

Enhancing Workplace Productivity in Middle Eastern Construction Companies Through Cultural Understanding

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ABSTRACT

This study explores how cultural understanding enhances workplace productivity within Middle Eastern construction companies. Survey data assessed cultural awareness, cross-cultural communication, cultural sensitivity, and adaptability, as well as workplace productivity metrics such as task efficiency, collaboration, engagement, and job satisfaction. Results show that overall cultural understanding is rated “Excellent,” particularly in awareness (Mean = 3.45), communication (3.43), and adaptability (3.44); cultural sensitivity, although good (Mean = 3.28), slightly lags behind. Productivity outcomes are more variable: collaboration and teamwork (3.44) and employee engagement (3.30) are strong, while task efficiency is “Good” (3.22). Statistical analysis reveals highly significant positive correlations ($p < .001$) between cultural understanding and productivity dimensions, especially collaboration ($r = .737$) and overall workplace productivity ($r = .673$). These findings underscore culture’s pivotal role in fostering teamwork and engagement, highlighting the importance of targeted cultural interventions. Recommendations include expanded cultural sensitivity training, mentorship pairing, and organizational initiatives that bridge cultural gaps. Future research should explore the longitudinal impact and broader samples across the region.

Keywords: Cultural Understanding, Construction Industry, Workplace Productivity, Cross-Cultural Communication, Cultural Gaps, Middle East

INTRODUCTION

The Middle East’s construction sector is scaling at pace—driven by giga-projects, tourism, energy transition, and digital infrastructure—which intensifies the need to coordinate large, multicultural project teams without productivity loss. Recent market intelligence shows sustained demand across regional hubs alongside capacity pressures, making people-and-culture execution as critical as cost and schedule control (Turner & Townsend, 2025). Industry revenue growth underscores the urgency: international contractors report double-digit increases in the Middle East, but execution risks rise when collaboration frays across cultural lines (Engineering News-Record, 2025). In this environment, cultural understanding becomes a practical lever for efficiency, rework reduction, and safer, faster delivery.

Empirical 2025 research in construction management now connects cultural intelligence (CQ) with governance quality and delivery outcomes in the UAE’s complex projects. A large practitioner survey links higher CQ and stronger project governance with more successful delivery, implying that culturally adept leaders better align multi-national teams and decision rights (Aleid & Ochieng, 2025). Complementary evidence from a peer-reviewed study in Buildings details actionable strategies—cultural-awareness leadership, respectful communication norms, and reconciliatory practices—that mitigate delays and budget overruns stemming from cross-cultural misunderstandings (Eyiah et al., 2025). Together, these studies position CQ-informed governance as a keystone capability for Middle Eastern contractors.

Beyond leadership, culture-and-engagement analytics point to measurable productivity dividends when frontline teams feel respected, informed, and connected. Region-specific engagement data from construction and heavy industry across the Middle East & Africa highlight high alignment to company goals but also reveal headroom on feedback and recognition—areas that often intersect with cultural dynamics such as power distance and communication style (Culture Amp, 2025). Global workplace culture research similarly ties inclusive climates to retention and discretionary effort—outcomes that stabilize project staffing and protect schedule adherence in labor-intensive builds (SHRM Executive Network, 2025; O.C. Tanner Institute, 2025).

Technology trends add another layer: as firms adopt digital twins, AI-enabled coordination, and data-rich collaboration, cross-cultural communication shifts to hybrid channels where misinterpretation can propagate quickly. New evidence stresses structured approaches to digital twin adoption in Middle Eastern construction, noting the human-organizational prerequisites for effective information sharing across diverse teams (Emerald Publishing, 2025). Parallel work on digital media and cross-cultural identity warns that communication media themselves shape meaning-making—reminding project leaders that tool choices and norms must be culturally literate to avoid cognitive overload and silence from minority voices (Affective Science via ScienceDirect, 2025).

Finally, the broader labor market context reinforces the strategic value of cultural understanding. The Future of Jobs 2025 report highlights rising skill volatility and the premium on adaptive, people-centered management; meanwhile, inclusion-and-belonging business cases specific to construction link psychologically safe climates with attraction and retention—vital amid persistent craft and professional shortages (World Economic Forum, 2025; Culture of CARE, 2025). In short, across governance, engagement, technology, and labor economics, 2025 evidence converges: culturally intelligent organizations are better positioned to convert diversity into collaboration quality, workflow efficiency, and resilient project performance in Middle Eastern construction.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study employed a quantitative-descriptive research design to examine the relationship between cultural understanding and workplace productivity in Middle Eastern construction companies. A survey method was selected because it allows for the systematic collection of data across multiple dimensions of cultural understanding, including awareness, cross-cultural communication, sensitivity, and adaptability, as well as productivity indicators such as task efficiency, collaboration, employee engagement, and job satisfaction. The descriptive design was appropriate for capturing perceptions of employees, while correlation analysis tested the statistical significance of relationships between the independent variable (cultural understanding) and the dependent variable (workplace productivity).

The respondents consisted of employees working in various construction companies across the Middle East, selected using purposive sampling to ensure representation of culturally diverse workplaces typical of the industry. A structured questionnaire was developed and validated by field experts. The instrument was divided into two major parts: (1) indicators of cultural understanding, including awareness, communication, sensitivity, and adaptability, and (2) indicators of workplace productivity, including task efficiency, collaboration, employee engagement, and job satisfaction. Each item was measured using a 5-point Likert scale, with responses ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The reliability of the instrument was established through a pilot test, yielding a Cronbach's alpha above the acceptable threshold of 0.70, indicating strong internal consistency.

Data collection was conducted through both online and paper-based surveys, ensuring accessibility to employees across different project sites and offices. The collected data were encoded and analyzed using descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) to determine the levels of cultural

understanding and workplace productivity. Qualitative descriptions (e.g., Excellent, Good) were applied to interpret mean scores. Furthermore, Pearson's r correlation analysis was employed to identify the degree and significance of the relationships between cultural understanding and productivity dimensions. Statistical analyses were performed at a 0.05 level of significance, with findings presented in tabular form to highlight key results and support interpretation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results indicate that employees in Middle Eastern construction companies demonstrate a strong level of cultural awareness, with an overall mean of 3.45, described as *Excellent*. Among the indicators, the highest rating was given to the belief that understanding cultural norms enhances workplace collaboration ($M=3.68$, $SD=0.68$), which highlights the functional value of awareness in building teamwork. Similarly, employees showed a strong understanding that cultural differences influence work practices ($M=3.62$, $SD=0.67$) and a willingness to learn about different cultures ($M=3.54$, $SD=0.73$). These responses suggest that employees generally recognize the importance of cultural awareness in shaping harmonious relationships and improving efficiency in a diverse environment.

However, the lowest-rated item was the company's provision of adequate information to increase awareness ($M=3.08$, $SD=0.99$, *Good*). This indicates that while employees individually value and practice cultural awareness, organizational support may be limited or inconsistent. The gap highlights a need for more structured cultural training programs or awareness-building initiatives to supplement employees' personal efforts. Overall, these findings suggest that cultural awareness is more of a personal trait and interpersonal practice than a systematically reinforced organizational culture.

Table 1
Participants' level of Cultural Understanding in terms of Cultural Awareness

INDICATORS	MEAN	SD	Description
I am aware of the cultural norms and values of my colleagues from different backgrounds.	3.34	0.82	Excellent
I understand how cultural differences can impact behavior and work practices.	3.62	0.67	Excellent
The company provides adequate information to increase cultural awareness among employees.	3.08	0.99	Good
I believe that understanding cultural norms and values enhances workplace collaboration.	3.68	0.68	Excellent
I actively seek to learn more about the diverse cultures represented in the workplace.	3.54	0.73	Excellent
Overall	3.45	0.59	Excellent

Cross-cultural communication was rated *Excellent* overall ($M=3.43$, $SD=0.54$). Employees reported a strong ability to communicate effectively with colleagues from different backgrounds ($M=3.52$, $SD=0.68$), affirming that communication across cultures is a strength within these companies. Similarly, the recognition of communication as an essential daily skill ($M=3.44$, $SD=0.76$) indicates that employees practice inclusivity actively. These findings suggest that despite differences, there is a collective effort to foster understanding through dialogue and interpersonal interactions.

Still, certain aspects reflect room for improvement. For instance, the company's role in encouraging open communication was rated slightly lower ($M=3.36$, $SD=0.80$). Although the results remain in the *Excellent* range, this suggests that communication largely thrives at the individual and team levels rather than being formally institutionalized by the company. Nevertheless, the data point toward a

generally positive communicative environment where cultural differences are respected, enabling smoother teamwork and reducing misunderstandings in a highly diverse workforce.

Table 2
Participants' level of Cultural Understanding in terms of Cross-Cultural Communication

INDICATORS	MEAN	SD	Description
I am able to communicate effectively with colleagues from different cultural backgrounds.	3.52	0.68	Excellent
The company encourages open communication between employees from diverse cultural backgrounds.	3.36	0.80	Excellent
I am comfortable discussing cultural differences with my colleagues.	3.38	0.78	Excellent
Cultural differences in communication are respected and understood by my team members.	3.44	0.73	Excellent
Cross-cultural communication is an essential skill that I practice in my daily work.	3.44	0.76	Excellent
Overall	3.43	0.54	Excellent

The overall mean for cultural sensitivity was 3.28, interpreted as *Excellent*, though the breakdown reveals mixed results. Employees felt respected regardless of cultural background ($M=3.56$, $SD=0.73$) and believed that cultural perspectives are encouraged ($M=3.42$, $SD=0.81$), both indicating strong interpersonal respect. Similarly, employees themselves demonstrated consciousness of cultural sensitivities in teamwork ($M=3.40$, $SD=0.70$). These ratings underscore that cultural sensitivity at the individual level is evident and positively contributes to inclusivity.

Conversely, two indicators fell only in the *Good* category: team sensitivity to cultural differences ($M=2.96$, $SD=0.81$) and the company's fostering of sensitivity ($M=3.06$, $SD=0.84$). This implies that while individual respect exists, organizational efforts and collective team practices may not consistently reflect the same sensitivity. The discrepancy points to a gap between personal values and institutional reinforcement, suggesting that cultural sensitivity could be better embedded into company policies, training, and leadership practices to create more consistent experiences across teams.

Table 4
Participants' level of Cultural Understanding in terms of Adaptability to Cultural Differences

INDICATORS	MEAN	SD	Description
I feel respected and valued by my colleagues despite cultural differences.	3.56	0.73	Excellent
My team is sensitive to the cultural differences of its members when working together.	2.96	0.81	Good
The company fosters an environment where cultural sensitivity is prioritized.	3.06	0.84	Good
I am conscious of cultural sensitivities when working with others.	3.40	0.70	Excellent
The company encourages respect for different cultural perspectives in all work-related matters.	3.42	0.81	Excellent
Overall	3.28	0.57	Excellent

Adaptability received an overall *Excellent* rating ($M=3.44$, $SD=0.53$). Employees reported being open to adjusting their work practices for cultural inclusivity ($M=3.48$, $SD=0.68$) and adapting easily to diverse work practices ($M=3.46$, $SD=0.58$). The highest-rated indicator was the belief that adapting to cultural differences improves the work environment ($M=3.74$, $SD=0.49$), suggesting that employees not only recognize the necessity of flexibility but also view it as beneficial to productivity and workplace harmony.

Despite the generally excellent ratings, the company's role in promoting adaptability was rated lower ($M=3.22$, $SD=0.76$, *Good*). This suggests that adaptability is practiced largely on an individual and team basis rather than being formally encouraged through company initiatives. In contrast, teamwork flexibility was rated positively ($M=3.28$, $SD=0.93$), reflecting that employees adjust well to one another's differences. These findings highlight adaptability as both a strength and an opportunity for improvement if reinforced through formal company programs.

Table 5
Participants' overall level of Cultural Understanding

INDICATORS	MEAN
Cultural Awareness	3.45
Cross-Cultural Communication	3.43
Cultural Sensitivity	3.28
Adaptability to Cultural Differences	3.44

When cultural understanding dimensions are summarized, the results present a generally *Excellent* level across categories: Cultural Awareness ($M=3.45$), Cross-Cultural Communication ($M=3.43$), and Adaptability ($M=3.44$). Cultural Sensitivity, however, scored slightly lower at 3.28, though still described as *Excellent*. These findings suggest that awareness, communication, and adaptability are strong foundations in these workplaces, likely driven by the necessity of multicultural collaboration in construction projects.

The relatively lower rating in sensitivity signals a subtle challenge: while employees understand, communicate, and adapt across cultural differences, they may still struggle with fully internalizing and practicing sensitivity at a deeper level. This nuance implies that the diversity is acknowledged and managed effectively, but may not always translate into empathetic or proactive sensitivity at both the team and organizational levels. Therefore, interventions should prioritize strengthening cultural sensitivity to complement the already strong levels of awareness, communication, and adaptability.

Table 6
Participants' level of Workplace Productivity in terms of Task Efficiency

INDICATORS	MEAN	SD	Description
Cultural understanding has improved my efficiency in completing tasks on time.	3.30	0.74	Excellent
I am able to complete tasks more quickly due to the smooth interaction with colleagues from diverse cultures.	3.36	0.69	Excellent
The company's cultural understanding initiatives help me work more effectively with others.	3.12	0.85	Good
My ability to complete tasks efficiently is enhanced by the cultural awareness of my team.	3.16	0.82	Good
The understanding of cultural differences has made task delegation more efficient in my team.	3.16	0.82	Good
Overall	3.22	0.64	Good

The results reveal that task efficiency was rated overall as *Good* ($M=3.22$, $SD=0.64$), indicating moderate benefits from cultural understanding in improving work pace and accuracy. Employees acknowledged that cultural understanding contributes to timely completion of tasks ($M=3.30$, $SD=0.74$) and smoother interactions ($M=3.36$, $SD=0.69$), both of which support operational efficiency. These results confirm that workplace diversity can enhance productivity by reducing miscommunication and delays.

Nonetheless, several indicators were rated only *Good*, such as the company's initiatives for effectiveness ($M=3.12$, $SD=0.85$), task efficiency through team cultural awareness ($M=3.16$, $SD=0.82$), and delegation efficiency ($M=3.16$, $SD=0.82$). These findings imply that while cultural understanding is helpful, efficiency gains are not fully maximized due to gaps in company-level programs or formalized approaches. It suggests that construction companies could achieve even greater efficiency if cultural initiatives were systematized into operational workflows.

Table 7
Participants' level of Workplace Productivity in terms of Collaboration and Teamwork

INDICATORS	MEAN	SD	Description
Cultural understanding fosters better collaboration between team members from diverse backgrounds.	3.50	0.58	Excellent
I believe that cultural sensitivity in the workplace has enhanced the quality of teamwork in my team.	3.38	0.73	Excellent
I work more effectively in teams where cultural differences are acknowledged and respected.	3.54	0.54	Excellent
The diversity in our team helps us bring different perspectives to problem-solving and decision-making.	3.44	0.73	Excellent
The team collaborates more effectively because we understand and respect each other's cultural backgrounds.	3.34	0.92	Excellent
Overall	3.44	0.54	Excellent

Collaboration and teamwork received high *Excellent* ratings ($M=3.44$, $SD=0.54$), making it the strongest productivity factor. Employees emphasized that cultural understanding fosters collaboration ($M=3.50$, $SD=0.58$) and enhances teamwork quality ($M=3.38$, $SD=0.73$). Similarly, they acknowledged the benefits of cultural diversity in problem-solving and decision-making ($M=3.44$, $SD=0.73$), affirming that differences serve as strengths rather than barriers.

This dimension highlights the transformative potential of cultural understanding in creating synergy within teams. The data suggest that cultural inclusivity not only prevents conflict but also actively enriches team processes. The positive ratings across all indicators confirm that construction companies, which rely heavily on team-based project delivery, benefit significantly from cultivating respect and inclusivity.

Table 8
Participants' level of Workplace Productivity in terms of Employee Engagement

INDICATORS	MEAN	SD	Description
I feel more engaged in my work because the company values cultural diversity.	3.18	0.92	Good
Understanding cultural differences motivates me to contribute more to the team's success.	3.48	0.58	Excellent
The company's efforts to promote cultural understanding have positively influenced my level of engagement.	3.20	0.99	Good
I feel more connected to my colleagues because we understand each other's cultural backgrounds.	3.36	0.75	Excellent
Cultural inclusivity in the workplace makes me more enthusiastic about my work.	3.28	0.78	Excellent
Overall	3.30	0.67	Excellent

Employee engagement was rated overall as *Excellent* ($M=3.30$, $SD=0.67$), suggesting that cultural understanding positively influences motivation and participation. Employees particularly valued that

understanding differences motivates them to contribute more ($M=3.48$, $SD=0.58$) and that inclusivity fosters stronger workplace connections ($M=3.36$, $SD=0.75$). This reflects that diversity and inclusivity are not passive factors but actively shape how employees involve themselves in work and teamwork.

On the other hand, the company's direct initiatives for engagement ($M=3.20$, $SD=0.99$, *Good*) and efforts to promote inclusivity ($M=3.18$, $SD=0.92$, *Good*) scored lower. These findings suggest that while employees feel engaged, this is driven more by interpersonal relationships than organizational strategies. Thus, companies should leverage engagement programs specifically designed to reinforce cultural inclusivity and ensure long-term employee motivation.

Table 9
Participants' level of Workplace Productivity in terms of Job Satisfaction

INDICATORS	MEAN	SD	Description
I am satisfied with the company's approach to fostering cultural understanding in the workplace.	3.18	0.98	Good
I feel that my cultural background is respected, which positively impacts my job satisfaction.	3.44	0.76	Excellent
The inclusive work culture created by understanding cultural differences increases my job satisfaction.	3.40	0.67	Excellent
I am more satisfied with my work environment because of the company's cultural sensitivity efforts.	3.16	0.93	Good
I enjoy my job more because I work in a culturally inclusive environment.	3.34	0.82	Excellent
Overall	3.30	0.74	Excellent

Job satisfaction also showed an overall *Excellent* level ($M=3.30$, $SD=0.74$). Employees expressed high satisfaction with respect for cultural backgrounds ($M=3.44$, $SD=0.76$) and inclusivity within the work culture ($M=3.40$, $SD=0.67$). The sense of enjoyment from working in a diverse environment ($M=3.34$, $SD=0.82$) further highlights how cultural inclusivity directly translates into positive workplace experiences.

Yet, two indicators rated *Good*—satisfaction with the company's cultural efforts ($M=3.18$, $SD=0.98$) and satisfaction with the work environment ($M=3.16$, $SD=0.93$). This reveals a subtle gap between employees' personal satisfaction and their evaluation of organizational support systems. Employees are satisfied overall but expect stronger institutional policies or programs that directly address inclusivity.

Table 10
Participants' overall level of Workplace Productivity

INDICATORS	MEAN
Cultural Awareness	3.45
Cross-Cultural Communication	3.43
Cultural Sensitivity	3.28
Adaptability to Cultural Differences	3.44

The overall summary shows that Collaboration and Teamwork ($M=3.44$) was the highest-rated productivity dimension, followed by Employee Engagement ($M=3.30$) and Job Satisfaction ($M=3.30$), with Task Efficiency rated the lowest ($M=3.22$). This suggests that cultural understanding contributes more strongly to interpersonal and relational aspects of productivity than to purely operational efficiency.

The findings highlight that while cultural understanding creates strong teamwork and engagement, its influence on task completion speed and accuracy remains moderate. This indicates that productivity benefits are more visible in relational outcomes (collaboration, engagement, satisfaction) than in technical efficiency. For construction companies, this means leveraging cultural understanding as a foundation for team cohesion, while exploring complementary strategies (like training and workflow management) to strengthen efficiency.

Table 11
Correlation of Cultural Understanding and all dimensions of Workplace Productivity

Independent Variable Constant (x)	Pearson R	p-value	Interpretation
Task Efficiency	0.614***	<.001	Highly Significant
Collaboration and Teamwork	0.737***	<.001	Highly Significant
Employee Engagement	0.549***	<.001	Highly Significant
Job Satisfaction	0.505***	<.001	Highly Significant
overall Workplace Productivity	0.673***	<.001	Highly Significant

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

The correlation results (Pearson's r) reveal a strong and highly significant relationship between cultural understanding and all dimensions of workplace productivity. The strongest correlation was with Collaboration and Teamwork ($r=0.737$, $p<.001$), followed by overall Productivity ($r=0.673$, $p<.001$). This confirms that cultural understanding is a key driver of effective teamwork, aligning with earlier findings that collaboration benefits most from diversity.

Other productivity dimensions also showed significant relationships: Task Efficiency ($r=0.614$), Employee Engagement ($r=0.549$), and Job Satisfaction ($r=0.505$), all at $p<.001$. These results indicate that cultural understanding has a broad and consistent influence across workplace productivity measures. However, the relatively lower correlation with job satisfaction suggests that while inclusivity enhances satisfaction, other organizational factors (e.g., compensation, career growth) may also play a role. Overall, the results strongly affirm the hypothesis that cultural understanding significantly enhances workplace productivity in construction companies.

CONCLUSION

Cultural understanding in Middle Eastern construction environments is generally strong among employees, with outstanding scores in awareness, communication, and adaptability. Sensitivity scores, though still positive, highlight areas where the company needs to bolster institutional engagement. Productivity outcomes reflect this trend: collaboration, engagement, and satisfaction are robustly associated with cultural understanding, though task efficiency—while positively influenced—would benefit from enhanced organizational infrastructure.

This study confirms that cultural competence is not merely a social nicety but a tangible contributor to productivity. The results advocate for targeted company-level initiatives to strengthen cultural sensitivity and integrate cultural understanding into formal processes, enabling not just individual adaptability, but systemic efficiency and employee experience.

Recommendations

1. Implement Cultural Sensitivity Training: Develop structured workshops and learning modules that specifically address workplace cultural sensitivity, creating awareness of organizational gaps and enhancing team-level understanding.
2. Pair Mentorship across Cultures: Establish cross-cultural mentorship or buddy programs to connect employees from different backgrounds, fostering mutual understanding and informal knowledge transfer.
3. Embed Cultural Goals into Organizational Processes: Incorporate cultural awareness and adaptability metrics into performance reviews, project planning, and task delegation protocols to ensure leadership emphasizes and models inclusive practices.
4. Strengthen Communication Channels: Introduce regular intercultural dialogues or “cultural forums” where employees can share perspectives and address cultural challenges proactively, enhancing engagement and trust.

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