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CONFLICT STYLE MEASUREMENT: ANTECEDENT TO CHANGE A PROPOSAL FOR AN EXPERIENTIAL EXERCISE DEMONSTRATION

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Many organizational situations involve elements of bargaining or negotiating--asking for a raise, refusing a raise, setting job objectives ad infinitum. Because of the tensions involved in these processes, feelings of the participants can easily slip over into those of conflict/competition. Since people tend to form comfortable or habitual patterns of acting or responding, it is intuitively appealing to assume that this bias holds in conflictual or competitive situations.

This experiential exercise is designed to give participants feedback on their habitual conflict responses--both verbal and non-verbal. This particular version of the exercise is being used in a class called Women in Organizations. The assumption is that there may be factors in the socialization process which cause women, on the whole, to respond differently than men. However, this assumption is not necessary to the validity of the exercise since in all cases the exercise provides feedback on basic conflict styles.

The exercise is conducted with dyads and two observers. The dyads are male/female, female/female, and male/ male. A situational role play involving conflict/bargaining is played out by each of the dyads. The observers check the performance of the participants using an observation form which lists typical verbal and non-verbal behaviors in each of several conflict style categories-e.g. accommodating, withdrawing, forcing, etc.

Participants are then given the option of trying a different conflict style. A short coaching session in the new style is conducted after which participants replay a similar scene. On the second rounds, the observational process focuses on the new behavior being tried.

Time for this exercise is flexible and depends on the number of dyads. In general play/coach/replay runs 20 to 30 minutes.