

Addressing Worldview Difference in Cross-Cultural Conflicts

by Sophia Tutorial



WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, we'll discuss how to address cultural differences in a conflict situation. The particular areas of focus include:

1. Worldview and Cultural Competency
 - a. Addressing World Differences in Conflict Effectively
 - b. Addressing World Differences in Conflict Ineffectively

1. Worldview and Cultural Competency

As you know, the cultures we grow up in greatly influence how we see the world and how we behave.

Because cultures differ, it's important to look at these cultural variances and understand how to address them when we find ourselves in conflict. Most of us naturally take our own views and ways of seeing the world as normal and true, perhaps even universally true, instead of attributing our personal views to a cultural worldview.

A **worldview** is the way we think and make decisions about our world and beliefs about what is right and normal. Our worldview comes from our **culture**, which comprises of others who share our same language, norms, traditions, and viewpoints.

We tend to take all of this for granted by thinking that the way we see things is the way everybody sees things, but this is untrue.

Different cultures have different worldviews and becoming fluent in another culture's worldview requires years of immersion in that culture; most of us do not have an opportunity to become fluent in another culture.

We may travel abroad or spend some time in a culture, but we rarely spend enough time to become culturally fluent. Instead, we should aim to become culturally competent, which is possible without becoming totally fluent in a culture.

To be culturally competent means to be able to recognize in a conflict when there might be some sort of cultural misunderstanding at play and to then have the strategies and ability to raise that issue in a way that's effective.

In a conflict resolution process, it is absolutely critical for a conflict resolver to be culturally competent.



TERMS TO KNOW

Worldview

The way a person interprets and makes decisions about his or her environment (world), including beliefs or assumptions about what is considered right or normal.

Culture

A form of human social organization in which people identify themselves as members of a group sharing symbol systems, norms, traditions, and viewpoints towards the world.

1a. Addressing World Differences in Conflict Effectively

When raising the issue of cultural differences in a conflict situation, the most effective way is to raise a question for the parties to discuss this possibility.

If you see something that you think might be a cultural issue, whether it be verbal or nonverbal, perhaps the parties have a different way of expressing themselves.

➡ **EXAMPLE** You might have one party who's very volatile and perhaps speaks at a louder volume. In this person's culture, interrupting each other or having a quick back-and-forth exchange is the norm.

However, the other party may be more accustomed to speaking slower with silent periods, or waiting for pauses. This cultural difference could be what is getting in the way of these two parties understanding each other's needs.

There could also be nonverbal signals that each party is interpreting based on their own cultural viewpoint. These views may be giving the parties perceptions about one another that are not allowing them to be fully present in terms of understanding each other's needs.

Beyond communication styles, there could be other elements that differ by culture, such as beliefs about power and status or gender, or any number of issues that could be culture-based.

If parties from different cultures have different worldviews, these views could be preventing the parties from really being able to communicate successfully with each other about their needs.

Thus, respectfully raising a question about this possibility can be a very effective way to generate a discussion about worldview and differences in culture.

In turn, that discussion can open the door for the parties to reach an understanding and be able to express their needs in a way that allows each side to hear the other.

1b. Addressing World Differences in Conflict Ineffectively

As you learned in an earlier lesson, an ineffective way of addressing worldview differences is to stereotype, or to make an assumption that comes from a personal bias about another culture.

We all have our own biases, so we have to be very careful and very self aware during this process. Saying something that could sound like one party blaming the other should also be avoided.



BIG IDEA

As a mediator in the conflict resolution process, use the following in a way that is helpful to each party:

- Listening attentively
- Respecting differences
- Raising questions

This can go a long way towards helping the parties address what could be cultural differences that are getting in the way of resolving the conflict.



SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned that different cultures have different **worldviews** so **it's important for a conflict resolver to be culturally competent**, or able to recognize and raise possible cultural issues at play in a conflict. You now understand that when addressing worldview differences in conflict, it's important to effectively raise the issue by asking questions and respecting differences instead of ineffectively making stereotypical or blaming statements. Good luck!

Source: Adapted from Sophia tutorial by Marlene Johnson.



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