Appendix A

Situational Conflict Styles Assessment Exercise

Read the scenarios below, then respond to the questions that follow, keeping in mind how *you* would respond in each specific role within each conflict. Please give honest, realistic answers to each question.

Situation 1a

You and a colleague are jointly responsible for developing a presentation. S/he has a very different way of approaching the project, waiting until the last minute, leaving much more to "see what the situation brings." You prefer to attend to details, practice the presentation several times, etc., but your meetings are being canceled due to conflicts in his/her schedule. When the presentation day arrives, everything is a disaster! Equipment is set up wrong, handouts are missing, and in the middle of the presentation, s/he digresses with a story that uses up time you needed to make some key points. As you are leaving, s/he says, "Well, this could have gone better. But I think people liked it."

1. What *behavioral response* would you most likely have to this conflict?

   _____ A. You glare angrily at your colleague and loudly declare that the entire presentation was a failure and that it was all his/her fault. Then you go directly to your immediate supervisor, blaming your colleague for the disastrous presentation and refuse to work with him/her ever again.

   _____ B. You nod in agreement with your colleague, while inside you wish you had the nerve to tell him/her that you think

it could have gone much better and that you are concerned about working with him/her again in the future.

_____ C. You busy yourself with clean up and leave quickly, saying you have another appointment. You try to escape seeing that colleague whenever possible in the future.

_____ D. You voice your disagreement, but acknowledge the fact that if you work together again, s/he will likely handle it in a similar fashion. Therefore, you would split any future responsibilities exactly in half.

_____ E. You disagree with your colleague, telling him/her you are worried about how other people in the department perceive your ability to handle responsibility. You discuss his/her busy schedule and agree that on your next project together, you'll swap child care to help him/her deal with stress and get things done on time.

2. What types of *emotional responses* would you feel in this situation? (check all that apply)

_____ anger _____ confusion _____ shame
_____ sadness _____ happiness _____ fear
_____ other:

3. What type of thoughts (*cognitive responses*) go through your mind in this situation?

4. What *physical responses* would you have to this situation? (check all that apply)

_____ sweaty palms _____ tunnel vision
_____ excitement _____ elation
_____ anxiety _____ nausea
_____ rapid breathing _____ tension:

___ forehead ___ cheeks
___ neck ___ arms
___ back ___ legs
___ other:

_____ other:

5. Given your overall response to the situation, what do you find to be helpful?

6. What needs to be changed or improved?

Situation 1b

You and a colleague are responsible for developing a presentation. S/he has a very different style of approaching the project, planning everything down to the last detail and insisting that everything be written down on index cards. You prefer to have a general idea of how the presentation will go, but want to leave room for audience participation, including a question and answer period. The request for this presentation came only two weeks ago, and with three children at home, it has been difficult for you to squeeze in meetings with your colleague on top of the regular work day. Yesterday you had to miss a meeting because your babysitter canceled at the last minute. When the presentation day arrives, there are some equipment mix-ups and several handouts are missing, but the audience doesn't seem to mind. Towards the end, one attendee asks a particularly thought-provoking question, which necessitates a fairly lengthy response from you. Before you know it, it's time to finish up—where did the time go? You leave the presentation feeling that, although everything didn't go exactly as planned, there was genuine interest in the material and appreciation of your knowledge. As you are leaving, you say to your colleague, "Well, this could have gone better. But I think people liked it." S/he stares at you, shocked. "This was a disaster," s/he says, " I can't believe you wasted so much time on that last question. They'll never come back again!"

1. What *behavioral response* would you most likely have to this conflict?

_____ A. You feel your blood rising and say loudly: "The only part of the presentation they didn't like was yours. Well, you won't have to work with me again, anyway." That same day, you go to your immediate supervisor and demand to be removed from future projects with this colleague. Who needs to work with such a control freak?

_____ B. You shake your head, feigning agreement with your colleague, while inside you wish you had the nerve to tell him/her that you really thought the presentation went okay. Furthermore, you thought it was totally appropriate to spend so much time answering audience questions.

_____C. You busy yourself with clean up and leave quickly, saying you have another appointment. You try to escape seeing that colleague whenever possible in the future.

_____ D. You assert your disagreement with your colleague. You suggest that in the future, you split the presentation exactly in half. S/he can control the first half of the agenda, while you take the second. This will ensure him/her all the time needed to get his/her points in, in whatever manner s/he chooses.

_____ E. You assert your disagreement with your colleague and indicate your interest in maintaining a healthy work

relationship with him/her. You learn that s/he is concerned about others' perceptions of his/her ability to handle a heavy workload, especially since s/he has made incredible efforts at improving his/her organizational skills. You empathize, telling him/her about your child care dilemmas. You agree to try to be more organized next time, and s/he offers to help by swapping child care in the future. You both tell your supervisor that you need more lead time for future presentations.

2. What types of *emotional responses* would you feel in this situation? (check all that apply)

_____ anger _____ confusion _____ shame
_____ sadness _____ happiness _____ fear
_____ other:

3. What type of thoughts (*cognitive responses*) go through your mind in this situation?

4. What *physical responses* would you have to this situation? (check all that apply)

_____ sweaty palms _____ tunnel vision
_____ excitement _____ elation
_____ anxiety _____ nausea
_____ rapid breathing _____ tension:

___ forehead ___ cheeks
___ neck ___ arms
___ back ___ legs
___ other:

_____ other:

5. Given your overall response to the situation, what do you find to be helpful?

6. What needs to be changed or improved?

Situation 2a

You have Johnny Jones as a student in your class this semester, and he is not doing very well. He is often late and unprepared, and he doesn't seem especially interested in class. You arrange a meeting with his father. Mr. Jones, initially pleased to hear of your concerns, later becomes defensive. His voice growing louder, he says that you make unreasonable expectations of your students. Kids

Johnny's age have other things on their minds, he contends. You are at fault for not being more flexible or helpful when Johnny has struggled.

1. What *behavioral response* would you most likely have to this conflict?

_____ A. You tell Mr. Jones that you are not being unreasonable. Other kids in the class manage to get their work done, despite outside interests. Rules are rules, and you can't make exceptions for one student. If Johnny doesn't get his act together, you will have no choice but to fail him.

_____ B. You listen to Mr. Jones rant and rave for half an hour, which makes you late for an important meeting. At the end of the conversation, you tell Mr. Jones that you will "see what you can do," but after you leave, you still have no idea how to help Johnny do better in class.

_____ C. You cut your conversation with Mr. Jones short, saying you have to get to a meeting soon. You tell him you will have to talk about it at another time but do not schedule anything with him or make any definite plans for dealing with Johnny in the future.

_____ D. You assert that you do not feel you are being unreasonable. Mr. Jones agrees to get Johnny to school on time and make sure he is completing all of his homework assignments. Several weeks later, you find Johnny is abiding by the rules, but only doing the bare minimum with no real enthusiasm for learning. You feel compelled to agree when his father says, "You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink."

_____ E. You arrange a meeting in person with both Johnny and his father. At the meeting, you and Johnny come to an agreement that if, with his father's guidance, he can make it to school on time and complete his homework assignments to the best of his ability, you will work out a more interesting reading list for the class. You will even include publications with articles about some of Johnny's favorite activities, such as mountain biking and skateboarding. You make sure both Johnny and Mr. Jones are aware that a lifelong enjoyment of reading and open lines of communication are far more important to you than simply enforcing rules.

2. What types of *emotional responses* would you feel in this situation? (check all that apply)

_____ anger _____ confusion _____ shame
_____ sadness _____ happiness _____ fear
_____ other:

3. What type of thoughts (*cognitive responses*) go through your mind in this situation?

4. What *physical responses* would you have to this situation? (check all that apply)

_____ sweaty palms
_____ excitement
_____ anxiety
_____ rapid breathing
_____ tunnel vision
_____ elation
_____ nausea
_____ tension:

___ forehead
___ neck
___ back
___ other:
___ cheeks
___ arms
___ legs

_____ other:

5. Given your overall response to the situation, what do you find to be helpful?

6. What needs to be changed or improved?

Situation 2b

Your son Johnny is a student in Ms. Smith's sophomore English class, and you know he is not doing very well. You are a divorced, single parent with sole custody of Johnny. You usually work third shift and sometimes don't come home from work until after Johnny has left for school in the morning. When he comes home from school, you are usually still asleep. He is frequently on his own and has to cook his own meals, but you can't afford to leave your job. You are actually a little proud of how self-sufficient Johnny has become over the last few years, especially when he helps out by going to the grocery store or cleaning the apartment. Recently Johnny brought home a note from Ms. Smith, which said he is in danger of failing, due to tardiness, incomplete assignments, and a bad attitude in class. You appreciate her concerns, but when you meet with her, you feel a growing resentment over her lack of flexibility and helpfulness. She doesn't have any idea how much of a struggle it has been for you to raise Johnny alone or for Johnny to grow up in a broken home. She offers only criticisms of Johnny, who is really a great kid. When she asks your opinion, you volunteer that you think she is placing unreasonable expectations on her students. She takes offense at this comment and says, "If Johnny wants to succeed in the real world, he's going to have to meet high expectations. The other kids are able to get their work done and participate in extracurricular activities. Johnny is just going to have to keep up."

1. What *behavioral response* would you most likely have to this conflict?

_____ A. You yell that Johnny has been out in the real world more than most of the other kids in the class. What he needs is a better teacher who understands kids. You leave the meeting angry and go directly to the principal's office, where you insist that Johnny be transferred to another English class.

_____ B. You listen to the teacher, nodding your head in agreement, but you are convinced that she needs a better grasp of the situation. You are afraid that if you voice any further disagreement, Johnny's grade will suffer, so you leave the meeting resigned that there is nothing to be done.

_____ C. You cut your meeting with the teacher short, saying you have to get to work. You tell her you'll have to talk about it later, but you don't schedule anything or make plans for the future.

_____ D. You disagree with Ms. Smith, but promise you will make sure Johnny gets to school on time and completes all his homework. You can't however, make him love school. As long as he's not talking out of turn or smart mouthing the teacher, there's not much you can do about his attitude.

_____ E. You assert your disagreement and ask if you can arrange a meeting that includes Johnny, since his needs are an important factor. At the next meeting, you allow Johnny to explain the difficulties he has getting to school on time and getting his work done. You make arrangements to have a tutor help him twice a week, until you can get moved from third to first shift. You learn that Ms. Smith is more concerned with helping Johnny to enjoy reading than with enforcing rules, and you successfully encourage her to add some bicycling and skateboarding periodicals to her reading list, to motivate Johnny to read more.

2. What types of *emotional responses* would you feel in this situation? (check all that apply)

_____ anger
_____ sadness
_____ other:
_____ confusion
_____ happiness
_____ shame
_____ fear

3. What type of thoughts (*cognitive responses*) go through your mind in this situation?

4. What *physical responses* would you have to this situation? (check all that apply)

_____ sweaty palms
_____ tunnel vision

_____ excitement
_____ anxiety
_____ rapid breathing
_____ elation
_____ nausea
_____ tension:

___ forehead
___ neck
___ back
___ other:
___ cheeks
___ arms
___ legs

_____ other:

5. Given your overall response to the situation, what do you find to be helpful?

6. What needs to be changed or improved?

Situation 3a

You are an administrator who feels overloaded with projects and paperwork. You work hard to keep things balanced, trying to provide your secretary with clear information and adequate lead time. But you are often unavailable, tied up in meetings. You recently gave him a report to type that you need today, as part of a large project to be done with other administrators. But when you arrived at the office this morning, you saw the report sitting on his desk, in a stack of work to be done, not looking anywhere near completion. Shortly before 10:00 a.m., he tells you he has a 2:00 dental appointment.

1. What *behavioral response* would you most likely have to this conflict?

_____ A. You take the report from his pile and announce you are taking over the project. At the meeting, you present what you can, then approach your supervisor about having your secretary transferred to another department. The day after the meeting, you blame him for your poor performance in from of the other administrators and threaten him with the loss of his job. At this stage, you don't want to hear any more of his excuses.

_____ B. You take the report from his pile and with a sigh of resignation, tell him he is no longer responsible for it. You spend the next four hours in your office, completing the report yourself, even though it means missing two other meetings and canceling lunch with a colleague.

_____ C. You shrug your shoulders and shut yourself in the office all morning. At noon, you decide to make an excuse not to attend the administrators' meeting. You ask your secretary to file the report when he is finished with it, but you don't ever read it.

_____ D. You ask your secretary about the status of the report. When he responds that he has worked on part of it, but it's not yet finished, you agree to complete a portion of it yourself, so he can make his dental appointment. You are still concerned about his completing future projects on time.

_____ E. You ask your secretary to take a break over coffee to go over the day's agenda. You learn he is confused about completing the report, because you have also given him some statistics to run by the end of the day. You learn, too, that the dental appointment is an emergency to correct a broken filling. You agree to devise a system for assigning priorities to future deadlines. In the meantime, you give him permission to give top priority to the administrators' report, so it will be finished by the time he needs to leave for his dental appointment.

2. What types of *emotional responses* would you feel in this situation? (check all that apply)

_____ anger
_____ sadness
_____ other:
_____ confusion
_____ happiness
_____ shame
_____ fear

3. What type of thoughts (*cognitive responses*) go through your mind in this situation?

4. What *physical responses* would you have to this situation? (check all that apply)

_____ sweaty palms
_____ excitement
_____ anxiety
_____ rapid breathing
_____ tunnel vision
_____ elation
_____ nausea
_____ tension:

___ forehead
___ neck
___ back
___ other:
___ cheeks
___ arms
___ legs

_____ other:

5. Given your overall response to the situation, what do you find to be helpful?

6. What needs to be changed or improved?

Situation 3b

You are the secretary to an overworked administrator. She is often unavailable, due to a heavy meeting schedule, but you try to keep up and meet all of her deadlines. She recently gave you a report to prepare for an administrators' meeting today, but you have a stack of statistics to compile by the end of the day. To make matters worse, you broke a filling in your tooth yesterday, and you can't get in to see the dentist until 2:00. You leave a memo on your boss' desk to that effect. As the morning wears on, you find the pain from the tooth evermore distracting, but you keep plugging away at the statistics, knowing that you also need to complete the report by the end of the day. Later that morning, your boss spies the incomplete report on your desk and takes it without saying anything, leaving right away for a meeting. When she returns at noon, she announces you'll have to cancel your dental appointment in order to finish the report.

1. What *behavioral response* would you most likely have to this conflict?

_____ A. You refuse to cancel the appointment and tell her she's impossible to work for. You tell her you have to go to the men's room, but actually you go to your supervisor's office and complain that your boss is denying you important medical leave. You threaten to file a grievance with your union, unless something is done about your boss. The best solution would be to transfer to a more reasonable administrator.

_____ B. Even though your tooth is throbbing, and you don't think it's fair that your boss took the report away without asking, you cancel the appointment and stay until the report is finished.

_____ C. You wait until your boss is at lunch, then take the rest of the day off sick, calling in a temp to finish the report.

_____ D. You call your dentist's office and get your appointment postponed until later in the day, so you can complete the report. You are rushing around so much that you never find out why your boss took the report from you in the first place.

_____ E. You tell your boss you could both use a break to go over the list of assignments for the day. You learn that not only did she forget that she gave you the statistics to complete, but she didn't read all of your memo about the dental appointment and had no idea it was an emergency. She's really concerned about getting the administrators' report done, which is why she took it off your desk in the first place; she thought she could finish it herself, but her noon meeting ran late. Together you come up with a system for prioritizing your future workload. You offer to move your dental appointment to later that afternoon, so that both the report and the statistics can be completed on time.

2. What types of *emotional responses* would you feel in this situation? (check all that apply)

_____ anger _____ confusion _____ shame
_____ sadness _____ happiness _____ fear
_____ other:

3. What type of thoughts (*cognitive responses*) go through your mind in this situation?

4. What *physical responses* would you have to this situation? (check all that apply)

_____ sweaty palms _____ tunnel vision
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___ back ___ legs
___ other:

_____ other:

5. Given your overall response to the situation, what do you find to be helpful?

6. What needs to be changed or improved?

Conflict Styles Key

Use the key below to assess your personal conflict style. Bear in mind that each different type of situation may evoke a different conflict style. This assessment may help you realize what kind of situations provoke conflict styles that are less productive and allow you to think about alternative responses.

Every time you answered A to question 1, you are using a *competing* conflict style. You move directly to meet your needs in the situation, with less regard for the needs of others. This conflict style is often characterized by aggressive communication and little listening. (Win/Lose)

Every time your answered B to question 1, you are using a style that is *accommodating*.

You yield to the needs of the other person or group, feeling that they are more important in the situation. Often characterized by submissive communication, accommodating conflict styles generally do not allow the other person to be aware of your concerns. (Lose/Win)

Every time you answered C to question 1, your are using a *withdrawing* conflict style (also called *avoiding*). You avoid bringing up possible differences, or perhaps deny that a conflict even exists. There is often limited communication or avoidance of contact, the issues fester unresolved. (Lose/Lose)

Every time your answered D to question 1, you are using a conflict style that is *compromising*. You assert your position, but are willing to trade off possible solutions through negotiation with the other party. Communication is assertive and respectful, though limited by presenting positions. (Win Some/Lose Some)

Every time you answered E to question 1, your are using a *collaborating* conflict style. You assert your needs and interests clearly and specifically, while hearing and respecting those of the other person. You try to consider the big picture and maximize relationships, as well as substantive issues. (Win/Win*)

Your other responses to the scenarios (emotional, cognitive, and physical), as assessed in questions 2 through 6, are also related to your personal conflict style. These types of responses, however, are not attributable to just one conflict style. For example, you may experience sweaty palms or tension, no matter what conflict style you are using, even if you are engaging in collaborative negotiation. Competing in conflict may evoke happiness in one person and fear in another. You may feel elation in a competitive situation, but so may someone engaged in collaboration. Being aware of these responses, many of which are our most basic "fight or flight" reactions, and how they relate to our overt behavior is a key element in dealing productively with conflict.

* In this situation, the *outcome* may not necessarily be Win/Win. What is important is the agreement to engage in a *process* to try to resolve the conflict, in which *underlying issues* from all parties can be explored. The Win/Win aspect is derived from the fact that each participant's interests or needs (rather than just positions) are discussed. That in its own right makes no one a loser.