



PART ONE - VIDEO

CROSS-CULTURAL MISUNDERSTANDINGS – INTRODUCTION

When receiving visitors or clients from other countries, visiting and meeting cooperation partners, working on an international team, presenting, giving feedback, negotiating or simply socialising, there is a need for effective cross-cultural communication. It means that:

- 1. You should be able to understand your own culture and the target culture you are dealing with;*
- 2. You should be flexible in the way you communicate with people from other cultures.*
- 3. You should adapt your style of communication to fit the situation.*

We communicate when we socialise, perform purposeful activities, give gifts and much more. Different cultures can have very different traditions and norms when it comes to issues such as:

- Body language — could your posture, gestures, and facial expressions be interpreted in a way that you don't expect?*
- Clothing — what is considered acceptable to wear at the workplace?*
- Decision making — how are decisions traditionally made in the culture, and who is involved in the process?*
- Feedback and criticism — are these provided in a direct way, or are they implied via contextual clues?*
- Gift giving — which kinds of gifts, if any, are acceptable or expected in various situations?*
- Greeting one another — what are the polite and expected ways of greeting another person?*
- Interacting with people of a higher status — are there special ways to honour elders or more highly ranked staff?*
- Physical contact — how much is acceptable, and in which circumstances?*
- Punctuality and the perception of time — should time arrangements be strictly observed, or are they more of a suggestion?*
- Social etiquette — how you should behave at the table, whether to go out of your way to hold the door open for others, how to make eye contact, etc.*
- The role of humour — which kinds of jokes, if any, are acceptable when?*
- The role of small talk — when is it expected, and which topics are considered polite? In the following video, you will see nine different situations in which misunderstandings arise between people at a workplace, all because of cultural differences between their styles of communication.*

Link: [WATCH THE VIDEO](#)



ONBOARDING — THE PROCESS OF BRINGING A NEW EMPLOYEE INTO A COMPANY, CAN BE A TRICKY PROCESS, NO MATTER WHAT, BUT ESPECIALLY IN A MULTINATIONAL COMPANY IN A CROSS-CULTURAL CONTEXT. IN THIS UNIT WE'LL FIND OUT EXACTLY HOW TO AVOID MISUNDERSTANDINGS AND HOW TO BECOME MORE UNDERSTANDING OF OUR FRIENDS AND EMPLOYEES FROM OTHER CULTURES.





Now, for each of the nine situations, try to identify exactly what went wrong and why the misunderstanding occurred.

Scene 1: What misunderstanding occurred between the manager and her employee?

- A. The employee put a drink on her manager's desk without being invited to.
- B. The employee was not on time for the meeting.
- C. The employee didn't realise that everyone at the company is expected to exercise regularly.
- D. The employee was not wearing clothing considered acceptable for the workplace.

Scene 2: What misunderstanding took place between the host and the guest?

- A. The host and the guest used different forms of greeting.
- B. The host and the guest couldn't agree on a time to meet.
- C. The host and the guest did not speak the same language.
- D. The guest was expecting to meet someone who looked completely different.

Scene 3: Why is the employee at the computer surprised?

- A. The other employee is late for the meeting.
- B. The other employee is not making proper eye contact.
- C. The other employee has entered the room and sat down without being invited to do so.
- D. The other employee used hand gestures that were considered offensive.

Scene 4: Why did the manager seem unhappy with the employee?

- A. The employee came to work sick.
- B. The employee got herself coffee but did not bring any for her boss.
- C. The employee did not arrive punctually.
- D. The employee did not greet her boss in a respectful manner.

Scene 5: What caused the somewhat awkward situation?

- A. The presenter did not speak the same language as the audience.
- B. The presenter's use of humour was not considered to be tasteful.
- C. The presenter's tone and body language were considered inappropriate for the situation.
- D. The presenter's apology was not considered to be sincere.

Scene 6: Why was the manager surprised by the employee's response to the feedback?

- A. The employee got out of her chair without being specifically invited to do so.
- B. The employee used overly informal language.
- C. The employee seemed to interpret it as positive feedback.
- D. The employee did not ask any follow-up questions regarding the feedback.

Scene 7: What led to the awkward moment at the end of the business deal?

- A. The visiting partners are worried about the environmental impact of flying a private jet.
- B. The visiting partners do not enjoy warm weather locations like the Bahamas.
- C. The visiting partners are worried that accepting the offer could be interpreted as taking a bribe.
- D. The visiting partners do not enjoy to travel by plane — only by rail.

Scene 8: Why did the employee feel uncomfortable in this situation?

- A. They realised that they were inappropriately dressed for the situation.
- B. The question about their family was inappropriate.
- C. They were not properly informed about the acquisition mentioned by the manager.
- D. They thought that the manager's style of communication was overly formal for the situation.





Scene 9: Why was the woman offended in this situation?

- A. The man did not properly bow to her as a sign of respect.
- B. She was shocked that the man didn't refer to her as "madam" or "maam".
- C. She thought it was rude for the man to look her in the eye.
- D. The woman interpreted the man holding the door for her as disrespectful and sexist.

AVOIDING CROSS-CULTURAL CONFLICT

Talk with a partner or in a small group about each scene (9 scenes are included in the video). Try to answer the following questions for each situation:

- What have you noticed and heard in the scene?
- What is your opinion of each situation?
- What would people from your country do in these situations?
- Do you consider what you saw good manners, bad manners, or not important / not necessary?

Why?

Then, after your discussion, write individual recommendations about how each of the nine awkward situations could be avoided in your future workplace.

