

**Teaching Example**

**Instructor's note:**

Though this reflection is longer than required, it is an excellent example of quality reflection and writing skills. See my notes throughout shared for the purpose of clarifying what is expected in exceptional reflections. Special thanks to Marsha Baisch for agreeing to allow me to use her paper as an example.

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Seeking the School Superintendent's license

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**Department of Educational Policy and Administration  
Licensing and Leadership Development for Educational Administrators  
Portfolio Reflection Sheet**

**1. Title of Exhibit:** Intercultural CONFLICT STYLE Inventory

**2. Competency:** Subp. 4 - Communications and community relations.

**Subcompetencies:** B) request and respond to community feedback and demonstrate consensus building and conflict mediation, C) identify, track deal with issues, and formulate and carry out plans for internal and external communications, D) exhibit an understanding of school districts as political systems by applying communication skills to strengthen community support, and F) relate political initiatives to children and families, including parental involvement and programs.

**Comment [AW1]:** Overall the reflection is well written and has a pleasing format. It is free of spelling and grammatical errors. It is essential for educational leaders to have all of their written products, that will be seen by others, to be "mail-out quality." Proof reading skills or seeking others who can provide that service, is essential.

**Comment [AW2]:** Interesting writing style throughout. Significant points are captured and set apart in the body of the whole.

**Comment [AW3]:** Listing of both the category of competencies and its sub-competencies is important for the reader.

This exhibit is representative of this competency and subcompetencies because it is important for individuals in leadership to have an understanding of their conflict style as they communicate with all the constituencies they come in contact with on a daily basis. When leaders understand the approach they most likely use when personally involved in conflict with another party, they will hopefully be able to apply some of the adaptive skills learned from completing the inventory, thus being more successful. This inventory also helps leaders understand the conflict styles of others, thus allowing for more accurate interpretation of statements and actions from the other party.

**Comment [AW4]:** This paragraph shows the connection between the topic of the reflection and the specific competencies identified. This is essential. It is not enough to simply list the competencies. There must be a connection made to the specific reflection topic. This gets the writer to **authentic application**.

**3. Describe the exhibit (the who, what, when, where of the exhibit):** *The Intercultural Conflict Style Inventory - Individual Profile (ICS-IP)* describes your preferred approach or style for resolving conflict. When someone completes the ICS Inventory they gain valuable insight on the approach they likely use when they are personally involved in conflict with another party (Hammer, 2003). This information is important because when involved in conflict individuals experience heightened levels of anxiety and stress and tend to resolve conflict by using their preferred style, and depend less on “adaptive skills” (Hammer, 2003). When not involved in conflict individuals are more apt to use different approaches to solving disagreements.

**Comment [AW5]:** This shows that the writer is able to “go to the balcony” (Bolman and Deal). Recognizing that individuals use different approaches depending on the emotional state shows a higher level of understanding.

The *Intercultural Conflict Style Inventory – Individual Profile* measures two fundamental approaches for responding to conflict. One core aspect of conflict style is the degree to which one resolves conflicts using more *Direct* or *Indirect* strategies. The *D/I scale* (**D**irect/**I**ndirect scale) assesses your preference for using more direct approaches or more indirect ways of responding to conflict (Hammer, 2003).

**Comment [AW6]:** Using italics and letters in bold helps to easily capture significance and pull main points from the text. It helps make the text less dense.

A second core aspect of conflict style is the degree to which one prefers to resolve conflicts using more emotionally *Expressive* or emotionally *Restrained* approaches. The *E/R scale* (emotionally **E**xpressive/**R**estrained scale) measures the degree to which you prefer to resolve conflicts using more emotionally expressive or emotionally restrained approaches (Hammer, 2003).

**Comment [AW7]:** The reflection is grounded in an explanation of the ICS-IP. It tells what the instrument describes, measures, and a description of each quadrant.

**4. Describe your evidence in the form of data and literature used to identify best practices.**

**A. Describe the data you gathered as part of this exhibit.**

The data gathered for this exhibit was the completion of the Intercultural Conflict Style Inventory. I learned that my D/I score was 30, which means that I prefer to resolve disagreements with others using more direct strategies. My E/R score was 19 which means that I prefer to resolve disagreements with others using more emotionally restrained strategies. I learned that my overall preferred intercultural conflict resolution style is discussion.

**Comment [AW8]:** This is a concrete example of the data, in this case the writer's personal data. The section also includes a description of the meaning and application of the data.

Conflict is common and present in many different kinds of social situations. Conflict occurs in our personal lives and our work lives. While there are many definitions of conflict, there is a general consensus that conflict involves two elements. First, conflict arises when we disagree with one another and second, conflict gives rise to affective or emotional reactions (Hammer, 2003). Conflict is also grounded in culture. When conflict arises and relationships are threatened or our sense of self-identity is challenged, our normal abilities at problem solving may be compromised. At times like this we tend to rely on previous experimental models for dealing with conflict. The experimental models we most rely upon are those we learned from the cultural community in which we were raised during our formative years. In times of stress and anxiety we tend to respond to conflict in ways we learned from our own culture group, thus making our approach to resolving conflict both patterned and culturally grounded (Hammer, 2003).

**Comment [AW9]:** The use of references throughout the reflection adds to its credibility and increases the scholarly quality of the writing. When using another's work, credit for his or her intellectual property must always be given. When a quote is used and the author is unknown, that should be stated. When that is not done the quote is falsely attributed to the author of the reflection.

Conflict style is one aspect of our "interaction style" and initially learned during our primary socialization in one or more culture/ethnic groups. We learn specific attitudes, knowledge behaviors, interpretive frameworks and strategies for defining and responding to conflict situations. Our conflict style can be modified, as we grow based on our experiences.

I learned that the *Discussion* style is my overall preferred intercultural conflict resolution style.

The *Discussion* style describes an approach to conflict resolution that emphasizes a verbally direct approach for dealing with disagreements and a more emotionally restrained or controlled manner for communicating with one another. The *Discussion* style emphasizes precision in language use and generally follows the maxim, “say what you mean and mean what you say.” Further, this style views more intense expressions of emotion as potentially the disagreement directly to one another is a comfortable approach for this style, yet this “discussion” should be based on objective facts if possible and each person should be cautious in injecting their own personal feelings into the process (Hammer, 2003).

I was not surprised with what I learned, because after reading the characteristics of the *Discussion* style I discovered that is the way I tend to resolve conflicts personally and professionally. I found the information enlightening and useful, especially the information related to culture. This information would have been helpful when I was the principal of Katherine Curren Elementary School. This school was very diverse with students and families from many different cultures. Had I known about the cultural patterns across conflict styles my conversations with parents and students in conflict may have been easier. After all, understanding cultural differences is the first step in effectively resolving conflicts. However, this information will help me be a more effective communicator in the future.

**B. Identify at least two readings.**

Intercultural conflict involves emotional frustrations or mismatched expectations that stem, in part, from cultural group membership differences. Conflict is an inevitable aspect of human relatedness, especially in intercultural situations. Cultural differences in conflict communication can exacerbate a conflict encounter. Thus, understanding cross-cultural differences in conflict behavior is the first step in developing an inclusive multicultural community (Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001). This reinforces what we learned earlier in that conflict behavior is learned within the primary socialization process of one’s cultural or ethnic group. Individuals learn the norms for appropriate and effective conflict conduct in their immediate cultural environment. To understand the intercultural conflict negotiation process, we have to first understand cross-cultural

**Comment [AW10]:** This is a high level reflection of a small section of literature on this topic. It is well written and effective in conveying a significant glimpse into culture, communication, and conflict. It compels one to learn more.

diverse approaches that people bring with them in expressing their different values, norms, and conflict styles in handling a conflict situation.

In the book, *Foreign to Familiar*, the author groups cultures into two groups, “hot-climate” (relationship-based) cultures and “cold-climate” (task-oriented) cultures. A striking difference between the hot- and cold-climate cultures has to do with whether the communication is direct or indirect. In the relational cultures, being indirect is not only a way of avoiding offending the other person and keeping that “feel-good” atmosphere, but also a way of making sure that in no way is one’s own preference imposed on another person. The “cold-climate” person, valuing accuracy, will be direct (Lanier, 2000). Lanier lists among the “cold-climate” regions Canada, the northern states of the United States, Northern Europe, (Switzerland and above), Israel, (the Jewish population that came primarily from Europe), the white populations of New Zealand, Australia, and southern Brazil, the white population of South Africa, and any other countries or parts largely settled by Europeans, such as Argentina. Among the “hot-climate” cultures, she includes the Southern United States, Asia, the Pacific Islands, South America (one exception would be much of urban Argentina which is eighty percent European), Africa, the Mediterranean countries (except the Jewish population of Israel), the Middle East, and most of the rest of the world (Lanier, 2000).

**Comment [AW11]:** The author went beyond the required readings for the course and sought additional resources to deepen her understanding of the subject.

When Dr. Mitchell Hammer visited our class he alluded to the fact the blacks are often misunderstood in the way they communicate. As the elementary school principal of a very diverse school for 10 years I would agree, and believe that black boys often get in trouble because their style of communication is often misunderstood. In *Black and White Styles In Conflict*, Kochman indicates that the modes of behavior that blacks and whites consider appropriate for engaging in public debate on an issue differ in their stance and level of spiritual intensity. The black mode – that of black community people – is high-keyed: animated, interpersonal, and confrontational. The white mode – that of the middle class white community - is relatively low-keyed: dispassionate, impersonal, and non-challenging. The first is characteristic of involvement; it is heated, loud, and generates affect. The second is characteristic of detachment and is cool, quiet, and without affect

(Kochman, 1981). This form of communication is often misunderstood by whites and interpreted as confrontational and threatening, thus leading to black boys getting into trouble

**Comment [AW12]:** This is a significant point when practicing equity leadership.

Dr. Mitchell Hammer's reasons for developing the Inventory were: 1) people revert to primary cultural ways when dealing with conflict, 2) people have different conflict styles, and 3) people have different communication styles. Style is an attitude that individuals within a culture express through their choice of cultural form – blacks prefer cultural forms that do not restrict their expressive capacities – and the way they choose to express themselves with a given form. By these standards, black style is more self-conscious, more expressive, more expansive, more colorful, more intense, more assertive, more aggressive, and more focused on the individual than is the style of the larger society of what blacks are a part (Kochman, 1981). When it comes to conflict, black presentations are emotionally intense, dynamic, and demonstrative; white presentations are more modest and emotionally restrained. Whites use the relatively detached and unemotional discussion mode to engage an issue; blacks use the more emotionally intense and involving mode of argument (Kochman, 1981).

Conflict style refers to general tendencies or modes of patterned responses to conflict in a variety of antagonistic interactive situations. Conflict styles provide an overall picture of a person's general communication orientation toward conflict. Individuals often have one or two predominant conflict styles or tendencies in managing everyday conflict. However, they also modify and tailor their conflict approaches based on situational factors. Thus, conflict style is an integrative combination of traits (e.g. cultural background and personality) and states (e.g. situational factors such as ingroup-outgroup conflict and conflict salience) (Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001).

Adapting behavior to cultural context is important as indicated by Dr. Hammer. One must be able to be interculturally competent and shift their frame of reference in order to be effective communicators and problem solvers.

## 5. Appraisal of the “Intercultural CONFLICT STYLE Inventory” as it relates to the four frames of organizations in Reframing Organizations.

### 1. The Structural Frame

The structural perspective champions a pattern of well-thought-out roles and relationships. Properly designed, these formal arrangements can accommodate both collective goals and individual differences. There are six assumptions that undergird the structural frame:

1. Organizations exist to achieve established goals and objectives.
2. Organizations increase efficiency and enhance performance through specialization and a clear division of labor.
3. Appropriate forms of coordination and control ensure that diverse efforts of individuals and units mesh.
4. Organizations work best when rationality prevails over personal preferences and extraneous pressures.
5. Structures must be designed to fit an organization’s circumstances (including its technology, workforce, and environment).
6. Problems and performance gaps arise from structural deficiencies and can be remedied through analysis and restructuring (Bolman & Deal, 2003, p. 45).

The structural frame looks beyond individuals to examine the social architecture of work. If structure is overlooked, an organization often misdirects energy and resources. This could lead to conflict. It may, for example, waste time and money on massive training programs in a vain effort to solve problems that have much more to do with social architecture than people’s skills or attitudes. It may fire managers and bring in new ones, who then fall victim to the same structural flaws that doomed their predecessors.

Comment [AW13]: Strong review of the frame.

The structural frame views conflict as a problem that undermines effectiveness. Hierarchical conflict raises the possibility of lower levels ignoring or subverting managements directives. Conflict among major partisan groups can undermine leadership’s ability to function. Such dangers are precisely why the structural perspective champions a well-defined chain of command. A basic function of authority is to resolve

conflict. If two individuals or departments cannot reach agreement, a higher level can adjudicate the dispute and make a final decision consistent with plans and goals (Bolman & Deal, 2003).

**Comment [AW14]:** Then, the author nails the specific application of the frame to this specific reflection topic.

**Comment [AW15]:** This paragraph is well written and shows the ability to use evaluative thinking.

**Comment [AW16]:** Same comments for each of the frames throughout this section. The author describes the frame and then applies it to the topic at hand.

## 2. The Human Resource Frame

The human resource frame centers on how characteristics of organizations and people shape what they do for one another. The human resource frame is built on four core assumptions:

1. Organizations exist to serve human needs rather than the reverse.
2. People and organizations need each. Organizations need ideas, energy, and talent; people need careers, salaries, and opportunities.
3. When the fit between individual and system is poor, one or both suffer. Individuals are exploited or exploit the organization – or both become victims.
4. A good fit benefits both. Individuals find meaningful and satisfying work, and organizations get the talent and energy they need to succeed (Bolman & Deal, 2003, p. 115).

People want to know how an organization is going to fulfill their needs and the organization wants people with the right skills and attitude needed to do the work. As a leader it is critical for me to know and understand the needs of the organization so that the right people will be hired to do the work. It is also important to ensure that the needs of those hired are being met so that they can do an excellent job for the organization. There are going to be personalities involved and with those personalities comes conflict. A leader needs to be able to respond to that conflict in ways that are healthy to the organization. In organizations many of the greatest joys and intense sorrows occur in relationships with people. Leaders need to ask themselves three critical questions:

- 1) What is happening in this relationship?
- 2) Why do other people behave as they do?
- 3) What can I do about it? (Bolman & Deal, 2003, p. 162).

Argyris and Schon (1996) propose the following: 1) emphasize common goals and mutual influence, 2) communicate openly and publicly test assumptions and beliefs, and 3) combine advocacy with inquiry. Leaders need to express openly what they think and feel, and actively seek understanding of others' thoughts and feelings.

Interpersonal conflict in groups can block progress and waste time. It can make things unpleasant and painful. Some groups rarely experience conflict, but most encounter differences in goals, perceptions, preferences, and beliefs. The larger and more diverse the group, the greater the likelihood of conflict. Here are some guidelines groups can use to help deal with conflict:

**Develop Skills:** Organizations are recognizing that group effectiveness depends on members' ability to understand what is happening and contribute effectively. Such skills as listening, communicating, managing conflict, and building consensus are critical in a high-performing group.

**Agree on the Basics:** It's important for groups to agree on goals and procedures. They need to have a shared understanding and commitment around the basics which will be the glue for holding things together in the face of the inevitable stress and strain of group life.

**Search for Interests in Common:** Groups need to know what they have in common so that when they disagree they can put it in a larger framework of where they can agree.

**Experiment:** Experiments can be a powerful response to conflict. They are a way to move beyond stalemate without forcing either party to lose face or admit defeat. Parties may agree on a test even if they cannot agree on anything else. They may also learn something that moves the conversation to a new and more productive level.

**Doubt your Infallibility:** Groups possess diverse resources, ideas and perspectives. A group that sees diversity as an asset and a source of learning has a good chance for a productive discussion of differences.

**Treat Differences as a Group Responsibility:** If there is conflict in the group it must be assumed that it is an issue of importance to the entire group, not just those with the problem (Bolman & Deal, 2003, pp. 177-178).

In an organization employees are hired to do a job, but they will bring social and personal needs with them to the workplace. Moreover, they spend much of their time interacting with others, one on one and in groups. Both individual satisfaction and organization effectiveness depend on the quality of interpersonal relationships. Leaders need to understand that groups operate at two levels: task and process. Both levels need to be managed if groups are to be effective (Bolman & Deal, 2003). As a leader it is important for me to understand these different individual and group dynamics in an organization that could lead to conflict. What I have learned about my individual style will be helpful in dealing with organizational conflict.

### 3. The Political Frame

The political frame views organizations as living, screaming political arenas that host a complex web of individual and group interests. Five propositions summarize the perspective:

1. Organizations are coalitions of diverse individuals and interest groups.
2. There are enduring differences among coalition members in values, beliefs, information, interests, and perceptions of reality.
3. Most important decisions involve allocating scarce resources – who gets what.
4. Scarce resources and enduring differences make conflict central to organizational dynamics and underline power as the important asset.
5. Goals and decisions emerge from bargaining, negotiation, and jockeying for position among competing stakeholders (Bolman & Deal, 2003, p. 186).

The assumptions of the political frame outline sources of power. From a political perspective, conflict is not necessarily a problem or sign that something is amiss. Conflict is natural and inevitable. The focus of the political frame is not on resolution of conflict, but on strategy and tactics. The question becomes how to make the best of it. Conflict has benefits as well as costs. Conflict challenges the status quo and stimulates interest and curiosity. It is the root of personal and social change. Conflict encourages new ideas and approaches to problems, stimulating innovation. Even more important than the amount of conflict is how it is managed. Poor conflict management leads to infighting and

**Comment [AW17]:** This is a clear statement that captures a nuance of the frame in few words.

destructive power, but well-handled conflict can stimulate creativity and innovation that make an organization a livelier, more adaptive, and more effective place (Bolman & Deal, 2003).

In a school district the dominant group is often the teachers' union rather than the school board or superintendent. The political view suggests that the exercise of power is a natural part of an ongoing contest. Those who get and use power best will be winners. As leaders and managers however, I believe it is our responsibility to manage conflict in ways that are ethical, open, and caring.

**Comment [AW18]:** This statement causes the reader to create a mental model of the author in the role of superintendent.

#### 4. The Symbolic Frame

The symbolic frame seeks to interpret and illuminate basic issues of meaning and belief that make symbols so powerful. From a symbolic perspective organizations are judged primarily by appearance. The symbolic frame distills ideas from these five core assumptions:

1. What is most important is not what happens but what it means.
2. Activity and meaning are loosely coupled; events have multiple meanings because people interpret experience differently.
3. In the face of widespread uncertainty and ambiguity, people create symbols to resolve confusion, increase predictability, find direction, and anchor hope and faith.
4. Many events and processes are more important for what is expressed than what is produced. They form a cultural tapestry of secular myths, heroes, and heroines, rituals, ceremonies, and stories that help people find purpose and passion in their personal and work lives.
5. Culture is the glue that holds an organization together and unites people around shared values and beliefs (Bolman & Deal, 2003, pp. 242-243).

Organizations function like complex, constantly changing, organic pinball machines. Symbols embody and express an organization's culture, which is the interwoven pattern of beliefs, values, practices, and artifacts that define for members who they are and how

they are to do things. Culture is a process and a product. In school systems administrative processes coordinate work through formal meetings, evaluation systems, accounting systems, management information systems, and labor negotiations (Bolman & Deal, 2003).

An organization without a plan is a reactive, shortsighted, and rudderless. Planning, then, is a ceremony any reputable organization must conduct periodically to maintain legitimacy. School districts and schools engage in strategic planning to achieve their objectives. This symbolic process involves constituents from the community, schools, and school district. It gives participants the chance to participate and interact. It is a forum for engaging a variety of problems, solutions, and conflicts that could become more troublesome should they surface in some other arena. It is a good way to manage conflict proactively.

Assessing the performance of staff and programs is another task assigned to a school district leader. Evaluation takes time, effort and money. From another perspective, evaluation ensures a responsible, serious, and well-managed image (Bolman & Deal, 2003). The evaluation process can incite conflict, but again how it is handled is what is important. Evaluation is widely used for symbolic reasons. It shows that an organization takes goals seriously, cares about its performance and its employees' performance, and wants to improve. The process gives participants an opportunity to share their opinions and have them recognized publicly.

Collective bargaining is another symbolic process. Teacher unions and school districts meet and confer to reshape divisive standoffs into workable agreements. The process typically pits two reasonable sets of interests against each other: unions want what's best for the teachers, and school districts try to keep salaries and benefits manageable. For this process negotiation strategies are useful. The aim of negotiation is to resolve conflict with a compromise or solution that is mutually satisfying to all parties. Negotiation requires a set of skills that must be learned and practiced. These skills include (1) the ability to determine the nature of the conflict, (2) effectiveness in initiating confrontations, (3) the

ability to hear the other's point of view, and (4) the utilization of problem-solving processes to bring about a consensus decision (Pfeiffer, 2003).

**Comment [AW19]:** This shows that the author functions at Bloom's synthesis and evaluation levels of thinking. Multiple examples of this can be identified throughout. Excellent.

## 6. Appraisal of the experience as it relates to your values and beliefs:

I believe that conflict is an inevitable part of life, personally and professionally. I have learned to not shy away from it and to even have the attitude that conflict can sometimes be your friend. It can force individuals and organizations to change, hopefully for the better. As the leader of an elementary school for 10 years there were definitely times when conflict was a part of our organization. I remember a time when a number of staff didn't feel that a particularly challenging first grade student should be allowed to remain in his class because his teacher was struggling with him. As the leader of the building I needed to make a decision based on what I thought was best for the student and not necessarily what was best for the adult. I chose to keep the student in the teacher's classroom, but added more support. Later, what we all learned from this experience was to trust each other and to accept our students. We also learned that we, the adults, needed to change in order to meet our students' needs and not try to change our students. Learning about my preferred conflict style will make me more aware of how I deal with conflict in the future, especially when interacting with people from other cultures. I think back to how I communicated with some of my families from other cultures in the past and know that, even though my preference is the discussion style, I have learned that I can make adjustments to be more interculturally competent.

**Comment [AW20]:** Good use of an example to add meaning and clarity at the top levels of Bloom's taxonomy.

## 7. Can this experience help you improve your current practice? How?

Serving as the principal of an elementary school for 10 years created endless opportunities for me to deal with conflict. Much of what I learned about how to deal with conflict was by experience and advice from my colleagues. I wasn't surprised to learn that my preferred style was the discussion style, because that is how I typically dealt with conflict. What would have been beneficial though, was knowing about the other styles and how culture played a role. What I learned will definitely help me be more interculturally competent as I deal with conflict in the future. I have also learned more about conflict and how it can impact individuals and organizations. I believe conflict is a

**Comment [AW21]:** The writer clearly demonstrates that learning about the topic has created new personal meaning and will therefore likely result in improved practice as an administrator.

necessary and integral part of realistic and effective problem-solving discussion. It is the essence of sound decision-making and can be a vehicle for broadening perspectives, discovering alternatives, and stimulating interaction. As a leader I have learned that I need to be comfortable and confident when dealing with conflict to ensure the success of the organization.

### References

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Comment [AW22]: APA style with consistent format.

