

# Introduction

[Sociology](#), [Communication](#)



Introduction It is an open fact that the ability to communicate and effectively resolve conflict among various ethnic employees within an organization is a reality that management faces today. It is crucial for managers to learn how to address concerns voiced by individuals of a different background. This ensures that the organization will run smoothly and the employees' will be satisfied and confident that they are valued by the company. However, it is important to learn how to solve conflict related to these particular incidents. As the workplace expands to represent a wide range of ethnically diverse individuals, organizational leaders must learn to effectively resolve conflict related to specific cultural differences. With the globalization of the labor force, businesses are working with more culturally diverse employees and co-workers than ever before, which is a great experience and at the same time a challenge. Teams that are ethnically diverse have advantages over demographic homogeneous teams by adding new perspectives and inputs. This diversity can also cause conflict within the team; however this is not a problem as long as it is constructively handled. If the problems are not constructively handled then economic and employee dissatisfaction can arise, two of the main reasons why management must learn to gain conflict resolution skills. Many failures in international cooperation and conflict resolution seem to be related to communication problems and cultural differences. In other words, the establishment of realistic, proper and effective communication, based on mutual cultural understanding and on goodwill, would solve many national and international disputes. This work examines the contention that honest and effective communication, based on cultural understanding, would contribute positively to the solution appearing

cross-cultural conflicts in teams. 1. Issues of Cross-Cultural Conflicts

Appearing The use of teams represents an important change in the way we work. The theory is that through the interdependency of the parts greater productivity is achieved by the whole. One reason that teams fail to meet performance expectations is their paralysis through unresolved conflict. Effective communication based on intercultural and political understanding communication can be considered one of the most pervasive problems among nation. Even within a single culture, communication tends to have many complex effects. Team members work in increasingly diverse environments: in terms of age (there are more older workers), gender (there are more women or men), race (there are more people of color), language (there are more languages spoken), and nationality (there are more immigrants). Beyond these differences, there are also deeper cultural differences that influence the way conflict is approached. When communication takes place between few cultures, these effects get even more complicated, primarily because they are symbolized in one context and transferred into another. The first thing to be said is that the development of team does not take place in a vacuum, but is embedded in the wider social, political and economic context of the day. The political situation of our presence affects on the way how do representatives of different cultures and countries display toward others. For example, it would not be appropriate to gather the team of people who takes a great interest to politics and are from America and Iran, Israel and Palestine, Pakistan and India etc. It is essential to remember that most development projects, political and technical assistance provided to developing countries do not take cultural and social

factors into consideration. A lot can be learned from past experiences, such as the case of the failed technical assistance to Iran. In 1980 (a year after the Iranian Revolution), a seminar was organized by a number of American academics and advisers who had been trying for years to introduce reform to Iran. Their lack of understanding of the society, the culture, politics and history of the country had not only led to the failure of their reforms, but it had created additional problems, conflicts and pessimism among the people of the host country. The aim of the American seminar was to study " the failure of U. S. technical assistance in public administration: the Iranian ease." American aid to Iran started in 1953 in the form of aid to ministries and continued for nearly 25 years. But even after decades, technical assistance failed to produce the hoped-for results, and many more mistakes were made than successes achieved because: \* Nearly all advisers in the public administration program arrived in Iran with no knowledge of the language and with a superficial knowledge of Iranian culture, history and social, economic and political systems; \* For an American to become attuned to the internal politics of a foreign country requires a radical shifting of his habits and attitudes; and \* Although one must caution against generalizing from a single case, or a few cases, the Iranian ease – and others – strongly suggest that developed countries do not know how to help developing nations in their reforms. The other case is the ongoing conflict between Israel and the Palestinians. This is essentially a dispute between two national identities with claims over the same area of land. Many attempts have been made to broker a two-state solution, which would entail the creation of an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel. Perhaps among the factors

that have hindered the resolution of the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians is the lack of mutual trust – a fundamental condition for the advancement of understanding between the parties. Another reason is the feeling of delegitimization, for the delegitimization of the adversary seems to be one of the major obstacles to a peaceful resolution of any conflict.

However, it is the violence between Palestinians and Israelis that is the major obstacle to a readiness within both societies to make major concessions towards a final settlement of the conflict. The second reason that harms effective communication in cross-cultural teams is the cultural prejudice.

Feelings of superiority towards the other are most harmful when one is trying to build relationships and solve conflicts between two nations.

Preconceptions about other people or nations as being hostile, alien, illiterate and uncivilized create antagonism and pessimism between the two parties and destroy other possibilities for development and success. Some countries are more individualistic than others in their orientations, which cannot be a sensible attitude in cross-cultural communication and could lead to misunderstandings between the two nations. Individualism is defined as " a social pattern that consists of loosely linked individuals who view themselves as independent of collectives and who are motivated by their own preferences, needs, rights and contracts." Among the many factors that inhibit cooperation and constructive relationships between nations is the expectation of being treated as important, as exceptional and as having the right to enjoy extra privileges. The next reason is that many misunderstandings have occurred, not only because of mistakes in the usage of words or expressions, but also because of the lack of goodwill and cultural

knowledge, which makes adaptation and change difficult. In the West, technological progress seems to have somehow undermined the need for the sound understanding of various levels of social and cultural reality. People who are more adventurous and who visit and live among societies other than their own are able to acquire a realistic knowledge of other cultures. But it is not sufficient to understand how others differ; we must also understand how we differ. Lack of attention to these norms, values and traditions and lack of basic knowledge of intercultural communication among different nations is a general problem even among officials and politicians at the highest levels. In fact, cross-cultural contacts are harmful unless they are conducive to constructive communication, and this can only occur if the parties have respect and sympathy for each other and show a large measure of flexibility. The last, but not less is religion. Personal clashes about religion are not that uncommon in the workplace. Yet, most organizations do not have a policy addressing the issue. That's according to a recent study by the Institute for Corporate Productivity, which found that one-third of 278 employers surveyed worldwide have seen worker conflicts in the workplace linked to religion. And even though personal friction over religious beliefs is not all that uncommon, nearly two-thirds of those companies say they do not have a written policy specifically addressing religious bias. Perhaps because of this lack of clarity, most companies opt to handle disputes quietly and internally.

2. Individualistic and Collectivist Dimensions of a Culture An important dimension of culture is the extent to which members identify with the group (in this case the team) rather than themselves as individuals. Individualistic cultures place a high value on " autonomy, initiative, creativity, and authority

in decision making." Individual interests trump group interests, and any group commitment is a function of a perceived self-benefit. Collectivist cultures, on the other hand, value the group above the individual. Group conformity and commitment is maintained at the expense of personal interests. Harmony, getting along and maintaining 'face' are seen as crucial. The dominant culture in the USA, Canada, Western Europe, Australia, and New Zealand is individualistic, while collectivism predominates the rest of the world. However examples of both are found everywhere. In California where the recent census found that 32% of the population is Hispanic, 7% are African American and 10% are of Asian descent, it can safely be assumed that a relatively high percentage of the workforce comes from a social environment that is collectivist. Individualists and collectivists view conflict differently. Collectivists, who place a high value on harmony and getting along, see conflict as a sign of social failure. As a result, comfort levels with conflict situations, especially of an interpersonal nature are low. Conflict is often avoided. While many individualists also feel discomfort with conflict, it is acknowledged as an inevitable part of life that must be dealt with. However, being in conflict with another is not necessarily something to be ashamed about. Team members from a collectivist culture will probably be more comfortable with a fellow team member addressing a conflict, rather than bringing in someone from the outside. Individualists, on the other hand, may prefer an impartial outsider, whose relationship to the team is remote—such as a Human Resource representative or external mediator. The expected role of the third party is also influenced by cultural dimensions. In western, individualistic cultures mediation has evolved as a process in which

the third party does not make decisions for the disputants. Some mediators provide an evaluation of the strengths and weakness and they are described as evaluative. At the other end of this continuum are mediators who do not make evaluations. They are purely facilitative. In collectivist cultures, mediators are often expected to provide counsel, evaluate and advise in an effort to restore harmony. Disputants engage a third party precisely because they are unable to find a solution themselves. There are a number of factors that contribute to communication style. One factor is the extent to which it is expressive or restrained. Some team members may have been socialized to reveal strong emotions and to feel comfortable with prolonged eye contact and touch. Others may be calm and mask emotions with a poker face, use monotone speech and avoid eye contact. These different communication styles are not problematic in and of themselves. However, problems arise when value judgments are made on the basis of the different styles. For example, if team members disagree and one represents his views and feelings forcefully with a raised voice, another more restrained team member may see that as arrogant. The same 'arrogant' team member may conclude that the restrained team member is untrustworthy because eye contact is not maintained. Another area of difference relates to directness. Some cultures are very direct. They like to 'cut to the chase' and get frustrated with someone who 'beats around the bush'. Indirect cultures prefer to deal with relational aspects first, and to restore harmony before addressing substantive issues. The individualistic vs. collective society exhibits a great deal of social differences among employees. As Americans separate themselves with silence and increased personal space, collectivist



countries such as China and Nigeria emphasize a concern for the relationships. For instance Canadians (an individualistic culture) preferred harmony-enhancing styles of resolving conflict, although Nigerians (a collectivistic culture) had an equal preference for both harmony-enhancing and competitive styles and it is widely accepted that Asian forms of collectivism place pressure on individuals to avoid disagreements of any kind. The Japanese represent a great example of Asian collective culture by managing conflict through avoidance or accommodation; they use collaboration infrequently because collaboration often requires the expression of different views. One way or another, mentioned differences between representatives of individualists and collectivist cultures from other side should be counted in the conflict solving in teams.

### 3. The Methods of Conflict Resolution in Cross-Cultural Teams

Given that teams are comprised of diverse individuals with unique cultural backgrounds, what lessons can we distill for the successful prevention and resolution of conflict?

1. Know Yourself and Your Own Culture Starting with yourself, examine your own beliefs, values, biases, and prejudices. How do you behave? What are your hot buttons? Locate your individual culture in the context of your family, regional, and national cultures. What is the social, political and economic context of the day? Being aware of our own cultures helps us to be open to different ideas. We are able to compare and contrast different approaches without being threatened.
2. Learn others' expectations We should count different expectations. The only way we will know what our team members expect is to have an explicit conversation about the nature of conflict and how we prefer to deal with it when it arises. This should lead to a more

general conversation that addresses how the team wants to work together. The sooner this happens the better. We can also read books and watch movies to understand others culture. Learning about a new culture takes time. Some liken culture to an iceberg where over nine tenths is out of sight. So it is with culture. There is the surface culture, and then there is that which is hidden-deep culture.

3. Check Your Assumptions As we filter incoming information through our senses (Sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch) it is natural to make assumptions. We should develop acceptable communication protocols to check out the basis of our perceptions. Failure to do so leads to inaccurate stereotypes and may foster negative feelings of hostility. One approach is to give specific feedback on the behavior you observed (" I noticed that you avoided eye contact when we were discussing the situation.") and to seek clarification of your interpretations. (" I suppose you could have been bored. Can you tell me what was going on?") Be open to various interpretations. Your first interpretation is not necessarily correct. Another variation is to give feedback on how you felt when the specified behavior occurred. (" I felt ignored when you avoided eye contact during our discussion. Can you tell me what was going on?") It sometimes helps to list all the possible interpretations you have thought of almost as if brainstorming.

4. Ask questions We should do it so as to learn about other cultures are so we can anticipate how situations will be dealt with and avoid conflict. Some go so far as to say this is necessary to show respect. Rather than assuming you know, you ask to clarify why things are being done differently. Open ended questions are generally less threatening, but close ended questions will often eliminate confusion on a particular aspect of

culture. 5. Listen Listening is widely acknowledged as a key conflict prevention and resolution skill. Care should be taken not to impose an approach to listening that causes discomfort. Not all cultures are comfortable expressing feelings in public. Used in a team environment effective listening enables new norms to emerge that reflect a deep knowledge for one another's 'ways.' This level of multi cultural maturity will not always be achieved, and the norms will often reflect an issue by issue compromise by the different cultures present. Each team member will adhere to their own ways, and when their culture conflicts with others, adopt the others through a mix match of procedures. However, a compromise over cultural norms is better the imposition of values by a dominant group. 6. Consider the Platinum Rule The Platinum rule encourages us to treat our team members as they would like to be treated rather than the way we like to be treated (the golden rule). It is similar to the difference between sympathy and empathy. Empathy is not about " walking a mile in his moccasins" but imagining " how he feels walking in his moccasins." Problems with the platinum rule arise when your way and the others way clash. 7. All conflicts are multi cultural There is as much diversity within a culture as between cultures. Thus, rather than thinking that we should use our cross cultural communication skills when we communicate between different cultural groups, we should assume that all communications are essentially cross cultural. It helps to remember that men and women form the two largest cultural groups. One challenge of working in a team environment is that it is essentially multicultural. Another is that conflict will arise from time to time. How team chooses to respond can often be the difference between success

and failure. The importance of talking about conflict prevention and resolution issues up front cannot be overstressed. It will go a long way to the enhanced productivity that is expected from a team that is performing well.

Conclusion From my point of view, competency in cross cultural management is a skill that companies are beginning to recognize. Personnel who are competent in cross-cultural management have recently received a lot of attention and are listed among the most important skill areas in the next ten years. Many public policies have been set regarding discovering, motivating and developing skills in the area of cross-cultural management. Appreciating instead of rejecting cultural differences within the workplace will bring success and employee satisfaction. While benefits will result as a firm increases the diversity of its workforce, quite possibly misunderstandings may also develop as a result of different cultural norms as more cultures are represented within the workforce. Therefore it is imperative that a manager respect the right of employees to have different points of view and to exhibit this respect. It is also significant for management to feel comfortable dealing with cultural differences as well.

Companies should attempt to select managers with strong emotional intellect and provide cultural trainings that consist not only of cultural facts but also interpersonal skills such as active listening, conflict management, and ethical reasoning. References 1. Paul Beamish, Allen Morrison and Andrew Inkpen, International Management (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2003), p. 201. 2. Rabi Bhagat et al., " Cultural Variations in the Cross-Border Transfer of Organizational Knowledge: An Integrative Framework," Academy of Management Review (April 2002), p. 208. 3. Norman Daniel, The Cultural

Barrier (Edinburgh: Western Printing Services Ltd., 1975), p. 62. 4. Cultural Issues in Mediation: Individualist and Collectivist Paradigms, Walter A. Wright, <http://www.mediate.com/articles/Wright.cfm> 5. When You Can't Get Through To Them: Cultural Diversity In Mediation Josefin Muñiz Rendón, <http://www.mediate.com/articles/rendon.cfm> 6. John Seitz, "The Failure of U. S. Technical Assistance in Public Administration: The Iranian Case," *Public Administration Review*, Vol. 40. No. 5 (Sept/Oct. 1980), pp. 407-413. 7. Neta Oren et al., "The Detrimental Dynamics of Delegitimization in Intractable Conflicts: The Israeli-Palestinian Case," *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, -No. 3 (2007) 8. Douglas Medin et al.. Sacred Bounds on Rational Resolution of Violent Political Conflict. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America (PNAS)*, March 1, 2007.