

## Using Self-Assessment Tools to Improve Instruction about Conflict Resolution

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Self-assessment instruments can be used by teachers to improve instruction about conflict resolution. When selected judiciously, assessment tools stimulate interest, illustrate important concepts, encourage students to relate concepts to themselves, and help students identify assets and liabilities in their competencies, attitudes, and behavioral styles related to conflict resolution.

Instructors should choose instruments that can be easily administered, scored, and interpreted in the classroom. Information about reliability, validity, and relevant norms should be available. Of course, it is also important to select instruments that illustrate concepts and assess characteristics that are directly related to teaching objectives.

I will describe a number of self-assessment instruments I have used successfully for a course on conflict resolution and/or for a unit on conflict and peacemaking in a social psychology course. I use one set of instruments to assess conflict resolution behaviors, styles, and attitudes. Students assess their interpersonal cooperativeness (instrument adapted from Martin & Larsen, 1976), tendencies to respond nonviolently (instrument adapted from Kool & Sen, 1984), conflict resolution styles (Rahim, 1983), and militaristic attitudes (Nelson & Milburn, 1999).

Another set of instruments is used to illustrate and assess competencies and personality dispositions that are hypothesized to be important determinants of conflict resolution behaviors and attitudes. Students assess their problem-solving abilities for international conflict resolution (Nelson & Milburn, 1999) and their tendencies for empathic concern and perspective taking (Davis, 1983). They also assess Social Dominance Orientation (Pratto et al., 1994) and Universal Orientation (Phillips & Ziller, 1997).

### Interpersonal Cooperativeness

This scale was adapted from a 28-item measure of competitive and cooperative attitudes created by H.J. Martin and K.S. Larsen (1976). I selected 13 items that seemed to assess interpersonal cooperativeness, kindness, and nonviolent behavior, and I wrote three additional items. The resulting 16-item scale may be obtained by writing to me.

In order to obtain total scores, first reverse scores such that 1=5, 2=4, 4=2, and 5=1 for the following items: 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 9, and 15. Sum scores and divide by 16. For students in two Introductory Psychology classes at my university in 2001, the percentile scores for men ( $n = 114$ ) were: 25<sup>th</sup> = 3.2, 50<sup>th</sup> = 3.6, 75<sup>th</sup> = 3.9. The percentile scores for women ( $n = 149$ ) were: 25<sup>th</sup> = 3.6, 50<sup>th</sup> = 3.9, 75<sup>th</sup> = 4.25.

### Interpersonal Nonviolence

Eighteen items were selected from the 65-item Nonviolence Test developed by V.K. Kool and M. Sen (1984). The resulting scale measures the tendency to respond

with assertive and nonviolent behavior, rather than with anger and aggression, to interpersonal provocation. The scale items may be obtained by writing to me.

To obtain scores, assign 1 point for an “a” and 2 points for a “b” on the following items: 1, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 13, 14, 15, 16, & 17. Assign 2 points for an “a” and 1 point for a “b” on items: 2, 4, 11, 12, & 18. Sum scores and divide by 18. For students in two Introductory Psychology classes at my university in 2001, the percentile scores for men (n = 116) were: 25<sup>th</sup> = 1.44, 50<sup>th</sup> = 1.67, 75<sup>th</sup> = 1.79. The percentile scores for women (n = 150) were: 25<sup>th</sup> = 1.61, 50<sup>th</sup> = 1.74, 75<sup>th</sup> = 1.83.

### Conflict Resolution Styles

The Conflict Management Inventory (Rahim, 1983) yields scores on each of five conflict resolution styles: integrating (also called problem solving), avoiding, dominating (or competing), obliging (or accommodating), and compromising. The 28-item scale, with instructions about how to score it, may be found on pages 371-372 of the article by Rahim (1983).

For students in two sections (one in 2003 and one in 2004) of a Conflict Resolution course that fulfills a general education requirement at my university, the percentile scores were as shown in the following table.

	<u>Males (n=26)</u>			<u>Females (n=36)</u>		
	<u>25%</u>	<u>50%</u>	<u>75%</u>	<u>25%</u>	<u>50%</u>	<u>75%</u>
<u>Dominating</u>	2.8	3.4	4.1	2.5	3.0	3.3
<u>Compromising</u>	3.3	3.8	4.3	3.7	3.9	4.1
<u>Avoiding</u>	2.2	3.1	4.2	2.9	3.4	3.9
<u>Obligating</u>	2.6	3.2	3.7	3.2	3.7	4.0
<u>Integrating</u>	3.5	3.9	4.5	3.8	3.9	4.2

### Militaristic Attitudes

The Militaristic Attitudes Scale (Nelson & Milburn, 1999) measures tendencies to favor use of military force rather than nonviolent alternatives for resolving international conflict and to favor reliance on military strength rather than international cooperation for maintaining national security. The 11-item scale may be found in Nelson & Milburn, 1999 .

To obtain scores, first reverse scores for some of the items as indicated on page 8. Then sum scores and divide by 11. For students in two Introductory Psychology classes at my university in 2001, the percentile scores for men (n = 116) were: 25<sup>th</sup> = 2.4, 50<sup>th</sup> = 2.8, 75<sup>th</sup> = 3.3. The percentile scores for women (n = 150) were: 25<sup>th</sup> = 2.3, 50<sup>th</sup> = 2.6, 75<sup>th</sup> = 2.9.

### Problem Solving for International Conflict Resolution

Problem-solving ability for international conflict resolution is assessed by using a checklist to evaluate essays written by students about how the U.S. President could deal with a hypothetical conflict. The instructions, examples of hypothetical conflicts, essay questions, and checklist and suggestions for scoring it are at the end of this manuscript. Results vary considerably as a function of the particular conflict used and of the educational experiences of the students. I do not have norms for the hypothetical conflicts and version of the checklist used here.

### Empathic Concern and Perspective Taking

The Interpersonal Reactivity Index was developed by M.H. Davis (1983) to assess four aspects of empathic tendencies. The scale has seven items for each of the four aspects of empathy. The two aspects that seem most relevant to conflict resolution are Empathic Concern and Perspective Taking. I generally use only the 14 items in the scale that are used to assess tendencies for Empathic Concern and Perspective Taking. The entire scale may be found in Table 3.1 on pages 56-57 in Davis (1996). Instructions for scoring are also described there.

For students in two Introductory Psychology classes at my university in 2001, the Empathic Concern percentile scores for men ( $n = 114$ ) were: 25<sup>th</sup> = 2.1, 50<sup>th</sup> = 2.7, 75<sup>th</sup> = 3.0. The Empathic Concern percentile scores for women ( $n = 149$ ) were: 25<sup>th</sup> = 2.7, 50<sup>th</sup> = 3.0, 75<sup>th</sup> = 3.4. The Perspective Taking percentile scores for men ( $n = 114$ ) were: 25<sup>th</sup> = 2.0, 50<sup>th</sup> = 2.4, 75<sup>th</sup> = 2.9. The Perspective Taking percentile scores for women ( $n = 149$ ) were: 25<sup>th</sup> = 2.0, 50<sup>th</sup> = 2.6, 75<sup>th</sup> = 3.0.

### Social Dominance Orientation

A high score on Social Dominance Orientation reflects a preference for inequality among social groups and a desire that one's in-group dominate and be superior to outgroups. I have used the 14-item version of the scale which may be found on page 760 of Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, and Malle (1994). Scoring instructions are included. After reverse scoring some items, sum scores and divide by 14.

For students in two Introductory Psychology classes at my university in 2001, the percentile scores for men ( $n = 116$ ) were: 25<sup>th</sup> = 2.2, 50<sup>th</sup> = 2.8, 75<sup>th</sup> = 3.6. The percentile scores for women ( $n = 150$ ) were: 25<sup>th</sup> = 1.9, 50<sup>th</sup> = 2.3, 75<sup>th</sup> = 2.9.

### Universal Orientation

This scale measures the degree to which a person attends to similarities rather than differences between self and others, identifies with others, and is accepting of others. The scale may be found on page 424 in Phillips and Ziller (1997) and on page 84 in Ziller, Moriarty, and Phillips (1999).

For students in two Introductory Psychology classes at my university in 2001, the percentile scores for men ( $n = 116$ ) were: 25<sup>th</sup> = 3.2, 50<sup>th</sup> = 3.5, 75<sup>th</sup> = 3.7. The percentile scores for women ( $n = 150$ ) were: 25<sup>th</sup> = 3.3, 50<sup>th</sup> = 3.5, 75<sup>th</sup> = 3.8.

Correlations Between Personality Dispositions And Measures of Violent and Nonviolent Attitudes and Behaviors [Intro Psychology students in 2001, 114 males and 149 females]

	Militaristic Attitudes		Nonviolence		Cooperativeness	
	<u>M</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>F</u>
Social Dominance Orientation	.52	.42	-.47	-.17	-.54	-.36
Universal Orientation	-.21	-.24	.39	ns	.38	.17
Perspective Taking	-.29	ns	.48	.51	.48	.36
Empathic Concern	-.36	-.25	.37	.35	.56	.47

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## Essay and Checklist for Assessing Problem-Solving Ability for International Conflict Resolution

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**Consent form:** If used for research, the first page of the test package would be a consent form. The form would explain that participation is voluntary and that results will be confidential. I motivate performance on the essay test by giving a point or two of extra credit, beyond the extra credit given for simply participating, to students whose essays are judged to be among the top 70% of the essays written by students for the study. The incentive system is explained on the consent form.

**Instructions:** This is an essay test that assesses your problem-solving ability in the area of international conflict. After reading the description of the hypothetical conflict, read the three specific questions you are expected to answer (one question on each of the following three pages). You may want to think about how you will answer the three questions before writing. A total of 20 minutes will be allowed for you to answer the questions.

**Hypothetical conflict situation:** Suppose that the President of the United States obtains evidence suggesting that the government of China is selling long-range missiles to Iran, North Korea, and other nations. The President believes that this situation threatens the future security of the United States and other nations. Given this conflict between the U.S. and China, what could the President do?

[Any conflict scenario for which many of the strategies on the checklist would be relevant can be used. Another possible scenario: Suppose that the President of the United States obtains evidence suggesting that the government of Syria is supporting terrorist activities against international corporations owned by U.S. and foreign citizens. Given this conflict between the U.S. and Syria, what could the President do?]

### Specific questions:

1. Before taking direct action to deal with this problem, what could the President do in order to analyze and better understand this conflict? Describe all the things you can think of that the President could do to better understand this conflict.

[allow one page for this question and the student's answer]

2. What alternatives could the President consider for dealing with this conflict? Describe all the actions you can think of that could be relevant for dealing with the conflict.

[allow one page for this question and the student's answer]

3. What are some important things for the President to consider in the process of evaluating possible actions and deciding on the best course of action? Describe all the criteria and considerations you can think of that might be relevant in choosing the best way of dealing with this conflict.

[allow one page for this question and the student's answer]

**Research using the essay and checklist:**

- Nelson, L.L., Golding, N.L., Drews, D.R., & Blazina, M.K. (1995). Teaching and assessing problem solving for international conflict resolution. *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology, 1*, 399-416.
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**Conflict Resolution Strategies Checklist**  
International Conflict Version 2002

Analysis of conflict prior to taking actions

- Obtain factual information or discuss accuracy of information
- Discover/discuss Other's perceptions, intentions, or interests
- Discuss expectations, concerns, or interests of U. S.
- Discuss influence of U. S. or third parties on actions of Other
- Discuss causes of conflict other than above
- Consult with U. N. or third parties abroad
- Consult with advisors, experts, or political leaders in U. S.

Generation of action alternatives

- Communicate demands or expectations to Other
- Negotiation (e.g., discuss, bargain, compromise)
- Mediation (e.g., U.N. as mediator)
- Arbitration or adjudication (e.g., World Court)
- Military threats or sanctions (credit generic threat or force)
- Nonmilitary threats or sanctions
- Positive incentives or rewards
- Friendly initiative
- Cooperation with third parties (e.g., U. N.) to influence Other
- Inaction/yield/withdraw

Evaluation of action alternatives

- Consider Other's dispositions or psychological reactions
- Consider possibility of violence, war, or physical injury
- Consider effects on the quality of future relationship with Other
- Consider reactions of, or effects upon, third parties abroad
- Consider economic costs/benefits
- Consider internal political costs/benefits or public support
- Consider costs/benefits other than above
- Explicitly consider ethical or normative criteria

Total points \_\_\_\_\_

Scoring suggestions: For each question, assign one point on the corresponding part of the checklist for the items that are mentioned or applied in the answer. Separate scores may be computed for analyzing conflict (0 to 7 points), generating alternatives (0 to 10 points), evaluating alternatives (0 to 8 points), and total problem solving score (0 to 25 points). Note that scores and use of particular strategies will vary depending

on the essay's conflict scenario because the relevance of specific considerations and actions is different from one situation to another.