

Student-generated Discussion Scenarios

Difficult Conversations Discussion Scenarios

Getting Personal with Sunny, Cher, and Frankie by Jackson Jablonski – You are a graduate student advisor. Frankie is a graduate student entering their second year advised primarily by Dr. Sunny and Dr. Cher. Frankie comes to you and shares that sometimes during private conversations, Dr. Sunny makes disparaging remarks about Dr. Cher. Frankie tells you that Dr. Sunny makes small remarks about Dr. Cher's competence and questions the health of their relationships at home within their family. Dr. Sunny also disparages the performance of other students, then "takes those things back" and asks Frankie to forget what they said. Frankie shares that this is difficult because he now feels uncomfortable sharing sensitive information with Dr. Sunny or asking them for advice. Frankie tells you he is concerned that what he shares will not be kept private and that this also strains his relationship with Dr. Cher.

- How would you approach this situation?
- Should you ask for Dr. Sunny's perspective?
- Explain any type of advice you might share with Frankie about their situation.

Adamant Adam by Lindsay Mikell – Adam and Tina work on a community service committee together with many other individuals. Everyone has an assigned position and accompanying duties that they are trusted to carry out. Adam is the Chair of this committee. His responsibility is to oversee business meetings that discuss event topics. Major decisions about spending money or design changes are voted on together so everyone has a chance to be heard and decisions are made fairly.

Recently, Adam conceived many ideas that he thinks are valuable, but instead of bringing them to the committee, he presented the ideas to individual committee members privately, including Tina. Tina feels pressured to do what Adam says since he is the committee chair. Adam is also very adamant about his ideas being the right ones to follow. Tina does not agree with Adam's decisions or the fact that he isn't considering the votes of the other committee members in the decision-making process.

Tina and several other committee members expressed their discomfort and frustration with Adam to the co-chair and others with higher positions within the committee. The committee members with higher positions spoke to Adam, but his behavior continues.

- How should this situation be approached?
- Who can or should speak to who?
- What can be done to address Adam's behavior in a productive and professional manner?

Getting Called Out by Dr. X by Christy Suhendy – Dr. X is the head of the department. It is apparent that he has a problem with his Emotional Quotient (EQ, see Emotional Intelligence content in Table 1). For instance, every time he sees someone doing the wrong thing, he talks about it in a staff meeting without naming the person he has a problem with. However, some staff members can identify the culprit. The staff are uncomfortable being called out this way.

They discuss suggesting to Dr. X that it will be better for him to have one-on-one conversations with the person he has a problem with. That way Dr. X and the employee can work on a solution in private. Unfortunately, the staff members are not brave enough to provide that suggestion to him because they are afraid it will cause another problem.

- What would you do if you were the staff member who was mentioned during the meeting?
- What would you do as one of the concerned staff members?

Emotional Intelligence Discussion Scenarios

The Unaware Superior by Cheyenne Brodie-McAleister – You work as a graduate assistant on a team with two other individuals. A busy fieldwork season has begun, and your team must sample several sites in the next two months. The lab technician in your group is responsible for scheduling and leading your team. She has put your team in dangerous situations during this season such as waiting out a lightning storm under a boardwalk on the beach during data collection. Also, fieldwork occurs over an 8-hour period or longer, but there are no designated breaks or scheduled lunches. However, the technician does not ask about the well-being of the rest of the team during fieldwork. When you explained that you had reached a limit for working under strenuous conditions and needed to stop, she complied but was visibly frustrated. The technician does not know when to stop and is not empathetic to the rest of her team's needs. She says you need to tell her when to stop working because she can push through to keep going.

- Is this an issue of emotional intelligence? Explain your perspective.
- How do you address the situation?
- How could you frame Emotional Quotient (EQ) as a leadership quality to the lab technician?

Managing Malevolent Mikaela by Jena Osmani – Alicia is a student coordinator at a community garden. She works on a team with 5 other student coordinators who collectively manage 15 interns. One of the students on the coordinator team, Mikaela, is very hardworking and handy, making her a great asset to the team. However, students on the management team find it difficult to collaborate with her, especially when it comes to decision-making, because she is insistent on doing things her way. She frequently makes choices without consulting the team, such as pulling plants out of the ground that others have planted. She often responds in a condescending tone if anyone openly disagrees with her gardening practices. She seems to react from a triggered state – often expressing her negative emotions in ways such as walking away in the middle of conversations, raising her voice, and moving aggressively (such as slamming objects and stomping).

Mikaela's behavior is impacting the sense of safety and stability of the work environment, as conveyed by multiple members of the team. Alicia feels frustrated by this dynamic and has tried to talk with Mikaela one-on-one in a calm manner. But Mikaela often does not acknowledge issues and avoids the conversation altogether.

- How could the team confront Mikaela about her behavior to help her empathize with the emotions of the other team members?

- Should the team go straight to higher management with their concerns? Why or why not?
- What kind of training or practices could management teach the student coordinators about the importance of emotional self-regulation and awareness in a team dynamic?
- How are the differences in leadership versus authority exemplified in this situation?
- What are the consequences of an authoritarian style of management?
- What are the benefits of teaching effective leadership in this situation?

When the Mouth Works Faster than the Mind by Taylor Petrusha – Lily loves to talk to people, but sometimes she has nervous tendencies. Lily is not comfortable with silence and tends to lead the conversation if the other person is not talking as much. Lily sometimes feels compelled to share information but only realizes later that she shared too much. Typically, when this happens, she is talking faster and thinking less, and she can feel her heart racing. Lily thinks it might be social anxiety and regrets the information she has shared.

- Why does Lily feel compelled to over-share information?
- Was Lily triggered? If so, did she experience an amygdala hijack (see Emotional Intelligence, Table 1)?
- Did Lily identify with the source of her problem?
- Provide steps Lily can take to improve her self-control over her emotions

Multiple Topics Discussion Scenarios

Emily's New Role by Carly Anderson – Emily is a new employee in a leadership position at a company that is based overseas in a country with a completely different work culture than she has experience with. Her first task is to improve production of growing plants in a greenhouse. Her previous job experience and education taught her techniques for producing high quality plants through protocols, standard operating procedures, and a science-based approach. The new company she works for has an obvious need to simplify and change protocols that could make a big impact on improving the quality of plants. Working in a new culture brings new challenges that involve building relationships and gaining trust. Making too many changes quickly in Emily's position might be off putting to her new colleagues.

- How can Emily approach the new changes she wants to implement?
- What should her first set of initiatives be at work?
- Should Emily focus on building relationships and gaining trust or make a head start on implementing new changes right away?

The Real World by Larsen McBride – The first big volunteer tree planting event of the year for Alachua County happens this Saturday and a big turnout is expected. I, as an intern with the county arborist, provide much of the help to facilitate these types of events. However, there is also an opportunity to earn a good amount of money on Saturday operating a parking lot for the big homecoming football game and festivities.

I prefer to do the tree planting but also need the income from the parking lot opportunity as money is very tight right now as a graduate student. My wife just opened her own business, so our income situation is even less stable now. However, because my boss and I are chummy, I

cannot help but feel like I am letting her down. I want to communicate to my boss that I feel bad that I will be absent for most of the tree planting event. Also, I want to make it clear that there are no hard feelings, but the parking lot event is something that I must do. Moreover, I want to hear anything she has to say about the situation.

My boss and I are generations apart. She is 28 years my senior, a mom, on track to retire from the county, and married to a successful engineer. We are both nature lovers, passionate about taking care of our county's urban forests, committed to using our knowledge of local ecosystems and tree care to serve smaller towns and marginalized communities. We are both the oldest of our immediate families, sensitive to bridging gaps between different subcultures and personalities, and attracted to changing the hearts and minds of strangers about the natural world.

Here are some questions coming up for me as I navigate the situation:

- I did not make it clear that I feel bad. Should I mention this to my boss? Why or why not?
- What types of non-verbal messages could I be sending?
- Picture yourself in my situation. How would you react if the boss threatened to let you go if you attended the parking lot event rather than the tree planting event?
- What kind of message would a firing in this type of situation send?
- Am I even looking at this from the right angle?

Know Thyself Before the Interview by Patrick McLoughlin – You are interviewing over lunch for a middle management position at a company in the tech industry. The office is large, open air, and even though the workday has been ongoing since the morning, there is sparse presence in the office. Your interviewers assure you that this is normal and that they were simply out late on another night of business-related socializing.

At the interview you find out that this company is largely run by younger men, who claim they "work hard and play harder". Some of your friends have warned you about rumors regarding sexual harassment, a poor work life balance, and "frat boy" culture. Regardless the salary being offered is very high and competitive with a lot of benefits. There is a high turnover of new employees, and a sense of nepotism behind the scenes. Regardless of these red flags, working for this company would be considered a "big win" for you and would look great on your résumé.

You manage to navigate the interview well enough and are more than qualified for the position. However, managers at your previous job were notably more mature and handled themselves quite differently. You snag the attention of a woman working in the offices and she testifies about the culture and stressful atmosphere that can be found here around "crunch time" when things are due. She loves the job regardless of the bad reputation and thinks that all the other people who quit early are simply not cut out for this high stress/ high reward lifestyle that go-getters and successful people have.

- Make a cost/benefit analysis for the potential new job. Would you consider working here?
- Work life balance is important, what red flags here imply a lack of it for this company?
- Would this workplace setting be more difficult for a woman or a man? Why?
- Many newer successful businesses have track records of toxic workplace environments.

- Does this tend to happen more in lucrative industries as opposed to others?
- What are some of your "Hard No's" when it comes to the new job possibility?

Unconscious Bias Discussion Scenarios

Extroverts and Introverts, Does Bias Play a Role? by Kathryn Chase – You are the head staff supervisor at your company. Your company hires two assistant managers, Bill, and Joe, for similar positions. Bill has an extroverted leadership style, while Joe's leadership style is more subtle. Martha, who directly supervises Bill and Joe, also employs a style of leadership that is forward and outgoing. You are aware that Bill and Joe are both effective at their jobs, as shown by their performance evaluations and other employees' feedback. Bill often receives positive feedback from Martha, and he has received word that he may be up for a promotion. Joe often receives suggestions to change how he leads meetings, and Martha expresses to you her doubts that Joe is a good fit for a team leader position. Joe also comes to you and expresses that he feels uncomfortable with the pressure he receives from Martha and that he also feels worthy of a promotion.

- What is going on in the dynamics between Bill and Martha and between Joe and Martha?
- What next steps might you personally take to improve the situation?
- What feedback might you offer Joe or Martha?

Confronting Cultural Bias by Hunter Goan – You are a contractor working in a suburb overseeing a team of roofers, the majority of whom are migrant workers who speak Spanish. There is a sign for your roofing company, in the front yard of the house you are working on, with a phone number to advertise the company and for neighbors to call in complaints. The day is windy. Consequently, some roofing materials blow away from the worksite during one of the stronger gusts. You send a few roofing assistants to collect any debris that blew away from the worksite. All debris was picked up as far as you can tell.

Then you receive an angry phone call from a woman who claims her yard was absolutely trashed from the debris flying by. You ask for her address so you can send someone over to clean up her yard, but she hangs up. You send a roofing assistant to find out where the debris could have gone, but he comes back unable to find any trace.

A few minutes pass then an angry woman comes over to yell at and berate all the workers. An assistant descends from the roof to speak with her as she continues to shout. Her face goes completely white when the assistant starts to speak English to her in a plain, American accent. Suddenly, her shoulders relax, her voice lowers, and she calmly leads the assistant to her property, where a total of two pieces of plastic were recovered.

You now receive an angry phone call from the head of the roofing company demanding to know why he received so many angry phone calls from one phone number.

- To what extent do you believe bias played in the woman's reaction to the roofing team and the assistant?

- Do you think it is necessary to mention the role bias may have played in this scenario to your boss?
- What do you ultimately plan on saying to your boss?

Bias in the Multi-generational Workplace by Anthony K. Gross – Tom is a 32-year-old Millennial in a position that deals with multi-generational employees, volunteers, and the public. He regularly requests that his assignments be laid out step by step and when they are completed looks for recognition of completion. His position is to research solutions to questions from the public and manage volunteers. On several occasions, he publicly announces that he only wants to work with other Millennials. He regularly looks past Baby-Boomer and Generation X volunteers and goes straight to the Millennials. However, on one team he works with the team leader is a Baby Boomer and the secondary is a Millennial.

- What does his statement reflect about his emotional intelligence?
- What type(s) of bias is he displaying?
- How does his bias potentially impact his volunteers and the effectiveness of the team?
- How could he be approached about his need to confront his bias?

Long-haired Ben Lets It Loose by Jackson Jablonski – Ben is a new worker in a 2-year exchange program with the company. Dr. Ronald is Ben's main supervisor. Ben has always wanted to grow his hair out long like the rockstars he saw in magazines growing up. One day he takes off his hat and lets it all down. Dr. Ronald notices Ben's hair and mentions that it is very effeminate. After that event, he notices that Dr. Ronald begins to treat him differently over the next few months. For example, Dr. Ronald begins asking if Ben needs help with tasks that were easily accomplished by him alone.

- Was Dr. Ronald's comment about Ben's hair appropriate?
- Do you think bias could be playing a role in how Dr. Ronald views Ben and his hair choice?
- What might lead Ben to want to say something to Dr. Ronald about this new treatment? What would he say?

Tom's Smart Dog by Yifan Jing – Tom has a smart dog in his home and all the family members love it very much. One day, Tom went to the supermarket to buy some dog food with his father. A new product caught their attention. It smelled good, and Tom wanted to try it. However, Tom's father stopped him because he found that there is garlic in the ingredients. Tom thought it was OK, the company is famous after all, but his father held the opposite view.

Then they came home and began looking for more information through the internet. During dinner time, they discussed this issue again with what they found. Tom found some newly published papers which support his perspective by doing several tests on feeding small animals garlic. The result shows that garlic is good for many kinds of animals. However, the father also found some cases that support his views. In these cases, several domestic dogs have become sick after eating garlic, and many dog owners firmly believe that garlic is like a poison to dogs. Finally, they just held their own views, and neither one can convince the other.

- Tom and his father both searched on the internet and found credible evidence, why do they still hold different perspectives?
- Whose opinion do you believe? Why?
- What would you do to evaluate claims regarding this dog food product?
- Did you have a similar experience in your life? How did you deal with it?

Jim's Jarring Jokes by Daniela Perez Lugones – Jim is a new employee at a non-traditional school. He comes from a traditional teaching background and is teaching the new STEM class. The principal is impressed with Jim's graduate degree in engineering and his presentation at the time of his interview. However, after a few months, many of the female students are complaining to their teachers about comments that Jim makes during class regarding women belonging in STEM, and he frequently shares problematic views towards the LGBTQ community. Jim also makes sexist and homophobic comments to his female coworkers, for example, expressing that their sexuality is not conducive to reproduction.

Several of the teachers approach Jim about these comments and try to explain that it is alienating and hurtful to the students and to the rest of the community. Jim claims that he was simply making a joke and that the girls are too sensitive. He also comments that if the girls do not want him to make these comments, then they should not bring up conversations that trigger this response during class. The teachers approach their principal about Jim's comments since his behavior will not change. However, very little is done because the principal does not believe that it is truly as bad as they say it is. The principal also states that perhaps the girls are just interested in creating drama. Nonetheless, the principal agrees to talk with Jim about the issue.

- What else could the coworkers have done in this situation?
- How could Jim have handled this situation differently?
- What is the principal's responsibility in this situation?
- What kind of bias is at play here? From the principal? From Jim?

Exploring Various Types of Bias by Taylor Petrusha – Sara and El have been close friends since college. Sara thinks very highly of El, but she sometimes becomes frustrated because El is not a very good listener and is oblivious to Sara's social cues. Sara expresses her apprehension to her other friend who has known El longer than her. Sara's friend tries to think back to a similar scenario between himself and El, but he can't think of a time. He says El has always been so great.

- Is the halo effect at play here?
- How do you eliminate this type of bias?
- If the halo effect is at play, do you think confirmation bias is, too?
- How do the halo effect and confirmation bias affect each friendship?

Ryan's Dilemma by Taylor Petrusha – Ryan created a discussion scenario for her class. The topic could be about unconscious bias or emotional intelligence. She realized after creating her scenarios that she based each of them off females of similar origins. She then decided that she needed diversity so that she is inclusive of all genders and cultures.

- Do you think Ryan is showing unconscious bias? If so, what strategies can Ryan implement to reduce unconscious biases? If not, why not?
- How could Ryan expand her cultural lens?
- Has Ryan increased her emotional intelligence?

What's Driving Cinthya's Hiring Decision? by Alejandra Sierra – Cinthya is a manager at a landscape maintenance company. She is in the process of hiring a new crew supervisor that will oversee managing an all-male crew. She preselected three candidates. John has a master's degree in landscape architecture and 15 years of experience in landscape design. Patricia has two years of experience managing a 50-person crew in a nursery greenhouse. Michael has one year of experience working as a mower in a landscape management company.

All candidates were asked similar questions during the interview process based on the competencies required for the position. Specifically, they were asked a question based on their experience managing all-male personnel.

After deliberating, Cinthya decided to hire Michael based on the following: 1) Michael is younger. Also, since he is a male, it would be easier for Michael to communicate with the crew despite lacking crew management experience; 2) although Patricia has experience managing a big crew, Cinthya believes the employees would not like a woman to be their boss; and 3) John is overqualified for the position.

- Is Cinthya biased in favor of or against a particular age and/or gender? Why or why not?
- How can Cinthya create a more diverse and inclusive workplace?

Parental Instinct or Parental Bias? by Sarah Tevlin – A parent has two children who both love art. Child 1 uses their allowance on paints and canvas, then spends their free time creating brilliantly colored works of art. Child 2 is equally creative. However, they prefer to apply color to themselves, frequently spending their time and money dyeing their hair in multiple colors and painting elaborate scenes onto their nails. Both children receive good grades in school and do all their chores. They frequently participate in extracurricular activities and have stable friend groups. However, the parent has expressed concern that Child 2 is going to be troublesome. They come to you looking for advice on how to avoid this potential outcome. When you ask, the parent cannot say why they think Child 2 is more troublesome than Child 1, only that their parental instinct is telling them so.

- Why might the parent think Child 2 will be in greater danger of getting into trouble than Child 1?
- Are there any biases at play? If so, what are they?
- How would you advise the parent?

To Tree or Not to Tree – Is There Bias Against Marie? By Elise Willis – Mike is the Program Manager at an urban forestry nonprofit and is working on some new projects with his team. One of the projects will require some new tree establishment methods. So, Mike seeks out help to get ideas on how to approach this new planting plan. He consults with an outside expert that he

admires and has gotten help from on past projects. Mike uses the expert's recommendations in crafting a plan for the staff.

Marie is relatively new to the team, and she has less arboricultural knowledge than Mike. Marie will be tasked with the follow-up care for the planting. However, Marie expresses concerns with the plan at the team meeting. Marie is especially concerned with some of the methods proposed by the outside expert. Mike insists that his friend has a lot of knowledge and pushes to have the team accept his plan anyway.

- Do Mike's actions reveal any unconscious bias? If so, identify Mike's biases. If not, explain why no bias exists.
- Do you think Mike is showing bias towards Marie consciously or unconsciously? Explain.
- What does this say about Mike's Emotional Quotient (EQ) as a manager?
- What should Marie do to advocate for herself going forward?

Managing Multiple Biases: Implications during the Tenure Process by Mengzi Zhang – Dr. Richard Kumar, originally from India, is a new assistant professor in your department. You are a tenured professor and serve on Dr. Kumar's mentoring committee. Part of your role is to help new faculty successfully navigate the tenure process. Dr. Kumar obtained a considerable amount of funding and currently has 4 graduate students in his lab. Three of the students are from India and one is from Brazil. He is now recruiting a fifth student.

You asked him how things are going. He mentioned that he has a couple of applicants, but he really likes a potential candidate from India. Dr. Kumar thinks the candidate is smart, hardworking, and he is considering extending an offer to the candidate. He also mentioned that he is quite happy with all the current Indian students in his lab. Dr. Kumar mentions that they are all very hardworking, very productive, and publish a good number of papers every year. He believes the potential candidate would also perform the same. You understand that being productive is not only good for his tenure but also good for the department overall.

One day, while you were chatting with other colleagues in the department, some of them mentioned that Dr. Kumar seems interested only in recruiting international students from his home country. They think Dr. Kumar should recruit more local students. You understand that negative feedback on Dr. Kumar's performance might jeopardize his tenure.

- Does Dr. Kumar display an unconscious bias when recruiting students? Explain.
- Would you let Dr. Kumar know the opinions of other faculty on this matter? Why or why not?
- If you decide to let him know their opinions, then how do you approach him?
- What type of conversation would you have with your colleagues?

Group-generated In-class Activities

Case Discussion

Mediation case study by Alejandra Sierra, Larsen McBride, and Mengzi Zhang

The objective of this case study is for students to apply the concepts of emphatic and effective listening, conflict resolution, and having difficult conversations in a multiple step mediation scenario. The case study can be discussed in a small group setting or by role play. Each scenario should be discussed prior to discussion of the next scenario.

Scenario 1 – Sarah was initially hired to supervise a team of five field employees. After two years, Sarah was promoted to manager and Cinthya was hired as the new field supervisor. Tom, one of the field employees, continually approached Sarah regarding the team’s activities. Tom felt more comfortable approaching Sarah since she was his former boss. Cinthya felt excluded and approached Sarah to discuss this issue.

- What would you recommend Sarah do to solve this issue?

Scenario 2.1 – Cinthya and Tom had a work conflict one day. Tom once again approached Sarah to tell her about the situation. Tom explained that he and Cinthya had a discussion but could not come to an agreement. Furthermore, according to institutional policy, he was informing Sarah for her to mediate the process.

- What would you recommend Sarah do to solve this issue?

Scenario 2.2 – As a mediator, Sarah met with Cinthya and Tom separately to discuss what she expected from them. During the individual meetings, they agreed that: 1) all the group members will give ideas on how to improve communication; 2) past problems will be left in the past; and 3) the objective of the meeting is to establish an action plan.

The meeting went smoothly. Tom provided excellent ideas. However, it went downhill when it was Cinthya’s turn to talk. She began to complain about why Tom approached Sarah, that he did not like to be bossed by a woman, and that he did not respect her because she was younger.

- What would you recommend Sarah do as a mediator to solve the conflict generated during the meeting?
- What should she do after the meeting?
- Are age and gender bias involved? How would you suggest working with these issues?

Creating Checklists

Difficult Conversation Checklist by Elise Willis and Anthony K. Gross

Your challenge is to create a checklist of items to consider and complete before and after having a difficult conversation. The activity may be presented in two different ways:

Option 1: Co-create a checklist as a class and then practice using it with an example in your life.

Option 2: Create a checklist ahead of time, present the list, and invite students to use it to practice with a conflict that they had in the past or present.

For both options, the goal is to facilitate a group discussion about the process of preparing for and debriefing from difficult conversations, and to practice with examples from our own lives.

Option 1: There are several ways to co-create a checklist as a class:

Potential steps for an in-person class:

- Review concepts from the week's material on the topic of having difficult conversations.
- On the whiteboard, write out 3 categories as columns: Assessment, Planning, and Review.
 - Hand out 3-5 sticky notes to each student. Instruct the students to write down what they think should go into the checklist. They can write one idea per sticky note and place it on the whiteboard under the applicable category. Ask each student to write at least one note for each category to ensure that each category gets sticky notes.
 - If they see other sticky notes with a similar idea, they can group them together.
- Review the sticky notes on the board as a group and come up with a reasonable list of checklist items (perhaps up to 10). Try to put the checklist items into an order that makes sense and identify if anything needs to be added or removed.
- Once the checklist is mostly agreed upon, write everything in a clear ordered list and invite students to choose an example from their life to practice using the checklist. This can be a past difficult conversation or a present conflict.
- Invite some students to share their examples. During the discussion, it might become clear that something in the list needs to be changed or something new added. Refine the list and encourage students to make their own custom version to have on hand for future use.

- Potential steps for online and hybrid classes:
 - Everything remains the same as the in-person class, except the sticky notes and whiteboard need to be made digital. Using a platform like "Padlet" could work but will require some testing to be sure. Please see this example Padlet page we put together: <https://padlet.com/elisemwillis/mjz2fayogp04uefx>

Option 2: Creating a list ahead of time and presenting it during class allows for more practice time and discussion about real examples. If you are pressed for time or do not want to use the online tools presented in Option 1, then this can be a shorter activity that uses the same concept of having a checklist.

Example checklist items:

1. Assessment:
 - Think about the situation - what happened and who was involved?
 - Consider how you are feeling because of the situation.
- Planning:
 - Write down what you hope to achieve by talking to this person.
 - Consider how and when you will reach out to start the conversation.
 - Write down the main things you want to discuss (following the Resolution Road Map framework)
- Review:
 - Think about what happened - did the conversation go as you planned?

- Recall the takeaways from the conversation and your next steps/follow-up.
- Contemplate what you learned and what things you might do differently next time.

Role Playing (see CERT, n.d. for tips on creating role playing activities)

Yifan Jing, Christy Suhendy, and Jena Osmani – Groups of two should form to take turns in roleplaying conflict and difficult conversational scenarios using the framework provided. One person will make a request or bring up an issue of conflict, while the other student will practice listening and responding to the other. Afterwards, they will switch roles.

Students may come up with their own scenario that is: 1) pertinent to a real-life conflict or difficult conversation they have experienced in the past, or 2) a conversation they know they may need to have in the future (e.g., with an advisor or roommate). Likewise, students may opt to use the following scenarios.

Scenario 1: Your coworker has an upcoming deadline for a project but becomes sick. They ask you to take on a large portion of their part of the project. You really would like to help, but you also have quite a bit on your plate with your portion of the project, and the deadlines are on the same day.

Scenario 2: Your advisor asks you to work on a particular afternoon at the last minute. You have an appointment that afternoon that you scheduled months prior. Your professor insists that your help and presence are necessary.

Patrick McLoughlin, Samjhana Khanal, Cheyenne Brodie-Aleister

Kate, a long-time employee, is requesting a day off from her job to attend her college graduation. Kate is a young female who works full time and has independently put herself through college. She has never been absent from work and often picks up shifts for other employees. She has set up a meeting with her boss to ask for the day off for her graduation.

Her boss is a middle-aged male named Greg. Greg prioritizes hard work and dedication to the job and, at times, can lack sympathy when it comes to having a work/life balance.

Kate's graduation ceremony coincides with a new product launch at the company. Kate spearheaded much of this project but also has a team that assisted her. Unfortunately, one of her team members will not be present for the launch as she was granted a vacation day.

Kate has worked hard throughout her time at this company to balance her educational and workplace commitments, and this ceremony is extremely important to her. If she is not able to attend, then she may reconsider continuing to work for this company. She really values this job but also worked extremely hard for her degree and cannot imagine missing out on the ceremony.

It is time for Kate to meet with Greg to request her day off. Greg is very hesitant to allow her the day off considering that another of her team members will be absent, and that Kate is responsible for much of the project.

Role play the conversation between Greg and Kate as she requests the day off for her graduation ceremony.

- Is there room for a compromise here that can satisfy both parties?
- What are some of the managerial shortcomings that lead to this bottleneck?
- What are some ways we can communicate workplace necessities in a professional manner? What do we do when management isn't flexible?

Lindsay Mikell, Daniela Perez, Kathryn Chase – Provide students with Lisa Gate’s “Conflict Resolution Foundations” and Marlene Chisolm’s “Having Difficult Conversations” videos on LinkedIn Learning prior to the following in-class activity. These videos provide students with background information on conflict resolution styles and tips on how to navigate difficult conversations.

Scenario – Dee is beginning to feel very frustrated with her coworker Sam. Sam has been late to work every day this week and Dee has had to take on his responsibilities. This is causing Dee to fall behind on her own responsibilities. Dee feels that Sam is being irresponsible and inconsiderate of how his actions affect the rest of the team. Dee wants to have a conversation with Sam to address this, but she is unsure of how to begin.

1. Break the class into pairs.
2. Provide each group with the above scenario. Each person will play an individual in the story.
3. Each group is assigned conflict resolution styles for each character. There is some room for the pairs to produce the background of the characters based on the conflict resolution style they are assigned.
4. Pairs run through the conflict resolution scenario on their own, switch roles, and repeat.
5. Each group presents their conflict resolution to the rest of the class.
6. Debrief/discuss at the end of each presentation:
 - a. Can you tell which conflict resolution styles (described in the videos) are at play in this situation?
 - b. What tools did each person use that were discussed in the lectures?
 - c. Is any person “winning” or “losing” as per the conflict resolution styles?
 - d. Is one person more in control of the conversation?
7. The class audience can act as facilitators.
8. In an open discussion with the class, provide suggestions for what could be done differently in each scenario.

Taylor Petrusha, Sarah Tevlin, Hunter Goan, and Jackson Jablonski – The purpose of this activity is for students to practice navigating conflict and difficult conversations. In preparation for this activity, students should watch the following LinkedIn Learning videos: Lisa Gate’s “Conflict Resolution” and Marlene Chism’s “Having a Difficult Conversation.”

The instructor should provide students with descriptions of the five different conflict response styles outlined by Lisa Gates in “Conflict Resolution.” These should be distributed at the start of the activity.

- Break the class into groups ranging in size from 2-5 students.
- Drawing on their own experiences, students develop a scenario in which they attempt to resolve a conflict or navigate a difficult conversation.
- At least one of the characters portrayed in the scenario should model one of the five conflict response styles.
- Students act out their scenario as a short skit.
- Following the skit, students in the audience may be asked to identify the portrayed conflict response styles.
- Building off their own experiences and what they learned from Lisa Gate’s “Conflict Resolution” and Marlene Chism’s “Having a Difficult Conversation” LinkedIn Learning videos, students discuss alternative ways the scenario could have been approached.

Conflict Response Styles (based on the Thomas Killman Conflict Model)

Compete: At the first sign of disagreement, you dig in and become more forceful with your demands. Any means to make your demands met are fair game, including threats. (I win, you lose)

Avoid: You do everything you can to protect yourself from rejection, even if it means taking up work you didn’t agree to. You don’t want to stir the pot and make the situation more uncomfortable than it already is. (I lose, you lose)

Compromise: You go into the conversation willing to give up a few of your demands if the other party is willing to do the same. (I win and lose; you win and lose)

Accommodate: You step out of your comfort zone to discuss the situation, but when asked critical questions you retract your demands or shut down. (I lose, you win)

Collaborate: You approach the conversation with a nimble mind. You accept that the best solution may be something neither party can find on their own. You try to find the best course of action by engaging the other party under a solution-oriented mindset. (I win, you win)

Sample Scenarios:

Apply the default conflict response styles to a scenario involving either a) conflict resolution, or b) difficult conversations

1. Conflict Resolution – Florence started a summer internship at her dream company two months ago. Florence loves her co-workers and can foresee a future with the company. However, there is one male co-worker who has given her a hard time since she started. Florence often hears him make comments to other male co-workers that females “shouldn’t work here because the job is too hard”. She also hears them saying HR only hires women to reduce gender inequality. As a part of Florence’s internship, she hosts her first team meeting alongside her superior. During the meeting, her male co-worker states that he disagrees with

her viewpoints. Florence asks what his thoughts are, and he shakes his head saying it would not work, giving no further information. The room goes quiet, and Florence feels triggered by his objection. Florence feels that her co-worker disagrees with her because she is female.

Act out Florence's conflict with her co-worker. The student playing Florence should decide which conflict response style they will initiate to address the problem.

Questions for discussion:

- Is Florence's co-worker right to act the way they did?
- Does Florence have a right to be upset?
- How might Florence respond to the immediate situation:
 - Ignore the comments
 - Confront the co-worker in the meeting
 - Report to her supervisor/HR after the meeting

2. Difficult Conversation – Cody is coming to the end of his master's program. As a condition of his stipend, he has been maintaining multiple long-term experiments for his advisor. At the start of his final semester, the advisor promised to find a replacement to take over these responsibilities so Cody could focus on preparing for his defense. However, months have gone by, and no replacement has been found. At the same time, his advisor started dropping hints that they want Cody to stay on and complete a PhD, something Cody has repeatedly mentioned that he does not want to do. Cody approached his advisor to discuss training some undergraduate interns to take over the experiments until an official replacement can be found, but the advisor repeatedly changed the subject. Cody suspects that his advisor is intentionally avoiding the prospect of his leaving., Cody becomes desperate for help as his defense approaches and decides to seriously sit down with his advisor to resolve the situation.

Act out Cody's discussion with his PI. The student playing the PI should utilize the avoidance conflict response style.

Questions for discussion:

- How should Cody address the issue?
- What are alternatives methods Cody might try to resolve the issue?
- Why might Cody's advisor avoid the situation?
- Who might Cody seek advice from?