

# “Guidelines of integrated management solutions: volunteers’ emotional intelligence, intercultural training and work productivity”

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# GUIDELINES OF INTEGRATED MANAGEMENT SOLUTIONS: VOLUNTEERS' EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE, INTERCULTURAL TRAINING AND WORK PRODUCTIVITY

## Abstract

The relevance of the research presented in the article is based on the results of studies of the last few decades, which show the increasing involvement of volunteers in various social and cultural areas of activities, but it should be emphasized that the involvement of volunteers could be even higher. However, there are considerable challenges in the area of volunteer work management, especially when analyzing the issues of emotional intelligence education, development of intercultural competence to increase work productivity.

The aim of this paper is to establish the guidelines of integrated management solutions for the increase of work productivity via the development of emotional intelligence and intercultural training of volunteers.

The aim was achieved not only based on the analysis of scientific literature, but also on the results of previous researches carried out by the authors of the article, i.e. a qualitative study interviewing individuals working with volunteers coming to Lithuania from foreign countries ( $N = 7$ ) and a quantitative study in which the volunteers were surveyed ( $N = 174$ ).

The paper, as a result, presents guidelines for the development of emotional intelligence and intercultural competence based on the concept of the expanding efforts by organizations that send, receive and coordinate volunteers. Four intersecting pairs of criteria for emotional intelligence and intercultural competence have been identified, the integration of which could serve to increase work productivity of volunteers in foreign countries.

The value of the article is based on the proposed new idea of integrating emotional intelligence and intercultural competence in order to increase work productivity of volunteers; additionally, it presents their development guidelines for organization management specialists. This study is focused on the integration of emotional intelligence and intercultural competence and identification of interrelated components. For this reason, it would be beneficial in the future to elaborate on the mechanism of how volunteers are prepared for foreign missions with the help of activities by the coordinating, sending and receiving organizations.

## Keywords

volunteers, emotional intelligence, intercultural  
competence, work productivity, management solutions,  
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**JEL Classification** M12, M14, M19

## INTRODUCTION

### Relevance of the research

Studies of the last several decades have shown an increasing volunteer involvement in various areas of social and cultural activities (European Parliament Special Eurobarometer, 2011; European Parliament, 2016),

though it is also noted that both volunteers themselves could be involved more (Brudney & Edward, 2000) and there is no shortage of challenges in the field of volunteer management. According to Haski-Leventhal and Bargal (2008), when pursuing volunteers that are engaged in the activity, there is a poor understanding of their organizational socialization related to the process during which volunteers are learning to work and internalize organizational values and goals in order to be productive. General volunteering principles are laid out by the European Commission (2016) and the EVS Quality Manual (2012, 2015), but they foresee only the principal guidelines that encompass the organization of volunteering and the functions of the sending and the receiving organization. This alleviates coordination of activities, but does not provide a volunteer with necessary guidelines for the development of intercultural competence and emotional intelligence in international organizations. It is common that national organizations operate according to the typical human resource management rules that do not tackle individual cases related to volunteering. For instance, Studer (2016) identifies a number of components that make volunteer management exceptional and unique. According to the author, such principles as the balance of interests, strategic obligation to volunteers, clarity of roles, team spirit, and respect complement the classic concept of human resource efficiency; as a result, volunteers should be treated as an exceptional stakeholder group. However, apart from the management of volunteers as a specific segment of human resource management, there are several other specific tasks that arise. For example, working with volunteers may differ depending on the organization type as well (McAllum, 2013). On the other hand, in a previously conducted study, Haski-Leventhal and Bargal (2008) discussed the stages of volunteer socialization and named emotional participation as one of the principal components. Volunteers encounter different cultures that elicit strong emotions (Mangold, 2012; Furham, 2012) and these become difficult to control for unprepared individuals. This requires knowledge of different cultures, which is identified as an intercultural competence characterized by an ability to adequately and appropriately react to cultural diversity (Cai, 2016; Fantini & Tirmizi, 2006). Still, in recent decades, emotional participation has been widely explored in the context of the ability of emotional intelligence, which helps one establish better emotional connections with people (Goleman et al., 2002; Kunnanatt, 2008; Brackett et al., 2011; Branscum et al., 2014; El-Chaarani, 2016; etc.). While it has been observed that, in a culturally diverse context, emotional intelligence creates the potential to achieve higher work productivity with the help of empathy and social skills (Lilis & Tian, 2009), there is nevertheless a shortage of studies that would combine such components as intercultural competence, emotional intelligence, and work productivity (Vveinhardt et al., 2019). This exact systematic perspective would make it possible to prepare and empower volunteers more effectively. Because of this, the research problem is raised in the form of a question as to how, after evaluating the insights of studies on intercultural competence and emotional intelligence, to formulate the principles based on which work productivity of volunteers would be improved, while making adequate management decisions that would address the development of the volunteers' emotional intelligence and intercultural training.

**The aim of the research** is to establish the guidelines of integrated management solutions for the increase of work productivity via the development of emotional intelligence and intercultural training of volunteers.

To achieve this aim, the following research goals are set:

- 1) to introduce the specifics of working with volunteers from abroad;
- 2) to propose the guidelines of integrated solutions.

## The methods of the research

The guidelines of management solutions were established based on the analysis of scientific literature and the problematic areas of working with volunteers from abroad identified in the results of conducted empirical research (qualitative  $N = 7$  and quantitative  $N = 174$ ), in addition to the utilization of methods of systemization, visualization and modelling.

## 1. THE SPECIFICS OF WORK WITH VOLUNTEERS FROM ABROAD

Several principles can be identified that describe the specifics of working with volunteers from abroad. The organizations that send and receive volunteers typically follow the European Commission's (2016) document, the EVS Quality Manual (2012) and other documents. Based on the established practices, each project involves three organizations (the receiving, sending and coordinating ones). In order to become a project participant, each organization has to acquire accreditation that grants them permission to work with volunteers and approves that the organization is ready for it. Usually three individuals participating in the process are singled out, such as a tutor, a mentor and a volunteer. Nevertheless, these outlining documents cannot account for all in-depth actions that take place in the receiving organization in connection to volunteer resources. Thus, general principles are specified that have to be implemented by the volunteer sending and receiving organizations, often based on the existent arrangements for working with volunteers, which may be dissimilar to one another. Work with volunteers begins from the promotion of programs and engagement of participants, whereas later on it proceeds with the volunteers themselves at both national and international levels (Gil-Lacruz et al., 2016). During the initial stage, a problem arises related to preparing the volunteers themselves for work (Haski-Leventhal & Bargal, 2008; Claxton-Oldfield, 2016; Nesbit et al., 2016). For instance, Jones (2018) notes that textbooks and lectures may impart the science of volunteer management, but the art of managing volunteers is nurtured through experience and reflection; for this reason, the researcher proposes to combine theoretical teaching with practice. First of all, the volunteer needs help in understanding his/her own role; nevertheless, according to Nesbit et al. (2016), expectations, conflicts, and perception of one's role are rather significant and underrated aspects of human resource management. The authors emphasize the fact that problems may arise if an unprepared volunteer is appointed to a managing position. Another sensitive management area related to volunteer preparation for work is socialization,

which is relevant both to volunteers arriving from abroad and to locals who find themselves in a new environment (Haski-Leventhal & Bargal, 2008; McNamee & Peterson, 2014). Haski-Leventhal and Bargal (2008) singled out several phases of socialization: the nomination phase, when the volunteer addresses the organization; organizational entrance transition; newcomer phase; accommodation transition; possible transition (ejection); emotional involvement phase; affiliation transition. These phrases highlight activity, relationships, costs and benefits, emotional participation, and even potential emotional burnout. The latter (i.e. emotional burnout) can be associated with the tensions that volunteers experience in the chain of processes, which encompasses involvement in volunteering, preparation for work, and voluntary work. McNamee and Peterson (2014) revealed four principal tensions of dialectic nature that exist in non-profit organizations: the dialectics of attractiveness and correction in the process of the socialization of new and future volunteers; the dialectics of volunteer supervision: in volunteering and negotiations for volunteers; independence, the dialectics of formalization and flexibility, which is related to the expression of management of expectations of volunteer activity and obligations; the dialectics of intimacy and distance, which is related to the scope and boundaries of volunteer relationships within organizations and beyond them.

Naturally, volunteering experiences are diverse, e.g. experienced volunteers (who spend 10 hours each) take particular care to choose the organizations that are in line with their own values (Einolf & Yung, 2018), which may ensure a better mutual understanding between the organization and the individual, as well as better interactions (Piedimonte & Depaula, 2018; Malbasic et al., 2018). Thus, in the context of international volunteering, it is important to consider that volunteers from different countries have different motives and values. A study by Stelzer and Lang (2016) revealed that volunteers working at U.S. hospitals emphasized the motives related to altruistic concerns, improvement, and social influence as the most influential ones, whereas the volunteers at the hospitals in Germany specified career expectations as more important. Another study clarified the role of career-related expectations. Volunteers of Austria, whose volunteering was based on per-

sonal motives and career expectations, felt lower job satisfaction than the volunteers who were oriented toward helping others (Stukas et al., 2014). In other words, volunteer receiving organizations should consider not only paying greater attention to volunteer motives, but also improving their intercultural competence. Volunteers face significant challenges related to emotions and their management. Strong emotions are elicited not only by a new culture encountered by the arriving volunteers, but also the specifics of the work. However, volunteers might not consider their work to require particularly strong emotions (Claxton-Oldfield, 2016), or it might be influenced by the unwillingness of the organization's management to deal with emotionally complex volunteer, which affects the volunteers' emotional commitment (Ward & Griene, 2018). Furthermore, organizations often fluctuate between overconfidence in volunteers and underestimation of their abilities. For example, Nesbit et al. (2016) note the mistakes when a volunteer is appointed as a manager, even though he/she does not have appropriate preparation, which is why training is one of the components of working with volunteers. On the other hand, it is important that the organization itself is able to use the volunteer's skills. For instance, if the volunteer has experience in fields other than the organization's, he/she may offer his/her ideas during the sharing of experiences and thus contribute to the improvement, renewal, and diversification of activities; as a result, customer expectations can also be fulfilled better (Lough, 2013). Still, some studies demonstrate that organizations are not always prepared to make use of volunteer work (Handy & Srinivasan, 2005), they should be significantly more flexible and pay more attention to empowering even the highly motivated individuals (Einolf & Yung, 2018). The studies that examine the impact of emotional intelligence and intercultural competence on work productivity of volunteers acknowledge the shortage of integrated research in this field and insufficient volunteer preparation for working abroad, which would assess subjective abilities of volunteers and also dedicate time to the development of their intercultural competence and emotional intelligence (Vveinhardt et al., 2019). In other words, in spite of good intentions of the volunteers themselves, the risk remains that, without sufficient competences in the aforementioned field, working abroad will

require greater emotional and temporal resources that could be used for work while avoiding additional stress. The latest study (Vveinhardt et al., 2019) highlighted the value that volunteers with experience in a specific culture have to the training of new volunteers for a mission, as well as the ability of the receiving organization to appoint an individual-friend (in addition to the mentor) who would help the volunteer integrate better.

## 2. GUIDELINES OF INTEGRATED SOLUTIONS

Both a developed emotional intelligence (Wong & Law, 2002; Cote & Miners, 2006; Devonish, 2016, etc.) and an increasing cultural competence (Lee & Kartika, 2014; Kanesei & Stier, 2017; Jyoti & Kour, 2017, etc.) are significant factors that allow the volunteer to ensure higher-quality interpersonal interactions and increase work productivity. Work productivity is perceived as an individual's possibilities to successfully perform tasks while utilizing the resources available in the workplace (Jamal, 2007). Other authors draw focus towards the behavior of the individual and the team and its changes (Fleury et al., 2017; Sujatha & Krishnaveni, 2018), the impact of emotions (Brief & Weiss, 2002; Koubova & Buchko, 2013), knowledge (Sujatha & Krishnaveni, 2018) and abilities (Brackett et al., 2006), job satisfaction (Wong & Law, 2002), etc.

Nevertheless, considering the breadth of the concepts of intercultural competence and emotional intelligence, the need arises to pinpoint the criteria that reveal the common ground between them. The summarized criteria are presented in Table 1.

Emotional intelligence and intercultural competence complement matching criteria (Table 1). For instance, in the context of emotional intelligence, awareness of oneself and others is focused on emotional reactions and empathy, whereas intercultural competence adds understanding of individual thinking structures, as well as one's own and the surrounding views and the knowledge about others and openness. That is, the conditions are created for a significant increase of opportunities for the volunteer's work productivity.



**Table 1.** Connections between emotional intelligence and intercultural competence

Source: Created by the authors.

Category	Criterion	Source
Emotional intelligence	Emotional awareness of oneself and others	Mayer and Salovey (1997), Brackett et al. (2011), Bacon et al. (2018), etc.
	Openness to emotions of others, empathy	Brown (2003), Bettis-Outland and Guillory (2018), etc.
	Quality of interpersonal relationships	Goleman et al. (2002), Davis (2011), El-Chaarani (2016), etc.
	Stress prevention and management	Wong and Law (2002), King and Gardner (2006), Houghton et al. (2012), Matthews et al. (2015), etc.
Intercultural competence	Cultural awareness of oneself and others	Wilenius (2006), Berdrow and Bird (2018), etc.
	Openness to cultural values of others, sensitivity and tolerance	Paine et al. (2016), Cai (2016), etc.
	Quality of interpersonal relationships	Lloyd and Hartel (2010), Jyoti and Kour (2017), etc.
	Stress prevention and management	Mangold (2012), Jyoti and Kour (2015), etc.

However, just like development of emotional intelligence, the increase of intercultural competence is related to sensitivity to others, tolerance, and better opportunities for stress management. Both emotional intelligence and intercultural competence are acquired and developed. The foundations are laid starting from childhood, in the family, in an intimate social environment (Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Brackett et al., 2006; Acevedo, 2017, etc.) and in educational institutions (Berdrow & Bird, 2018), but this does not guarantee the result which may be needed to a volunteer arriving in a different cultural environment. Volunteer sending and receiving organizations have the possibilities to purposefully prepare volunteers by organizing training. According to Terry (2007) and Majeski et al. (2017), training is one of the main methods to quickly and effectively teach the desired competences. Training has such a potential, because group resources can be utilized and group members become a form of support to one another as sources of information. In order for a volunteer to feel safe after arriving to another country, advance

preparation is necessary. One of the best methods is group meetings or even trainings, which would focus completely on interculturalism. Delgado et al. (2016) emphasize that such training could encompass simulations with group members, presentation of theoretical knowledge on intercultural competence, the awaiting challenges, potential methods of solving them, and an examination/analysis of one's own culture as well, because, from the authors' viewpoint (Dusi et al., 2014; Delgado et al., 2016), the possessed social skills, cultural awareness, and other knowledge are all significant to intercultural competence. Still, in order for the work with volunteers to ensure high-quality services, the European Commission has prepared structured recommendations, which the organizations are encouraged to follow (European Commission, 2009, 2011, 2016; EVS Quality Manual, 2012, 2015). These documents discuss the activities of the sending, receiving, and coordinating organizations, as well as the participating individuals (tutor, mentor, volunteer). In this context, the mentor bears a significant amount of responsibility. The mentor usually performs various roles while working with the volunteer: as a teacher, a friend, a motivator, an adviser, a role model, a mediator, a coach, and a consultant (Kimming, 2015). Thus, to summarize the aspects discussed above, an allocation of responsibilities based on certain problem areas can be highlighted, which is presented in Table 2.

Even though in all cases the greatest responsibility for the decisions in a particular area falls on the volunteer and his/her motives and his/her responsibility, quite a few of the responsibilities are shared with the tutor and the mentor, which confirms that, as the volunteer is leading and making decisions, all three parties must cooperate closely and coordinate their actions (Table 2). According to Ochieng and Price (2009), in order to effectively manage an intercultural team, it is necessary to also be familiar with the principles of human resource management where intercultural competence plays a substantial role (Kenesei & Stier, 2017; Majeski et al., 2017), helping one to avoid misunderstandings and conflicts. Still, it is obvious that, in the cases when the volunteer's work is overseen by multiple organizations, the need arises for a better synchronization of work in the field of human resource management, when the organizations themselves also overcome intercultural

**Table 2.** Allocation of responsibilities in order to ensure adequate volunteer guidance

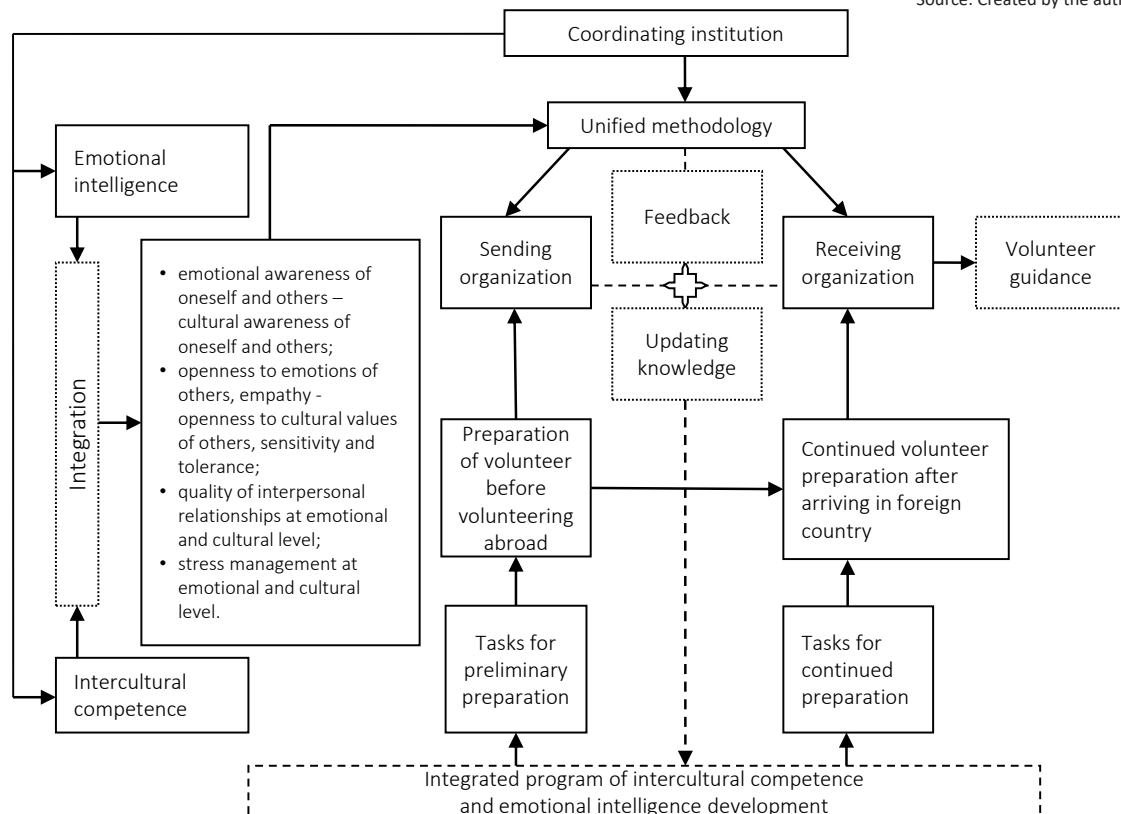
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Responsibility	Mentor	Tutor	Project coordinator	Sending coordinator	National agency	Volunteer
Problematic area						
Volunteer preparation before the start of volunteering	–	–	–	+	–	+
Volunteer's introduction into the organization's work structure	–	+	–	–	–	+
Volunteer guidance at the organization	+	+	+	–	–	+
Recognition of the volunteer's competences	+	+	–	–	–	+
The provided feedback	+	+	+	+	–	+
Relationship between the involved organizations and the volunteer	+	+	+	+	+	+
The volunteer's ability to reflect	+	+	–	–	–	+
The volunteer's ability to understand other people, recognize their emotions	+	+	–	–	–	+
The volunteer's attitude towards what is happening around him	+	+	+	+	–	+
The volunteer's desire to become a part of the local community	+	–	+	–	–	+

tural barriers. Kenesei and Stier (2017) observe that cultural differences also have an impact on inter-relationships, which is why learning about the cultures of the other volunteers is essential in order to establish close inter-relationships with them. When one lacks the knowledge as to why people from a certain culture behave one way or

another, unavoidably, this creates favorable conditions for conflict situations. Based on the previously discussed factors, general guidelines can be laid down that would enable an integrated perspective on making decisions, which take into account emotional intelligence and intercultural competence (Figure 1).

Source: Created by the authors.

**Figure 1.** Guidelines of integrated solutions for the increase of volunteer work productivity

Emotional intelligence and intercultural competence are proposed to be seen as phenomena that complement one another whose synthesis reveals four possible pairs of related criteria:

- 1) emotional awareness of oneself and others – cultural awareness of oneself and others;
- 2) openness to emotions of others, empathy – openness to cultural values of others, sensitivity and tolerance;
- 3) quality of interpersonal relationships at emotional level – quality of interpersonal relationships at cultural level;
- 4) stress prevention and management at emotional level – stress prevention and management at cultural level.

In this context, while preparing volunteers for working abroad, receiving them, and managing them, a significant role is played by the coordinating institution in order to determine inter-coordinated procedures of working with the volunteer. These procedures involve cooperation between the volunteer sending and receiving organizations, in which the latter organization establishes tasks related to a specific culture and activity, while the sending one orients volunteer preparation towards the tasks raised by a specific culture.

### 3. DISCUSSION

In the context of results of this research, it is proposed to treat emotional intelligence and intercultural competence as complementary phenomena. Similar views are also held in other scientific research, which emphasizes openness to cultural values of others, empathy, sensitivity, tolerance, etc. (Paine et al., 2016; Malbasic et al., 2018; Piedimonte & Depaula, 2018, etc.). However, we offer a broader approach systemizing these dimensions, the constituents of which are worth discussing in more detail, considering other studies.

Emotional cognition of oneself and others, included in our recommendations of integrated solutions to enhance volunteers' work productivity, has common points with Houghton et al.'s (2012)

model of relationships between emotional intelligence, self-leadership, and coping with stress among students of management. The model presented by the authors means that control of emotions and self-discipline, resulting in self-efficacy, may facilitate students' stress coping. In addition, the research conducted by Dajnoki et al. (2017) shows that persons coming from other countries may face hostile stereotypes existing in society, inspired by fear of losing their occupied positions in organizations. Our research demonstrates that cultural awareness of oneself and "different" persons in the context of emotional intelligence and the resulting openness to the emotions of culturally distinguishing persons, empathy can be a meaningful alternative to reduce hostility. This closely relates to openness to cultural values of others, sensitivity and tolerance. For example, the study conducted by Hudson and Inkson (2006) showed that volunteers working abroad not only acquired new skills, but also experienced changes in their personal identity and value approaches. However, it is no less important to develop these qualities still before going volunteering.

The constituent of emotion-focused quality of interpersonal relationships is associated with Brackett et al.'s (2011) insights that individuals' ability to understand emotional states and views of other persons, develop communication, and control behavior enables development of emotional intelligence, contributing to positive social functioning. The authors also note that representatives of all professions – educators, psychologists, human resources specialists, and chief executives – started integrating emotional intelligence into their daily practices, which shows that emotional intelligence is an integral part of work in volunteers' activities as well.

In order to substantiate the constituent of quality of interpersonal relationships in the intercultural context, links with Kenesei's and Stier's (2017) insights are envisaged, emphasizing that cultural differences affect interpersonal relationships, therefore, the establishment of close inter-relationships with volunteers requires knowledge of their cultures. Results of the research conducted by Kenesei and Stier (2017) demonstrate that possible communication and cultural obstacles encountered by the participants of interactions



while solving problems eventually are related to their personality traits, experience, knowledge of cultures and openness to other cultures.

Considering the constituent of emotion-focused stress prevention and coping, parallels are drawn with Claxton-Oldfield's (2016) research results demonstrating that although generally volunteers do not treat their work as very stressful, literature reveals some potential stressors and challenges they encounter as well as some of their commonly used coping strategies.

Meeting a new culture causes stress; therefore, it is important how intercultural competence development could help to reduce volunteers' stress experienced in another cultural environment. On the one hand, the duration of volunteering, cultural immersion, reflection, and reciprocity

of contacts are positively related to intercultural competence (Lough, 2011), and, on the other hand, a significant role is played by the hosting organization, which should help to overcome cultural barriers and establish relationships with the local population. This is also confirmed by the study of Dames and Geeraert (2015), the results of which show that the support received from the hosting country's population was related to less stress than the assistance provided in one's country. Our research demonstrates that in order to reduce stress experienced by the volunteer, the organization's support in developing intercultural competence and making contacts in the local community together with the volunteer's involvement should form a coherent system. Disregard of at least one of the constituents in this system would have a negative impact on the volunteer.

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## CONCLUSION

Even though studies have shown that intercultural competence and emotional intelligence contribute significantly to the increase of work productivity, and some of the resultant ideas can be used when preparing volunteers for work, attention has to be drawn to the fact that there is still a lack of a unifying perspective, which would combine these components. Furthermore, the classic human resource management theory should be expanded in response to issues related to volunteer work. For this reason, we propose an integrated approach to the development of intercultural competence and emotional intelligence in order to increase work productivity of volunteers by first identifying four inter-related categories that could become the guidelines for the preparation of volunteers who intend to work abroad. In this context, it is noteworthy that a united volunteer preparation system is needed, where responsibilities are shared between the coordinating, volunteer receiving, and sending organization, and the latter is given the final role of introducing the volunteer into a specific culture and field of work. In order to ensure work productivity, guidance is needed not only to the volunteers, but also the coordinating organization, which can significantly contribute to the creation of a unifying system.

*Novelty and scientific value.* A new idea of integration of emotional intelligence and intercultural competence in order to increase volunteer work productivity has been proposed. The results of our research show that the phenomenon of emotional intelligence, which so far has been little analyzed in the context of volunteering, has close relationships with volunteers' intercultural competence and work efficiency. Research results can be useful for the academic community in the future, conducting quantitative and qualitative research developing a systematic approach to volunteers' preparation and involvement. In addition, the proposed attitude can be beneficial to institutions organizing international volunteering, seeking that volunteers experience less stress, become part of the new cultural environment more successfully, and that their missions become more efficient.

*Practical value of research.* It presents integrated guidelines for the development of volunteers' emotional intelligence and intercultural competence, which provide the conditions for organization management specialists to organize more productive work of volunteers abroad.

**Research limitations and further studies.** This study is limited to the integration of emotional intelligence and intercultural competence, while distinguishing the inter-related components. In the future, it would be meaningful to elaborate on the mechanism of coordination of volunteer preparation for foreign missions between the coordinating, sending and receiving organization.

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