FREE GUIDE · MULTICULTURAL TEAMS

Cross-cultural conflict: a reading grid

5 differences that create misunderstandings, the question to understand, and 5 checks before jumping to conclusions.

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A remark that hurts without meaning to. A silence you take for agreement. Someone you find "difficult".

In a multicultural team, many personality clashes are really different codes: each person reads the other through their own.

I appreciate that you want to understand before you judge. Now, I invite you to check your interpretations before you conclude.

Ayoub

Neither of you is wrong

The truth isn't in your version, or in theirs. There are two perceptions, and two codes.

Clarifying them is often enough to resolve the conflict. And there's only one way to do it: ask, before you assume.

1 Saying things directly, or not

"Your report isn't good, redo it." For one person, that's efficient. For another, it's humiliating.

WHAT MAY BE AT PLAY In some settings, frankness is a sign of respect. In others, it feels like an attack.

TO UNDERSTAND **"How would you prefer I tell you when something isn't working?"**

2 Silence

You ask "no objections?". Silence. Two people disagreed.

WHAT MAY BE AT PLAY Silence can mean agreement, polite disagreement, or simply time to think.

TO UNDERSTAND **"I'd rather hear your concerns now. Who wants to add something, even privately after the meeting?"**

3 Hierarchy

Someone never points out your mistakes in meetings. You conclude they lack critical thinking.

WHAT MAY BE AT PLAY For some people, contradicting their manager in public is unthinkable. They do it in private, or not at all.

TO UNDERSTAND **"Your perspective is useful to me, even when you disagree with me. How would you prefer to tell me?"**

4 Time and deadlines

A "late" deliverable: a lack of respect for one person, a normal adjustment for another.

WHAT MAY BE AT PLAY For some, a deadline is a firm commitment. For others, a guideline that adjusts to circumstances.

TO UNDERSTAND **"When we set a date, what does it mean to you?"**

5 Expressing emotions

A colleague raises their voice. The team sees it as aggressive.

WHAT MAY BE AT PLAY In some settings, showing frustration is normal, even a sign of commitment. In others, self-control is a core value.

TO UNDERSTAND **"I felt a lot of intensity earlier. What was important to you?"**

5 checks before you conclude

Have you ever asked yourself how many "personality clashes" were really misunderstandings? The next time a behaviour shocks you, run it through this grid before you react.

1. **Is this a disagreement on substance, or a difference in style?**
2. **How would this behaviour be understood where this person comes from?**
3. **Have I checked my interpretation with them?**
4. **Are the team's unwritten rules clear to everyone?**
5. **What can I adapt in the way I communicate, before asking the other person to change?**

And for the whole team

Most cross-cultural conflicts don't require choosing a side. They require making the codes visible.

I invite you to ask the question as a team: "What goes without saying here for some of us, and not for others?"

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