

## HR

**Coming to the UK - A Cultural Introduction**

The regular rotation of expatriate staff in and out of UK branches and offices is part of the life cycle of Companies whose Head Offices are in China, Japan and Korea. Leaving your home country and coming to the UK to live and work is an exciting and challenging experience. In this newsletter we will review some topics that may contribute to an expatriate's success in their assignment here in the UK.



One aspect of cultural difference between the UK and your home country to bear in mind is what the academic Geert Hofstede noted as Collectivism versus Individualism. Individualism is the degree to which people's self-image is defined in terms of "I" or "We". According to Hofstede, individualist societies people look after themselves and their direct family only. In Asian collectivist societies people identify with groups thinking in terms of 'We'. Japan, China and South Korea have relatively low individualism scores compared to the UK. Newcomers to the UK also need to be mindful of the fact that the younger more individualistic generation in particular ask for more regular feedback than you might expect to give in your home country. They also place

greater emphasis on benefits and flexible working. Understanding these cultural differences will help you anticipate and deal with these things, and in turn provide you with the opportunity to explain to your local colleagues how your organisation thinks and does things.

It is important to note how diverse the UK, and in particular London, is. Over 300 different languages are spoken at home in London, and 37% of its population was born outside the UK (2011 Census). Outside of London, the West Midlands, parts of Yorkshire and even South Wales can be ethnically diverse with large South Asian, Chinese, eastern European and Somali populations. There is also a growing Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer / Questioning (LGBTQ) community in the UK. This diversity is reflected in the workplace with many employers embracing diversity as means of attracting prospective employees. As well as showing an interest in your workplace diversity, you can ask your new local colleagues for advice, particularly about any words they may recommend you avoid in the course of even casual conversations.

Be aware that UK Employment legislation covers 9 protected characteristics including discrimination on the grounds of race (colour, nationality, ethnicity), religion & belief, sexual orientation and gender reassignment. Understanding and being sensitive to the subtleties of culture will therefore help you avoid embarrassing misunderstandings with a financial and reputational cost to the Organisation if your employee takes legal action. The more information you have about the local people you work with, the more cultural intelligence you acquire, especially in mindfulness and empathy. In turn, the bigger the chance of getting the most out of your time, both professionally and personally, as an expatriate in the UK.

**3HR are well placed to support and assist our clients as we can arrange training sessions for you and your staff which explain and expand on these and other related concepts.**

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