

# Addressing Communication Style Difference in Cross-Cultural Conflicts

by Sophia Tutorial



## WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, we'll discuss some strategies and techniques for addressing communication style differences in conflict situations. The specific areas of focus include:

1. Raising Communication Style Differences
  - a. Self-Awareness
  - b. Non-Blaming statements
  - c. Cultural Competency

## 1. Raising Communication Style Differences

Communication can open a door between people or create misunderstanding, particularly when there are **communication style differences** involved.

These differences are due to culturally derived ways of communicating; neither party intends to send a particular message, and that message gets misinterpreted.

The way someone is communicating may just be the natural and correct way of communicating in that person's culture. Thus, when two or more people from different cultures are speaking, misunderstandings can arise.

Quite often, the fact that there are communication style differences is not even apparent until miscommunication occurs.

So when that happens, it's always good to notice and raise the issue, because doing so can open the door to promoting better understanding.



### TERM TO KNOW

#### Communication Style Difference

A difference between the culturally-derived communication styles of two or more people attempting communication.

#### 1a. Self-Awareness

Noticing and raising the issue of communication style differences begins with self-awareness. Throughout earlier lessons, we've talked about a lot of different ways that people communicate, both verbally and non-verbally.

This is why it's crucial that you continue to ask yourself, "What am I communicating?" More specifically, "What am I communicating if I'm communicating with someone from another culture?"

It's impossible not to communicate; even when you have your mouth shut, you're communicating something through eye contact, gestures, or body language.

If you are speaking, you're either being direct or indirect. Whether you're communicating verbally or non-verbally, you're always sending messages.

When you notice that there's been a disconnect somehow in the back and forth of that message between sender and receiver, simply raising it and putting it on the table can be very helpful if done well.

### 1b. Non-Blaming Statements

In order to raise the issue of communication effectively, it's very important not to use blaming or shaming language. You want to simply report what happened.

➞ **EXAMPLE** Someone did something with either eye contact or body language that made you upset. Perhaps the person looked away while you were speaking, used a gesture that you misunderstood, or moved in too close to speak with you when you were having a conversation.

You could bring up whatever that was by saying, "When you \_\_\_\_ (avoided making eye contact, made that gesture, etc.), I reacted the way I did because to me that means \_\_\_\_ (tell the person what that means to you culturally and how you reacted instantaneously because of that meaning)."

It's not blaming when you talk about the situation that way; rather, you are talking about the behavior and your reaction to it because of the culture you come from.

Handling miscommunication this way can really open the door, so it's sometimes also helpful to be self-revealing.

➞ **EXAMPLE** Perhaps you've discovered something or something happened traveling abroad that caused you to realize that someone misunderstood what you were doing. Now, you know how easily that can happen. That kind of self-revealing statement can be helpful, too, in the right context.

### 1c. Cultural Competency

It's also important to remember that becoming really fluent in another culture takes years. Most of us don't have the opportunity to fully immerse ourselves in another culture, so the next best thing is to become culturally competent.

As we've discussed, being culturally competent means being aware that you're always sending messages in a variety of ways and then recognizing when that's happening.

Cultural competency also involves speaking about cultural differences in a way that could be helpful to resolving the conflict.



**BIG IDEA**

Approaching cultural communication style differences through self-awareness, non-blaming statements, and

cultural competency can provide a great opportunity for promoting cross-cultural understanding.



## SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned several ways through which you can effectively **raise communication style differences** in cross-cultural conflicts: self-awareness, non-blaming statements, and cultural competency. You now know that by approaching cultural communication style differences in these ways, you are taking steps toward creating an environment that promotes a greater understanding of cultural differences. Good luck!

Source: Adapted from Sophia tutorial by Marlene Johnson.



## TERMS TO KNOW

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