

MULTICULTURALISM AND MULTINATIONAL TEAMS IN THE ROMANIAN HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY

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Abstract

In an increasingly digitized and interconnected global economy, the Romanian hospitality industry, as an integral part of the travel and tourism sector, is currently challenged by a major human resource deficit, a problem shared across Europe. Romanian hotels have opened their doors to recruiting and hiring external labor from Eastern countries, the Middle East, the Far East, Asia, and the Pacific, as well as from African and South American nations. Following the model of other industries that already have long-standing experience in this regard, the process of integrating this workforce into the hotel industry has been achieved with small but steady steps. With the assimilation of international staff, hospitality entrepreneurs quickly realized they were facing the challenges of multiculturalism. These issues are related to direct or indirect communication and address, language barriers, preconceptions, and differing approaches to the concepts of hierarchy and authority. In this context, the present research aims, on the one hand, to highlight the multitude of these situational confrontations, and on the other hand, to identify solutions for resolving them, as multiculturalism and multinational work teams are becoming a normality in the Romanian hospitality industry.

Keywords: multiculturalism, tourism, hotel industry.

JEL: Z310, Z320.

I. The Nature of the Hospitality Industry

The inherent nature of the hospitality industry, coupled with the increased accessibility of international tourism, implies that a significant portion of this sector's clientele possesses diverse cultural backgrounds, experiences, and histories. The same can be observed regarding the workforce. In today's interconnected world, workplaces are becoming increasingly diverse and multicultural.

Culture is fundamental in shaping an individual's identity and the manner in which they interpret and react to various situations. By recognizing and leveraging the differences between the clients and employees of the tourism industry, a safe, culturally rich, and welcoming environment can be established for all stakeholders.

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II. Strategic Advantages of Multicultural Work Environments

For the hospitality industry, where serving a global clientele is the norm, multicultural work environments yield significant benefits. These environments not only enhance creativity and innovation but also foster personal development and expand career opportunities.

One of the most notable advantages of multicultural environments is their capacity to stimulate creativity and innovation. In hospitality workplaces, where addressing the unique needs of guests and providing exceptional experiences are paramount, diverse perspectives are invaluable. When individuals from different cultural backgrounds collaborate, they bring unique ideas and approaches to problem-solving. This diversity encourages brainstorming and innovative thinking, leading to solutions that might not emerge within more homogeneous teams.

Multicultural teams can create guest experiences that are more inclusive and engaging. For instance, incorporating cultural elements from the backgrounds of team members into hotel décor, menus, or events can resonate with a global clientele[6]. Furthermore, working in a multicultural environment helps refine the ability to communicate across cultures.

On the other hand, multicultural workplaces expose employees to various languages and communication styles, improving their ability to manage and overcome linguistic barriers. Different cultures have unique norms for non-verbal communication. By working in a diverse environment, tourism employees develop a profound awareness of these signals, enhancing their capacity to communicate effectively. Hospitality professionals often interact with guests from around the world. Intercultural communication skills enable them to connect with a multitude of clients, improving the guest experience and bolstering their career prospects.

Another significant advantage of working in a multicultural environment is the broadening of horizons, rendering industry employees more adaptable and empathetic. Hospitality workplaces require professionals to handle diverse situations with grace. These multicultural settings help staff develop empathy, facilitating connections with colleagues and guests from diverse backgrounds. Exposure to different traditions and viewpoints fosters an open-minded mentality. Understanding the practices and beliefs of others enriches both professional and personal life.

Experience in a multicultural workplace is a major asset for anyone seeking to pursue a global career in hospitality. Employers in the global hospitality industry seek candidates who can work seamlessly within diverse teams. Multicultural experience demonstrates their ability to adapt and thrive in international environments. Whether managing a hotel abroad or hosting international guests, the skills acquired in a multicultural workplace prepare them for the complexities of working in global markets. Collaborating with colleagues from around the world expands their professional network. These connections

can lead to exciting professional opportunities and insights into different hospitality markets. Thus, multicultural environments are naturally inclusive, bringing together people with diverse experiences and perspectives.

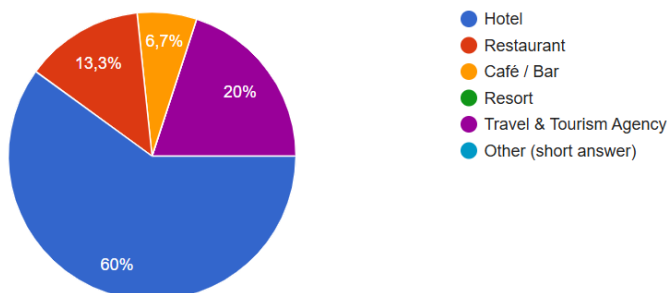
Workplaces in multicultural settings encourage collaboration by valuing each individual's contribution, creating a sense of belonging and mutual respect among team members [7]. Inclusivity fosters a positive work culture in which employees feel valued and respected, leading to higher rates of satisfaction and retention. For hospitality employers, fostering a multicultural workplace is not only about inclusion but is a strategic business advantage.

Multicultural workplaces attract top talent from around the world, enriching the organization with diverse skills and perspectives. Studies show that diverse teams make better decisions by considering a wider range of ideas and viewpoints. A multicultural team is better equipped to understand and meet the needs of an international clientele, thereby increasing guest satisfaction and loyalty.

III. Managing Cultural Diversity: A Study on Employee Perception and Operational Efficiency

Based on these analyses, a study was conducted on a sample of 64 individuals. The field research was carried out via an online questionnaire, distributed to professionals working within multicultural environments in the Romanian tourism industry, across various organizational levels ranging from entry-level to top management. Over half of the sample consists of respondents aged between 21 and 30 (43.8%) and 31 and 40 (25%), with 62.5% of the total being female. Regarding their professional roles, 40% of the respondents hold top management positions (management and supervisory), while 20% are employed in hotel front-office departments. In terms of their specific sector of activity, 60% of the respondents work in the hotel industry, 13.3% in the food and beverage sector (restaurants), and 20% in travel agencies.

Type of Hospitality Establishment

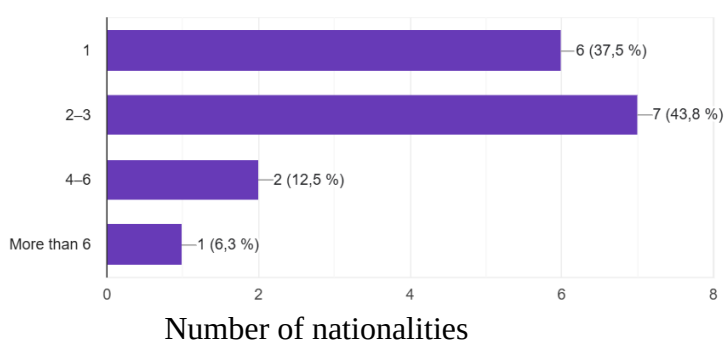


Source: Elaborated by the author (based on the survey results)

Continuing with the profile of the respondents, it was observed that a plurality, 37.5%, possess a moderate professional tenure of between one and three years. Conversely, 50% of the sample is situated at the extremes of the spectrum: 25% have less than one year of experience, while another 25% possess over eight years of seniority.

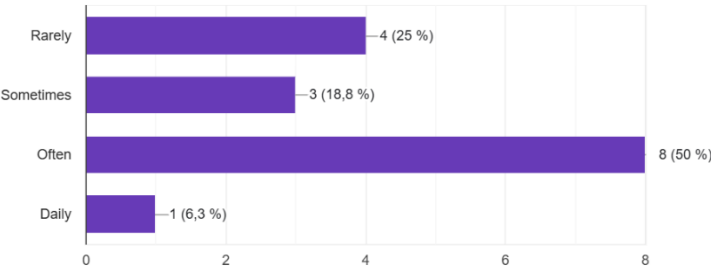
Regarding the nationalities of the participants, the vast majority are Romanian citizens working within multicultural environments; however, responses were also recorded from employees originating from countries such as Pakistan, Macedonia, and Peru.

In assessing the perceived diversity of their multicultural workplaces, 50% of respondents characterized their environment as "moderately diverse," while 12.5% described it as "slightly diverse." This suggests that tourism industry work environments in Romania remain predominantly composed of domestic employees. Nevertheless, 43.8% of respondents indicated having colleagues from two to three different countries, 12.5% from four to six countries, and only 6.3% reported working with individuals from more than six different nations. Consequently, this leads to the conclusion that, for the surveyed group, a "moderately diverse" multicultural environment typically denotes the presence of two to three nationalities.



Source: Elaborated by the author (based on the survey results)

To evaluate the extent of communication within these multicultural work environments, the question "How often do you interact with colleagues from other cultures?" was posed. Half of the participants (50%) responded "often," suggesting that the 40% of employees in top management and supervisory roles do not have direct colleagues of other nationalities but frequently engage with them during their shifts. Furthermore, the fact that only 6.3% interact with colleagues from different cultures on a daily basis indicates that such frequent interaction is characteristic primarily of those in entry- and mid-level positions.



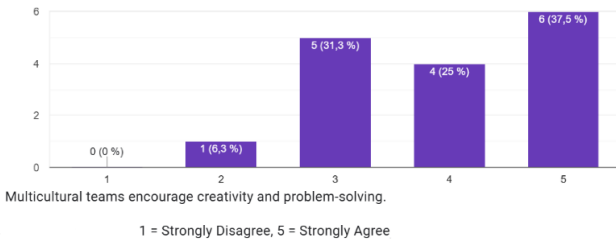
Frecventa interactiunii la serviciu cu colegii de alta cultura
Source: Elaborated by the author (based on the survey results)

Regarding the communication challenges encountered within multicultural work environments, 43.8% of respondents perceive no difficulty, while 31.3% characterize it as slightly difficult; notably, no respondent considered communication to be very difficult.

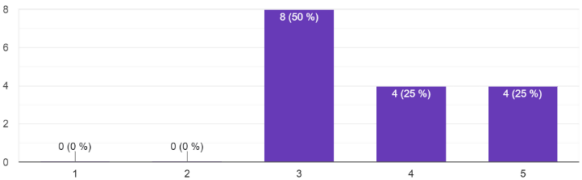
In terms of the primary medium of professional interaction, 50% of the participants indicated that English serves as the principal language of communication in the workplace.

When assessing the operational impact of multilingual communication barriers, the vast majority of respondents (75.1%) reported that their daily activities are not adversely affected by multicultural communication. Furthermore, 93.8% of those surveyed expressed respect for the cultural differences of their colleagues, and 100% agreed that multicultural teams foster enhanced problem-solving and creativity.

Team members respect cultural differences.
1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree



Multicultural teams encourage creativity and problem-solving.
1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree

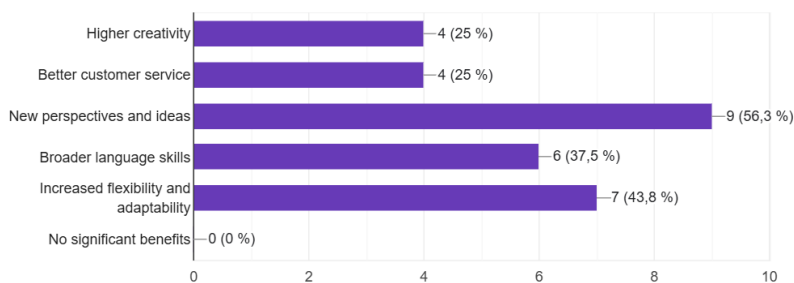


Source: Elaborated by the author (based on the survey results)

Only 25% of the respondents consider that linguistic and cultural barriers may generate "slight" conflicts within the workplace. Given that all tourism companies operating with a multicultural workforce organize "working in culturally diverse conditions" training sessions, the vast majority of respondents in the present study (87.6%) perceive these courses as either useful or very useful.

Among the most frequently identified challenges of working in a multicultural environment, respondents highlighted the following probabilities: linguistic barriers (37.5%), differences in work styles (12.5%), and the misinterpretation of colleagues' gestures or vocal tones (18.8%). These findings were further corroborated by the responses to the question, "How often do misunderstandings arise due to cultural differences?", to which all interviewees responded "rarely" (37.5%) or "very rarely" (62.5%).

The research indicates that employees perceive significantly more benefits from multicultural work environments than problems or negative effects. This observation is reflected in the data below, where 50% of respondents believe that multiculturalism provides new ideas and perspectives. Furthermore, it is seen to broaden linguistic competencies (37.5%), develop workplace flexibility and adaptability (43.8%), enhance creativity (25%), and improve customer engagement methods (25%). These results convey a highly positive and receptive attitude toward multicultural environments, with 75% of respondents affirming that multiculturalism in tourism definitively enhances the guest experience within the hospitality industry



The benefits of multicultural teams

Source: Elaborated by the author (based on the survey results)

Among the linguistic barriers exemplified and addressed by the interviewees were: "Research about these things on the internet," "Getting help from my colleagues," "By more actively trying to understand different cultures," and "I ask the client to write it down on a paper."

The solutions recommended by the participants to enhance collaboration within multicultural teams included: understanding the cultural backgrounds of colleagues, learning the local language, leading with empathy and flexibility,

fostering acceptance and open communication, and building solid professional relationships.

These proposed solutions align with strategies identified by experts in multicultural workplace dynamics, such as:

- Encouraging team members to share their cultural narratives and values to establish human connections.
- Acquiring proficiency in the local language, as even basic knowledge can dismantle barriers and demonstrate respect for the community in which the team operates.
- Empathetic leadership—leaders must remain flexible and recognize that employee motivations and reactions may vary according to their cultural context.
- Avoiding jargon and idiomatic expressions that may lead to misinterpretations in communication.
- Utilizing visual aids—when linguistic barriers arise, documenting ideas in writing to confirm mutual understanding.
- Attending to non-verbal cues (such as eye contact or gestures) to prevent actions that might be perceived as disrespectful.
- Acknowledging that errors (such as those made during order-taking) are often the result of linguistic barriers rather than a lack of professional intent.
- Training staff in problem-solving techniques tailored to the cultural sensitivities of both colleagues and guests.
- Providing information regarding cultural taboos or specific etiquette rules (e.g., the rigorous protocols of politeness in Japanese culture).
- Cultivating a mentorship culture where experienced employees assist new hires in navigating cultural differences.

Nevertheless, cultural disparities regarding work methodologies and communication styles represent some of the most frequent challenges within an international professional environment. In Western cultures, such as those of the Netherlands or Germany, there is a profound emphasis on employee autonomy and independent decision-making. Employees from these nations are accustomed to assuming individual responsibility and making decisions without the necessity of frequent approval from superiors.

In contrast, within Eastern European cultures [3], there is a more pronounced tendency toward collaboration and mutual assistance. Employees from these backgrounds may maintain different expectations concerning guidance and support from colleagues or management. Furthermore, they may anticipate a more defined hierarchy and a directive leadership style, wherein leaders provide precise instructions and closely monitor team progress.

To mitigate these differences, it is essential for team leaders and managers to develop clear communication strategies that account for these cultural particularities. An effective approach involves organizing workshops and

intercultural training sessions designed to assist employees in understanding and mutually accepting their respective work styles.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the effective integration of employees from diverse cultures within an international work environment requires understanding, empathy, and a strategic approach to managing diversity. Intercultural training, mentorship, and an openness to diversity are key elements in building resilient and well-integrated teams. Companies that employ individuals from various countries must adapt their management, communication, and integration strategies accordingly.

Success within a multicultural environment is predicated on two fundamental pillars: acceptance and communication. A cohesive team will consistently find methods to transform challenges into positive experiences, both in terms of client interactions and internal team dynamics.

While multicultural teams offer numerous benefits—including innovation, diverse perspectives, and greater flexibility in problem-solving—a lack of effective integration can lead to conflict, misunderstandings, and a reduction in organizational efficiency.

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