

The Group from Hell: Strategies for Resolving Conflicts in PBL Groups



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**(courtesy of
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Phases of Group Development

Forming



Storming



Norming



Performing

Group Task

Define purpose

Determine objectives

Define task requirements

Determine & accept roles

Establish ground rules

Determine consequences

Agenda setting

Monitor performance

Provide feedback

Apply consequences



Phases of Group Development

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



The Team Grid and Code of Conduct Exercise

Name, Phone, and Email Address	Things I Love to Talk About	Why I Am Taking This Class	Personal or Professional Achievement for 2007	On Teams, I tend to be a...

Code of Conduct: How should we handle poor performance on this team?



In Groups, I Tend to Be a....

- Leader
- Worker
- Planner
- Mediator
- Entertainer



Purposes of “Completing the Grid”?

- Forming:
 - What does everyone expect to get out of this class?
 - Do we have 5 leaders? Entertainers?
 - How do I contact you?
- Storming
 - What role do I want to play? (Leader vs. Entertainer)
- Norming
 - How do we handle poor performance?
- Encourages the movement through the phases and the formation of trust



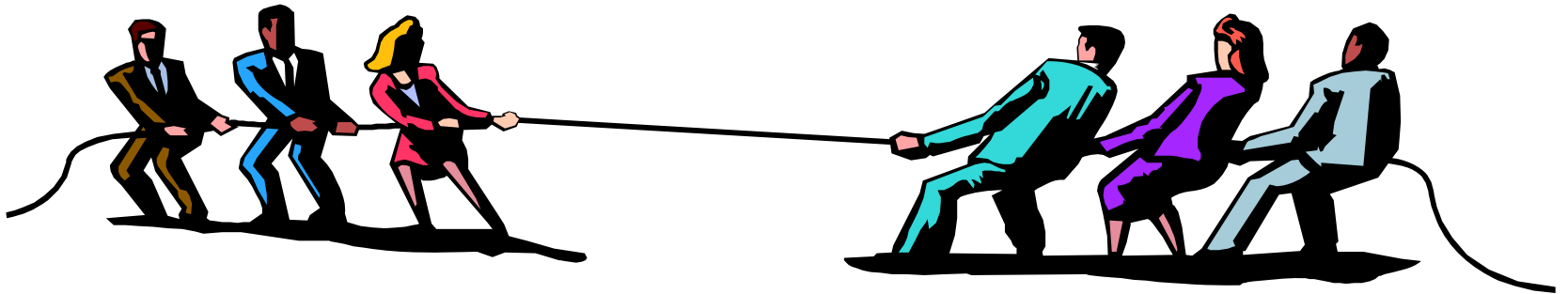
Trust and Teams

- Trust is “a willingness to put oneself at risk within a specific context.”
 - Trusting behavior: delegation of tasks to a team member
 - Distrusting behavior: Completing all tasks on your own.
- To be “trustworthy,” indicates one has characteristics that merit another’s trust:
 - Competence—one has the capacity to complete the desired task.
 - Benevolence—one cares about my needs and will act in my best interests.
 - Integrity—the person is honest and keeps his or her commitments.



Nurturing and Eroding Team Trust

Name some actions that team members take to undermine perceptions of their competence, benevolence, and integrity.





Purposes of “Completing the Grid”?

- Forming:
 - What does everyone expect to get out of this class?
 - Do we have 5 leaders? Entertainers?
 - How do I contact you?
- Storming
 - What role do I want to play? (Leader vs. Entertainer)
- Norming
 - How do we handle poor performance?
- Encourages the movement through the phases and the formation of trust



Purposes of “Completing the Grid & Code of Conduct

- Learn about one’s team members:
 - Reduces depersonalization (benevolence)
 - Differing priorities (Leader vs. Entertainer)
 - What is my role? How important is this class to me?
 - How do I contact you?
- Allows groups to learn about their group members
 - What skills do my team members have? (C)
 - What will happen if tasks are not completed? (B, I)
 - Sets expectations early (I)
 - Improves chances tasks are completed on time (C, B, I)
- Encourages the formation of trust



Improving Team Trust

- Establish a team code of conduct:
 - Set expectations early (I)
 - What will happen if tasks are not completed? (B, I)
 - Define each member's skill set (C)
 - Improves chances tasks are completed on time (C, B, I)
- Decrease depersonalization (B)
 - Who are my team members?
 - What is my role? How important is this class to me?
 - How do I contact you? (B)
- Encourages the formation of trust



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



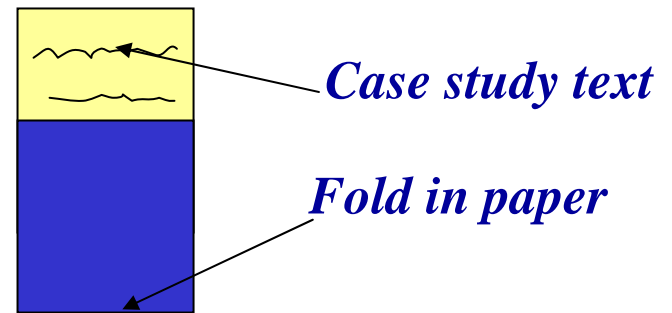
Step 1: Conflict Case Studies

- 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 possible resolutions on the case study handout, in 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.



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 can 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?**

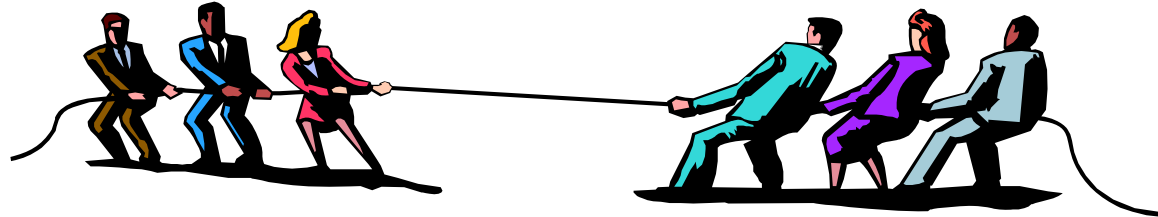
Be prepared to report out on questions C & D in 10 min.



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**



Suggestions for Getting Started

- **Explain why learning in groups is a good strategy.**
- **Ask students to report on past experiences.**
- **Talk about support mechanisms.**
- **Use group warm-up activities.**



Forming Groups

**Randomly heterogeneous -
“counting off” :**

- from roster
- in class

**Intentionally heterogeneous, based
on information:**

- from student records
- supplied by students



Rotating Roles



Discussion Leader

Keeps group on track; maintains full participation



Recorder

Records assignments, strategies, unresolved issues, data; convenes group outside of class



Reporter

Reports out during whole class discussion; writes up final draft of assignments



Accuracy Coach

Checks group understanding; finds resources



Examples of Ground Rules

Come to class on time every day

Come to class having done the assignment and prepared to discuss it

Must notify members of the group ahead of time if must miss class for any reason

Be willing to share information

Respect the views, values, and ideas of other members of the group

If members of the group violate these ground rules, other members of the group may impose the following consequences:



Peer Evaluation

Some general suggestions:

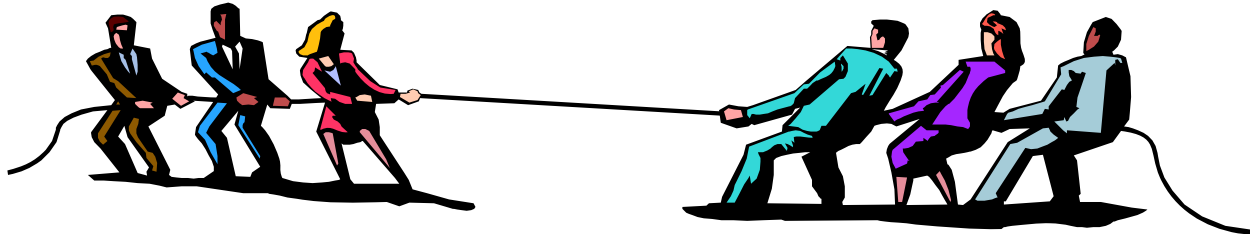
- **Use predetermined written criteria that focus primarily on behaviors**
- **Do at least 2X per semester**
- **Factor results into students' grades**
- **Summarize results and distribute summaries**
- **Keep the process simple**
- **Incorporate into group assignments**



Resolving Conflicts

Level 2 - Empowering students

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

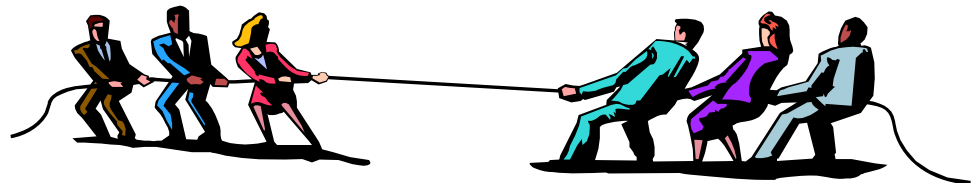




Resolving Conflicts

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.



Additional Resources

Conflict Resolution Network <www.crnhq.org>

Conflict Research Consortium <www.conflict.colorado.edu>

The Conflict Resolution Information Source
<www.crinfo.org>

Burgess, G. & H. Burgess. “Group projects: A conflict resolution guide for students.” *Beyond Intractability*, G. Burgess & H. Burgess, eds. Conflict Research Consortium, University of Colorado.
<www.beyondintractability.org/user_guides/students/>