

Conflict Assessment Paper
Analyzing How I Handle Conflict

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Introduction

Unless every person thought, acted, and did the same as everyone else, conflict is something that every person will encounter in their lives. This class has provided me with an opportunity to learn about conflict, how to resolve it, and how to analyze my personal responses to conflict. Before entering this class I was aware of the ways I responded to conflict, usually involving verbal arguments, passive aggressive communication, and very infrequently using physical aggressiveness, but not of the theory behind the actions I took. With nearly half of the semester passed now, I've had the opportunity to adopt a new outlook on how to approach and resolve situations of conflict. This essay will discuss the positive conflict resolution skills I've been working on, such as collaborating with the people involved in the conflict, and some that need more work, such as engaging in passive aggressive speech less frequently. Additionally, I will cover the connections to conflict resolution theory I've learned, such as practicing compromising when I see it as the best solution and engaging in conflict resolution collaboratively. Finally, I will discuss the skills provided to me in this class and have they allowed me to analyze some of my conflicts from the past eight weeks. This analysis views topics like the dysfunctional cycle patterns I try to avoid using as well as the more positive outcomes I use in my conflict resolution skills.

Skills Assessment

Using the data from the conflicts I've recorded over the course of the semester I've been able to identify conflict resolutions skills to assess. These skills are passive aggressive communication, collaboration, and compromise. Collaboration and passive aggressive communication are two of the more pressing skills for me to improve as the reduction of passive aggressiveness can have an increase on the outcome found using collaboration. Taking a more analytical approach to conflict instead of just trying to win the conflict has allowed me to notice the less beneficial habits I have like raising my voice or being passive aggressive.

Raising my voice and using passive aggressive communication are two conflicting ideas and they serve different purposes when I encounter conflict. I find myself using passive aggressive speech when I know I can use it to make the other person angrier and then try to turn it against them to win the argument. I relate to Signe Whitson's article, *The Passive Aggressive Conflict Cycle*, where she states, "The passive aggressive person has learned to defend against his angry feelings by denying them and projecting them onto others."¹ I view the passive aggressive conflict cycle as a defense tactic that I use to undermine the other person's argument and turn the favor in my outcome. In reality all that will end up happening is the continuation of a destructive communication cycle. I've found myself being passive aggressive when I want to feign avoidance of conflict, but still make the other person

feel like there is a conflict for them to resolve. My decision then places the initialization stage solely on the other person, which is harder for them to carry out.

On the contrary, I tend to raise my voice in verbal arguments to show an increase in passion of the argument. I am more likely to get involve in a conflict and raise my voice which will start to cause a schismogenesis in which I want the other person to match my passion. I find myself engaging in this negative skill when people aren't engaging me in conflict resolution. In their article, *Conflict Management: Difficult Conversations with Difficult People*, Dr. Ann Lowry and Amy Overton say that in order for people to effectively deal with conflict that motivation is required and active engagement will lead to better results than avoidance.² I use my voice as a way to try and engage people to want to deal with the conflict, although all I may be doing is making the conflict worse by eliciting an emotional response rather than a logical response.

Contrary to the negative skills I've noticed myself practicing I've also been able to improve my conflict skills by engaging more in collaborative conflict resolution. In conflicts with my friends and new roommates, we collaborate the find the best solution for the conflict. I didn't include many of these in my ten conflicts because when I originally thought of what conflict was, I didn't include collaborative efforts in my thoughts. I've now noticed that I solve more conflicts than I realized using collaboration. With most

people, I feel like I have a tendency to expect that I'll have to fight for what I want and usually give up something in order to make them happy. Recently I've noticed myself not escalating a conflict and it's resolved using collaboration very quickly and without any type of strong arguments. In conflicts that I have with my family, I find it harder to collaborate to resolve the conflict and it will be solved either by the power imbalance between parents and siblings or through some sort of compromising. Recchia, Vickar and Ross argue found in their study on power imbalances between family members, that parents acquire their greater physical strength, improved reasoning, and control over family resources.³ This imbalance of power is what I consider to lead to lesser collaboration in my family between my siblings, myself, and my parents. We are good at compromising and finding solutions that work for almost everyone, but it usually involves some verbal arguments and one or more person not getting what they wanted.

Theoretical Connections

Understanding how I can use different conflict theories is important to understand my own behavior. I can try to avoid dysfunctional conflict cycles and attempt to engage in more functional conflict cycles. I'm also able to separate out my conflicts into different categories, being tangible and intangible conflicts. This course has broadened my understanding of conflict resolution and helped me learn where and when certain skills are more

appropriate.

The conflict I recorded with my ex-roommate about him bringing people back to the room is an example of an intangible conflict. The argument may have been about him bringing a guest to the room without asking, but the underlying conflict was about my privacy of the room being violated. Professor Erlandson at Albion university writes in her article *Journal of College & University Student Housing* that "Private space also helps in coping with social pressure by providing a release from role demands and social demands."⁴ It's clearer to see why I reacted the way I did from both my privacy being violated, and the stress of dealing with that. If this conflict had been approached with a more functional conflict cycle, my roommate could have asked me in advance to have the room. I may still have fought him on it, but we could have compromised on a solution that would have given both of us the desired outcome. In his honors research project at the University of Akron, Billie Radcliffe writes that in college roommates, "conflict occurs most often because of miscommunication, so the emphasis on clear and concise communication in relationships is important."⁵ Had my roommate and I worked on establishing better communication, we could have avoided a lot of the issues we had and I may still be living in that house.

Analyzing My Behavior

Recording some of my conflicts over the course of the semester has

given me insight on how I deal with conflict. I noticed that I tend to use verbal arguments in almost every one of my conflicts and it usually doesn't escalate to much more than that. However, if the conflict includes something that targets me directly on how to do something, I'll use passive aggressive communication as a defense mechanism. In their article published to the Journal of Managerial Psychology, authors Edward McIlduff and David Coghlan found that passive aggressive behavior includes resenting others for suggesting how to do something or to increase productivity.⁶ Depending on the context of the suggestion, I take it as a personal attack and I try to dismiss it by being passive aggressive. As I stated before, this only leads to an escalation of the conflict.

In my some of my other arguments I recorded, I may have initially responded with verbal or physical aggression and then taken some time to think more about the response and find a better solution. Other aspects I've noted in my conflicts were how many of them dealt with my immediate family members. They were not these great, big earth shattering conflicts, but minor ones that we discussed and tried to compromise on a solution for everyone. Clark et al. discussed this in their article, *Types of Conflicts and Tensions Between Older Parents and Adult Children*, about how "Conflict seems to be both pervasive and a natural part of family interactions."⁷ Conflict in my large family of 7 people is something that I've become accustomed to. It can take up a lot of time, as I learned by recording my

conflicts, but having these conflicts allows me to practice more of the skills that I've learned in this course.

Conclusion

Learning about different conflict theories, assessing my conflict resolution skills, and analyzing my behavior in situations of conflict has given me new insights on how I handle conflict. I feel that the tools I've learned so far in the course are preparing me to better handle conflict and get better at conflict resolution. Having the ability to be more aware of the decisions I make when faced with a conflict has opened me up to think more deeply about the actions I make. Instead of jumping into a conflict without giving too much thought, I can pull myself away from it momentarily and formulate a plan to best solve the conflict. In regards to my more negative behaviors, I'm making progress on using those skills less. Overall, I feel that this course and reflection described in this paper has made me more better at conflict resolution and has given me new skills to use to do so.

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- ⁵ Radcliffe, Billie K., "Conflict Styles and College Roommates" (2017). *Honors Research Projects*. 424.http://ideaexchange.uakron.edu/honors_research_projects/424

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- ⁷ Clarke, E. J., Preston, M., Raksin, J., & Bengtson, V. L. (1999). Types of conflicts and tensions between older parents and adult children. *The Gerontologist*, 39(3), 261.

Appendix A: Conflict Records

Conflict Records

Instructions: Make 10 copies of this record. Over the next number of weeks, observe your conflicts and fill out a record for each one. After you accumulate 10 or more, you should be ready to write your paper.

Interpersonal Conflict Record

Date: 08/30 Time: 17:00 (AM/PM) Length of argument (time): 1.5 hours

Topic/Issue of conflict:

A friend of mine posted something on social media so I asked them if they understood how their post could be interpreted poorly.

How often has this issue come up in the past?

Rarely 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Very Often

What actually started/triggered the conflict?

The posting on social media, and my response to the posting.

Brief description of the conflict: verbal argument, physical abuse, silent treatment/stonewalling, changed subject/made light of conflict, etc.:

It was an argument over social media. The person I was arguing with you not address the questions I was asking, would change the subject, and dismiss my comments because I "didn't know what I was talking about"

Emotions you experienced:

Anger, disbelief, and a little bit of humor

How did it end?

I stopped responding after I realized this person wasn't going to actually answer anything I was talking about. They later deleted the post and removed me from all their social media accounts.

Intensity of disagreement:

Low 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 High

Degree of resolution:

Resolved 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Unresolved

Conflict Records

Instructions: Make 10 copies of this record. Over the next number of weeks, observe your conflicts and fill out a record for each one. After you accumulate 10 or more, you should be ready to write your paper.

Interpersonal Conflict Record

Date: 9/2 Time: 23:00 (AM/PM) Length of argument (time): 1 hour

Topic/Issue of conflict:

My roommate waited for me to go to sleep so he could bring a girl back to the room without asking me.

How often has this issue come up in the past?

Rarely 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Very Often

What actually started/triggered the conflict?

I woke up as he opened the door and started asking him who she was, and told him it wasn't okay if she stayed in our room tonight.

Brief description of the conflict: verbal argument, physical abuse, silent treatment/stonewalling, changed subject/made light of conflict, etc.:

Verbal argument about her staying, and vilifying me for not wanting her to stay, and making light of the conflict.

Emotions you experienced:

Annoyance and slight disgust

How did it end?

She left, but he tried to bring her back later. Eventually I moved out of this house and found a new place to live.

Intensity of disagreement:

Low 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 High

Degree of resolution:

Resolved 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Unresolved

Conflict Records

Instructions: Make 10 copies of this record. Over the next number of weeks, observe your conflicts and fill out a record for each one. After you accumulate 10 or more, you should be ready to write your paper.

Interpersonal Conflict Record

Date: 9/7 Time: 14:30 (AM/PM) Length of argument (time): 1 hour

Topic/Issue of conflict:

I have been struggling with some injuries and my coach wants me to run more miles and do harder workouts.

How often has this issue come up in the past?

Rarely 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 **8** 9 Very Often

What actually started/triggered the conflict?

I had a weekly meeting with my cross country coach about my training and injuries and he wanted to know how I was feeling.

Brief description of the conflict: verbal argument, physical abuse, silent treatment/stonewalling, changed subject/made light of conflict, etc.:

Changing the subject to talk about other athletes who have done the training he wants me to do, and making light of how serious my injuries actually were.

Emotions you experienced:

Disappointment and burnt out from having this conversation before.

How did it end?

He still wanted me to do more miles, but made me feel a little better by saying it would be okay if I just worked towards that instead of trying to make the jump immediatly.

Intensity of disagreement:

Low 1 2 **3** 4 5 6 7 8 9 High

Degree of resolution:

Resolved **1** 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Unresolved

Conflict Records

Instructions: Make 10 copies of this record. Over the next number of weeks, observe your conflicts and fill out a record for each one. After you accumulate 10 or more, you should be ready to write your paper.

Interpersonal Conflict Record

Date: 9/9 Time: 22:00 (AM/PM) Length of argument (time): 20 minutes

Topic/Issue of conflict:

My roommate brought a different girl back to the house this week and didn't ask if she could stay here. Instead he left her in the house by herself with no one else here.

How often has this issue come up in the past?

Rarely 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Very Often

What actually started/triggered the conflict?

I walked into the house and found this girl sleeping in my roommate's bed with no one else in the house. I called my roommate and told him I was kicking her out because he wasn't here and didn't ask me if she could be in our shared room.

Brief description of the conflict: verbal argument, physical abuse, silent treatment/stonewalling, changed subject/made light of conflict, etc.:

Verbal argument.

Emotions you experienced:

Annoyed and frustrated that he keeps doing things like this and worried about her going through things in the house.

How did it end?

I kicked her out of the house and told her she could come back with my roommate. He told me it was "uncool to do" and then we left it at that.

Intensity of disagreement:

Low 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 High

Degree of resolution:

Resolved 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Unresolved

Conflict Records

Instructions: Make 10 copies of this record. Over the next number of weeks, observe your conflicts and fill out a record for each one. After you accumulate 10 or more, you should be ready to write your paper.

Interpersonal Conflict Record

Date: 9/17 Time: 14:45 (AM/PM) Length of argument (time): 15 minutes

Topic/Issue of conflict:

My professor decided to change the assignment for the program we had to write and it was still due on the same day (tonight)

How often has this issue come up in the past?

Rarely 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Very Often

What actually started/triggered the conflict?

A couple students asked questions about the homework due tonight, and he changed what he wanted us to do on the spot. I asked him why he wasn't clear at the start of the assignment and why he wouldn't give us more time for a new program.

Brief description of the conflict: verbal argument, physical abuse, silent treatment/stonewalling, changed subject/made light of conflict, etc.:

Verbal argument about the assignment

Emotions you experienced:

Anxiety about confronting my professor and a little bit of anger about having to do a different assignment with less time.

How did it end?

The professor gave us one extra day to complete the assignment after other students started joining me in the argument.

Intensity of disagreement:

Low 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 High

Degree of resolution:

Resolved 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Unresolved

Conflict Records

Instructions: Make 10 copies of this record. Over the next number of weeks, observe your conflicts and fill out a record for each one. After you accumulate 10 or more, you should be ready to write your paper.

Interpersonal Conflict Record

Date: 09/29 Time: 14:00 (AM/PM) Length of argument (time): 45 minutes

Topic/Issue of conflict:

As I near graduation my parents want me to start looking for a job, but I want to try to be a professional runner for at least a year.

How often has this issue come up in the past?

Rarely 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Very Often

What actually started/triggered the conflict?

My mom and I were talking about finances and how I would live after college. Right now I have school paid for, but if I don't have a job I have about 2 months of rent until I would need to get a job. My parents wants what's best for me, and they don't think being a professional runner will pay the bills

Brief description of the conflict: verbal argument, physical abuse, silent treatment/stonewalling, changed subject/made light of conflict, etc.:

We got into a verbal argument, and I would try to change the subject from finances and bring up other runners who have done this out of college.

Emotions you experienced:

Disappointment, stress, anxiety, and a small amount of anger.

How did it end?

We both conceded that it's a possibility for me to run, but at the same time I have to be realistic. I don't have money to fund this, and if I can't get a contract, then I have to get a job.

Intensity of disagreement:

Low 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 High

Degree of resolution:

Resolved 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Unresolved

Conflict Records

Instructions: Make 10 copies of this record. Over the next number of weeks, observe your conflicts and fill out a record for each one. After you accumulate 10 or more, you should be ready to write your paper.

Interpersonal Conflict Record

Date: 09/29 Time: 10:00 (AM/PM) Length of argument (time): 2 hours

Topic/Issue of conflict:

Trying to plan a travel itinerary for a trip this winter with my family.

How often has this issue come up in the past?

Rarely 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Very Often

What actually started/triggered the conflict?

The cost of the trip and the dates that everyone wanted to travel. People wanted to go to different places on different dates and no one could agree on where to go.

Brief description of the conflict: verbal argument, physical abuse, silent treatment/stonewalling, changed subject/made light of conflict, etc.:

Verbal arguments, passive aggressive comments, and lack of communication

Emotions you experienced:

Stress and annoyance

How did it end?

Since no one could agree on a trip we canceled it and we'll try to do it again some other time.

Intensity of disagreement:

Low 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 High

Degree of resolution:

Resolved 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Unresolved

Conflict Records

Instructions: Make 10 copies of this record. Over the next number of weeks, observe your conflicts and fill out a record for each one. After you accumulate 10 or more, you should be ready to write your paper.

Interpersonal Conflict Record

Date: 9/30 Time: 11:00 (AM/PM) Length of argument (time): 1.5 hours

Topic/Issue of conflict:

My younger sister, who goes to school in San Francisco, wanted to take my car and use it until my parents got a new car and gave me their old one.

How often has this issue come up in the past?

Rarely 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Very Often

What actually started/triggered the conflict?

My sister made a comment about how I don't work anymore, yet I still have a car, and she works 40 hours a week babysitting and doesn't have a car.

Brief description of the conflict: verbal argument, physical abuse, silent treatment/stonewalling, changed subject/made light of conflict, etc.:

My sister would change the subject when I would object to her taking my car. Other than that it was a tame discussion with a lot of back and forth.

Emotions you experienced:

Not too many emotions, just voices being raised occasionally.

How did it end?

My parents decided that my sister would get a week with my car and then during that week we'd decide what would happen after that.

Intensity of disagreement:

Low 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 High

Degree of resolution:

Resolved 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Unresolved

Conflict Records

Instructions: Make 10 copies of this record. Over the next number of weeks, observe your conflicts and fill out a record for each one. After you accumulate 10 or more, you should be ready to write your paper.

Interpersonal Conflict Record

Date: 10/1 Time: 15:00 (AM/PM) Length of argument (time): 30 min

Topic/Issue of conflict:

Booking flights to go visit a friend internationally

How often has this issue come up in the past?

Rarely 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Very Often

What actually started/triggered the conflict?

He needed to know the dates to request time off from work and I wanted to find the flights that were cheapest so I could save some money.

Brief description of the conflict: verbal argument, physical abuse, silent treatment/stonewalling, changed subject/made light of conflict, etc.:

We argued about when the best time would be for me to come.

Emotions you experienced:

A little bit of irritation

How did it end?

We found dates that were a little more expensive that I would have liked, but he didn't have to request off as many days of work so we compromised.

Intensity of disagreement:

Low 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 High

Degree of resolution:

Resolved 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Unresolved

Conflict Records

Instructions: Make 10 copies of this record. Over the next number of weeks, observe your conflicts and fill out a record for each one. After you accumulate 10 or more, you should be ready to write your paper.

Interpersonal Conflict Record

Date: 10/7 Time: 17:00 (AM/PM) Length of argument (time): 1 hour

Topic/Issue of conflict:

I made a comment about a character in a TV show and my roommate didn't like the comment that I had made.

How often has this issue come up in the past?

Rarely 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Very Often

What actually started/triggered the conflict?

After I made the comment, my roommate sprayed me with water from his water bottle. In response, I threw a fork at him. He later apologized, but blamed my comment for making him react the way he did, so it was my fault.

Brief description of the conflict: verbal argument, physical abuse, silent treatment/stonewalling, changed subject/made light of conflict, etc.:

Physical altercation, stonewalling, and blame

Emotions you experienced:

Anger

How did it end?

The next day, I asked if we could talk about the conflict and see what each of us were thinking when we made our respective actions.

Intensity of disagreement:

Low 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 High

Degree of resolution:

Resolved 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Unresolved