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INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCIES AS A FACTOR OF PROJECT TEAM EFFECTIVENESS: THE CASE STUDY OF GERMANY

Migration processes, driven by socio-economic and geopolitical transformations in recent years, have significantly influenced labor markets in European Union countries and highlighted the need for effective integration of foreign workers. This issue has become particularly acute since 2022 due to the large-scale displacement of people from Ukraine, posing challenges for host countries, primarily Germany, not only to ensure employment quantitatively but also to achieve sustainable and high-quality professional integration. Despite the increasing employment rates of Ukrainian refugees, quantitative indicators do not fully reflect the actual level of professional adaptation, team effectiveness, or long-term career mobility. This article examines intercultural competencies as a critical factor for successful project team performance and as a key resource for the professional integration of Ukrainian migrants into the German labor market. It is argued that the effectiveness of collaboration in multicultural environments depends not only on professional qualifications and language proficiency but also on social-behavioral skills, adaptability, empathy, tolerance, and the ability to interact constructively with colleagues and management. The theoretical foundation of the study is based on contemporary approaches to intercultural competence analysis, particularly Jürgen Bolten's concept, which defines it as a dynamic combination of personal, social, and functional-strategic components manifested through interaction in teams and professional activities. The practical implementation of these competencies is analysed through the example of the forwarding and logistics sector in Germany, characterized by high operational complexity and the need for integration of professional, cognitive, language, and intercultural skills. The study demonstrates that formal competency assessments, including professional tests, language tasks, and exercises in logic and analytical thinking, allow for an objective evaluation of Ukrainian specialists' readiness to work in a structured and multicultural professional environment.

Keywords: competence, project team, Ukrainian migrants, German labor market, forwarding and logistics

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МІЖКУЛЬТУРНІ КОМПЕТЕНЦІЯ ЯК ФАКТОР ЕФЕКТИВНОСТІ РОБОТИ ПРОЄКТНИХ КОМАНД: ПРИКЛАД НІМЕЧЧИНИ

Міграційні процеси, зумовлені соціально-економічними та геополітичними трансформаціями останніх років, суттєво вплинули на структуру ринків праці країн Європейського Союзу та актуалізували питання інтеграції іноземних працівників. Особливої значущості ці процеси набули після 2022 року у зв'язку з масовим переміщенням населення з України, що поставило перед приймаючими державами, насамперед Німеччиною, завдання забезпечення не лише кількісного працевлаштування, а й якісної та стійкої інтеграції мігрантів у професійне середовище. Попри зростання рівня зайнятості українських фахівців, кількісні показники не завжди відображають реальний рівень професійної адаптації, ефективності участі у проєктних командах та здатності до довгострокової кар'єрної мобільності. У статті досліджено міжкультурні компетенції як ключовий чинник успішності командної взаємодії та важливий ресурс професійної інтеграції українських мігрантів на німецькому ринку праці. Аргументовано, що ефективність роботи в мультикультурному середовищі залежить не лише від фахової підготовки та мовної компетентності, а й від рівня сформованості соціально-поведінкових навичок, здатності до адаптації, емпатії, толерантності та вміння конструктивно взаємодіяти з колегами та менеджментом. Теоретичною основою дослідження є сучасні підходи до аналізу міжкультурної компетентності, зокрема концепція Юргена Болтена, яка визначає її як динамічну сукупність особистісних, соціальних та функціонально-стратегічних компонентів, що проявляються у процесі взаємодії в команді та професійній діяльності. Практичну реалізацію цих компетенцій проаналізовано на прикладі сфери експедирування та логістики в Німеччині, де робота характеризується високою операційною складністю та потребує поєднання професійних, когнітивних, мовних та міжкультурних навичок. Показано, що формалізоване оцінювання компетентностей, включно з професійними тестами, мовними завданнями та завданнями на логіку й аналітичне мислення, дозволяє об'єктивно визначити готовність українських фахівців до роботи в мультикультурному та структурованому організованому середовищі.

Ключові слова: компетентність, проєктна команда, українські мігранти, ринок праці Німеччини, експедирування та логістика.

Introduction. Migration processes driven by socio-economic and geopolitical transformations of recent years have had a significant impact on the labor markets of the European Union (EU) countries. These processes intensified markedly after 2022 due to the mass forced displacement of the population from Ukraine, which brought the issues of integration and adaptation of migrants and refugees into the socio-economic systems of host countries to the forefront. In this context, migrant employment goes beyond purely economic indicators and acquires an interdisciplinary character, combining aspects of labor economics, sociology, management, and intercultural communication.

Germany, as one of Europe's leading economies and a primary destination country for migrants, is of particular interest for studying professional activity in a multicultural environment and identifying the competencies required for effective interaction within

project teams. On the one hand, the German labor market offers considerable opportunities for the integration of foreign workers; on the other hand, it is characterized by structural and cultural factors that affect professional adaptation, employment quality, and the long-term sustainability of migrant integration.

At the same time, there is growing recognition that successful employment and effective performance in multicultural teams depend not only on formal factors such as legal status, education level, or language proficiency, but also on the level of intercultural competencies developed by all participants in the labor process. This concerns not only migrants themselves, but also employers, managers, team members, and institutional intermediaries whose interaction shapes the actual working environment.

Purpose. The purpose of this article is to examine

intercultural competencies within project teams and the specific features of migrant employment in EU countries, using Germany as a case study.

To achieve this objective, the following tasks were addressed:

- to analyse the role of intercultural competencies in ensuring the effectiveness of project team performance;
- to summarize J. Bolten's model of intercultural competencies and substantiate its applied relevance;
- to demonstrate the interrelation between professional, linguistic, and intercultural competencies using the logistics sector as an example.

Analysis of recent research. Empirical studies exist that measure and assess intercultural competencies in teamwork, for example through developed scales such as TWC-CQ, demonstrate that different components of these competencies (behavioral, motivational, cognitive) have varying effects on the competitiveness of team members in culturally diverse environments [1].

Special attention in the literature is given to cross-cultural team-building practices in Europe [2], where intercultural interaction is viewed as a factor enhancing productivity, creative potential, and innovative thinking within project teams. This includes both normative-theoretical models and practical methods for creating inclusive environments adapted to cultural differences among participants.

Article [3] analyses the importance of intercultural communicative competence in virtual and face-to-face teamwork during the COVID-19 period. The authors apply quantitative methodologies to identify patterns of teamwork in culturally diverse projects and teams.

Study [4] examines the impact of cultural diversity on the effectiveness of international project teams. The author argues that while cultural diversity can enhance teams' innovative potential, in the absence of adequate intercultural competencies it may also complicate communication and coordination. Key factors for ensuring team effectiveness include adaptability, intercultural communication, and inclusive management approaches.

The authors of study [5] emphasize that integrating specialized training programs and team learning practices enables participants to interact more effectively in international project environments, which is particularly relevant for migrant adaptation in labor markets. Overall, this body of research highlights the importance of purposeful development of intercultural competencies for increasing productivity and reducing the risk of misunderstandings in multicultural teams, which is directly relevant to the study of Ukrainian migrant integration into the German labor market.

In addition, research on supply chain strategies in project activities [6] complements the intercultural competence discourse by highlighting the role of coordination, communication, and decision-making in complex project environments. In international logistics and supply chains, these processes inherently involve cross-cultural interaction, which underscores the indirect importance of intercultural competencies for project team effectiveness.

This academic seminar [7], conducted by Prof. S. Hajatpour at FAU, focuses on the role of intercultural competencies in labour market integration processes. The course analyses how cultural awareness, communication styles, institutional norms, and individual adaptive capacities influence migrants' professional inclusion in Germany. The materials provide a conceptual and practice-oriented perspective that complements empirical studies on intercultural competence by emphasising its relevance for employment structures and organisational contexts in multicultural labour markets.

Main content. As of October 2025, approximately 4.3 million people in the EU had received temporary protection due to the war in Ukraine [8]. Germany remained the largest host country: by the end of the most recent reporting period, approximately 1.2 million individuals were benefiting from temporary protection status in Germany (around 1,218–1,229 thousand persons).

An analysis of labor market integration dynamics shows a noticeable acceleration in the employment of Ukrainian citizens in Germany during 2022–2025. At the initial stage of mass displacement (summer–autumn 2022), the employment rate among the working-age population (approximately 20–64 years) was low, at around 16%. In 2023, the average rate increased to approximately 22%, and by early 2024 it had risen further to about 27% [9]. The most recent studies indicate that by summer 2025, the employment rate among Ukrainian refugees aged 20–64 who arrived during the first months of the war reached approximately 51%, indicating substantial progress over a three-year period. However, the share of unemployed individuals and those temporarily unavailable for the labor market (due to childcare responsibilities, integration courses, or retraining) remains significant, suggesting continued potential for further integration.

The rising employment rate of Ukrainian refugees in EU countries, particularly in Germany, reflects gradual structural integration into national labor markets. At the same time, quantitative employment indicators do not fully capture the complexity of economic integration, as employment stability, professional mobility, and job-qualification matching largely depend on non-financial and intangible factors. One of the key factors is the level of intercultural competencies, which determine migrants' ability to interact effectively in multicultural work environments, adapt to institutional and communicative norms of the host country, and establish professional relationships with employers and colleagues.

In a contemporary context where artificial intelligence increasingly assumes routine tasks, the question arises as to which skills make project team members truly indispensable and unique. Beyond technical expertise, the importance of soft skills - skills rooted in human experience, intuition, and interpersonal competence - is steadily increasing [10]. These skills not only enhance the effectiveness of teamwork during project implementation but also constitute a competitive advantage in the labor market. The article [11] emphasises

the role of linguistic distance and language competence as key factors of labour market integration, which constitute an integral component of intercultural competence.

Key soft skills required for participants in international teams are outlined below (Table 1). A central role in this context is played by intercultural competence - the ability to interact effectively with representatives of different cultures - which constitutes a critical professional skill in a globalized environment (Fig. 1).

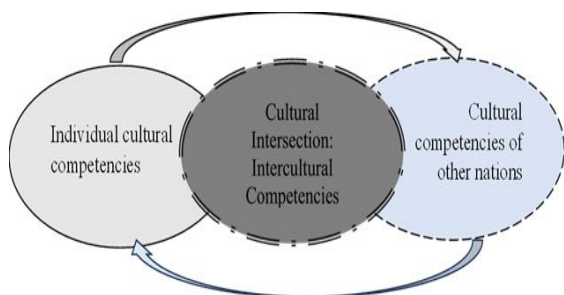


Fig. 1. Formation of intercultural competence in project team collaboration

Intercultural competence includes cultural awareness, sensitivity, communication abilities, adaptability, respect, and empathy. Project team members are required to act interculturally competently, understand cultural differences among participants, avoid misunderstandings, and build sustainable relationships with all stakeholders.

Intercultural competence is formed by a set of interrelated components, including empathy; tolerance and openness; communicative ability, understood as culturally sensitive, respectful, and clear communication; language competence; self-reflection, defined as awareness of one's

own cultural influence; flexibility and adaptability; as well as teamwork skills and the ability to manage and resolve conflicts.

These competencies are not innate but can be developed through education, targeted training, and personal experience. Teams formed with consideration of cultural diversity possess a significant potential for enhanced creativity and the generation of innovative solutions. Diverse backgrounds and different ways of thinking contribute to a broader perspective on contemporary challenges, which positively affects a team's problem-solving capacity, increases project productivity, and enhances the overall adaptability and effectiveness of organisations.

Intercultural competence within project teams also helps to prevent stereotyping and fosters the emergence of unique insights, as well as a supportive and inclusive working atmosphere in which diversity of opinions and experiences is valued. It emphasizes the importance of respect for individual differences among team members and the ability to find common ground even in complex conflict situations. Figure 1 illustrates the intersection between one's own cultural competencies and those of other cultures, where intercultural competence emerges at this boundary.

Intercultural competence becomes particularly relevant in the context of military hostilities in Ukraine, when a significant share of specialists is forced to integrate into the labour markets of other countries. Under such conditions, the ability to interact effectively with representatives of different cultures becomes critical for unlocking the potential of diverse teams and achieving the strategic objectives of organisations.

Table 1 – Key professional competencies and their scientific rationale in project team performance

| № | Competency | Core Aspects | Scientific Rationale | Project Team Application |
|---|--------------------------|--|--|---|
| 1 | Emotion Intelligence | Self-awareness; self-regulation; empathy; social skills | A high level of emotional intelligence enhances interpersonal interaction and team productivity | Ensures effective communication, prevents conflicts, and supports team morale |
| 2 | Creativity | Thinking outside of the box; generating unconventional ideas; willingness to experiment; interdisciplinarity | Creativity is key for innovation processes, enabling the development of new approaches and solutions to complex problems | Promotes idea generation, process optimization, and innovative solutions within the project |
| 3 | Critical Thinking | Information analysis; source evaluation; rational approach; evidence-based decisions | Ensures accurate assessment of information and improves decision-making based on facts | Helps objectively evaluate project data, make informed decisions, and minimize risks |
| 4 | Adaptability | Openness to new experiences; positive attitude towards change; lifelong learning | Enables effective responses to technological and social changes | Provides flexibility in managing project changes and rapid adaptation to new conditions |
| 5 | Communication skills | Persuasiveness; active listening; nonverbal communication; transparency | Facilitates conflict avoidance, increases work productivity, and improves collaboration quality | Ensures clear information exchange, reduces misunderstandings, and improves team coordination |
| 6 | Teamwork | Team orientation; constructive conflict resolution; responsibility | Enables achieving collective goals, effective task distribution, and enhances group performance | Supports interaction among team members, ensures collective task completion, and achieves shared collective results |
| 7 | Leadership Competencies | Leading by example; motivational abilities; decision-making skills | Contributes to organisational stability, boosts team motivation, and enhances decision-making quality | Helps coordinate team work, motivate participants, and make timely project decisions |
| 8 | Intercultural Competence | Openness and respect; adaptability to cultural context; cultural awareness | Ensures effective interaction in a globalized environment and minimizes cultural misunderstandings | Promotes productive collaboration among team members with diverse cultural backgrounds, strengthening team |

In the research of the German scholar Jürgen Bolten, intercultural competence is understood not as a set of isolated knowledge about other cultures, but as a dynamic complex of individual, social, and strategic capabilities that are realized through interaction. This approach is especially relevant for analysing the

professional integration of Ukrainian migrants into the German labour environment, which is characterized by a high level of cultural diversity and clearly structured organisational norms.

Figure 2 summarizes J. Bolten's approach to structuring intercultural competencies, which is based on

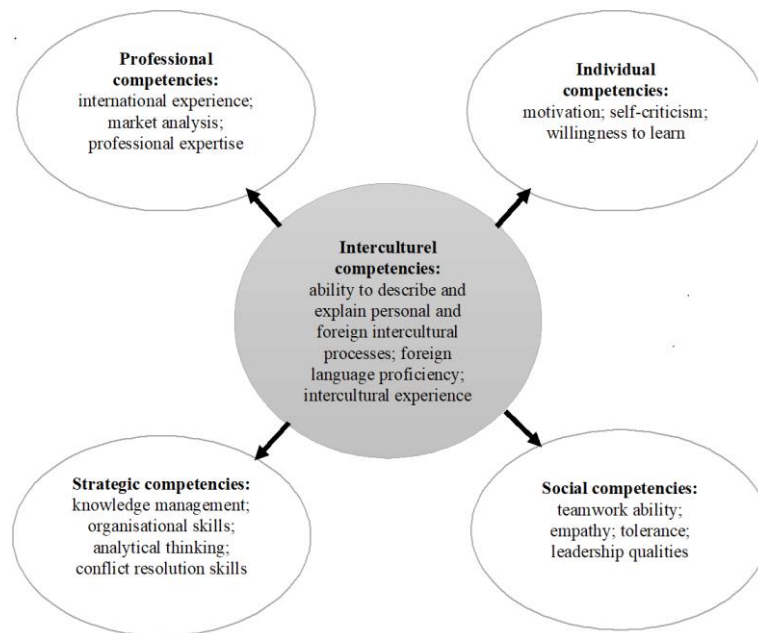


Fig. 2. Intercultural competencies according to J. Bolten: classification of competency types

The application of this model to the analysis of the integration of Ukrainian migrants into the German labor market makes it possible to consider intercultural competencies as a key resource for successful professional adaptation in a multicultural working environment.

Among the sectors of the German labor market—such as elderly care, cleaning services, warehouse operations, and tax consulting - a stable demand for qualified personnel is also observed in the field of freight forwarding and logistics. This sector is characterized by high operational complexity and a strong need for specialists with interdisciplinary competencies. Logistics and freight forwarding represent a particularly illustrative professional environment in which the combination of professional expertise, language proficiency, and intercultural competencies directly determines employment opportunities for Ukrainian professionals in Germany. The specific nature of logistics activities requires a comprehensive assessment of competencies, encompassing professional, analytical, linguistic, and intercultural components. In practice, these competencies are manifested through compliance with business communication standards, accuracy in fulfilling contractual obligations, and effective interaction with partners from diverse cultural backgrounds.

their integrated and process-oriented nature. The model reflects the interrelation between the personal, social, and functional–strategic dimensions of intercultural competence. The personal dimension includes such characteristics as openness, empathy, and tolerance of ambiguity; the social dimension encompasses skills of intercultural communication, teamwork, and conflict management; the functional–strategic dimension refers to the ability to apply intercultural knowledge in professional activities and decision-making processes.

Professional competencies in logistics are assessed through concrete operational skills, including the calculation of transportation costs, the application of Incoterms, route planning, delivery time control, preparation of transport and customs documentation, as well as the use of digital logistics systems such as Transportation Management Systems (TMS) and Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) systems. These competencies form the foundation of the daily professional activities of a freight forwarder in Germany.

Language and communication competencies have clear practical relevance and include conducting business correspondence in German, negotiating by phone with carriers, coordinating terms with clients, and interacting with financial institutions. Insufficient language proficiency directly affects service quality and may result in financial losses.

Analytical and cognitive competencies are applied when working with tariffs, currency transactions, assessing route profitability, and resolving non-standard situations such as delays, cargo damage, or changes in transportation conditions. Logical and visual thinking are essential for rapid information processing under time constraints.

Intercultural competencies are expressed through adherence to German standards of business conduct,

including punctuality, clarity of agreements, written confirmation of decisions, and a well-defined hierarchy of responsibility. For Ukrainian specialists, this implies adapting communication styles and organisational behavior while maintaining professional autonomy.

A practical example illustrates the effectiveness of a competency-based approach to employment in logistics and freight forwarding. The author of the article successfully completed a comprehensive qualification test in German with a score of 87%. The test consisted of 100 tasks to be completed within 100 minutes and assessed professional logistics knowledge, mathematical and analytical skills, proficiency in German and English, understanding of financial and banking operations, as well as logical and visual reasoning abilities. This standardized assessment format enables employers to objectively evaluate a candidate's professional and intercultural readiness for work in the German logistics environment. The obtained result confirms not only the presence of applied competencies but also the ability to function effectively in conditions of linguistic, organisational, and cultural diversity, which constitutes a key requirement of the contemporary German logistics services market.

Thus, passing a comprehensive competency assessment serves as an instrument for the objective verification of various types of competencies. Among these, intercultural competence is integrated with professional and cognitive skills and directly influences the prospects of successful employment of Ukrainian specialists in the freight forwarding and logistics sector in Germany.

Conclusions. The employment situation of Ukrainian migrants in Germany indicates gradual integration into the national labor market: by the end of October 2025, more than 1.2 million individuals were under temporary protection, and the employment rate among the working-age population had increased to 51%. At the same time, effective participation in project teams and the sustainability of professional integration depend not only on the level of professional expertise and language skills but also on the development of intercultural competencies. These include adaptability, cultural awareness, empathy, tolerance, and the ability to engage in constructive interaction.

In the multicultural environment of logistics and freight forwarding, these competencies are realized through adherence to professional and communication standards, precision in fulfilling obligations, and efficient coordination with partners from different cultural backgrounds. The formation of such competencies occurs through practical experience, specialized training, and

formalized assessment procedures that integrate professional, cognitive, and interpersonal skills. The achieved test result of 87% confirms the formation of the necessary professional, linguistic, and cognitive competencies, enabling effective task performance within the German logistics market, which is characterized by high requirements for accuracy, responsibility, and intercultural interaction.

Therefore, the combination of intercultural, linguistic, and professional competencies forms a solid foundation for the effective integration of Ukrainian specialists into the German professional environment and minimizes the risks of communication failures within project teams.

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