GROUP ASSIGNMENT 1

CASE STUDY 3 (RELEASE 2)

IT2160-PROFESSIONAL SKILLS

Personality, Cognitive Style & Emotional Intelligence

Case Study reference number: A1-CS-3-R2

"Reading Between the Lines": Individual Differences and Misalignment in a Sri Lankan University–Industry IT Project

Case Study Narrative

The Faculty of Computing at a leading state university in Sri Lanka had entered into a collaborative agreement with LankaSys Solutions, a mid-sized IT services firm based in Battaramulla. The objective was to co-develop a learning analytics dashboard that would help lecturers identify students at academic risk early in the semester. The project was positioned as mutually beneficial: the university would receive a functional prototype, while LankaSys would gain a public-sector reference and access to graduate talent.

The development team was deliberately mixed. Two LankaSys engineers worked alongside academic staff and final-year undergraduates. While the technical scope appeared manageable, the human dynamics were less predictable. Meetings alternated between the university's boardroom, a formal, hierarchical, and protocol-driven space, and LankaSys's open-plan office, where conversation was informal and fast-paced.

The Project Team

Dr. Shanika Weerasinghe, the academic coordinator, had overseen multiple funded projects. She was methodical in her approach, preferring written updates, clear milestones, and documented approvals. In meetings, she listened carefully before speaking and often summarized discussions to ensure shared understanding. She rarely showed visible frustration, even when timelines slipped.

Ravindu Silva, a senior software engineer from LankaSys, was known internally as a "problem solver." He enjoyed tackling ambiguous requirements and often suggested technical shortcuts to accelerate progress. Ravindu spoke confidently and sometimes filled silences quickly, assuming that lack of objection signaled agreement.

Madhavi Jayaratne, a business analyst recently promoted within LankaSys, acted as the main liaison. She took detailed notes during meetings and frequently followed up with clarification emails. Madhavi was attentive to how messages were phrased and often re-read her own emails before sending them, concerned about how they might be interpreted.

Isuru Pathirana, a final-year undergraduate assigned to the project, worked part-time while completing his studies. Isuru was enthusiastic but cautious. He waited for explicit instructions before proceeding and frequently asked whether his work "matched expectations." When feedback was delayed, he tended to slow down rather than take initiative.

Early Interactions and Emerging Differences

The first joint meeting focused on defining the dashboard's core indicators. Ravindu sketched ideas rapidly on a whiteboard, suggesting predictive metrics based on attendance patterns. Dr. Shanika nodded occasionally but asked few questions during the session. Isuru observed quietly, typing notes.

At the end of the meeting, Ravindu said, "So we're aligned on attendance, assessment marks, and engagement logs. We can start building."

Dr. Shanika responded, "Let us circulate minutes and confirm before development begins."

Ravindu interpreted this as a formality. Dr. Shanika interpreted it as a necessary checkpoint. Neither clarified their assumption.

The next week, Ravindu began implementing a preliminary model using sample data. He viewed early development to surface issues quickly. Madhavi, however, noticed that no formal confirmation had been received from the university. She drafted an email summarizing the agreed-upon indicators and waited for Dr. Shanika's written approval before circulating it.

Isuru, assigned to clean historical data, hesitated. Without explicit confirmation, he was unsure whether the indicators Ravindu mentioned were final. He sent Madhavi a message asking, "Should I proceed with attendance data only, or wait?" Madhavi replied, "Let's wait for confirmation." Ravindu, unaware of this exchange, assumed progress was being made.

Perception, Assumptions, and Attribution

At the following review meeting, Dr. Shanika asked for an update. Ravindu enthusiastically demonstrated a prototype chart. Dr. Shanika appeared surprised. "I thought we were still finalizing indicators," she said.

Ravindu replied, "This is just to show possibilities. It's easier to discuss with something visible."

Dr. Shanika paused before responding. "From the university's side, we prefer not to see development until indicators are agreed. Otherwise, it creates expectations we may not approve."

Madhavi noticed the tension and attempted to reframe the discussion by referring to her pending email. Isuru remained silent, unsure whether his lack of progress would be questioned.

After the meeting, Ravindu told a colleague, "Academics overthink everything. They slow projects down." Dr. Shanika later told another lecturer, "Industry partners rush without understanding governance." Each explanation attributed the issue to the other party's disposition rather than the situational difference in working norms.

Emotional Responses Under Pressure

As the semester progressed, the project fell behind its informal schedule. The university requested a demo for an upcoming senate meeting. Ravindu felt confident the prototype could be polished quickly. Madhavi felt anxious about committing it without written alignment. Isuru worried about his contribution, noticing that others spoke confidently while he waited for direction.

During a planning meeting, Ravindu said, "We can deliver a demo in two weeks."

Madhavi asked, "Should we confirm the scope before promising dates?"

Ravindu replied, "If we keep waiting, we'll never deliver." His tone was firm, bordering on dismissiveness.

Madhavi became quieter for the rest of the meeting. Later, she sent a carefully worded email highlighting risk. Ravindu skimmed it and replied briefly, "Noted." He believed action mattered more than discussion.

Isuru, sensing tension, avoided asking questions and focused on minor tasks he knew were safe. His productivity increased in volume but not in strategic value.

Escalation and Reflection

When the demo date approached, Dr. Shanika reviewed the dashboard and raised concerns about data interpretation. Ravindu felt frustrated, interpreting the feedback as resistance to change. Madhavi felt caught between both sides, re-reading emails to ensure neutrality. Isuru felt invisible, unsure whether his efforts were recognized or useful.

The demo ultimately proceeded, but with limited functionality. Feedback from the senate was cautious rather than enthusiastic. No one openly blamed another, but private interpretations hardened.

Despite the technical viability of the system, the collaboration now carried uncertainty. Decisions seemed slower, communication more guarded, and assumptions less generous. The project continued, shaped as much by individual differences in how information was perceived, evaluated, and emotionally processed as by lines of code.

Case Study Questions

1. Identify one instance where a lack of shared understanding arose due to different interpretations of the same interaction.

2. Using cognitive style differences, explain why Ravindu and Madhavi respond differently to ambiguity in project requirements.

3. Choose one character and explain how their locus of control influences their behavior when feedback or direction is unclear.

4. Explain how perception influenced the post-meeting explanations Ravindu and Dr. Shanika formed about each other's behavior.

5. Analyze how emotional regulation affected communication between Ravindu and Madhavi during deadline discussions.

6. Evaluate the potential impact of Isuru's quiet participation on team decision-making and project outcomes.

Instructions to students:

Assessment Weight

- **Total Marks:** 10 Marks
- **Presentation Group:** 6 Marks
- **Mirrored Groups (Evaluation & Critiques):** 4 Marks

Group Structure and Participation

- Each presentation group must consist of **6 members**.
- All **6 members must be present** during the assessment.
- Mirrored groups will actively **evaluate and provide constructive critiques** to the presenting group.

Presentation Requirements

- **Presentation Duration:** 15 minutes
- **Critique Session:** 5 minutes (conducted by mirrored groups)
- **Presentation Format:**

    - A **PowerPoint slide deck** is mandatory.
    - Slides must be uploaded to **CourseWeb at least ONE day prior** to the scheduled presentation date.

- All members must engage equally in the presentation.
- The presentation must be based entirely on the provided case study and Week 3 Lecture concepts.
- Presenters must answer ALL discussion questions provided at the end of the case study

Evaluation and Critique

Mirrored groups will:

- Listen to the presentation attentively
- Provide **constructive, academically grounded feedback**
- Address strengths, weaknesses, clarity, application of concepts, and engagement
- Critiques must be respectful, relevant, and based on Week 3 material

Academic Integrity

- **Plagiarism is strictly prohibited.**
- All content presented must be the group's original work.
- Any violation of academic integrity policies will result in penalties according to institutional guidelines.

Presentation Group Marking Rubric (6 Marks)

Criterion	Description	Marks
1. Content Accuracy & Use of Week 2 Concepts	Answers all six questions; integrates Personality, Cognitive Styles, and Emotional Intelligence concepts; applies theory accurately to the case.	**2.0**
2. Analysis, Critical Thinking & Depth	Demonstrates insight; connects case → theory → group's own experience; shows logical reasoning and reflective analysis.	**1.5**
3. Structure, Clarity & Presentation Quality	Clear structure; smooth flow; coherent transitions; high-quality PPT; ideas well-organized.	**1.0**
4. Team Participation & Equal Contribution	All six members present; equal speaking roles; coordinated teamwork; effective time management.	**1.0**
5. Communication Skill & Professional Delivery	Clear verbal delivery; confidence; engagement; professional tone.	**0.5**

- **Total Marks: 6.0**

Mirrored Group Critique Rubric (4 Marks)

Criterion	Description	Marks
1. Constructive Feedback Quality	Feedback is respectful, relevant, and academically grounded; critique aligns with Personality, Cognitive Styles, and Emotional Intelligence concepts	**1.5**
2. Analytical Depth of Critique	Identifies strengths and weaknesses in the presenting group's analysis; shows insight and understanding of case study concepts.	**1.0**
3. Engagement During Presentation	Attentive listening; takes notes; asks meaningful and relevant questions; shows active involvement in session.	**1.0**
4. Professionalism & Communication	Communicates respectfully; uses appropriate academic tone; delivers critique clearly and confidently.	**0.5**

- **Total Marks: 4.0**