

# Collaborating Consciously in a Global Environment

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Participants in our training programs frequently voice their day-to-day frustrations about the challenges of getting things done in a global virtual environment. I often hear the same question over and over “How can I get them to understand how we work here?” Unfortunately, with the daunting amount of work piling up, people rarely take the time to learn how their colleagues in overseas offices operate or to share deeper insights into expectations within their own workplace. All too often being unaware of the cultural differences leads to misunderstanding, misinterpretation and consequently mistrust.

As we prepare to celebrate Valentine’s Day this week, it’s a good time to consider how you nurture your professional relationships with your staff and colleagues overseas. Building trust in a virtual environment requires creativity and patience, particularly when you lack face-to-face interactions or even many opportunities for synchronous communication due to time zone differences.

ICA’s new model focusing on **Conscious Collaboration** provides a pathway to engage and motivate globally-dispersed staff and colleagues more effectively. When we are mindful of how we interact and the messages we and others deliver across cultures we increase our ability to connect and build the trust that is so critical to working together successfully.

Culturally-competent global leaders understand the responsibility they have in creating transformative change and motivating staff across cultures. It is important to equip yourself with the necessary skills to achieve success with culturally-diverse staff and teams. This requires a careful balance by being both detached and interconnected. Detachment is critical to maintain poise and a calm mind when dealing with conflict or challenging situations. Interconnection is central to explore different perspectives and to demonstrate concern for others. It is therefore vital to cultivate cultural self-awareness and awareness of others to enhance intercultural interactions. ICA’s five-step model on **Conscious Collaboration** provides simple techniques to increase trust and build stronger relationships in a global environment.

## 1. Be Present

One of the key skills when working in global environments is to be aware of your own behaviors, thoughts and emotions and be receptive to divergences you encounter with others. In order to do this, it is important to stay in the moment. Begin by focusing on your breath, taking deep diaphragmatic breaths and notice what is happening in your body as you begin to center yourself. Incorporating mindfulness-based practices to remain in the present moment will demonstrate respect for your colleagues and clients and minimize the risk of important information being lost. Observing your surroundings is also critical to pick up cues from others. The more you can tune into what is happening around you, the more you will be able to assess similarities or differences. When working across cultures it is important to find this balance between maintaining

authenticity to who you are while at the same time exploring ways that you can adapt more to those around you. Being present allows you to be better prepared to initiate and to cope with change.

## **2. Engage**

When you engage fully with others you are more adept at exploring their cultural perspective. Appreciative inquiry enables you to examine another's viewpoint when you demonstrate both curiosity and genuine interest in what they have to say. When you listen actively you also expand your ability to focus not only on what is being said but also how you are interpreting it. These communication techniques encourage you to provide feedback or confirm what was heard, by either repeating or paraphrasing what you heard in your own words, thereby reducing the risk of making false assumptions. This is particularly critical when communicating across cultures given the vast differences in communication context and styles. Engaging authentically with others is fundamental to foster a more positive and holistic approach to finding a solution. This is key to building trust, validating their opinion and motivating them to be active participants.

## **3. Empathize**

When you try to understand another's perspective from her reality, you become sensitized to her worldview. While you may not always agree with the perspective, developing a compassionate lens provides you with deeper insight into the cultural values, beliefs and assumptions inherent to her way of thinking and ultimately working. In relationship-oriented cultures in particular, empathy is vital to display commitment, maintain harmony and to save face. It also allows you to explore their processes to find a common direction.

## **4. Unify**

The more you can merge your ideas and resources in a mutually beneficial and respectful way, the more you can increase your chances of success. In cross-cultural interactions, people are often emphatic that their approach is the most effective to reaching a desired outcome. However, to motivate culturally-diverse teams or staff it is important to unify different perspectives so they feel committed to the process. Positive outcomes occur when you can synthesize different perceptions to capitalize creatively on solving a problem or finding a solution.

## **5. Synergize**

Success in a global environment occurs once you are able to articulate the cultural differences sufficiently that you can leverage the strengths of your culturally-diverse staff or team to foster cohesive and active participation. When you integrate the different ideas, communication and work styles and expectations of each person, you foster inclusivity which will empower others to engage and contribute. This synergy will enhance your team's collective energy and creativity and will help you cultivate a common vision to allow you to thrive.