



## Critical Moments

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### What is it?

Critical moments, also known as turning points, are moments in a conversation in which a comment or action is decisive in determining the flow of the rest of the conversation or interaction. This may take place within one conversation or it can be over a period of time across several interactions. Paying attention to critical moments increases our sense of agency when we realize that we have choices in how we respond. Ideally, we respond in ways that lead to constructive outcomes and improved communication. However, this is not always the case.

Enhanced communication leads to better quality relationships. Communication is a complex activity that requires skills, knowledge and awareness. It is an activity we can improve in and requires a level of motivation and intention to want to perform better.

Communication becomes more complicated when we cross cultures and do not have the same verbal and nonverbal cues from which to make meaning. The more self-aware and other-aware we become, the more we will notice critical moments. They are excellent opportunities for learning.

### Who uses the concept?

There are a small number of scholars and practitioners who consciously use this concept. However, many of us realize there are times we are at a crossroad and know that the next action we take will elicit a certain response from the other party. We can use critical moments as learning opportunities so that we are more intentional in our communication.

### Fit with intercultural dialogue?

Critical moments are especially relevant in the context of intercultural dialogue because we may say or do something that is interpreted very differently from our intentions due to different cultural understanding. When this occurs and we are aware of it we need to make a decision about how to redirect the interaction. If we are unaware of it, we need to read the other party's reactions and decide what to do in this new critical moment.

### What work remains?

There are many chances for learning and improved intercultural communication if we utilize critical moments more deliberately. One way is to reflect on our interactions with others, to pay more attention to unexpected reactions. To use this as a chance for learning we need to think about what else we could have done to get the reaction we wanted. We can reflect on what went according to plan and why.

### Resources

- Fisher-Yoshida, B. (2014). Creating constructive communication through dialogue. In P.T. Coleman, M. Deutsch & E.C. Marcus (Eds.) *The handbook of conflict resolution: Theory and practice* (3rd ed., pp.877-897). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Nagata, A.L. (2012). Bodymindfulness in coordinating the management of meaning across cultures. In C. Creede, B. Fisher-Yoshida & P.V. Gallegos (Eds.), *The reflective, facilitative and interpretive practices of the coordinated management of meaning* (pp. 259-276). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Pearce, W. B. (2007). *Making social worlds: A communication perspective*. Malden, MA: Walden.