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# CULTURAL DIVERSITY: MAKING INTERCULTURAL COLLABORATION POSSIBLE FOR MULTINATIONAL CORPORATIONS

*Claudia Carballal-Benaglio*<sup>1</sup>

**T**HE cultural variety and differences in race, national origin, ethnic background, and religion that exist in the world permeate our everyday life and enriches our existence. But harmonious work environments require the ability to at least feel comfortable with these differences. Many born-and-raised Americans have different perspectives and understandings shaped by their ancestors' ethnicities and cultures. Not only are generations of Americans comprised of many cultures, but the United States absorbs millions of immigrants every year that, aside from adding cultural value, also present challenges in terms of cultural and language differences. Because of this, the ideal work setting would be one in which employers and co-workers respect diverse cultural identities in a person. There is also a legal aspect to cultural diversity; every human being has the right to enjoy and develop their own cultural life and identity. But the right to culture is limited at the point at which it infringes on another human right and, in accordance with international law, no right can be used at the expense or destruction of another.

Today more than ever before, we find ourselves in foreign countries dealing with different languages, customs, and perceptions. *Intercultural collaboration* brings many advantages to multinational corporations, but it also presents the risk of miscommunication and project failure. The actions, gestures, perceptions, ways of thinking, and language that a person encounters in a foreign business setting are subject to a wide range of interpretations, which can often lead to misunderstandings. The key to effective collaboration is to acquire basic understanding of the concepts of cultural diversity, cultural rights, cultural awareness, and cultural intel-

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ligence, as well as embracing cultural differences as an integral part of a business setting to the point of making cooperation possible.

The understanding of how a person's culture may form their values, behavior, beliefs, and basic assumptions, commonly known as *cultural awareness*, has become an important quality in professionals around the world. Today, relocation services may provide a variety of cross-cultural orientation sessions and tools to help employees deal with the lack of cultural awareness and limited knowledge of new business protocols. But our awareness of cultural diversity would be moot in the absence of *cultural intelligence*—or, the ability to interpret a person's unfamiliar and ambiguous gestures and customs in the way culturally intended. The innate or learned ability to accurately interpret foreign ways of communication has become crucial for successful multicultural projects. Moreover, you cannot have cultural intelligence without *emotional intelligence*. Both cultural intelligence and emotional intelligence require the suspension of judgment and analysis before action. A person with high emotional intelligence makes cooperation possible by grasping what makes us human and understanding and accepting what makes each of us different from one another.

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