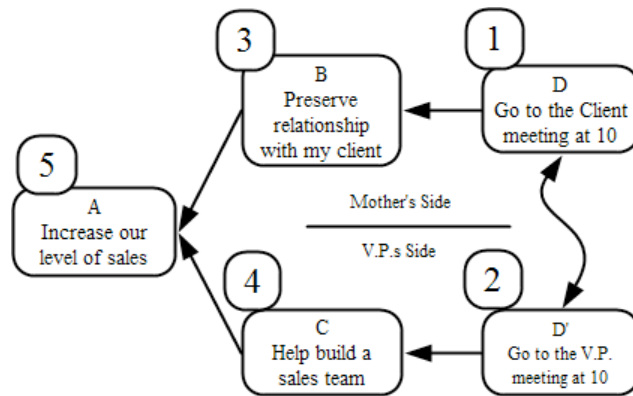
Father: "Can you tell us why?"

John: "They usually have a lot to say to us and some things to hand out."

Father: "What's the essence of what they have to say?"

John: "They tell us what's going well, what we need to improve, and our goals for the week and the season. They give us a pep talk about helping each other, working together, and pulling for the team."

Mother: "I see where you're going with this. I need to change C so that it makes sense and feels right. You remember that my major complaint about the last V.P. of Sales was that we were always competing against and undercutting each other instead of working together as a team. Team building was one of the top criteria in hiring this guy."



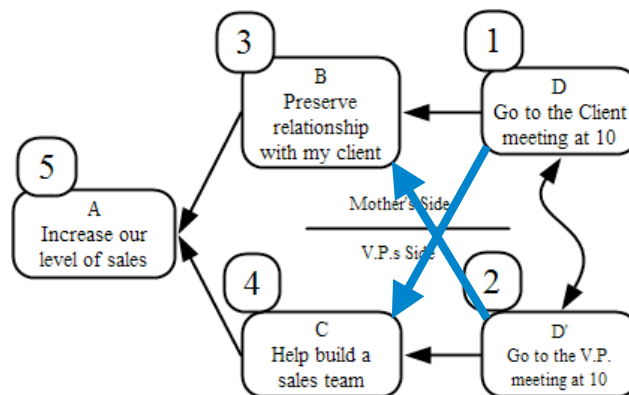
"Okay so assuming that I'm getting what I asked for, I suppose that I need to help it happen by collaborating in the process. C should read something like 'help build a sales team.'"

"And I'll read it. In order to increase our level of sales, I must help build a sales team. In order to help build a sales team, I must go to the V.P.s meeting at 10."

"John, I think I'm feeling like you did before dinner, but I'm not seeing an alternative like your different video game."

John smiling: "You still need to check for blocking and check assumptions."

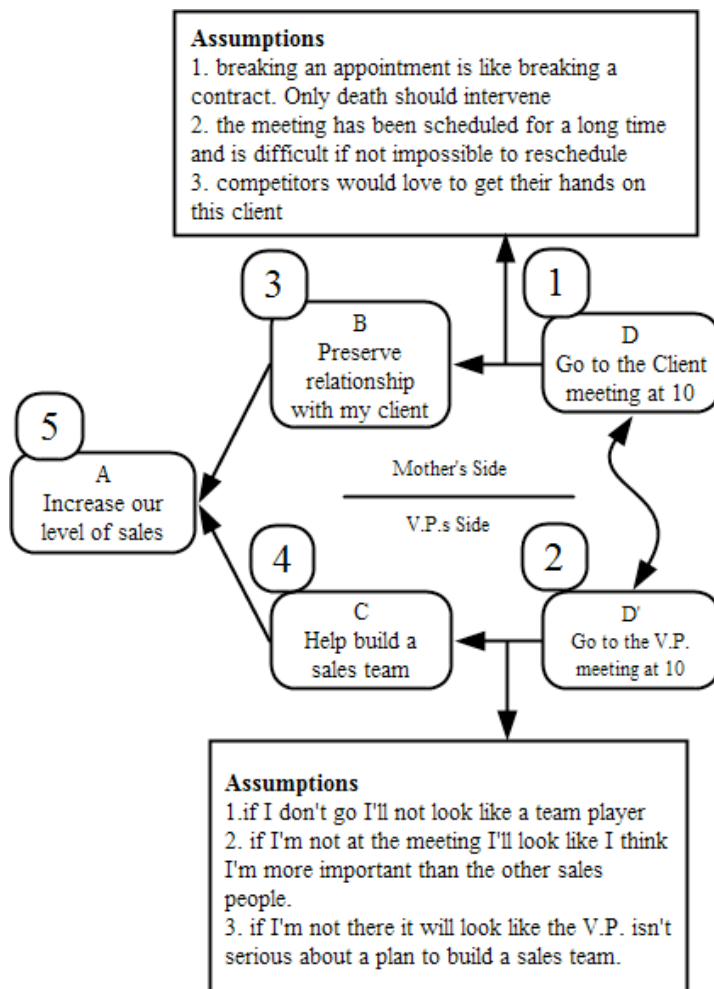
Mother draws the arrows and asks the questions. "Does D going to my client meeting at 10 block C his need to help build a sales team?" I suppose it does. If I don't go to his meeting I'll not look like a team player. I'll look like I think I'm too good to work with the rest of the sales force and it will diminish him in their eyes."



"Does D' his wanting me at his meeting at 10 block my need B to preserve the relationship with my client. You bet it does!"

Mother: "John, do you have homework?"

"This is it. Mr. A wanted us to write a couple of clouds on our own conflicts or things in our daily life. With this and the video game and you and Dad this evening and me in the principal's office this afternoon, I've got a ton of stuff for class tomorrow.



Mother: "What do you mean, you in the principal's office?"

John: "Got yah, just kidding. But, you do need to do the assumptions on your meetings tomorrow. Can you talk to the V.P. before 10?"

Mother: "I'll go in early. I've noticed that he's usually in by 6 and my meeting is just across town so I've only got 75 minutes travel time."

Mother wrote her assumptions on both sides of the conflict.

"You know you guys, this is good. It really makes me think about a conflict instead of saying or doing something I might later regret."

"Guys ...any suggestions on how to handle it tomorrow?"

John: "Well, you remember when I started with describing your side of the cloud. Did it surprise you?"

Mother: “A little, but I know you are a considerate person. The V.P. knows very little about me so it’s probably a good idea to let him know right away that I can see his side of the situation. Then I’ll go through the assumptions and see what he has to say. It looks like my only hope is that something comes up that makes him delay his meeting.”

The Next Morning

Mother enters the V.P.’s office. After a brief exchange of pleasantries they get down to business.

Mother: “I know that in order to increase sales, you probably want to build more of a team effort among the sales force and that in order to build a team, you want everyone at your meeting at 10.”

V.P.: “That’s exactly right and you know it better than anyone in the company.”

Mother: “You also know that in order to increase sales, I must maintain a good relationship with my major client. In order to maintain that relationship, I must meet with them at 10.”

“I know that will make it appear that you aren’t serious about teamwork if I’m not there, and that I’ll look like a queen bee and look bad to all my peers.”

V.P.: “I thought we’d settled this yesterday, but I see you’ve given it some thought from my point of view. Let’s see, Charlie and Karen both called and said their best airline connections would make them up to a half hour late, so we can’t really start on time anyway. How long will it take for your meeting?”

Note: It’s not necessary to show the Cloud to the person with whom you are communicating. It is sufficient if you are comfortable talking through the cloud and raising the salient points.

Mother: "About an hour and then we meet again later in the week. I could probably be back here by noon."

V.P.: "Okay we'll all meet in my conference room at 12:15 for lunch. I'll get a message to the rest of the folks to ease up a bit and not plan to arrive until lunch. I'm sure we'll want to hear about your meetings later this week with your big client."

Mother: "Thank you. I'll be there at 12:15."

The stories above are adaptations of actual personal experiences related to me by friends and colleagues.

Next is an example that could be used in History, Sociology, Economics, Technology Education, or Science classes and perhaps others. The story line is adapted from the essay *The Tragedy of the Commons* by Garrett Hardin published in the journal *Science*, 162(1968):1243-1248.

An Example of a Chronic Conflict for use in classrooms

Topic: Impact on the Environment

Story Line:

Picture a very large pasture where all can graze their cattle. Each cattle herder will attempt to keep as many cattle as possible on the commons. This arrangement may work satisfactorily for generations because wars, poaching, and disease keep the numbers of people and cattle below the carrying capacity of the land. As the cattle herders try to maximize their gain by adding cattle to their herd, a time comes when the herds overgraze the pasture. The quality of the pastureland begins to decline. The cattle herders are independent, self-reliant people. They make their own decisions. All of the herders decide what to do with their own herd. Adding to their own herd is a gain for them, but everyone shares the loss to the common pasture. They

each decide to add more cattle to their own herd, all of the herds are increased, the pasture is ruined, and all of the herds are lost.

This can be viewed as an independent decision or internal conflict of each cattle herder or it can be viewed as a decision to be considered by a group of cattle herders.

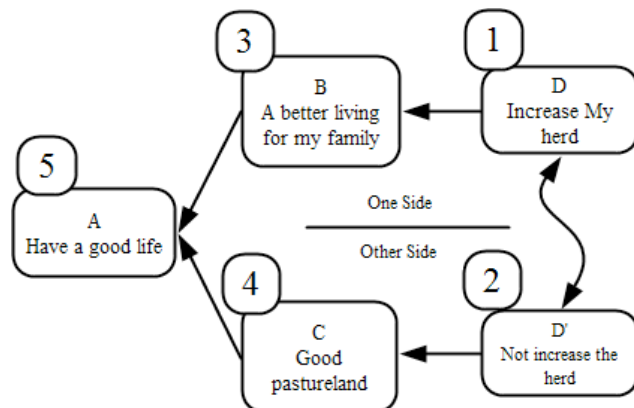
In either case we are examining conflicts in a broader context and with different definitions. Here a choice or decision is defined as a conflict between two necessary conditions. If you view the decline of the common pastureland as a problem, then the cloud defines a problem as a conflict between two necessary conditions. Problems, choices, decisions, and conflicts may almost always be described as a conflict between two necessary conditions.

Individual internal conflict or decision

The herdsman facing the situation has a choice between increasing his herd and not increasing his herd.

In order to have a good life he must make a better living for his family. In order to have a better living for his family, he must increase his herd.

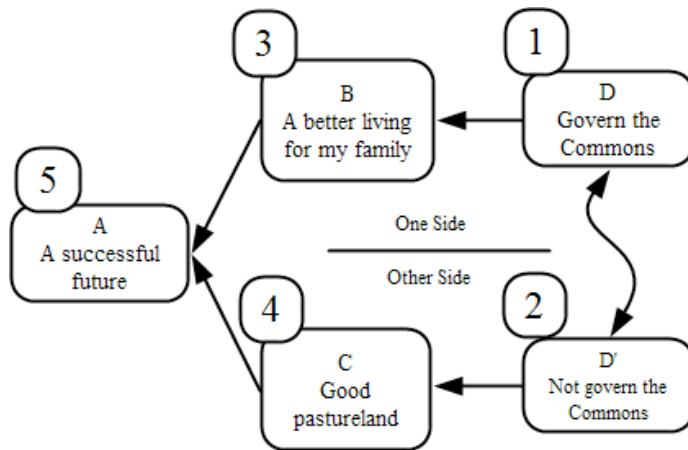
In order to have a good life he must have good pastureland for his herd. In order to have good pastureland for his herd he must not increase his herd.



Checking for blocked needs and identifying assumptions in this Cloud provides for extensive discussion of the difficult situation faced by the herdsman using the commons. It also gives students an opportunity to consider alternative solutions to the choices faced by historical figures.

Then identifying similar dilemmas in one's personal life or in today's society provides additional discussion. Bringing the discussion of historical dilemmas into the personal lives of students makes history relevant to their lives.

Group Conflict or Decision



The “Tragedy of the Commons” story line provides additional dilemmas for the group of herders on the Commons.

They face an uncertain future if the pastureland is overgrazed and deteriorates. If they can see the potential for overgrazing and a ruined pastureland, they may find themselves faced with deciding on some method of governing the pasture. Historically, fences and the concept of privately owned property are methods that have been used to govern what was once held in common.

Evaluation

How good is the Evaporating Cloud? Does it do the tasks we assign to it? How well does it do those tasks? What tasks have we assigned to the Cloud?

How does the Cloud perform these tasks for the classroom?

- Describe a conflict, choice, or decision
- Analyze a conflict, choice or decision
- Find resolution to conflicts
- Describe a problem
- Analyze a problem
- Find creative solutions to problems
- Easy enough for children and powerful enough for their teachers

Description

The Cloud is a simple tool for describing conflicts and decisions. The five basic questions and the graphic representation provide a picture for the mind's eye. The logic of the diagram provides for clear thinking about the structure of a conflict or decision. The structure and logic bring one or more of the sides of a conflict to see the situation from the point of view of the other side.

Analysis

The Cloud supplies questions to logically analyze a conflict or decision. It brings the sides of a conflict to examine if what they want will block the need of the other side. It brings each side to raise and question their own assumptions as well as the assumptions of the other side.

Resolving Conflicts

The Cloud does a good job of helping resolve conflicts when there are obviously invalid assumptions that can be recognized by both sides of a conflict. The cloud can do a good job of resolving difficult conflicts when coupled with other thinking tools of the Theory of Constraints.

Making Decisions

The Cloud provides everything for decisions that it provides for conflicts. It may do a better job of describing decisions because they are even more internal than a conflict with another person. We seem to easily question the assumptions and attribute motivations to other people, but have a more difficult time doing the same for our selves. With decisions we must examine both sides internally and determine our own assumptions and motivations.

Solving Problems

The Cloud is good for solving problems that can be described within its structure. It is excellent for examining assumptions about the problem, but is weak at generating creative solutions as it relies on the individual's experience and intuition. Finding the creative solution is where the Cloud couples well with TRIZ and inventive problem solving.

Ease of use

The Cloud has proven itself as an effective tool in classrooms and on playgrounds around the world. It has proven its effectiveness with children of four and five years old. It is painted on the floors of hundreds of classrooms and on the hard surface of as many playgrounds. Young children, who are not yet writing, are able to talk their way around the Cloud.

Powerful

The Cloud and several other thinking processes of the Theory of Constraints are currently being used in business and industry by workers on the factory floor and CEOs who lead the companies.

The Cloud is a powerful and versatile tool to have in your toolbox!

