

Culture Conflict

I knew my new roommate was Chinese, and yet I could not understand what he was saying. Was this really Chinese he was speaking? We went to the public baths and he kept his underwear on. I had never seen anybody do that before. Is he really Chinese?

It becomes more and more common for those people who enjoy different cultures to have such an experience as that above. Cooked in wine, snails are a great luxury in various parts of the world. However, some people would never recognize snails as such a great delicacy. One man's meat is another man's poison.

Cultures shape our perceptions, attributions, judgments, and ideas of self and other. Though cultures are powerful, they are often unconscious, influencing conflict and attempts to resolve conflict in imperceptible ways. During our processes of growing up, the very culture around us is shaping what we see and don't see, how we perceive and interpret, and where we draw boundaries. We may mistake differences between others and us for evidence of bad faith or lack of common sense on the part of others, not realizing that common sense is also cultural. What is common to one group may seem strange, counterintuitive, or wrong to another.

If we have a further thought on the essence, culture is always a factor in conflict, whether it plays a central role or influences it subtly and gently. Conflicts between teenagers and parents are shaped by generational culture, and conflicts between spouses or partners are influenced by gender culture. In organizations, conflicts arising from different disciplinary cultures escalate tensions between co-workers, creating strained or inaccurate communication and stressed relationships. Intractable conflicts like the Israeli-Palestinian conflict or the India-Pakistan conflict over Kashmir are not just about territorial, boundary, and sovereignty issues -- they are also about acknowledgement, representation, and legitimization of different identities and ways of living, being, and making meaning.

Given culture conflict's complication, what should be done to smooth the suffering conflict?

Effective communicating

It is communication with others who are different from us which brings variety that makes people experience those kinds of culture conflicts. In most cases, few would like to live in the same area for a life time. People need something fresh, different from their own experience, and hence conflicts occur during this process.

The world advances because of "difference." How could it progress if the entire human race follows the same footprint of our ancestors? Thus, learning from those people who have a different mind will bring one creative thoughts.

Admittedly, people who are brought up in different circumstances do suffer from culture conflicts. The most unfortunate thing in the world is misunderstanding between those who have a different cultural environment. How could two be in harmony with each other without understanding and forgiving?

Effective communication needs some skills, which are very important to smooth the conflict. For example, if I invite a foreign friend for dinner, it is proper to ask the taboos according to his/her culture. I should ask indirectly if it is sensitive to ask. To communicate more effectively, one should think and speak in another's culture habit.

Culture conflicts are always hurting, but we can make it easier to deal with when considering effective communication. We have more similarities than differences though we have different culture backgrounds. If everyone is considering more about others in their cultural attitude, those culture conflicts are less suffering.