# Group Dynamics and Conflict Management

*Institute for Transforming Undergraduate Education*

*University of Delaware*

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# Phases of Group Development

## Group Task

**Forming**

Define purpose
Determine objectives

**Storming**

Define task requirements
Determine & accept roles

**Norming**

Establish ground rules
Determine consequences
Agenda setting

**Performing**

Monitor performance
Provide feedback
Apply consequences

# Phases of Group Development

| | **Group Task** | **Evidence of Failure** |
|---|---|---|
| **Forming** | Define purpose<br>Determine objectives | Group lacks focus<br>Attends to wrong things<br>Conflict over objectives |
| **Storming** | Determine task requirements<br>Determine, accept roles | Not completing tasks<br>Conflict within group |
| **Norming** | Establish ground rules<br>Determine consequences<br>Agenda setting | Poor standards<br>Conflict within group & w/instructor<br>Late or incomplete assignments |
| **Performing** | Monitor performance<br>Provide feedback<br>Apply consequences | Poor performance continues<br>Conflicts go unresolved<br>Sense that grades unfair |
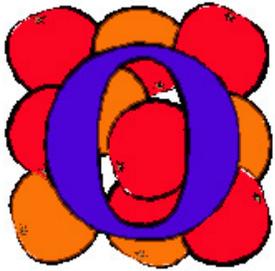
# Once upon a time...

A team of students had four members called Everybody, Somebody, Anybody, and Nobody. There was an important job to be done. Everybody was sure that Somebody would do it. Anybody could have done it, but Nobody did it. Somebody got angry about that because it was Everybody's job. Everybody thought Anybody could do it but Nobody realized that Everybody wouldn't do it. It ended up that Everybody blamed Somebody when Nobody did what Anybody could have done.

- Graham Gibbs, "Learning in Teams"

# Three Styles of Resolving Conflict

## *Win-Lose*
– strategies used are power, dominance, forcing

## *Lose-Lose*
– common strategy used is compromise

## *Win-Win*
– strategies used are integration, collaboration, problem-solving

# Step 1: Conflict Case Studies

A. Read over the case study that your group has been given.

B. Consider the possible resolutions to the dilemma posed by the case.

C. List the possible resolutions on the case study handout, the blank space beneath the text.

# Step 2: Conflict Case Study

A. **Fold the handout so that your ideas for resolutions are covered up by the folded paper, but the case study text is still revealed.**

*Case study text*

*Fold in paper*
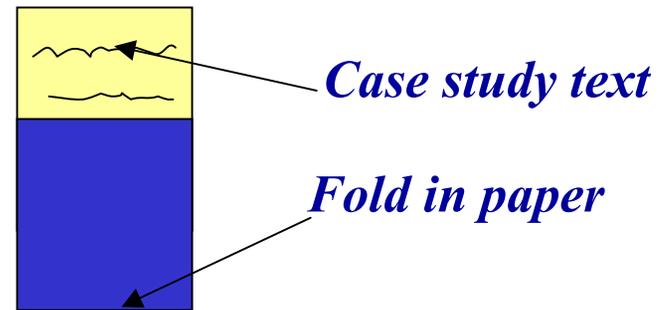
B. **Pass the folded case study on to the group on your left.**

C. **When you receive another group's case study, keep that group's ideas for resolutions covered up.**

# Step 3: Conflict Case Study

A. Read over the new case study that your group has been given.

B. What are the possible ways in which the group and/or course instructor bring about a positive resolution?

C. List these on the handout, in the new blank space beneath the case study.

# Steps 4 & 5: Conflict Case Study

A. Pass the case study on to the group on your left.

B. Uncover the possible resolutions "brainstormed" by the previous 2 groups.

C. Given the information that you have, which of the resolutions do you think is the best option? Why?

D. Could the conflict that arose in the case have been prevented or significantly lessened? If so, how?

*Be prepared to report out on questions C & D in 10 min.*

# My Group from Hell

**Take 5 minutes to trade stories with your neighbor about your "group from hell."**
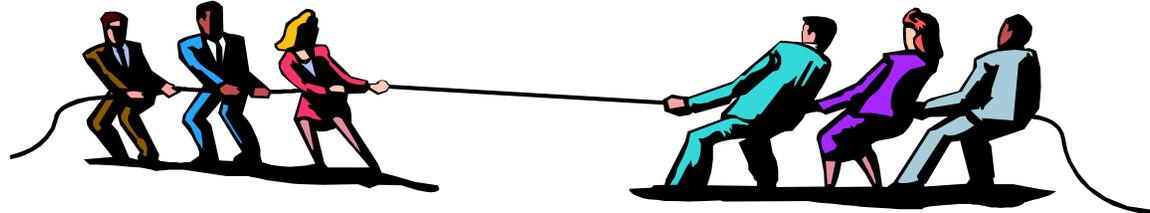
*How was the conflict resolved?*

# Resolving Conflicts

## *Level 1 - Preventing escalation*

– **Monitor groups for early signs of conflict**
– **Intervene on the spot**
– **Group evaluations - individuals plus process**
– **Encourage spontaneous verbal feedback**

# Suggestions for Using Groups

- **Set the stage early**

- **Form heterogeneous groups**

- **Use permanent groups**

- **Rotate roles of responsibility**

- **Rely on group-selected ground rules**

- **Conduct peer evaluations**

# Resolving Conflicts

## *Level 2 - Empowering students*

- Listen to student concerns (all viewpoints)
- Encourage students to resolve the conflict
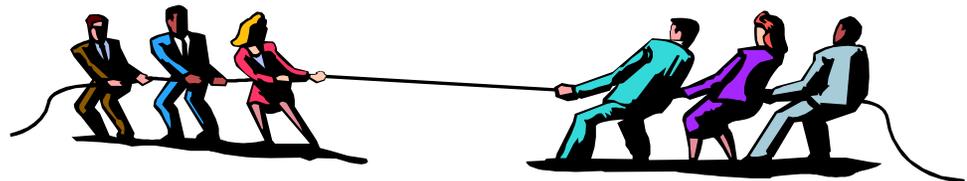- Coach students on possible resolution strategies
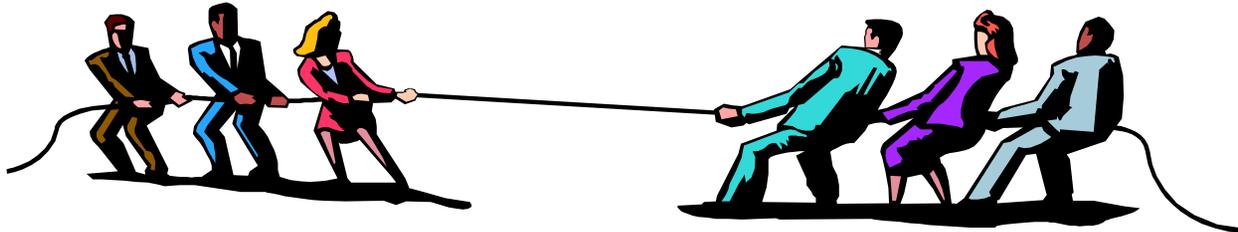
# Resolving Conflicts

## *Level 3 - Serve as mediator*

– **Establish ground rules**
– **Ask each student to present point of view while others listen**
– **Ask each student to define ideal outcome**
– **Review group ground rules**
– **Facilitate discussion of possible outcomes**

# Resolving Conflicts

## *Level 4 - Instructor intervention*

– **"I reserve the right to…." statements in the syllabus**

**Levels 1-3 are loosely based on:**

Weider-Hatfield (1981) A unit in conflict management skills. *Communication Education* 30: 265-273.

Adler, Rosenfeld, and Towne (1983) *Interplay: The Process of Interpersonal Communication*. New York: Rinehart & Winston.