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MULTICULTURALISM  
UNITED IN DIVERSITY

A ROMANIAN PERSPECTIVE

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## CONTENTS

9	A VOYAGE OF DISCOVERY
11	Multiculturalism—United in Diversity: A Romanian Perspective
18	1. Bridging the differences: intercultural communication in business
24	2. Workplace hurdles: different cultures working together
29	3. Romanian women leading a cross-cultural team: what are the challenges?
35	4. Doing business in Romania: main cultural values
41	5. Leadership style—how does culture influence leaders?
46	6. The emergency tool kit: developing a set of skills for multiple cultural situations
52	7. Cultural preconceptions: French and Romanians at the merger table
58	8. Collaborating and communicating across genders
65	9. Humor in Romania: from survival method during communism to ice-breaker in business

70	10. Romania through common stereotypes: vampires, Roma people, communism. What else?
77	11. Intercultural intelligence: How the insiders play the game in Romania—organizational culture vs. national culture
85	12. Cultures doing business together: Romanians & Icelanders' communication pitfalls
91	13. Doing business à la grecque in Romania; an intercultural perspective
97	14. From Russia with love. Russians (and Romanians) doing business
105	15. Virtual multicultural teams: real communication in the virtual world
114	16. Motivation across cultures: what drives Romanians to work?
121	17. Explicit, implicit communication and the Barbarian reflex. Where do Romanians fit?
127	18. Management culture in Romania: what does the boss say?
136	19. Intercultural communication: Business negotiations in Romania
147	20. Buying a business in Romania: cultural due diligence and hidden cultural rules
154	21. Ethnic entrepreneurship in Romania: Turkish business development
162	22. In food we trust: a story of Irish and Romanians working together

- 167 pentru
23. Marketing across cultures: why the “American ROM” campaign for Romanian chocolate bar worked
- 178 24. Modern Austrian business society and old traditions at play in Romania: the Viennese Ball
- 182 25. Cultural differences in advertising: Romania and Brazil
- 189 26. Intercultural: Team work with a fusion spin
- 196 27. Intercultural: Cultural ethical dilemmas in business—from bribes paying to political affairs
- 207 28. Intercultural communication: Business networking and cultural behavior patterns
- 214 29. Intercultural communications: corporate holiday parties in Romania
- 219 30. Intercultural communication: Frugal or reverse innovation. Doing more with less in a cross-cultural approach
- 226 31. Intercultural: Learning from Ireland’s Celtic Tiger while preparing for St. Patrick’s Day
- 231 32. Intercultural: The dual-culture phenomenon in international organizations
- 237 33. “The Connoisseurs of Life: distinctive properties around the world and Romanian owners”
- 247 34. “COM UM QUILO DE CARNE DE VACA E UM LITRO DE VINHO NÃO SE MORRE DE FOME”—Corporate Social Responsibility at the International Level

## A VOYAGE OF DISCOVERY

*Irina Budrina not only knows what she writes and talks about, but she is, as they say, walking her talk. Born in Russia, having traveled all over the world, with an MBA in Japan and a Ph.D. in Romania (REI, ASE) she has been living in Romania for the last 12 years.*

*The present book is, therefore, based on her very rich and significant encounters with people and organizations in various parts of the world and mainly in Romania.*

*You are reading a book which is a voyage of discovery and learning about our own and other cultures. Leadership, intercultural communication, cultural dimensions, cultural values, and gender issues in business and beyond business are just some*

Respect of the discussions you are going to be part of through  
Irina Budrina's knowledgeable and skillful guidance.  
This is a book to enjoy and to reflect upon.

Professor Mariana Nicolae, REI (ASE)

## **Multiculturalism—United in Diversity: A Romanian Perspective**

**In today's world, exposure to other cultures has become a symbol of increasing globalization processes. Many people leave their home area to go on a voyage of discovery and learning about other cultures, which affects their original cultural identity.**

Interactions with multiple cultural settings and globalizing transformations have affected the world over the past twenty years and increased opportunities for communicating almost instantly across previously built barriers.

The needs of the 21st century demand citizens that are culturally sensitive and internationally focused, with an orientation toward the future rather than the past. Cultural Diversity is in it.

The concept of multiculturalism offers a new orientation toward the future.

“Multiculturalism is a system of beliefs and behaviors that recognizes and respects the presence of all diverse groups in an organization or society, acknowledges and values their socio-cultural differences, and encourages and enables their continued contribution within an inclusive cultural context which empowers all within the organization or society” (Caleb Rosado, 1997).

The essence of multiculturalism is the ability to celebrate with the Other in a manner that removes all barriers and brings unity in diversity. Multiculturalism pushes us to look upon the Other not as a potential enemy but as a profitable partner.

Managing diversity is an ongoing process that unleashes the various talents and capabilities which a diverse population brings to an organization, community or society, so as to create a wholesome, inclusive environment, that is safe for differences, enables people to reject rejection, celebrates diversity, and maximizes the full potential of all, in a cultural context where everyone benefits.

Multiculturalism, as the art of managing diversity, is an inclusive process where no one is left out. Diversity, in its essence, then is a safeguard against

ethnocentrism (making of one group as the norm for all groups).

No cultures should be verbally and/or physically attacked based solely on the negative meaning given due to biological, cultural, political or socioeconomic differences (such as gender, age, race/ethnicity, political party, class, education, values, religious affiliation or sexual orientation). The motivating factor for such attitude is fear, arising out of ignorance of the other culture, which is different from your own.

Multiculturalism should be the only option open to educators, leaders, and administrators in an ever-increasing culturally pluralistic environment. Today's diverse student populations and workforce is simply not going to go away, but increase. This is the direction of the future multicultural, multiethnic, multilingual communities. And effective leaders are recognizing it. The art of managing diversity is thus of great concern to all persons charged with the responsibility of overseeing the work of others.

Multiculturalism, then, may very well be part of an ongoing process which enables people to become world citizens—persons who are able to transfer their own racial/ethnic, gender, cultural and socio-political reality and identify with humankind throughout the world, at all levels of human needs.

### **The concept of multiculturalism itself**

- allows to explore the meaning of culture and how cultures operate, sharing the basic values across cultures, it promotes an “awareness and appreciation” of your own culture and the cultures of others;

- helps to promote mutual understanding and a sense of belonging within and across different communities in which people are located, and an ability to engage with a variety of other communities through meaningful cross-cultural communication at local, national, regional and global levels, and more successfully interact and engage across these levels;

- values the experiences and different cultural backgrounds and creates a learning resource in a positive manner for developing skills, knowledge, values and attitudes needed to participate actively as a critically informed member of society: local, national, regional and global ;

- affirms the right of all people to access important learning strategies and resources;

- provides an educational framework that is relevant and responsive to all needs, despite the varied experiences, knowledge and backgrounds.

### **Requirements**

Basic needs are sensitivity and self-consciousness: the understanding of other behaviors and ways of thinking as well as the ability to express one’s own point of view in a transparent way with the aim to be understood and respected by staying flexible where this is possible, and being clear where this is necessary.

It is a balance adapted between three parts:

1. knowledge (about other cultures, people, nations, behaviors...),
2. empathy (understanding feelings and needs of other people), and
3. self-confidence (knowing what I want, my strengths and weaknesses, emotional stability).

### **Cultural differences**

Cultural characteristics can be differentiated between several dimensions and aspects (the ability to perceive them and to cope with them is one of the bases of intercultural competence), such as:

- Collectivist and individualist cultures;
- Masculine and feminine cultures;
- Uncertainty avoidance;
- Power distance;

Respect pentru • Monochrone (time-fixed, “one after the other”) and polychrone (many things at the same time, “multi-tasking”) aspects;

- Structural characteristics: e. g. basic personality, value orientation, experience of time and space, selective perception, nonverbal communication, patterns of behavior.

### **Improving Intercultural Communication**

It is essential that people research the cultures and communication conventions of those whom they propose to meet. This will minimize the risk of making the elementary mistakes. It is also prudent to set a clear agenda so that everyone understands the nature and purpose of the interaction. When language skills are unequal, clarifying one’s meaning in four ways will improve communication:

1. avoid using slang and idioms, choosing words that will convey only the most specific denotative meaning;

2. listen carefully and, if in doubt, ask for confirmation of understanding (particularly important if local accents and pronunciation are a problem);

3. recognize that accenting and intonation can cause meaning to vary significantly; and

4. respect the local communication formalities and styles, and watch for any changes in body language.

5. Investigate their culture’s perception of your culture by reading literature about your culture through their eyes before entering into communication with them. This will allow you to prepare yourself for projected views of your culture you will be bearing as a visitor in their culture.

If it is not possible to learn the other’s language it is expected to show some respect by learning a few words. In all important exchanges, a translator can convey the message.