

What Is Intercultural Conflict?

It's commonly believed that work teams that are composed of culturally diverse workers are more creative and productive than those that are homogeneous. While this has been proven to be true among well-integrated and fully-functional groups it has been increasingly reported that the differences that bring diverse viewpoints and ideas also result in more conflict.

Cross-cultural conflict occurs when employees with different cultural values or beliefs disagree about how to resolve issues and problems. These differences can evidence themselves by anything from simple arguments to formal complaints to the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

Culture is much more than external differences in language, dress, and food customs. Culture is also composed of internal factors such as ways of thinking, problem solving, respect for authority, communication styles, urgency to address challenges and much more. This makes its influence difficult to recognize and address without specialized training.

Intercultural conflict can be the result of different negotiation styles, decision-making methods, or even opposing views about how to resolve conflict. In today's global workplace, culture is an integral part of conflict and conflict resolution. Culture gives us messages that shape our perceptions, attributions, judgments, and ideas of self and others. Though culture is powerful, it is often unconscious but still influences conflict and attempts to resolve conflict in imperceptible ways unless the participants have been trained to be aware of differences and how to bridge them.

Cross-cultural conflict can be a positive force in the workplace (see article "The Power of Intercultural Conflict") but it must be managed. Contact us for a free consultation about how to harness the power of diversity in your company by calling (800) 417-7325.

About the author: Michael Soon Lee, DBA, is a cultural expert and author of eight books about overcoming cultural conflict including, "Cross-Cultural Selling for Dummies" and "Black Belt Negotiating". Dr. Lee has spoken to over 1,000 organizations around the world such as Coca-Cola, Chevron, Boeing, State Farm Insurance, and Charles Schwab.