

Making Conflict Resolution Culturally Competent

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WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, we'll discuss how culture impacts the conflict resolution process. The specific areas of focus include:

1. Cultural Competency in Conflict Resolution
2. Adapting Elements of the Resolution Model
 - a. Communication Style
 - b. Worldview
3. Principles of Cultural Competency

1. Cultural Competency in Conflict Resolution

As you learned in a previous lesson, gaining insight into cultural differences can help prevent miscommunication and conflict. However, an awareness of culture is important in the actual resolution process as well.

This involves **cultural competency**, or the ability to recognize when culture is playing a role, and then being able to bring that up in a way that can be helpful to move the process forward.

Thus, the conflict resolution process needs to adapt itself to cultural competency, particularly when there are one or more parties who are not United States natives.



TERM TO KNOW

Cultural Competency

The ability to recognize when culture may be playing a part in a conflict or communication difficulty and the ability to raise the role of culture in a way that helps overcome the problem.

2. Adapting Elements of the Resolution Model

The conflict-resolver must be aware of cultural differences and adapt the process accordingly because the model of mediation here in the United States is really based on two main elements:

- Our communication style
- Our worldview

Since our communication style and worldview are built into the United States model for mediation, it's important to think about how we might be able to adapt each of those elements.

2a. Communication Style

Our **communication style** is the way we communicate as members of a given culture. Every culture has a way of communication that is considered to be correct and effective within that culture.

In the United States, our mediation model encourages communication in a very direct style. This comes from our cultural viewpoint that being verbal is important; we encourage people to learn to use what we call "I" statements in order to speak up and own their feelings from that first person point of view.

In some cultures, this would not be an effective or correct way to communicate because these cultures are more indirect in their communication style. There would be an acceptance of qualifier statements instead of "I" statements.

Cultures that favor direct communication are called low context cultures, while cultures that favor more indirect communication are called high context cultures.

➞ **EXAMPLE** Someone from a high context culture may use qualifying statements, such as "Perhaps it would be good to consider..." or ask a question, such as "Don't you feel that?" They may even downplay something by giving it another kind of disqualifier: "I may be wrong, but I think...."

In these high context cultures, the nonverbal may carry more contextual meaning than the verbal. These qualifying statements may be a comfortable way to phrase things, and they also allow the person to preserve group harmony, which may be important in their culture.

Adapting the way we phrase things, and the way we consider communication to be effective in the resolution process is the first step.



TERM TO KNOW

Communication Style

The way in which a culture or individuals consider communication to be correct/most effective.

2b. Worldview

Our **worldview** is the way we interpret the world and decide to do things here. It's based on our beliefs and assumptions in the United States about what's right and what's normal.

All worldviews are based on these beliefs and assumptions; they come out of the culture that we live in.

In the United States, we base our mediation model on equal status; we believe power in the process is equally held. Everybody at the table gets a turn to speak and a turn to listen.

This could be at odds with a cultural viewpoint that status is of more importance.

➞ **EXAMPLE** There might be a party who feels as though someone else may need to speak first because status or role needs to be recognized.

It's important to understand these differences when setting up guidelines. As you've learned, the United

States mediation model allows people to set their own guidelines and come up with their own solutions.

However, there may be times where people from particular cultures feel a little uncomfortable with that level of ambiguity.

➡ **EXAMPLE** People from certain cultures might prefer to have some rules or established procedures for how to proceed, rather than loose guidelines. This can allude, in turn, to the issue of status in terms of how power is recognized around the table.



TERM TO KNOW

Worldview

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

3. Principles of Cultural Competency

It's important to keep in mind that in order to be a culturally competent mediator, there are some principles you should follow:

- Be flexible
- Listen actively
- Ask questions
- Recognize complexity
- Respect differences

All of these principles work together to create cultural competency.

Flexibility is very important because you never know what you might discover in a process involving very different cultures, and there is complexity whenever you're bringing people from different cultures with different worldviews to the table together.

There will be differences, and it's important to respect and distinguish these perspectives. Once again, flexibility is important to accommodate these differences

All of this starts with self-awareness. If you want to be culturally competent in the conflict resolution process, you must be aware of your own communication style and worldview.



SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned that **cultural competency is a crucial part of the conflict resolution process**. Because the United States mediation model is based on our particular communication style and worldview, it's important for the mediator to **adapt these elements** in order to accommodate the people from other cultures who are part of the resolution process. You now understand that there are some **principles of cultural competency** in conflict resolution, such as being flexible, listening actively, asking questions, recognizing complexity, and respecting differences. At the forefront of all of these should be a self-awareness of your own personal communication style and worldview. Good luck!



TERMS TO KNOW

Communication Style

The way in which a culture or individuals consider communication to be correct/most effective.

Cultural Competency

The ability to recognize when culture may be playing a part in a conflict or communication difficulty and the ability to raise the role of culture in a way that helps overcome the problem.

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.