

**Identifying Conflict Styles of Agriculture Students at an HSI**

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### **Introduction**

Everyone has to deal with conflict from time to time. Conflict is a natural outcome in any setting in which people interact with each other (Chandolia & Anastasiou, 2020). While the word “conflict” may have a negative connotation, it can often lead to positive outcomes when handled well, such as an exchange of ideas. Unfortunately, conflict can also result in negative outcomes when not handled well, such as poor communication and a difference in values and views (Chandolia & Anastasiou, 2020). In order to work towards positive outcomes of conflict, it is important to first understand how you personally handle conflict as well as the ways others may handle conflict. In this study, the researcher will be looking to identify the styles of conflict present in the agriculture students at Texas A&M University-Kingsville, a regional Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI).

### **Conceptual Framework**

A theoretical framework for understanding differences in conflict resolution styles is grounded in the development of the Intercultural Conflict Style Inventory (Hammer, 2005). Towards this a practical, four-quadrant intercultural conflict resolution style model is proposed based on high/low levels of directness and high/low levels of emotional expressiveness: (1) discussion style (direct & emotionally restrained), (2) engagement style (direct & emotionally expressive), (3) accommodation style (indirect & emotionally restrained) and (4) dynamic style (indirect and emotionally expressive).

### **Methodology**

This descriptive study sought to determine the different conflict styles of students enrolled within the Texas A&M University-Kingsville. The researcher used the Intercultural Conflict Style (ICS) created by Mitchell R. Hammer to determine the students’ conflict styles. The ICS Inventory was completed in the Summer and Fall of 2022 by students of three classes: AGRI 4350 (Collective Leadership), AGSC 5361 (Facilities for Agriculture Science), and AGSC 1451 (Introduction to Agriculture Systems). There was a total of 66 students participating in this study.

Within the ICS, there are two parts, a survey and graph, along with an interpretive guide that was given to each participant. Scores were measures on two scales; Direct/Indirect (D/I) score and an Emotionally Expressive/Emotionally Restrained (E/R) score. Using these scores, the researcher can put a participant into one of four conflict styles, the Discussion style (Direct and Emotionally Restrained), the Engagement style (Direct and Emotionally Expressive), the Accommodation style (Indirect and Emotionally Restrained), and the Dynamic style (Indirect and Emotionally Expressive).

Dr. Hammer used a panel of experts to create the content of the inventory by evaluating their meaning using a focus on their direct/indirect or emotional expressive/ restrained communication. The instrument was also assessed by one graduate student, two faculty in agricultural science, and one faculty within the Spanish language arts department. In regard to validity the ICS can be generalized based on biological sex, education and time spent within communities of other cultures. The original ICS had a coefficient alpha of .73 for the direct/

indirect scale and a .85 for the emotional expressive/ emotional restraint scale. For this study an overall alpha coefficient of .79 was found.

### **Findings**

All four conflict styles were found among the participants. 4.5% of participants were in the Dynamic style, 7.6% were in the Engagement style, 22.7% in the Accommodation style, and a majority (65.2% ) were found within the in the Discussion style on the ICS. the Direct and Indirect (D/I), as well as the Emotionally Expressive and Emotional Restraint (E/R) scales of the instrument. The D/I, and E/R scores were then graphed in order to determine the participants conflict style. The overall mean score among participants for D/I was ( $M = 35.73$ ,  $SD = 7.70$ ) while the mean score for E/R was ( $M = 20.95$ ,  $SD = 8.43$ ).

### **Conclusions & Recommendations**

While the study found participants in all four styles of conflict, almost 88% of students participating were found in either the Discussion style or the Accommodation style. . These findings are slightly different then the findings of Alagozlu in (2017), which found American college students to most likely be categorized within the Engagement style. Both of these styles are characterized by Emotional Restraint as opposed to Emotional Expression, meaning that these students are likely use limited nonverbal communication and present themselves in a calm manner during conflict. Students in the Discussion style, however, are going to be more direct as it relates to dealing with conflict. They are more likely to explain exactly what they want or need to the other party. The Accommodation style is characterized by a more indirect approach, meaning people in this category are more likely to use analogies or metaphors during conflict and focus more on maintaining a relationship that fighting the root of the conflict.

When looking at Hammer's Interpretive guide (2003) he states that North American cultural patterns are primarily found within the Discussion style of conflict resolution. He also states that cultural patterns of Latin America can primarily be found within the Accommodation style. The North American cultural patterns mixed with Latin American cultural patterns found in South Texas could be one reason why we see that a majority of participants from this study can most likely be categorized within the Discussion style, and the second highest percentage of students categorized within the Accommodation style.

Some recommendations for research would include replicating this study at similar Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSI). This would help to further validate the results of this study with students from similar demographic backgrounds. A larger sample size would also be recommended if further research or replication were to be performed. The larger sample size would allow for better representation across the board for each demographic.

The researchers recommend incorporating training and use of the ICS in other courses. This will create an environment in which students can understand each other and the ways each person communicates in times of conflict. It is recommended that educators have those "tough" conversations about cultural differences with the individuals in their classroom. Allowing individuals to group share about cultural differences in a safe environment will add to the understandings that each individual has with each other. The ICS is just one way that both educators and students can immerse themselves in conflict resolution styles that may be different from their own.

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