



How to maximise performance when building teams with cultural differences



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Understanding the value of cultural diversity

Whether you're a multinational corporation or a local business, there's never been a better time to hire the best employees from around the world.

Thanks to a connected world, organisations of all sizes can work with top-notch talent across the globe. However, engaging a global staff isn't always simple, and if you don't understand the cultures of your employees, your professional communication will suffer.

A global workforce translates to a global influence on the workplace. Under the right leadership a global workforce can inspire one another to greater innovation and growth – both personal and professional. Celebrating cultural diversity is key.

In a workplace, “cultural diversity” must include respect for all employees, regardless of race, ethnicity, age, ability, language, nationality, socioeconomic status, gender, religion, or sexual orientation. The task for leaders is to seek to understand and welcome staff differences, while also working to get the best performance from each member.

In this eBook, we'll explore how cultural diversity enriches the workplace and invigorates team performance. Plus, we'll provide tips on how leaders can foster a welcoming work environment that inspires a stellar contribution from each team member.





Navigating cultural intelligence as a leader



True leadership is based on building relationships. Your ability to navigate a culturally diverse team and lead them with skill and empathy is called “cultural intelligence,” or CQ for short. You can improve your CQ – and your staff relationships – by learning more about your employees’ cultures and backgrounds. Another crucial element of CQ is self-awareness. Exploring your cultural blindspots and unconscious bias can be profoundly rewarding on a personal level. For your employees, it’s heartening to see a leader who acknowledges unconscious bias and genuinely wants to change it.

By combining self-awareness and a sincere interest in learning from your team, you can adapt your leadership style to resonate with your employees and inspire their best performance.



Here's what we suggest:

1

Explore your work style and gauge whether you may be forcing it onto others. For better or worse, culture is formative. It touches every facet of your personality, including your work style. Self-awareness regarding your own work preferences and biases will help you see how this is affecting your leadership – for better or worse.

2

Educate yourself on other management styles to broaden your leadership portfolio. There are many effective approaches to leadership, and you can find one that responds to and respects your team's cultural differences.

3

Accommodate cultural differences in your management style and on a personal level. Little touches – like respecting holidays or unique cultural events – show staff that you appreciate their culture.

4

Ask more questions. We don't have a graph on this, but we have a hunch that growing your CQ is directly related to the number of questions you ask. Asking questions and listening closely to the answers helps build a comprehensive understanding of your culturally diverse team.



Building a foundation of inclusion and trust

The internet and its global workforce capabilities may have accelerated diversity, but the demographics of staff have been changing for decades. In the UK, the difference in the employment rates between the white ethnic group and all other ethnic groups combined dropped by 7% between 2004 and 2021.

As leaders, our aim should be to acknowledge and respond to the shift in office demographics with an inclusive, welcoming environment. According to a Glassdoor study, employees work harder and stay longer in organisations that celebrate their cultural differences. What's more, a genuine investment in building an inclusive workplace improves your organisation's chances of standing out to potential employees and to customers.

We've identified these steps as essential for promoting inclusion in your organisation:



1 Assign a leader for the change.

A figurehead who's sincere and enthusiastic about inclusion can stoke excitement in your employees. This role should have access to top-level management so that employees know that inclusion is a priority at the highest levels of leadership.

2 Remember, "inclusion" includes everyone.

Make it clear that everyone is expected to participate and embrace this organisation-wide effort. Inclusion isn't the sole domain of HR, and every department should pitch in.

3 Write "inclusion" into your values.

When inclusion is explicitly stated as a company value, it holds greater weight for employees and clients alike.

4 Acknowledge bias.

Unconscious bias is present in systems as well as individuals. Your organisation's leadership should make finding and eliminating bias from their policies and procedures a continual priority.

5 Develop and learn. Education is the most effective equaliser. Cultural education is also important because it allows all staff to understand one another better and contribute to creating an inclusive, well-rounded workforce.

When you work to promote inclusiveness consistently and sincerely, trust will naturally follow.



Effective communication in cross-cultural teams

Intercultural communication may not always come easily. It's not surprising that different cultures communicate in different ways, and those differences may not always translate smoothly between team members.

Professional customs can be wildly divergent, with some cultures practising strict rules of office protocol and others embracing a more laid-back approach to the workplace. There are also the familiar language barriers that teams

working across global locations can face, hampering effective communication and productivity.

Communication styles also vary between individuals, with culture serving as an influential backdrop. This can quickly lead to ineffective exchanges and personality clashes, so it's critical that your entire team acknowledges communication as a unique facet of cultural diversity and seeks to understand it – and one another – better.

Here are six strategies that we recommend to promote better communication between cross-cultural team members:



1 **Research etiquette** in addressing colleagues or meeting new coworkers across your different locations. Share these insights with all of your team members, to make them aware of the customs and when to use them.

2 **Eliminate slang and speak with purpose.** There are idioms in every language, and they often don't translate to non-native speakers. Be aware that using idioms in your professional language may isolate non-native speakers or leave them unclear about what's expected.

3 **Speak clearly,** enunciate your words, and use purposeful, simple language wherever possible. Overly complicated communication isn't helpful or inclusive.

4 **Send and receive nonverbal cues.** You can send nonverbal cues that promote good communication, like showing that you're listening intently with nods and good eye contact. You should also read the nonverbal cues of your colleagues, like noticing whether they seem confused or frustrated. You can even embrace visual supports like graphics and charts to explain your point without language.

5

Send important information and next steps in writing, to all participants following meetings. That way, everyone has a chance to review what was written and either agree to it or amend it.

6

Use humour cautiously. Humour is, at the best of times, extremely subjective. Between cultures, it can be almost irreconcilably different, and a poorly-judged joke can cause real problems between team members. Use caution when attempting humour, and stick with gentle jokes that are unlikely to provoke offence.

Don't forget that "language" can include the native tongue of an employee, their local dialect, language disabilities, and even their proficiency with technical or industry jargon. Different language barriers can arise within a conversation, so it's essential to watch your coworkers closely for nonverbal cues that indicate they don't understand you.

In some cultures, it's impolite to speak up when confused or to disagree with an authority figure. Encourage team members to ask questions and make your meetings a safe space for them to discuss and learn. Listen to each question with patience and respect, and reply in kind.

Nurturing professional development and growth

You'll get the best from your multicultural team when you promote cohesion while still celebrating cultural differences. To do that, you should focus on allowing each team member to have a role in the team's achievements – a role that they enjoy and feel empowered to accomplish successfully.

Cohesive teams prioritise the triumph of the group rather than the promotion of the individual. To foster that kind of team dynamic, you'll need to create teams in which every member is treated fairly and equally, with their unique traits and skills considered assets to the group.

You can start by:

- 1 Acknowledging each team member's strengths and skills.
- 2 Creating social opportunities for bonding and understanding.
- 3 Setting group and individual goals that draw on each member's skills.
- 4 Drawing up procedures and protocols that allow the team to meet those goals.

Once the team is comfortable with their roles, their colleagues, and their goals, they'll start to work with unity. Their complementary skill sets will come into focus, and they'll be able to acknowledge how each member contributes differently to a successful whole.

Regular communication – both for the group and individuals – is essential to keep everyone referencing their roles and goals. You should continue to provide opportunities for bonding, both inside and outside of work.

And don't forget to celebrate your victories! Reaching a goal together is a profound bonding experience, one that transcends cultural boundaries and establishes your professional team as a special little culture all its own.

Embracing cultural diversity as a corporate asset

We've talked a lot about the challenges of leading culturally diverse teams, but it's time to celebrate the many things that can go brilliantly, wonderfully well.

Cultural diversity on your team should be embraced as an asset. With healthy leadership, diverse teams can be dynamic, offering your company priceless advantages like:



- ✓ Innovation arising from each member's culturally unique way of approaching challenges.
- ✓ Diverse skills that can enable your organisation to provide better tailored products or services.
- ✓ Insider knowledge of nuanced local marketplaces, and insights on how to market to them.
- ✓ Opportunities for personal and professional growth for your entire company as team members share their experiences and learn those of others.

In a global marketplace, cultural diversity is both a practical reality and a strategic advantage. Embrace it, and you'll find it professionally elevating and personally rewarding.

Pivot to a more inclusive management style with C-me!

Become a more effective leader and a champion of cultural diversity with a comprehensive understanding of your leadership style. When you unlock your managerial strengths and weaknesses, you'll be better poised to lead your multi-cultural team with empathy and inclusiveness. The advantages of professional profiling don't stop with the leadership team. Everyone in your organisation can hone

their leadership skills and pinpoint their unproductive biases with razor-sharp insight into their physiological preferences.

At C-me, we empower growth and development with our cutting-edge personal development platform. Our tool not only helps you understand employees' unique cultural differences but also provides actionable techniques to help you learn to lead your diverse team better.

Interested in seeing the C-me platform in action?

Book a free demo today or take it for a spin yourself in our free trial to explore how our innovative tool can help you hone your leadership skills to respond to a culturally diverse team.

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