

Seeking a New Career or Advancement

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Cross-Cultural Communication

You will be working with many different people from different cultures and in different time zones all over the world. Cross-cultural communication will help you understand the similarities and differences among different cultural groups and engage with different people from different cultures. For people to work together in teams and organizations, they need to understand each other well across cultures.

Working with people from other cultures

Your teams and organizations will have members from all over the world. There will be cultural differences between you and them. Some things you do will be different from how they do them. Since you are working with them, you need to understand each other to work together efficiently. Here are some ways to improve your cross-cultural communications:

- Research and study the cultures of people you work with. Find out what types of gestures and actions they use for communication. Find out if there are any gestures you use that are offensive to them and avoid those gestures. Find out which gestures they understand and try to use those.
- Don't use slang when having cross-cultural communications. Your slang comes from your culture and other cultures may not understand what it means. In some cases slang from your culture may offend people from other cultures.
- Be careful with humor. Different cultures have different understandings of humor. What is funny in your culture might not be funny in other cultures. People from those cultures may be confused. Sometimes humor that's funny in one culture is offensive in others.
- Speak slower if someone asks you to, but don't speak too slow or it may offend the other person.

Problems with cross cultural communication

Problems happen with cross-cultural communication, but if you know what causes them, you can avoid them. Here are some of the problems that can happen:

- Gesture problems - Simple gestures in one culture can mean something different in another. You may use a gesture that's positive in your culture, but is offensive to the person you are communicating with from another culture. In the same way, another culture's positive gesture may be offensive to you.
- Stereotyping - Stereotyping is offensive, and it gives you the wrong ideas about cultures. Sometimes well-meaning people mistake stereotypes for knowledge of a culture and use them to communicate with members of that culture.
- Misunderstood humor - Most cultures have some form of humor and jokes. People from other cultures might be confused by your joke, or, in some cases, jokes that are funny to you might offend people from other cultures.
- Differences in messaging - You might send an email and find it either doesn't get a response, or the response is slow. Some cultures treat email and other communications differently. You might come from a culture where individuals answer emails right away, but the culture you sent the email to doesn't respond until their whole team looks at the email.
- Time zone problems - The world has 24 time zones, one for each hour. You need to check where the people you are communicating with are and what time zones they're in. Problems happen when someone in one time zone calls out at a regular time like 9:00 in the morning, but the person on the other end of the communication has to wake up at 3:00 in the morning to take the communication. The receiver sees this as inconsiderate and it can lead to conflict and lost opportunities.

Managing Conflict

When people work together, there will be some miscommunications. Problems with interpersonal communications, cross-cultural communications and clashing thoughts and ideas create conflict. Conflict can make your team inefficient since members have a difficult time working together. Being able to manage conflict will keep conflict from harming productivity and help your team work together toward goals even if they disagree with each other.

Why does conflict happen?

Conflict happens for many reasons. Here are a few of the situations that cause conflict:

- Personality conflict - Every person is different, and each person has their own personality. Sometimes these personalities clash.
- Work environment problems - Having a negative work environment leads to conflict. It's important to keep a safe, comfortable work environment to prevent conflict.
- Interpersonal communication problems - Misunderstandings and negative responses to criticism cause conflict.
- Cross-cultural communication problems - Cultural misunderstandings and assumptions may create conflicts.

How do I solve conflict?

Conflict is natural when people work together. People have different ideas and disagree. Once conflict happens, you need to solve the conflict before it becomes worse.

- Address issues as soon as you see them. Meet with the team members involved with the conflict and listen to what each of them has to say. Give each of them a chance to share their side of the conflict.
- Be clear about what each side needs and address the situation. Once you know what each side needs and you heard both sides' information about the conflict, find a resolution that will stop further conflict.
- Prevent conflict by keeping a safe, pleasant work environment. Keep the environment positive. Encourage open, friendly communication between team members. If there are minor disagreements, let them share them in an open, positive environment and put them aside before they create bigger problems.
- Encourage team members to share their ideas and cultures with the rest of the team often to promote cultural understanding and prevent cross-cultural communication problems.

What if I'm in the middle of the conflict?

As an IT professional, you will face conflict at times in your career. Conflict will happen, and dealing with it well will stop it from getting in the way of your work. Handling conflict and interruptions is important for success in your field. Here are some times you may be faced with conflict:

- Critical feedback - How you take criticism can lead to knowledge or conflict. When you receive criticism:
 - Listen actively to what the other person is saying. Figure out the point they are telling you. Is it constructive criticism? If it is, thank them and learn from it. Work on improving what they criticized you about.
 - If the criticism is empty criticism or hostile criticism, don't fight back. If the person keeps doing it, report the hostile behavior to your supervisor. If you fight back, it will end in conflict.
- Interruptions - Sometimes someone will interrupt you while you are speaking. When you deal with an interrupter:
 - Find a time to talk to the interruptor in private and tell them you are upset about the interruptions. Say something like, "Please let me finish my sentences when I speak. I would be happy to answer any questions or discuss any points after I finish speaking".
 - When they interrupt you at a meeting or in a conversation, calmly ask them to let you finish your sentence. If you react with hostility, your reaction will create conflict.

Key takeaways

- Having good interpersonal communication skills will help you throughout your career as a team member and as a leader. Knowing which type of communication to use helps you get messages across in specific situations.
- You will be working with people from all over the world in your career. Having cross-cultural communication skills will help you understand them and show respect for their cultures. It will also help you teach them about your culture and prevent misunderstandings.
- Managing conflict is important when you are dealing with a team or organization and other team members. Always listen with an open mind to all sides of the conflict.
- When someone criticizes you, responding with hostility will create conflict. If the criticism is constructive, learn from it.
- A safe, comfortable workplace helps prevent conflict.
- Instead of responding to an interrupter with hostility, calmly ask them to let you finish your sentence.

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