

INTERCULTURAL AWARENESS AND INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE: 5 GOLDEN RULES

INTERCULTURAL CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

ERMES

ENHANCING
RESOURCES FOR
MOBILITY
EXPERIENCES AND
STRATEGIES

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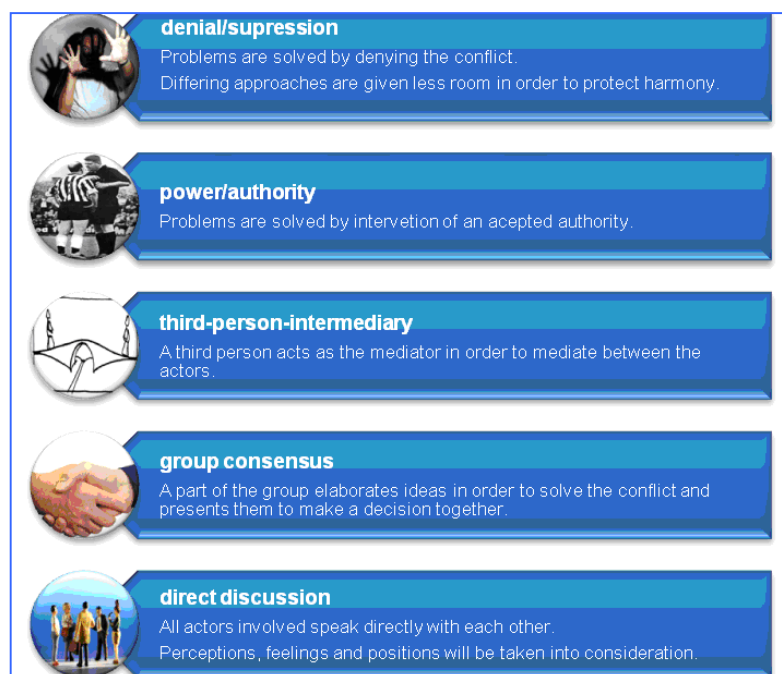
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MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES IN INTERCULTURAL CONFLICTS

Different strategies to solve a conflict

There are different ways of solving a conflict. These strategies are highly dependent on respective culture standards. The following conflict solving strategies exist in all cultures but are preferred to a different extent. It is to be taken into consideration that on a national culture level there are manifold conflict approaches among the individuals as every person is influenced by different sub cultures.



Adapted from Bennett 1995

Exercise

Case study to reflect different conflict management strategies

Step 1:

Please read the following case study and reflect the different conflict management strategies. Arrange the following options in the order that seems most likely to you. Try to anticipate the position of the person introduced in the case study.

Step 2:

Case: Roberto is Italian and he works as a supervisor for foreign staff members. He has developed an idea on how to assist the German colleagues at the Italian branch office. His German colleague Andrea has noticed that the implementation of this idea could cause irritations among the German staff.

Imagine you were Andrea: what would you do?

- I would talk with a friend of mine and ask his advice on what to do in this situation.
- I would not do anything. Probably no relevant problems will arise.
- I would see my boss and talk to him/her about my concerns.
- I would just talk to Roberto and tell him honestly what I think. Then I would propose to search for a better alternative together.
- I would see my friend who is also a friend of Roberto and ask him to talk to him with regard to this matter.

Step 3:

Discuss the individual rankings in small groups, reflecting the criteria which have led to the particular ranking.

Step 4:

Discuss with the whole group: how would the ranking differ if Roberto was Alfred from Germany, the German colleagues were Chinese, the Italian office was a German office and the German colleague Andrea was the Chinese colleague Ping?

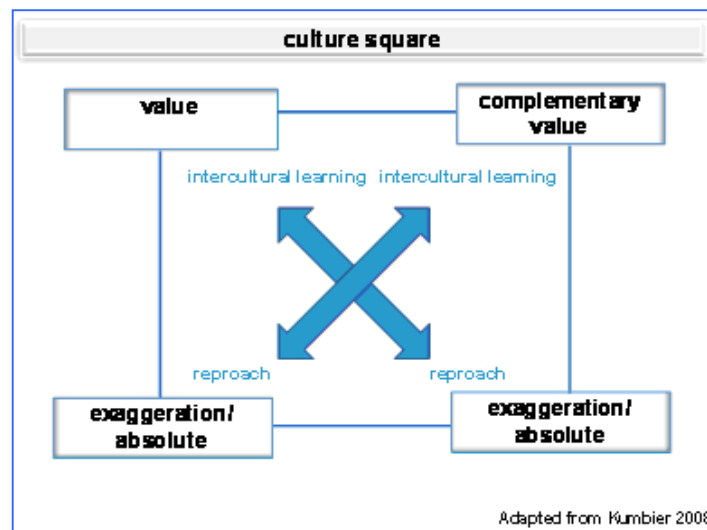
Handling of intercultural dilemma in international business

Intercultural irritations may arise from the assumption of individuals, being part of a certain group with agreed culture standards, to appreciate their values extremely high whereas they define the opposite value as worthless.

Individuals with intercultural intelligence will however approach the opposite value of the counterpart as being complementary for the own culture.

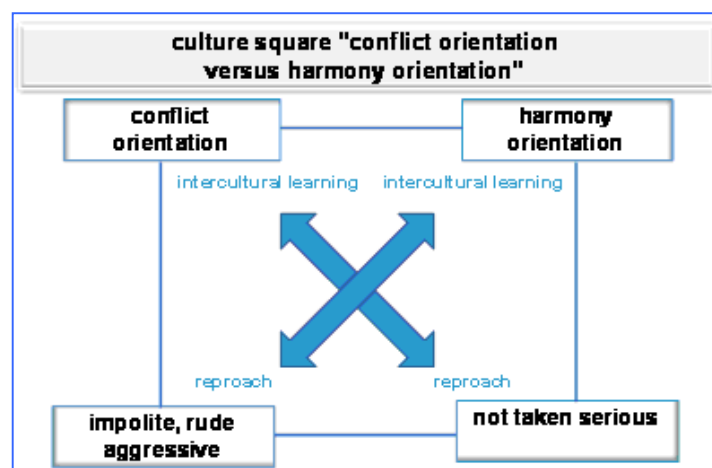
The *culture square* outlines that

- every value becomes worthless if it is exaggerated or seen as absolute.
- every value has a complementary value to balance and complement it.



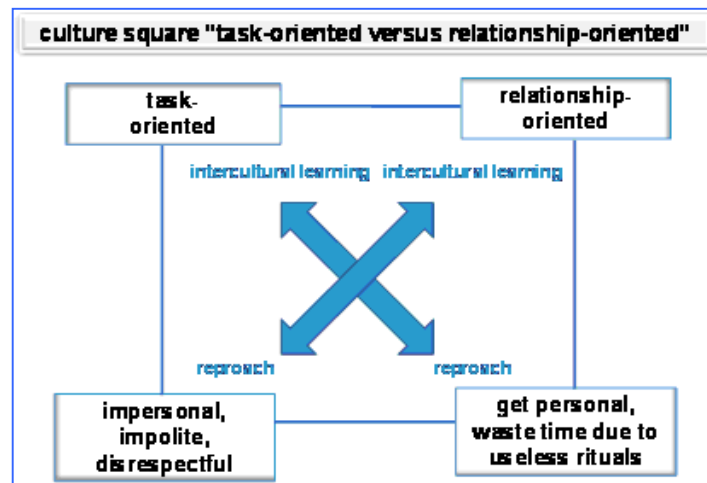
There are various dilemmas due to manifold culture standards of different international business partners collaborating. These are to be reflected and taken into consideration in order to handle intercultural irritations or solve intercultural conflicts.

Conflict orientation versus harmony orientation



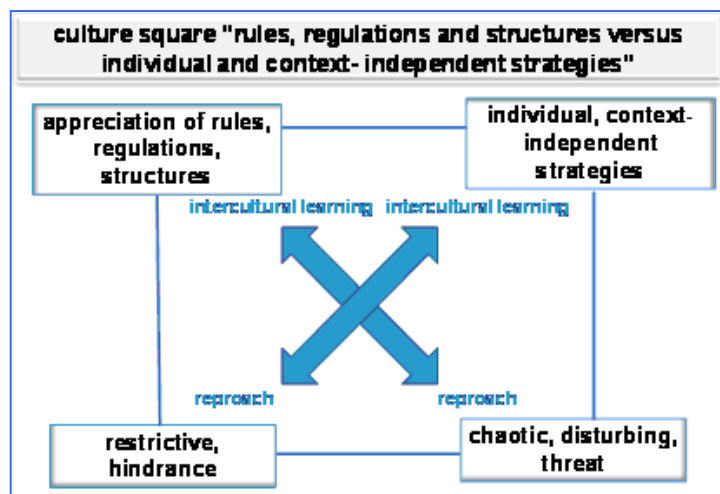
In some cultures harmony is considered as being essential for team work and work relationships. In order to maintain a positive social atmosphere, statements are either to be avoided completely if they contain negative messages or criticism or they are to be forwarded in a way, so the person being criticised does not lose his/her face. In other cultures people tend to confront conflicts in a direct manner. Criticism is to be expressed and problems are to be addressed in order to solve problems.

Task-orientation versus relationship orientation



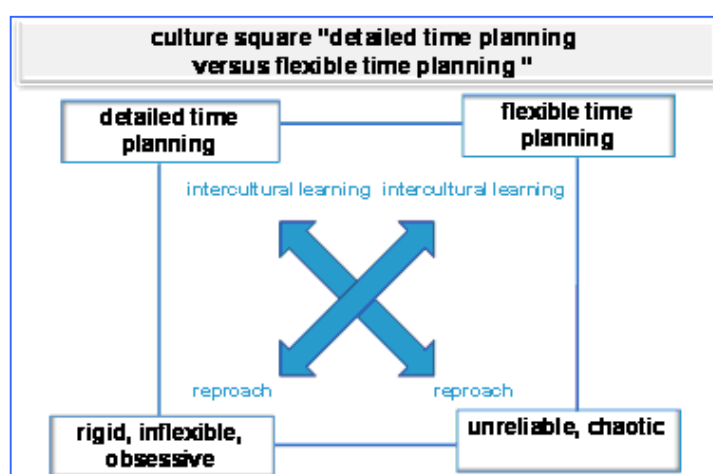
When people meet, they meet on at least two levels: on the task level which deals with content and is objective, and on the social-emotional level which deals with individual emotions and relationships. Cultural differences in international collaboration occur when for example in a meeting one person's culture may place more emphasis on the task level whereas the other person's culture sees the social-emotional level as more important. Collaboration partners who mainly focus on the tasks may appear rather impersonal. They appear satisfied when they are able to communicate with their collaboration partners about task-oriented matters. In other business cultures a good personal relationship between the collaboration partners is seen as the basis of a fruitful cooperation. For these people it is hardly possible to agree about work packages or common strategies without a reliable relationship based on social contact in order to build mutual trust.

Rules, regulations and structures versus individual and context-independent strategies



Doing successful business requires both: reliable regulations and agreements of employees and clients and the necessary flexibility to adapt to the rapid changes of the globalised market and initiate a continuous process of improvement. In order to face these challenges some enterprises attempt to develop clear rules and procedures. They search for security by defining responsibilities and tasks for all employees. Other companies find this approach rather restricting than supporting. They are used to undefined and unclear situations and seek for freedom in order to develop their personal strategies to face challenging and unforeseen situations.

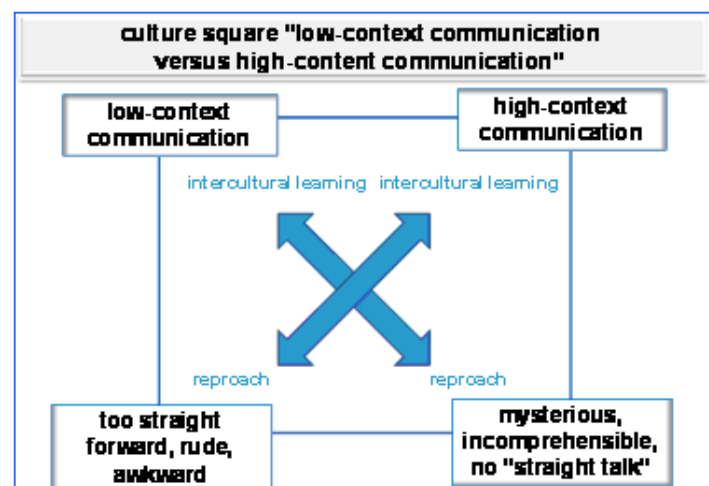
Detailed time planning versus flexible time planning



Time can be structured and used in many different ways. There are cultures in which people see time as a good that is available sufficiently. They prefer a flexible time planning and make rough plans but then act spontaneously depending on the

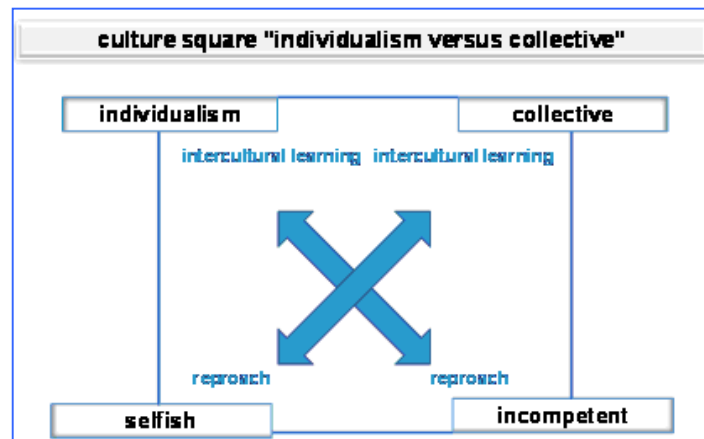
given situation. They take things as they come and react by adapting to what appears to them to be the important needs at the moment. Thus, they alternate between different courses of action often and quickly, sometimes following an only roughly defined goal or fulfilling some short-term requirements. In other cultures people draw up considerably more detailed timelines and structure each step in order to reach their goals. Time is perceived as a valuable good which should not be wasted. Therefore a great deal of effort is put into good time management and punctuality. People with detailed time planning prefer to organise tasks step by step. They concentrate at a particular time on a particular thing.

Low-context communication versus high-context communication



The term “context” refers to information in a statement that remains unspoken. How much information is explicitly and clearly expressed varies from culture to culture. If a large amount of the message remains unspoken, it is considered to have a “high-context”. In order to understand the message behind what has been said, the receiver has to share the social matters and certain rituals of communication of the sender. If most of the message is verbally formulated and does not need additional interpretation, the amount of context necessary to understand it is low. This is termed as “low-context”.

Individualism versus collective



Collaboration in a team of enterprise always challenges the question how to balance personal interests and the interest of the group or company. There are two

different approaches: collective cultures emphasise the loyalty towards the company, cooperative decision taking and good personal relationships among the group members. Individualism on the other hand is focused on the person as an individual and its individual freedom. Personal independence and self-sufficiency are highly regarded. The primary identity is the personal identity of the individual, which distinguishes and characterises the individual from all other people. The right or obligation of each individual to take responsibility for his/her own life plays an important role in this context.

Dealing with intercultural conflicts in a constructive manner

In order to deal with intercultural conflicts in a constructive manner it is essential to follow basic principles of the mediation concept:

Distinguish between person and problem

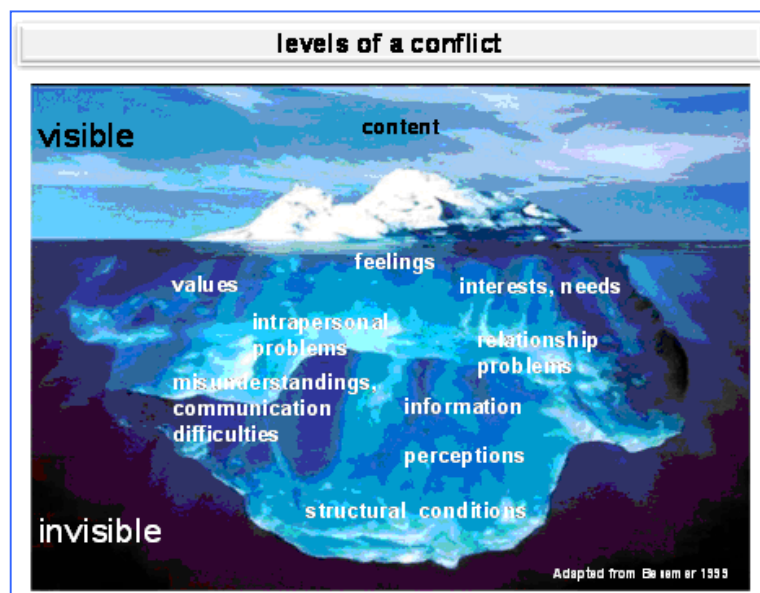
That implies to search for a solution of a problem without attacking the business partner as a person. In an intercultural context it is extremely important to keep in mind not to provoke that the partner "looses his/her face". Therefore it is vital to explicitly distinguish between the issue at conflict and the person.

Distinguish between position and need

The needs behind the respective positions are to be revealed. This way mutual understanding will be facilitated and it be easier to find a solution. To outline needs is essential, whenever culture-specific positions are advocated, as they often lead to culture relevant misunderstandings and irritations.

Analyse the different levels of a conflict

In most cases a conflict will only show superficial viewpoints. In order to analyse and solve a conflict in a constructive manner, it is essential to take the other levels into consideration.



Keep up communication or establish contact again

In order to solve a conflict in a constructive manner, it is vital for the conflict partners to remain in contact or to get in contact again. How this will be implemented best, taking into account the different culture standards of the actors involved, depends on the relevant individual, culture-specific or context-dependent requirements. It might make sense to talk face-to-face, involve a third party, address the topic in directly or indirectly, etc.

Search for new solutions

Alternative solutions in a conflict should be worked out involving the conflict partners. All actors are to act with cultural sensibility.