

Translating Cultures in International Mediation

Stefanie Stadler-Norman



Differences in Disagreement/ Relational Orientation

- Cultures differ in the way they view, relate and orient to disagreement and relationships
- These different stances influence how dissent is approached and how conflict is addressed and resolved
- In order to understand how to facilitate between cultures it is necessary to understand how cultural orientations and communicative practices are intertwined

Overview

- This paper will address 3 issues:
 - **Differences** in orientation to disagreement and relationships
 - **Impact** of these differences on intercultural communication
 - **Competencies** that can help in the facilitation/mediation process

DIFFERENCES

Differences in Disagreement

- German Culture

- Disagreement does not need to be avoided
- A heated debate is enjoyable
- Dissent is expressed openly or exacerbated
- Lack of disagreement is boring
- Emotions are displayed openly
- Disagreement does not necessarily indicate conflict

- Asian/ Anglo-saxon Cultures

- Disagreement is to be avoided
- Seek agreement and common ground
- Dissent should be played down
- Emotions are restrained
- Disagreement is a precursor to conflict

Differences in Relational Orientations

- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kc50NUInsi0>

Differences in Relationships

- German Culture
 - Disagreement can be sociable
 - Disagreement does not affect relationships
 - Strong relationships can withstand disagreement
- Asian/ Anglo-saxon Cultures
 - Social harmony and politeness are foregrounded
 - Disagreement threatens social bonds
 - Disagreement affects relationship maintenance

IMPACT

How differences influence how we deal with conflict

• German Culture

- Disagrees freely and openly
- Expresses honest opinions (even if they are very blunt and straightforward)
- Does not consider a need for face-work
- Does not avoid conflict and dissent
- Will see less of a need to resolve conflict

• Asian/ Anglo-saxon Cultures

- Holds back with disagreement
- Stronger concern for other's face-needs
- Avoids dissent and escalation of conflict
- Will seek to avoid conflict and resolve it
- If there is a serious conflict situation it will likely be perceived as worse and less resolvable

Consequences

- Different cultures differ in their assessment of:
 - Whether something is a conflict situation or not
 - The severity of the conflict
 - The impact it has on social relations
 - Whether it requires facilitation/mediation
 - The consequences of the conflict

COMPETENCIES

Relevant Competencies

- Attuned: Watch out for subtle signals that give away how the other party feels about what has been said/done (Early detection)
- Building of shared knowledge: Making aims, goals, motivations clear
- Interpersonal attentiveness: Being sensitive to face-concerns/needs
- Rapport building: Investing time to work on good relationships
- Synergistic solutions: Finding solutions that meet the needs of all parties
- Self-awareness: How self is perceived by others and how they react to self
- Acceptance: Accepting differences and being prepared to work with them
- Flexibility: Readiness to abandon rigid behaviours and adapt to current situations/circumstances

Example: Attuning

- 1 **B:** Can I just ask one question? xxxxxx If I understood you, xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx you were talking about the aspirations
C: m
NV:
- 2 **B:** for teachers, xxxxxx and xxx I think you used the word their knowledge of design. xxxxxx Does that imply
C: mhm mhm
NV: I-nod-I I-pronounced nod-I
- 3 **B:** that you see the role of teachers as authoring and creating their own materials xxx for use in
C: mhmmm
V: I--emphatic—I
NV: I-----two very slow nods-----I I-pronounced nodI
- 4 **B:** computer based learning? xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx
C: mhm
V: I-reluctant-I
NV: I-hesitant nod-I I-repeated minimal nods-I
- 5 **B:** Should I read that into what you say? xx oh maybe I'm not clear.

Example: Interpersonal Attentiveness

- http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/cross_fac/globalpeople/competency/relationships/interpersonal/
- **Case Study Example: Giving face**
- During a visit of members of their Chinese partners' team, the Head of Department (HoD) of the UK institution engages in positive face-giving practices during a project meeting. This practice shows good-will, appreciation for the partners' status and authority and creates a basis for maintaining relationships.
- The partners were discussing the need to pilot the material that they were jointly developing. The senior Chinese project member mentioned the difficulties and costs that the Chinese team would face if material was to be piloted at the Chinese partner institution. The following exchange then took place:
- HoD: [...] *We have many international students, some of whom will be Chinese who will love to do additional work.*
- Some: (Laughter)
- HoD: *No, they will, when they get another course free, which it will be, in a subject area that is relevant to them, so this will be a big plus – especially when they know that (name of the senior Chinese project member) is involved, famous Professor from Beijing, so this will be great [...] this will be a big tick [...] we can really build that up into a big plus. We'll be carefully selecting volunteers because we know we'll have so many*

Way Forward

- In order to facilitate intercultural understanding we need to:
 - Deepen and broaden our understanding of cultural differences in perceptions of and attitudes towards conflict
 - Understand the impact such differences have on conflict management
 - Find meaningful ways of dealing with differences
 - Develop relevant competencies that help foster better mutual understanding and synergistic solutions

Thank You !



SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES
& SOCIAL SCIENCES

Contact Information

s.stadler@ntu.edu.sg

www.globalpeople.org.uk



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