



Strathmore
UNIVERSITY

SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES

BAC 1203

**END OF SEMESTER EXAMINATION
INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION**

Date: Thursday, 19th March 2020

Time:13:00 -15:00

Instructions

1. This examination consists of **FOUR** questions.
2. Answer **Question ONE (COMPULSORY)** and any other **TWO** questions.

QUESTION ONE

Informal Conflict Resolution: A Workplace

by Mullen Taylor

Conflict resolution practice has largely focused on conflict taking place in public, as if it was set on a theater stage with an audience watching the interactions unfold. In reality, conflict plays out behind the scenes, unobserved by the conflict analysts and system designers.

Kolb and Bartunek, editors of **Hidden Conflict in Organizations**, bring to light the dynamics of informal conflict resolution. In this context, informal conflict resolution is defined as resolution facilitated by organizational members through other means than the formal processes of grievances, investigations and litigation (Kolb and Bartunek, 1992. p. 19). These informal conflict resolvers make a significant impact upon organizations either by resolving the conflict or channeling it to a formal mechanism.

Informal conflict resolution often takes a nonrational approach (Kolb and Bartunek, 1992, p. 20). Kolb and Bartunek describe this approach as accenting "**the unconscious or spontaneous aspects of disputing, ones that are driven by impulse and the feelings of participants and not simply their cognition**" (1992, p. 20). Therefore, emotions are seen as a means of conflict management rather than a hindrance to conflict management (Kolb and Bartunek, 1992. p. 20). In essence, Kolb and Bartunek are attempting to reclaim emotion as a valid expression in conflict resolution, and that expressing emotion does not necessarily imply a loss of reason. Furthermore, they imply that the formal methods of conflict resolution favor the rational over the emotional.

In a large publishing company in New York, a young woman, Laura, was hired as a copy editor for one of the many journals produced by the company. Seven other employees worked on this team editing this Journal, including a senior editor named Tim. Laura had worked there for about a month when she and her fellow co-workers went for happy-hour after work. Everybody had a great time and had consumed a fair amount of alcohol. When everybody was leaving the bar to head home, Tim, who had been secretly attracted to Laura since she started work at the journal, hailed a cab and offered to share the ride with Laura. Laura accepted the offer. Once she was inside the cab, Tim then suddenly made an aggressive sexual advance toward her. Horrified, Laura pushed him away and told him to get out of the cab. Mortified, Tim slinked out of the cab.

The next day, Laura came to work with some apprehension. How would she deal with Tim? Would the cab incident affect her job? Although Tim did not supervise her, would he try to get her fired? Tim immediately went to her office and apologized for his extremely inappropriate behavior in the cab. Relieved at his apology, Laura decided not to pursue the matter through any formal channels in the office. She figured that since Tim apologized, there was no need to dwell on the incident. After all, Laura was a new employee, still in the process of learning the office politics and proving herself as being a competent editor. She did not want to rock the boat or bring negative attention to herself.

Everything would have been okay if Tim had stopped at just one sincerely expressed apology. However, whenever he found himself alone with Laura, Tim apologized again. And again. He said he was sorry about the incident at every opportunity he had for three months. This constant apology was awkward and annoying to Laura. Ironically, by Tim apologizing continuously for his unwanted attention in the cab, he was foisting another form of unwanted attention upon Laura. When he first started apologizing, Laura told him that "it was okay". After three months of many apologies, she reached a point where she asked him to stop apologizing, to no avail. Frustrated, she confided in a few co-workers about her unusual dilemma. Consequently, these co-workers lost respect for Tim.

Although the cab incident was not common knowledge in the office, Tim sensed that others knew about it by the way they interacted with him. The incident became the office "elephant" that the employees "in the know" saw, but didn't explicitly acknowledge. Meanwhile, Laura was tired of hearing Tim apologize and her feelings of discomfort increased. So when another editor position opened up in another journal division of the company, she applied for the job and was transferred to the other journal. In her new position, she didn't have Tim bothering her anymore. But she was unhappy with her new job. The journal material was very boring. She didn't work as well with her co-workers as she did in the previous journal (excepting Tim). She realized that she really enjoyed her old job. She began to regret her decision to avoid the conflict with Tim by moving to the new job. In an effort to seek advice as to how to solve her problem, Laura decided to consult with the company ombudsman.

QUESTIONS

- i) Identify the conflict in this article. (3 marks)
- ii) What is the role of emotion in conflict resolution? (3 marks)
- iii) What is the connoted difference between informal and formal conflict resolution? (6 marks)
- iv) Some scholars have discussed the 'conflict intensity continuum'. What is it and how can it be applied in understanding the conflict in the article, or any other? (5 marks)
- v) Write notes on the three causes of conflict. For each cause, show what the relationship between conflict and interpersonal communication is. (9 marks)

- vi) Citing examples from the article, determine and justify whether this ends up as a case of conflict avoidance or conflict resolution, and make a judgment on the decision made. (4 marks)

QUESTION 2

A friend of your family has just formed an organisation and she is looking for a front office intern. Her organisation deals with abused persons, and so quite often, the people who come to the office are either abused or want to work with the abused. You offer yourself for the position. She, however, insists that she is looking for someone who is “good with people and who understands people” for the position of a front office manager, and seems to be doubting your capacity.

In three arguments, explain why you qualify for this position, grounding your thoughts on the study of interpersonal communication. (15 marks)

QUESTION 3

In this unit, you have covered several theories which help to explain a number of elements in interpersonal communication.

Discuss three, and be careful to show their value, as well as raise a critic for each. (15 marks)

QUESTION 4

“Power is a more powerful factor in Interpersonal Communication than is often acknowledged. Men and women can gain power or lose it just as easily, in moments of a lack of consciousness.”

Justify this statement, then, write about power in interpersonal communication, and key elements that ought to be considered on gaining or losing power. (15 marks)