

Gaining Cultural Insight

by Sophia Tutorial



WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, we'll discuss some ways of gaining cultural insight, and why this type of insight is important to the conflict resolution process. The specific areas of focus include:

1. Ways of Gaining Cultural Insight
 - a. Print Resources
 - b. Cultural Dialogue
2. Initiating Respectful Dialogue

1. Ways of Gaining Cultural Insight

We're all influenced by the cultures we grow up in, but few of us realize how deeply culture has influenced our behavior, norms, and way of seeing the world. We take these influences for granted until we encounter another culture.

IN CONTEXT

If you've ever traveled abroad, either for pleasure or for business, you've realized that it is important to come to terms with how other cultures see the world and communicate, in small ways or in big ways.

Even small things, such as nonverbal gestures, can make a statement that you might not intend to make. For example, the thumbs up nonverbal signal that we use here in the United States to mean something good is really insulting in some countries.

1a. Print Resources

Because it's so common to stumble in this sort of way when traveling abroad, there have been a lot of books written on the norms of different cultures.

There are scholarly books written by people who have studied the subject, as well as non-scholarly work. You can also go on the internet and Google certain topics.

🔗 **EXAMPLE** If you plan to travel to a particular country, you can Google a query about culture or verbal and nonverbal communication styles in that country.

Those are really good ways to get information about a culture that you're traveling to, no matter the reason for your trip.

1b. Cultural Dialogue

Of course, the very best way of gaining insight is total immersion in the culture. Not many of us have the opportunity to do that, so in lieu of cultural immersion, **cultural dialogue** is the next best thing. Cultural dialogue allows you to discuss the cultural differences between your own culture and another culture, ideally with someone from that culture. By discussing the differences in worldview and communication, you can create mutual understanding.

If you know someone from another culture, perhaps through work or social gatherings, you can initiate a conversation with him or her. There are also workshops and trainings designed to help businesspeople initiate that cultural dialogue.

Engaging in cultural dialogue is very important, as few of us realize that the things that we take for granted in terms of our behavior and way of seeing the world are not universally taken for granted.



TERM TO KNOW

Cultural Dialogue

Discussion of cultural difference (worldview and communication) intended to help create mutual understanding.

2. Initiating Respectful Dialogue

When initiating a cultural dialogue, it's best to first have self-awareness, and to realize that you may stumble.

➦ **EXAMPLE** You can be honest about some things that maybe happened to you personally if you have ever traveled abroad, or things that you have run into that made you realize that you didn't know something about another culture.

Being honest about what you don't know constitutes self-awareness, which can do a lot to open the door. You also want to ask questions, and make sure to listen actively.

That natural curiosity and willingness to be honest with another person helps enable both parties to speak openly about their cultures and whatever differences they have run into, and thus share cultural insight with one another.



BIG IDEA

We all come from cultures in which we take certain behaviors and views for granted. While this is natural, it's important to gain insight into other cultures. Outside of cultural immersion, the best way to gain this knowledge is through cultural dialogue.



SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned that while it's helpful to **gain insight into another culture** through print resources, the best way aside from cultural immersion to gain this insight is through cultural dialogue.

You now understand that in order to **initiate a respectful dialogue**, it's important to be honest, ask questions, and listen actively to ensure that both members of the conversation are able to openly share their different perspectives. Good luck!

Source: Adapted from Sophia tutorial by Marlene Johnson.



TERMS TO KNOW

Cultural Dialogue

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