



Workshop Title: Resolving a conflict in intercultural environment

CODE: CA_L4_WA4_W2_FU

KEY COMPETENCE: Cultural Awareness

LEVEL 4

WORK AREA 4: Cross cultural communication

PARTNER: Folkuniversitetet

Duration: 4 hours



ANNEXES

Annex 1. Conflict types

Interpersonal conflict refers to a conflict between two individuals. This occurs typically due to how people are different from one another, including culturally.

Intrapersonal conflict occurs within an individual. The experience takes place in the person's mind. Hence, it is a type of conflict that is psychological involving the individual's contradicting thoughts, values, and principles (including cultural ones).

Intragroup conflict is a type of conflict that happens among individuals within a team. The incompatibilities and misunderstandings (including cultural ones) among these individuals lead to an intragroup conflict.

Intergroup conflict takes place when a (cultural) misunderstanding arises among different teams / groups within an organisation.

Constructive conflict refers to conflict in which the benefits exceed the costs; it generates productive, mutually beneficial, shared decisions. In constructive conflicts, the process becomes as important as the end result. Individuals come together to redefine or strengthen their relationship for the greater good of the parties involved. Constructive conflict has many positive benefits, including feelings of security and wellbeing.

Destructive conflict often flows from narrowly defined or rigid goals, and most often produces negative results. Individuals involved become less flexible and assume that the opposing party must suffer defeat. Involved parties succumb to personal attacks, threats and a general tone of hostility. Destructive conflict often contributes to an ongoing cycle of anger, fear and isolation between individuals and within a group. When destructive conflict occurs, the people involved will feel a number of negative emotions as well, such as rejection, resentment and shame.

Source:

<http://www.typesofconflict.org/types-of-conflict/>

Annex 2. CASE STUDY - Intercultural conflict

An American lady arrived in a small hotel in Mumbai. She was hungry, so the first thing she did was asking a friendly young guy at the reception for a good place to eat.

“There is a wonderful restaurant just to the right of the hotel. You won’t miss it. It’s called ‘Taj’, I strongly recommend it,” he told to the lady.

The lady walked out of the hotel and saw no restaurant on the right whatsoever.

The guy at the reception was surprised the lady didn’t find the hotel. Now he explained that “you just walk out of the hotel, cross the street, and the restaurant will be on your right, it has a sign. It’s by the clothing shop, you won’t miss it for sure”.

The lady precisely followed the instructions, but there was no restaurant. She walked for several minutes, but saw neither a restaurant, nor a clothing shop. She was hungry, and she felt a little annoyed with the guy, suspecting he was nothing but ‘messaging’ with her.

The guy looked scared, when he saw the lady returning once again. The lady complained angrily and enquired why the guy was fooling her. For every guest’s argument, the receptionist just kept saying ‘It’s straight to the right from the hotel’, being astonished by the lady not being able to find something so obvious.

In the end the guy had to suggest to walk the lady there. They left the hotel, crossed the street, turned to the right, and then walked for ten minutes, passing several side streets. At last, they reached the restaurant.

QUESTIONS FOR THE DISCUSSION:

1. What is the cultural context of the conflict?
2. Is it a constructive or a destructive conflict?
3. What possible negative consequences this conflict can bring for the hotel?
4. What possible benefits this conflict can bring to the hotel?
5. How can negative effects of this intercultural conflict be abolished or decreased?
6. How can positive sides of this conflict can be used intentionally?

The conflict in the case study is based on the differences between high context and low context cultures.

In the American culture people communicate as literally and explicitly as possible. Good communication requires clarity and explicitness, and accountability for accurate transmission of the message is placed firmly on the communicator. While in India messages are often conveyed implicitly, requiring the listener to read between the lines. Good communication is subtle, layered, and may depend on copious subtext, with responsibility for transmission of the message shared between the one sending the message and the one receiving it. Therefore, being an effective communicator vary dramatically from one culture to another.

Thus, the receptionist provided all of the information necessary for someone from his own culture to find Taj. An Indian living in the same cultural context would have figured out quickly where the restaurant was from what was explained.

Constructive conflicts have the following functions:

- function of detente between the antagonists, for example, between employees with different cultural backgrounds
- 'communicative' function, thanks to which people can learn about each other's cultures;
- function of accelerator and the driving force of improving the quality of the services in regards with intercultural communication;
- function of promoting a socially necessary cultural balance within the hotel staff;
- function of securing development of the organization (a hotel) through revelation of the opposing (cultural) interests, as well as opportunities for their analysis and determination of the necessary changes;
- function of re-evaluation of hotel's cultural values and norms towards more intercultural direction;
- function of strengthening loyalty of the hotel's staff

The functions of destructive conflict are the ones resulting in the decrease of profits and the quality of the services:

- dissatisfaction, bad state of mind, increased staff turnover, reduced productivity;
- reduction in the degree of cooperation in the future, destruction of the communications system, hotel's staff splitting into groups

- potential development of prejudices towards clients from certain cultures and subsequent worse service towards them
- blind devotion to one's group and subsequent counterproductive competition with other groups of the hotel;
- regarding the other party as an enemy, considering your goals as positive and the goals of the other party as negative;
- minimization of cooperation between the conflicting employees;
- increase of hostility between the conflicting parties with a decrease in communication and increase of hatred;
- shift in priorities: giving greater importance to the victory in the conflict rather than to solving a problem;
- development of new intercultural conflicts; consolidation of violent ways of solving problems among the hotel's staff.



Annex 4. Role play scenarios

Role playing scenario, profile 1 – Client lady

You are a 53 year old Russian businesswoman, who is a loyal VIP-client at one of the luxury hotels in Stockholm.

The background:

You decided to hand over your Versace dress (purchased at auction for 17,000 dollars) to the hotel laundry.

The laundry department did not clean the dress, as on the side of the dress they saw that the material and crystals were damaged. Employees returned the dress in the room, placing it gently on the bed and left a written message that washing the dress using an industrial washing machine is not possible, since it will damage the dress even more, and if you want, the dress can be given for dry cleaning.

When you returned to your room, you saw the neatly folded dress and the message on your bed. You immediately went to the Guest Relations and filed a complaint about the hotel damaging your expensive dress. The complaint was transferred to the Department manager, whom you are about to meet.

The task:

As a representative of a **relationship-based culture**, it is important for you that the hotel you stay trusts you, so that you can trust them as well. The whole situation with the dress is your little artifice in order to check the hotel's trust to you.

You know your dress had been already damaged before you gave it to the laundry. You are creating this conflict on purpose, because you want to check the real attitude of your favorite hotel towards you, its VIP client. This is your hidden goal. So if the hotel pays you for the dress, you will know you were not wrong about your choice. And of course, you will leave their money to them.

Since Russian culture belongs to **confrontational cultures**, a confrontation like this wouldn't damage your relationships with the hotel, in case they prove you their attitude. This is also why

in the conversation with the Guest Relations manager that you are about to have now, you can be quite conflictual. You are supposed to claim the money for your 'damaged' dress and never admit you knew it had been already damaged until you get the full amount of 17,000 dollars in your hands.

As a representative of **high-context culture**, during the conversation you read between the lines / 'listen to the air', trying to reveal the hotel's attitude towards you, paying attention to every small detail of the Guest Relations manager's behavior. You know it's not just words that you have to pay attention to. So if you notice something suspicious in the manager's behavior or think he doesn't mean what he says, feel free to bring this up.

Role playing scenario, profile 2 – Guest Relations manager

You are the manager of Guest Relations Department at one of the luxury hotels in Stockholm.

The background:

The loyal 'VIP' returning guest, who always spends much money in your hotel, handed Versace dress (purchased at auction for 17,000 dollars) to your hotel laundry.

The laundry department did not clean the dress, as on the side of the dress they saw that the material and crystals were damaged. Employees returned the dress in the room, placing it gently on the bed and left a written message that washing the dress using an industrial washing machine is not possible, since it will damage the dress even more, and if you the guest wants, the dress can be given for dry cleaning.

Once the guest returned to her room, she saw the neatly folded dress and the message on her bed. She immediately went to the Guest Relation and filed a complaint about the hotel damaging her expensive dress. The complaint was transferred to you, the Department manager. You are now about to meet the guest.

The task:

You know 100% that your staff did not spoil the dress and that it's most likely that the Russian guest is trying to take advantage of you.

However, your hotel policy is that the client is always right.

You are Swedish, and as a representative of **this task-based culture**, you would normally search for who is right in the situation and act accordingly. The relationships in the task-based cultures are dropped easily, based on the practicality of the situation. Nevertheless, in the situation described you are torn what to do, as this VIP guest is bringing good profit to the hotel.

Your goal in the conversation is to 'disagree productively', finding the conflict resolution strategy that would be the hotel's best interest. You need to decide whether you pay the money or not and how much (in case you do).

During the conversation, as a representative of Swedish **low-context culture**, you try to be very explicit in what you say. You also try to **avoid any confrontation** as much as possible, as it is both against the hotel's policy and your cultural mentality.



Annex 5 Answer guideline for the trainer

Due to:

- Very high image / reputation risks, related to important VIP clients
- Possible loss of a loyal and returning client
- Risks, related to the guest belonging to **high-context** and **confrontational culture**. In particular, the guest can misinterpret the manager's messages, hearing things the manager didn't include in his message. This can be followed by destructive actions from the guest's side, such as a scandal that would go beyond the walls of the hotel.
- Ethical factor of the probability that it was actually not a guest, who damaged the dress, the recommended conflict resolution strategy for the Guest Relations manager would be **smoothing**:
 - To check if the dress actually costs \$17,000
 - To reimburse the guest the exact same amount

This solution is also supported by the hotel's policy that the guest is always right.

Additionally, it is important for the Guest Relations manager to be explicit and treat the guest the way a VIP-client from **a culture with high power distance** should be treated. The manager should take into account cultural characteristics of the client, possibly arranging the conversation in a deeper personal way, which promotes trust within **relationship-based cultures**.

Annex 6 Tips for conflict resolution in intercultural communication

Cultural conflict and intercultural communication

- People may consider themselves similar when common or shared cultural values, norms and attitudes exist.
- People may stop communicating or understanding each other when they view others to be different
- Conflicts could arise through misunderstanding or lack of communication
- Successful team leaders are required to focus on cultural conflict recognising and problem solving in an international organisation
- Developing effective intercultural communication skills among your team is the key to their success

4 rules to develop effective intercultural communication skills:

1. Assume cultural differences rather than seek similarities, because once the similarities have been found, it would be difficult to accept cultural differences later on
2. Focus on describing or evaluating behaviours, not individuals, to make other people less defensive.
3. Try to think or behave from other people's point of view because it is easy to communicate when there is an understanding of other people's needs.
4. Do not hesitate to seek additional information from others rather than only listen to one person because there might be misrepresentation or miscommunication among people.

In interacting with individuals from other cultures, differences in conflict resolution strategies emerge.

Tips for a representative of an individualist culture, finding themselves in a conflict with an individual from a collectivistic culture:

- 1) Be aware of face-saving concerns, especially in terms of balancing humiliation and pride, respect and disrespect, and shame and honor.
- 2) Be patient and observe mindfully. Give yourself a few seconds before responding. Be aware of past experiences that are shaping your behavior in this one. Also, collectivists tend to focus on 'how' questions, so be aware of this and limit your 'why' questions.
- 3) Be a mindful listener. Pay attention to nonverbal cues.

Tips for representative of a collectivist culture, finding themselves in a conflict with an individual from an individualist culture:

- 1) Try to be assertive and practice a conflict resolution strategy that allows everyone the right to speak equally.
- 2) Use "I" statements and ask more 'why' questions.
- 3) As a mindful listener, paraphrase often and learn to occasionally verbalize your emotions, attitudes, and experiences within the conflict situation itself. That is, don't rely too heavily on nonverbal cues or count on others to read yours.

Sources:

<https://www.universalclass.com/articles/business/intercultural-communication/how-to-manage-intercultural-conflicts.htm>

<https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1023525/FULLTEXT01.pdf>