

Types of Relational Double-Binds

Level I: *Core Life Value Double-Bind* [Yvon St-Arnaud]

The Core Life Value (CLV) double-bind occurs when the CLV of two people or partners come into a reciprocal conflict or double-bind with each other whereas the unit has difficulty managing their conflicts. Conflict usually consists of a hurtful experience for both individuals but normally without profound or lasting damage to their egos or their relationship.

The CLV double-bind is characterized by a high level of relationship distress during conflict. Individuals or partners:

- have basic childhood injuries;
- possess basic communication and relational skills;
- do not cause deep or durable relationship injuries during conflicts;
- often have the ability to repair the relationship in the event of a relationship injury.

E.g.: Partner A's CLV is to feel listened to;
Partner B's CLV is to feel free.

During conflicts, the two people or partners get stuck relationally because one (A) seeks to feel listened to at all costs by the other (B) without paying attention to the other's (B) need for freedom. Moreover, the other (B) seeks to feel free at all costs but fails to listen to the other (A).

This is the level I deadlock: *the Core Life Value double-bind!*

Level II: *Schema Double-Bind* [Jeffrey Young]

This double-bind occurs when the schemas of two people or partners come into acute conflict whereas the actors manage with great difficulty to settle their conflicts, being caught up in their respective schemas or their partner's schema(s); at times they are unable to resolve their conflicts and remain stuck. The conflict usually consists of a very hurtful experience for both, with, on occasion, an affront and/or new wounds to their egos and the relationship.

The schema double-bind is characterized by a very high level of relational distress during conflicts. Individuals or partners:

- have basic childhood injuries, some of them relatively deep;
- have significant gaps in communication and relationship skills;
- may occasionally generate deep and/or lasting relationship wounds during conflicts;
- don't often have the ability to repair the relationship in case of relationship injury.

E.g.: Partner A has *emotional deprivation schema* (basic belief: "my needs will not be met"; paradox: "I will (unknowingly) ensure that they will not be met");
Partner B holds the *entitlement schema* (basic belief: "Everybody owes me everything!"; paradox: "I'm going to ensure (unknowingly) that I don't have anything/no one in the end").

During conflicts, the two people or partners remain stuck because one (A) seeks to have their need met (but does not express it clearly) while the other (B) is focused on their own needs, which causes a fairly high level of distress because the two generally remain stuck in an endless conflicting spiral often without resolution to their conflict.

This is the level II deadlock: *the Schema double-bind!*

Level III: *Transferential Double-Bind* [Sigmund Freud]

The transferential double-bind takes place when both partners or people enter the transferential dynamic, i.e. "transference/countertransference" (partner A's deep unresolved childhood injury [trauma] versus partner B's deep unresolved childhood injury [trauma]), while being unable to resolve their conflict, often unable to broach the subject of conflict, and while activating childhood traumas which adds to the complexity of the conflict that is triggered, preventing any possible resolution to the initial conflict.

The transferential double-bind is characterized by an alarming level of relational distress often ingrained in *shame*. Individuals or partners:

- have a deep traumatic childhood history [abuse or neglect + shame];
- have several significant gaps in communication and relational skills, and often exhibit reactive hostility and/or helplessness towards each other;
- tend to cause and/or reactivate deep relational wounds during conflicts;
- very rarely have the ability to repair the relationship in the event of a relationship injury.

E.g.: Partner A tends to feel manipulated by the other (as was the case with her mother during childhood);

Partner B tends to feel attacked by the other (as was the case with his father as a child).

During conflicts, the two people or partners remain stuck, hurt and often hurtful because one (B) reacts to the other (A) who did not necessarily have a hostile intention, but from whom (B) perceived a relational threat. Partner A reacts to B's reaction by either withdrawing (and feeling hurt) in full emotional distress or by responding in a tit for tat manner with hostility to the reaction of partner B. It is the endless spiral of mutual hostility (between two "persecuting victims") where the primary conflict is little broached or possibly not broached at all let alone managed, and where additional secondary conflicts are generated (by the hurtful attitudes or actions of either or both partners, or their perceptions of such attitudes or actions by the other). This type of exchange causes a very high level of distress – at times alarming - because the two people or partners end up being hurt or hurtful while new injuries are added to the relational baggage already heavy and ingrained in trauma.

This is the level III deadlock: *the Transferential double-bind!*

These double-binds are cumulative, i.e. Level II individuals hold Level I and Level II double-binds, and Level III individuals hold the double-binds of Level I and II and III (see table below).

CLV: The Core Life Value, a fundamental relational value or need that a person needs to have fulfilled in order to be happy in life.

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