

Discover Your Conflict Style For Student Group Work

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Materials needed:

A Conflict Style Inventory or Assessment. There are numerous examples such as:

1. A reputable and empirically tested instrument is the [Thomas Kilmann Instrument \(TKI\)](#), a forced choice assessment under \$20.
- 1) [Style Matters](#) by Kraybill is another instrument (under \$10) claims to be culturally sensitive Likert-response alternative.
- 2) Conversations [about the differences](#) can be found online too. But if you google *free conflict style assessments*, free options appear [like this one](#); however, the validity/reliability of the results may be shaky. But this could serve as a teachable moment to discuss practicing critical information literacy and research methodology.

Learning challenge addressed/predictable outcome:

This should ameliorate group dynamics, prevent conflicts from escalating, and aid students' ability to product higher quality projects.

Best used for:

Group projects spanning significant time (e.g., at least several weeks) that must produce/create a final product.

Learning objectives/skills fostered:

This should facilitate student's interpersonal communication skills, team building, and conflict resolution problem-solving skills.

What to do / how to do it:

Consider how deeply you want students to explore their communication tendencies. Here are several assignment options:

1. [Discover your Conflict Style](#): simply ask students to complete a conflict styles assessment and send their results to you.
2. [Conflict Style Reflection Paper](#): take it further by asking students to write a 1-2 page reflection paper. Prompts might include: the results, reactions, agree/disagree, and/or to provide a past conflict example demonstrating how they used that particular conflict style.
3. [Share Results with Group Members](#): create a group assignment asking groups to meet, share the results (if they feel comfortable of course), and find similarities and differences.
4. [Group Contract](#): to extend #3, ask each group to generate a group contract which details a specific response plan if conflicts do arise while completing the project. Ask groups to demonstrate how they used the conflict styles results to create the contract.
5. [Analyze Case Studies](#): in groups, provide hypothetical conflict case studies and ask the group to generate how the different conflict styles might respond. Ask how their group could respond so conflict doesn't escalate.

Tips for implementing:

- Start small if this is your first time integrating this topic into your class.
- Find ways to embed the language of the conflict styles throughout the semester in your curriculum; this can be a humorous way to thread this content into any subject you teach. Conflict occurs in every class, every department, every discipline, and every career; help students see the benefits of handling conflict.

Sample Assignments

Below are several actual assignment prompts that integrate portions of the 1-5 assignments described above.

Conflict Prevention Activities

Whitney Scott
Child & Adolescent Development
Research Project Peer Evaluation

Group Style and Conflict Style Reflection

First, get to know you and your research group!!!!

In order to produce an effective product (a research paper) with a group of colleagues, it is vital you learn about each other. You need to know how to effectively work together and this requires a conversation about each member's strengths and weaknesses. You will be expected to work in groups with your co-workers in your careers; therefore, this is a great opportunity for you to learn more about yourself and group dynamics. Your group will probably face several conflicts, miscommunications, or disagreements through this process... how do you plan to handle that? Effective groups establish certain roles or ways to contribute on a weekly basis. Not everyone will be able to attend every single meeting and your group may decide that is appropriate if group members contribute in other ways. Each group member probably has very different educational goals, different styles of communication, and different expectations of how group work "should" be done. Your group needs to figure this out asap!

Step 1: Reflect on how you work best in groups (consider strengths and weakness). Read the information provided on group work, including the list of questions you will discuss with your group members. You must review each of the following:

- Conflict Resolution Questionnaire
- Conflict Management Survey
- Hypothetical Conflict Scenarios
- Group Roles Resources
- Group Meeting Interview Questions

Step 2: Complete the *Conflict Resolution Questionnaire* and *Conflict Management Survey*, determine your scores, and interpret your results. It is imperative that you examine how you handle conflict since you will experience conflict on a regular basis in your careers.

Step 3: Schedule a group meeting to learn about this groups' dynamics. Use the *Group Meeting Interview Questions* on the next page to guide this meeting. Refer to the *Group Roles Resources* to discuss not only the logistics of time management, group roles, and basic communication, but MOST importantly you must discuss how each person handles conflict. Therefore, you must have your conflict questionnaires completed before this meeting. Review the *Hypothetical Conflict Scenarios* page and discuss how you plan to respond if you find yourself in those situations. Please note that these are real-life conflicts taken from previous classes. Your group should generate some guiding principles to follow -- How do we generate/ brainstorm/ create new ideas together? How do we handle disagreements or conflicts?

Step 4: After your group has met and discussed everything on the next page, write a **reflection** on what you have learned about yourself and your group members in 1 page or less (single spaced okay) per person. You do not have to write the response of each person for each question, but rather describe the most important aspects that you learned about being a part of this group. Your reflection should address the following main points:

Conflict Resolution: Based on the results of the survey, how do you typically handle conflict? Which sections had higher scores vs. lower scores? What's your style (1-5) of handling conflict? In general, what new insights about conflict did you learn about yourself? How do your group members handle conflict? Describe one of the hypothetical scenarios and how your group will respond.

Communication: How does your group plan to communicate with each other (time, roles, expression opinions)

Peer Evaluation: How does your group plan to rate each other for each process step? Is this going to be confidential, open for discussion, what if there are disagreements about ratings?

Step 5: Submit the individual reflections as a compiled packet. For example, if there are 5 people in the group, each person should write their reflection but submit the 5 reflections as a stapled packet together. In order for the entire group to pass this step, everyone is required to submit a reflection.

Group Meeting Interview Questions

Before your group begins, discuss what everyone thinks about group work. What makes group work effective and ineffective for you? As a group, discuss the below questions. I will give you class time to start this meeting.

Time

Every student is juggling many complex variables in addition to school (work, home, commuting, finances, health, etc.). What is your main complexity this semester? After everyone has disclosed, brainstorm ways each of you can be a source of strength for each other to complete this project.

Commitment

Not everybody has the same educational goals. Some group members may want to get an A no matter what on this project; others may want to learn something valuable from this project; others may be enjoying a carefree semester. What is everyone's level of commitment and how is this level typically expressed on a weekly basis? How will your group handle differences in level of commitment?

Expressing Opinions

How does everyone express an opinion at a meeting? If you have an idea, do you "blurt it out" as fast as you can before you forget it (perhaps interrupting and dominating the conversation some times)? Do you typically wait for others to ask your opinion? If you have an opinion and someone rejects it (or you think rejects it) how do you respond? How should your group handle someone dominating the conversation and someone not verbally offering their opinion? How should ideas and suggestions be shared in your group?

Conflicts

Some groups will experience conflict, frustration, or a difference in opinion during this project. Keep in mind that many employers complain that college graduates lack the skills to problem solve or work effectively with others. Therefore, it is important for you to take time to discuss with your group members how you plan to solve conflicts this semester. Discuss with your group your conflict scores on the two surveys (Conflict Resolution Questionnaire and Conflict Management Survey) and read the hypothetical scenarios to discuss how you plan to approach those situations.

Communication

At the beginning of the semester everyone will exchange contact information (phone, email, etc) because this will be a critical aspect to the group. If someone calls you, is it important to return their phone call the same day or 1 day later? How long is too long? How about emails? Decide as a group how to handle situations when group members do not return attempts to contact each other. What should the group do?

Group roles

Research has found that if group members establish group roles, they can be more effective and more satisfied with the group experience. Review the sheets on group roles (next pages) and consider your personal strengths. What would be a great way for you to contribute to this unique group? Discuss your strengths and weakness with the group.

Peer Evaluation

You are expected to evaluate each group member's contribution during the process and at the end. Your group is required to submit assignments throughout the semester and many of them require the group to rate to what extent each group member contributed to each step (see step b for an example). Discuss how your group will complete these ratings (e.g., one person rate everyone, everyone rate each other, everyone discuss and agree upon the ratings, etc.). Please review the final peer evaluation sheet with your colleagues as well.

Hypothetical Conflict Scenarios

Read the following conflict scenarios and discuss with your research group how you would respond in these situations. Did the group members in these scenarios handle the situation responsibly, fairly, and accurately? Would you react the same? How would you have changed the situation?

#1: Your Friends in Child & Adolescent Development

Monica, Ross, and Chandler have been working diligently for the first half of the semester meeting regularly and everyone completing their share of the work. All of sudden Monica starts missing a meeting here and there. She keeps apologizing for missing meetings, but **continues to be absent in class and fails to submit her share of the work**. Ross and Chandler decide they are going to just start giving her low ratings and if she doesn't help out anymore, they'll certainly rate her low on the final evaluation so she won't get the same credit. Ross decides he'll put the final draft of the paper together; once he receives Monica's part, he realizes that it's poorly written, doesn't flow with the rest of the paper, and must be re-written. Monica believes she contributed just as much as the other two. What do you think about this situation?

#2 Child & Adolescent Development Idol

Paula, Randy, and Simon got off to a great start for their research project. They decided at their first group meeting that the first assignment for the research project was cheesy and a waste of time. Someone took charge and said, **"I say that everyone just agree to do their fair share of the work and let's just rate each other the highest score no matter what. This will avoid any problems in the future if we all just rate each other 5s every time."** Everyone contributed their fair share up until week 11 in the semester when it was time to actually write the paper. Simon started flaking out on meetings and didn't help much with the paper outline. Paula and Randy started getting nervous that he wouldn't write his part of the paper so they delegated less work to him in case he didn't actually write it. Simon felt strongly that he was doing his fair share of the work, but when it came time to do the final evaluation, Paula and Randy rated Simon low- going against their agreement on the first meeting to rate everyone high. What do you think about this situation?

#3 Child & Adolescent Development in the City

Carrie, Miranda, and Charlotte had their first group meeting and they had difficulty connecting and finding a time they could all meet. Carrie leaves town every Friday night to go home for the weekend and Miranda has a full time job and works mornings and evenings. They decide they'll try to meet after class whenever they can and communicate over phone or email. Charlotte was not very talkative during the first meeting and is frequently absent in class, making it difficult to include her in decisions. The research project begins with Carrie and Miranda doing most the work and filling in Charlotte on decisions made. The group doesn't make much progress and now both Carrie and Miranda have been flaking out. Neither one of them have responded to either emails or phone calls by Charlotte. Once it's time to start writing the paper, **Charlotte is the only one around so she begins to write it on her own**. Charlotte rates both Carrie and Miranda low on the final evaluation. What do you think about this situation?

#4 Seinfeld's Child and Adolescent Development

Elaine, Jerry, and George get along great at their first research meeting. Everything is in line: their meeting time, exchange of contact information, and a specific plan of how to handle group dynamics and conflict. They are excited to get started. They agree to rate each other honestly each week. The week in which the group was collecting research articles Jerry was missing from class and didn't respond to email or phone. The group rated him low that week and the next week Jerry came to class indicating that something had come up out of town and he was sorry. The following week Elaine was sick with the flu and didn't help out, but she called everyone to let them know why she couldn't help. When it came to the ratings, Jerry argued that they should rate her low since she didn't do anything this week. George disagreed. Jerry got upset and said, **"You two rated me low when I had to leave town suddenly and I didn't help, just because Elaine is sick and didn't help at all, doesn't mean we should rate her high right?"** What do you think about this situation?