

# INTERCULTURAL AWARENESS AND INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE: 5 GOLDEN RULES

## WHAT IS AN INTERCULTURAL CONFLICT

**ERMES**

ENHANCING  
RESOURCES FOR  
MOBILITY  
EXPERIENCES AND  
STRATEGIES

LLP-LdV-TOI-11-IT-592  
Agreement N° 2011-1-IT1-LEO05-01895  
CUP G32F11000090006

## Colophon

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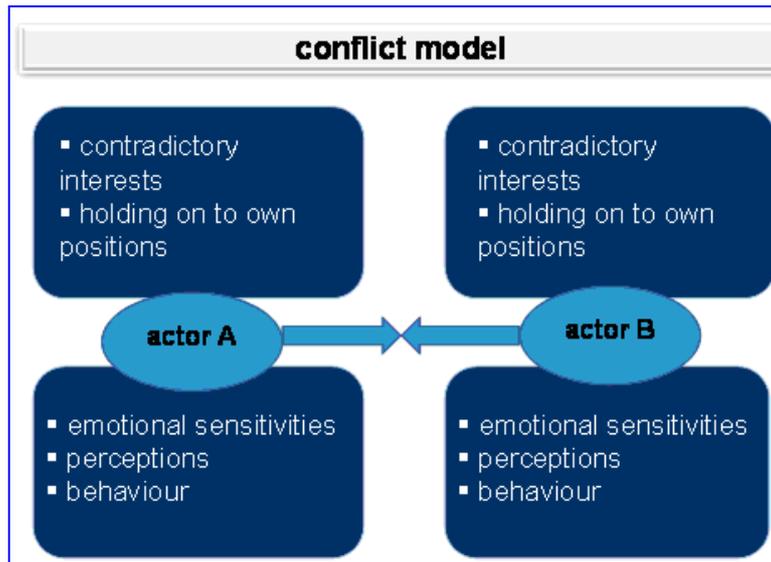
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## CULTURES AND CONFLICTS

### What is intercultural conflict?

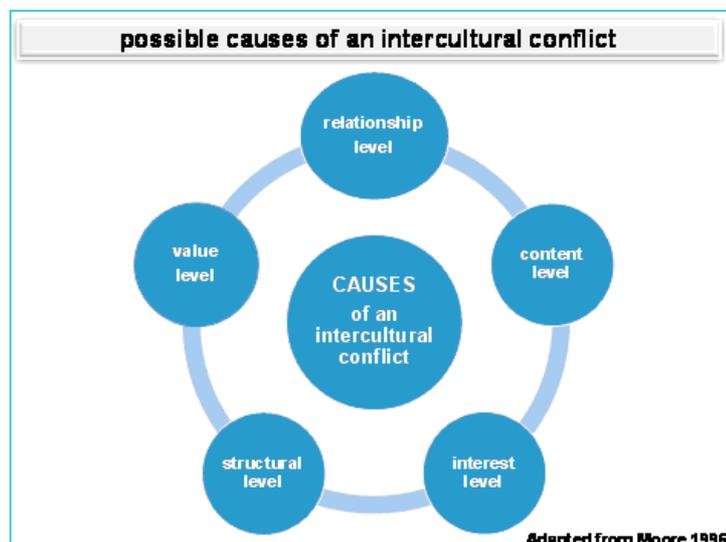
A conflict emerges within the context of social interaction between actors (individuals, groups, enterprises, states, etc.). At least one actor has to have an (apparently) contradictory approach with regard to the way of thinking, feeling, perceiving, interpreting or acting.



The conflict partners argue based on their individual perceptions and reality constructs, which are determined by the individual himself/herself, society and culture. **Intercultural conflicts are evoked by (apparently) contradictory reality constructs of the conflict partners due to their different (implicit) culture standards.**

### Possible causes of an intercultural conflict

In most cases the reasons for a conflict are complex. Therefore it has to be assumed that there are manifold levels that may have an impact on an intercultural conflict.



### Relationship level

Adapted from Moore 1996

If the relationship level is cause of an intercultural conflict, it may be due to strong emotions of the actors, misunderstandings due to language problems or different communication conventions or stereotypes, which lead to negative perceptions, interpretations and actions.

### **Content level**

On the surface conflicts, which occur on the content level, are due to differing information, forwarding of misleading information or loss of essential information.

### **Interest level**

Conflicts on the interest level are mostly evoked by a perceived, interpreted or experienced situation of competition.

### **Structural level**

The reasons for intercultural conflicts on a structural level appear in destructive behaviour or interaction, unequal distribution of power and resources or other structural hindrances for cooperation.

### **Value level**

The value level implies that the conflict emerges from different criteria and interpretations with regard to positions and behaviour. Furthermore they are based on different attitudes towards life, ideologies, religions, etc.

The different levels may have more or less impact on the individual intercultural conflict but they always affect each other and therefore are to be conceived as components of a system, which are to be analysed in order to be able to identify, manage and solve a conflict.

### **Different conflict strategies**

Every individual is capable to apply different strategies in order to deal with a conflict. These strategies become visible in the way a person reacts emotionally or behaves in a concrete conflict situation. There are five different strategies of

approaching a conflict, which in principle every person has at his/her disposal. Which one will be applied, depends on the situation and the particular context.

### **Attack strategy**

A person choosing this approach will play an active role in a conflict, defending his/her own position and attitude in a confronting manner. Other people might feel offended, challenged or intimidated by this approach.

### **Defence strategy**

A person choosing this approach will rather start to defend himself/herself and will try to justify his/her own position. Other people might perceive such a conflict partner as insecure.

### **Escape strategy**

A person choosing this approach will withdraw very quickly and step out of a conflict situation in order to avoid trouble. Other people might not be able to understand such a strategy at all.

### **Freeze strategy**

A person choosing this approach will keep silent and internally withdraw, remaining isolated. He/she experiences fundamental fears.

### **Distraction strategy**

A person choosing this approach will come up with a completely different issue in the middle of the conflict situation, or will bring in a person that has not taken an active role in the conflict originally.

Every culture knows conflicts and has developed specific approaches to handle conflicts. These strategies are closely connected with the respective values shared by members of a group.

Cultures do not principally differ concerning fundamental values but are only different with regard to the degree. Therefore the diverse conflict 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.

The preferred strategy in conflict situations worldwide is to avoid the conflict. (cf. Augsburg 1992). Certainly the approaches of avoidance are manifold, e.g. by remaining silent in the conflict, by breaking contact, by avoiding personal get-togethers or even by staff replacements.