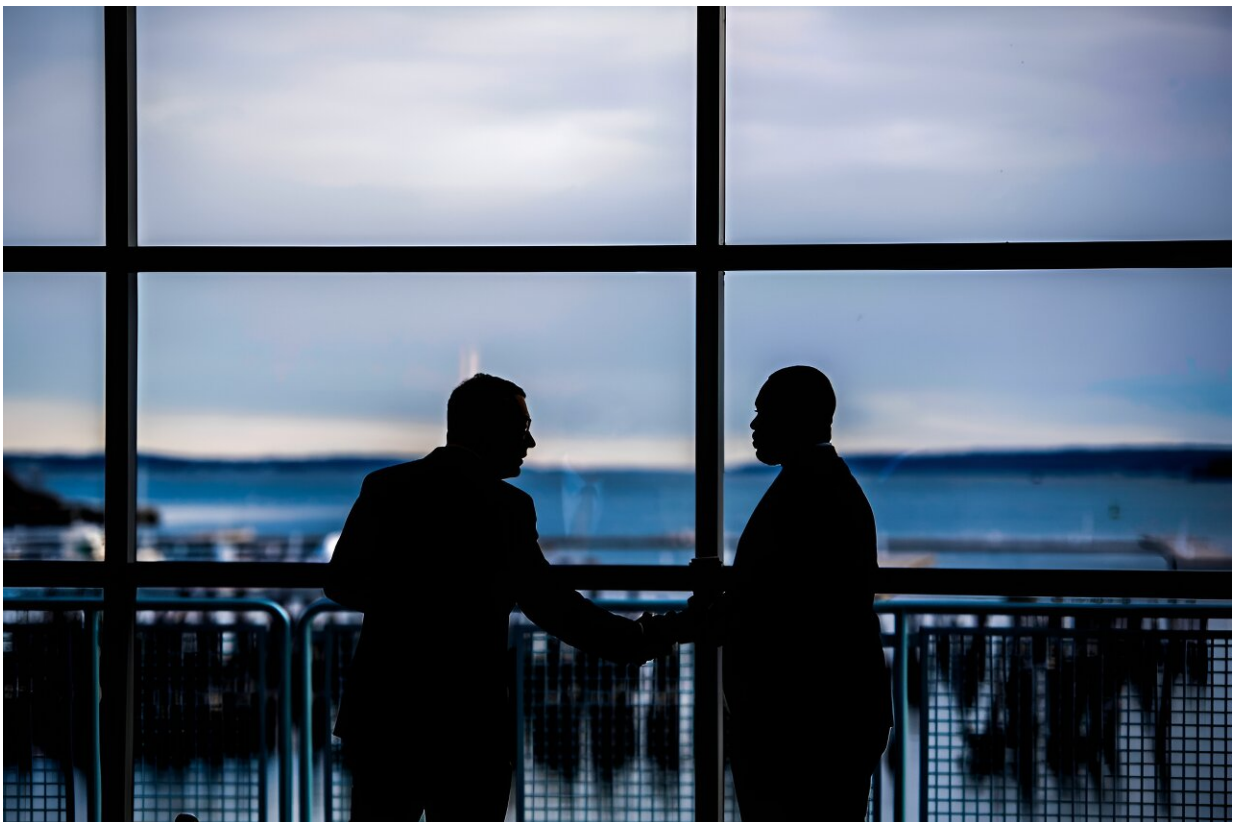


# Bicultural staff can better boost chances of success in international negotiations, researcher explains

May 30 2024, by Patrick Daly

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Biculturals can influence business negotiations and "help their firms outperform others," according to Northeastern co-authored research. Credit: Matthew MODOONO/Northeastern University

A study co-authored by a Northeastern University researcher has found that hiring senior staff who are comfortable in more than one culture to conduct international negotiations can help "supercharge" the result for businesses.

Research conducted by Priyan Khakhar, head of international [business](#) at Northeastern University in London, and others found that people deemed to be "biculturals" appeared to have an advantage when it comes to bridging divides between two [different cultures](#).

Khakhar and his colleagues—Hussain Gulzar Ramma from the University of Adelaide in Australia and Vijay Pereira from the NEOMA Business School in Reims, France—define biculturals as people who "have internalized two or more cultures"

The findings were [featured last month](#) in the *European Business Review*, a periodical aimed at [global leaders](#) and others in business.

The study, "Biculturals in international business negotiations: moving away from the single culture paradigm," [published](#) in the *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, explored how biculturals "possess higher cultural intelligence than monocultural individuals." It found that their cultural knowledge and the way they hold multi-identities can influence business negotiations and "help their firms outperform others."

Khakhar said they picked 35 bicultural senior managers in Lebanon to interview because the Middle East country has witnessed regular patterns of migration and return over the past five decades due to instability, including a civil war between 1975 and 1990, and the 2006 war with Israel.

In addition to Lebanon, the participants had experience of cultures in countries such as the United Kingdom, the United States, France,

Australia, Canada, Armenia and Brazil.

After using [artificial intelligence](#) to pick out themes from the interviews, Khakhar said the researchers found biculturals had the ability to be "one person, two personalities," with those interviewed often suggesting they could tap into a different part of their personality when speaking another language.

This shifting identity and ability to blend cultures, according to Khakhar's article in *The European Business Review*, is a "beneficial superpower" that can "help create understanding and synergy between parties with different cultural backgrounds."

A second finding was the ability of those immersed in several cultures to switch between different ways of thinking.

"When it comes to international cross-cultural communication, there is always room for miscommunication because we don't understand customs or the nuances sometimes," Khakhar told *Northeastern Global News*.

"So there is a bridge-building capacity that these biculturals have. And, as a result, their adaptability was higher."

The research thirdly found, the assistant professor said, that biculturals were innovative thinkers, creative and more resistant to going along with so-called "groupthink."

The professor's analysis also found that such people had the ability to immerse themselves into major global corporations with greater ease than someone from a single culture.

Khakhar, who previously lived and taught in Beirut, argues that

employing a bicultural person can have benefits in some business situations.

Being able to make bonds across different cultures can "nudge the negotiation towards a certain party, even if in an implicit way," the assistant professor said.

Khakhar said, "In terms of building bridges, there are implicit connections that [biculturals] make with the language, the linguistics and understanding nuances."

He suggested that a corporate U.S. company might find that a Japanese employee who has studied and lived in America might prove a "good negotiator" to strike deals with a Tokyo firm as their dual experience could help create a mutual rapport.

But Khakhar said there were two sides to the argument and that context would be key when making hiring decisions.

He continued, "I'm not saying bicultural individuals are going to be Superman or Superwoman in negotiations by the virtue of their upbringing, background or ethnic mixes.

"There are also studies out there that show that if biculturalism is not navigated well, it can lead to [psychological effects](#), such as confusion—it can lead to things like paralysis in decision-making.

"So when it comes to selecting managers, obviously their culture is not the only criteria of hiring. It is about the overall blend.

"But if there was that competence there—they call it bicultural integration competence and there is a scale that measures it—then that would be a plus.

"They have the ability to successfully navigate two or three cultures when not everyone can."

**More information:** Priyan Khakhar et al, Biculturals in international business negotiations: moving away from the single culture paradigm, *Journal of Organizational Change Management* (2023). [DOI: 10.1108/JOCM-04-2022-0110](https://doi.org/10.1108/JOCM-04-2022-0110)

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Provided by Northeastern University

Citation: Bicultural staff can better boost chances of success in international negotiations, researcher explains (2024, May 30) retrieved 18 June 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2024-05-bicultural-staff-boost-chances-success.html>

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