

Instructional Scenario

Communicating in Conflict



Course/Duty Area: Cadet Leadership / Leading Teams: Communication, Trust, and Conflict

Scenario: C/SSgt Morales is the project leader for a service learning project aimed at organizing a community Safety Stand-Down Day. To manage the project, Morales has implemented a Team Operating Agreement. However, as the deadline approaches, the team is struggling.

Cadet Thompson, the logistics coordinator, has become a dysfunctional team member. He is consistently late for briefings, failing to meet the professionalism and punctuality standards agreed upon by the team. When confronted, Thompson rolls his eyes and claims he is burned out from other classes. Meanwhile, Cadet Rivera, who is very invested in the success of the project, has started bypassing Morales's authority to bark orders at Thompson to "fix his act."

The team's trust is eroding, and the mission plan is falling behind schedule. Morales must intervene to address Thompson's followership, de-escalate Rivera's aggression, and get the squad back to a performing stage.

Morales reflects on the following:

1. **Leading Self:** How does self-regulation affect how Morales should handle Rivera's insubordination? How can Morales stay grounded?
2. **Leading Teams:** How can Morales use active listening to find the root cause of Thompson's lack of discipline? Is this a time to shift to a situational leadership style?
3. **Planning Missions:** How does this internal conflict affect the risk assessment for the project? If Thompson fails to secure the equipment, what is the contingency plan?

Big Question: How does a leader's ability to diagnose conflict and adapt their communication style ensure mission success while maintaining team trust?

Focused Questions:

1. **Followership:** Why is it essential for Thompson to understand the leader's intent even if he is feeling personally overwhelmed?
2. **Conflict Resolution:** Using interest-based problem-solving, how can Morales address Rivera's behavior without discouraging her initiative?
3. **Motivation:** Which motivational techniques would be most effective for a team member who has lost focus due to external stress?
4. **Evaluation:** How can an After-Action Review (AAR) be used mid-project to pivot and improve group performance?

Student Project or Outcome:

The Unit Recovery Briefing and Documentation

Students will work in small groups to resolve the scenario by producing:

1. A corrective briefing: Conduct a three-minute informal briefing to the squad that addresses the breakdown in the Team Operating Agreement.
2. A formal counseling record: Draft a written summary of a one-on-one meeting with Thompson using active listening strategies to identify root causes.
3. An updated project management tool: A revised Gantt chart or RACI chart reflecting task re-assignments

to mitigate the risk caused by the delay.

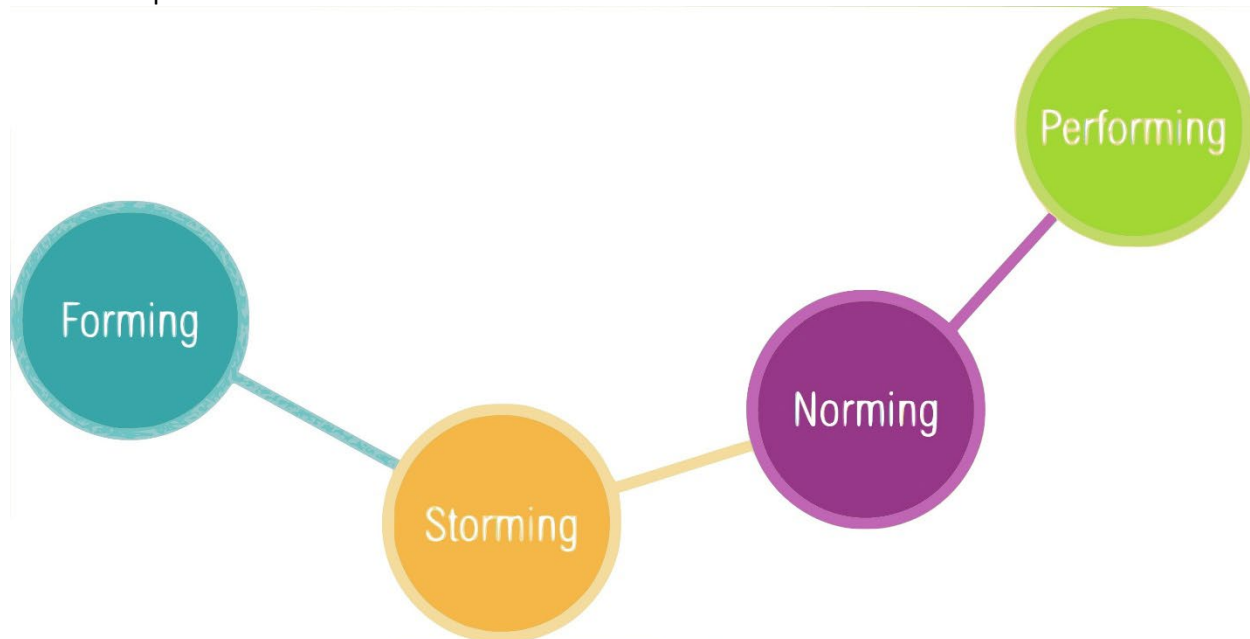
Project-Based Assessment:

Leadership Competency Rubric

- Communication: Does the student demonstrate clear verbal and appropriate nonverbal techniques during the briefing?
- Problem-solving: Does the student's plan address the root cause (i.e., Thompson's burnout/Rivera's style) rather than just the symptoms?
- Ethical Leadership: Does the leader model accountability and fairness in their treatment of both cadets?
- Systems Thinking: Does the student explain how the conflict between two people impacts the entire community project?

Teacher Resources:

- **MCWP 6-11 Leading Marines** – To provide the foundational philosophy on values and individual development
- **Tuckman's Stages of Group Development** – To help cadets identify that "Storming" is a natural part of the process



- **The Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI)** – To help students understand their natural response to conflict (i.e., compete, collaborate, compromise, avoid, or accommodate)
- **Harvard Business Review: "Followership: What it is and Why it's Essential"**
- **Project Tool: Asana or Trello Guide** for creating work breakdown structures