

Fostering collaboration and empathy in multi-geographical teams

By [William Kuan](#)

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There are three key components to achieving synergy when managing teams across multiple geographies.



Source: www.unsplash.com

First, we must simultaneously be persistent and intentional about driving our goal and vision with clarity, even if we are spread across three or four different countries. There must be unity and engagement around our purpose and mandate.

Secondly, it is important that every team member 'walks the talk', as the living embodiment of our vision in front of customers. We need to be consistent throughout our interactions in living our vision.

Finally – and this is the component that ties it all together – We must increase our levels of understanding and empathy in multicultural teams.

Fostering understanding

I have been very fortunate to have my career take me around the globe. I have worked in Portugal, Switzerland, Brazil, Kenya, and South Africa, among other countries. The main insight that I can truly say I have gleaned from my multicultural work experience is that no matter where in the world you are, truly connecting with people through empathy is the most important attribute you can nurture. It drives connections with people across cultural and geographical divides and fosters relationships that are based on mutual understanding.

The nature of marketing and communications is that we are often faced with marketing one solution to different territories all at once. The core challenge for us is: How do we manage our efforts without a purely one-size-fits-all approach while understanding the significant differences between the regions and also finding synergies?

Communicating with consideration

The truth is, you have to be a chameleon in the way you communicate. The adage, 'Think globally and act locally' really fits in this scenario, because communicating with other countries – either internally or externally – means we must consider

'global' needs and enable solutions from our home base. That requires understanding and, once again, empathy.



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It doesn't matter where in the world you are, some things are common to humans in general and those are the best starting points for communicating with teams anywhere. There is no space for any kind of judgement of different cultures. It is our responsibility to be open-minded and to listen as much as possible. Even if there is a language barrier, we still all speak one universal language – and that is a simple human connection.

Many companies will conduct cultural briefings for staff who interact in different cultural environments. While they are helpful, it is always interesting seeing cultural theory vs reality in practice. Human nuances go further than any textbook learning and the best way to foster cultural understanding in real-life interaction.

The interconnected world

In many ways, Covid-19 has approximated cross-cultural teams more. Indeed, there is a lot more digital communication between teams in multiple geographies for many global companies. But unless we are mindful of more than just the task at hand, we can miss out on the things that create human connections. In a face-to-face interaction, there is generally more nuance. This is where you get to really know someone – through their body language, mannerisms, and physical presence.

When we communicate digitally, the humanity of our interactions is sometimes severely lacking due to the 'down to business' nature of video calls. We often jump straight into whatever order of business is on the agenda and forget that we are not robots, just there to do a job. Yet it adds so much value to any communication when we intentionally take the time to not just jump into a call and address work issues.



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Saying "How are you?"

Starting with a simple 'How are you?' makes a world of difference. Making conversation and engaging on a personal level 'lubricates' the communication process. It creates context around the other person in the 'room' when we are genuine and show empathy towards the face on our screen. This is where we can pick up some of those missing pieces and mannerisms we used to get from in-person meetings. If we just come out of our bubbles for a minute or two and get to know each other, cultural differences disappear.

Fostering empathy within your team across multiple geographies is a simple, human solution to business problems. Empathy from within cannot help but translate to empathy without, ultimately reaching the customer. With the customer at the centre of our purpose and vision, empathy is the key to delivering winning outcomes as a team, and positively impacting our customers through the products and services we deliver. So, perhaps it's time we all made our businesses more 'human'.

ABOUT WILLIAM KUAN

William aims to instil true passion about Roche Diagnostic's solutions and products, which filters through to all aspects of the organisation so that in turn, the organisation can collectively translate that "contagious" passion through to patients and customers. It falls to marketing and communications to build strategic imperatives and make them a reality, both internally and externally, so that the ultimate result is achieved: to bring positive impact to patients and customers.
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