

Strategic Approaches to Managing Cross-Cultural Leadership in Global Business Environments

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Abstract

This paper examines how leadership style, cultural intelligence (CQ) and leadership adaptation affect team performance and employee satisfaction in cross-cultural teams in Indian organisations. A mixed-methods approach was employed, including qualitative interviews were carried out on the executives of multinational and large domestic organizations and quantitative surveys with 400 employees working in different industries. The results indicate that transformational leadership is much more effective in improving team performance ($\beta = 0.38$, $p < 0.01$) and transactional leadership is more effective in hierarchical settings ($\beta = 0.22$, $p < 0.01$). Cultural intelligence (CQ) positively predicted leadership effectiveness ($\beta = 0.52$, $p < 0.01$), which showed that leaders who have a high CQ were more effective in managing cross-cultural teams. Also, the localisation of leadership to local cultural aspects enhanced employee satisfaction ($\beta = 0.45$, $p < 0.01$), indicating that the adaptation of leadership styles to cultural norms creates a more inclusive and productive workplace. These findings emphasise the role of culturally aware and adaptive leadership in international business. The study hypothesised that to improve the dynamics and performance of the teams, organisations must pay attention to CQ training, inclusive leadership practices, and cross-cultural collaboration. The influence of the new technologies on the leadership at the cross-cultural level, the cultural peculiarities of the region in India, and the idea of hybrid types of leadership to organise the international team in practice should be discussed in future research.

Keywords: Leadership Styles; Cultural Intelligence (CQ); Team Performance; Employee Satisfaction; Leadership Adaptation; Cross-Cultural Teams; Global Business Environments.

I. INTRODUCTION

The contemporary business world has made cross-cultural leadership a critical competency among leaders who have to operate in a wide array of cultural environments in teams (Shim & Steers, 2012). With organisations going global, leaders are confronted with the issue of communicating, motivating and leading people who belong to different cultures well. Cross-cultural leadership is not all about understanding the difference in culture, but also the capacity to change leadership styles and strategies to improve team performance and organisational success (Alvarez & Sahija, 2022). Learning about the influence of cultural

differences on leadership practices is essential when it comes to promoting teamwork, innovation, and productivity in international teams (Bird & Mendenhall, 2016).

The present paper sought to discuss the increasing significance of cross-cultural leadership in a globalised world. Although several studies have been carried out on the issue of cultural differences, there is a dearth of thorough research on effective strategies for managing cross-cultural teams. Through the study of the intersection of culture and leadership, this paper contributed to the knowledge of adapting leadership practices to different cultural contexts, thereby improving the performance of the organisation. The study was of value to leaders and managers, who struggled to guide diverse teams and found ways of being more inclusive and effective in leadership.

Objectives

RO1: To investigate the main theories and models of cross-cultural leadership and their applicability to global business settings.

RO2: To analyse the issues leaders, face when working with multicultural teams and how they can be overcome.

RO3: To examine strategic solutions to the development of effective cross-cultural leadership with an emphasis on cultural intelligence and adaptive leadership.

RO4: To make practical suggestions that leaders can use to be more effective in managing diverse teams and leading to organisational success.

Hypothesis

H1: Leadership styles adapted to cultural context of cross-cultural teams in Indian organisations will positively affect team performance.

H2: Cultural intelligence (CQ) will have a positive impact on leadership performance in the management of cross-cultural teams within an Indian organisation.

H3: The effectiveness of leaders will differ drastically among the various cultural groups within Indian organisations.

H4: Leadership styles adapted to local cultural environment will have a positive impact on employee satisfaction and participation in cross-cultural groups.

The original contribution of this paper is that it is practical in its aspects in taking care of cross-cultural leadership approaches, making a bridge between theory and practice in an international business environment. The research filled the gaps in the existing literature on cross-cultural leadership and offer practical tools to business leaders by presenting case studies, practical steps, and information about how cultural intelligence can be incorporated into business leadership.

The paper will be structured as follows: Section II contain a review of significant theories, research challenges and gaps. Section III describes the research design and data collection methods. IV deals with leadership styles, cultural intelligence and case studies. Section V addresses barriers to communication and the impact of globalisation. Section VI discusses findings and implications. Section VII concludes with significant findings and gives a recommendation on future research.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The Hofstede Cultural Dimensions theory has been a classic approach in the research of the effects of cultural values on both leadership and organisation (Hanges et al., 2016). It unveils six dimensions, such as Power Distance and Individualism vs. Collectivism, which can help leaders to understand how their team may perceive authority, decision-making, and collaboration. Another theory that has had an impact is Trompenaars Model of National Culture Differences, which presents seven dimensions of culture that define leadership styles, such as Universalism vs. Particularism and Achievement vs. Ascription (Rao-Nicholson et al., 2020). This model sheds light on the difference in business practices between cultures and gives an idea of how to lead in different cultures (Al-Badawi & Al-Tarawneh, 2024; Ermasova, 2021). The GLOBE study is a major project based on these concepts, and it focuses on the study of leadership behaviours and dimensions of culture in 62 countries. It recognises nine cultural dimensions, such as Performance Orientation and Humane Orientation, and discusses the ways these cultural dimensions affect leadership behaviours, with the point that leadership expectations differ widely based on cultural values (Al-Tarawneh, 2024).

The biggest obstacle to cross-cultural leadership comes in overcoming the barriers of communication, since the difference in communication styles, like direct and indirect communication, can lead to misunderstanding (Mhlongo et al., 2024; Den Hartog & De Hoogh, 2024). When cultural biases lead to misinterpretation of behaviours, the result may be a lack of trust and team cohesion, as cultural misunderstandings are common. Besides, leaders may not be able to apply their leadership styles to other cultures. Whereas there are cultures that would embrace authoritative leadership, there are cultures that embrace participative leadership, and this may be a source of tension and flexibility is needed.

Leadership in a cross-cultural environment needs leaders to be culturally intelligent (CQ), the capacity to comprehend, adjust to, and efficiently relate with individuals of other cultures (Akande et al., 2025; Hill et al., 2021). High CQ leaders are better able to address cultural differences and lead multicultural teams (Okuboye, 2021). Another best practice is inclusive leadership, which entails leaders who are keen on establishing an atmosphere in which every team member feels respected and appreciated. Inclusive leaders use the different views of the people in their team to facilitate innovation and enhance decision-making. Moreover, cross-cultural teams should be managed with flexibility and adaptability, and the leader should have the capacity to change his/her approach depending on the cultural setting (Thapliyal & Joshi, 2022; Mouboua et al., 2024). Lastly, cultural sensitivity training may assist leaders and team members to recognise and value cultural differences, minimise misunderstandings, and enhance teamwork. These are the best practices that leaders should adopt in order to have high-performing and multicultural organisations that are instrumental in the success of global organisations.

The studies on the effect of emerging technologies on cross-cultural leadership are very sparse, particularly in the context of the emergence of virtual teams (Onyusheva et al., 2020). Many of the studies rely on Western models of leadership, and little is done in terms of non-Western models in other parts of the world, such as Asia, Africa and Latin America. The importance of cultural intelligence to digital leadership is also not investigated enough, with the majority of the research

conducted in the context of face-to-face communications. Lastly, most of the cross-cultural leadership research is cross-sectional and thus restricts the comprehension of the long-term effects, which could be covered by longitudinal research.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The research is a mixed-methods study that incorporates qualitative and quantitative methods of research to present a thorough discussion on cross-cultural leadership in India. The qualitative component explores the problems of the experiences of leaders working with multicultural teams in Indian organisations in greater detail, their problems, approaches, and cultural intelligence. Quantitative elements used to collect the numerical data, in the form of surveys, to investigate the success of the different leadership strategies in various cultural contexts in India. It is possible to construct a fragile perception with the help of this mix, whereby the qualitative knowledge is supported by the quantitative tendencies. Such a mix of the two methods results in the validity and richness of the study, as the findings are enhanced and are more relevant in the Indian context.

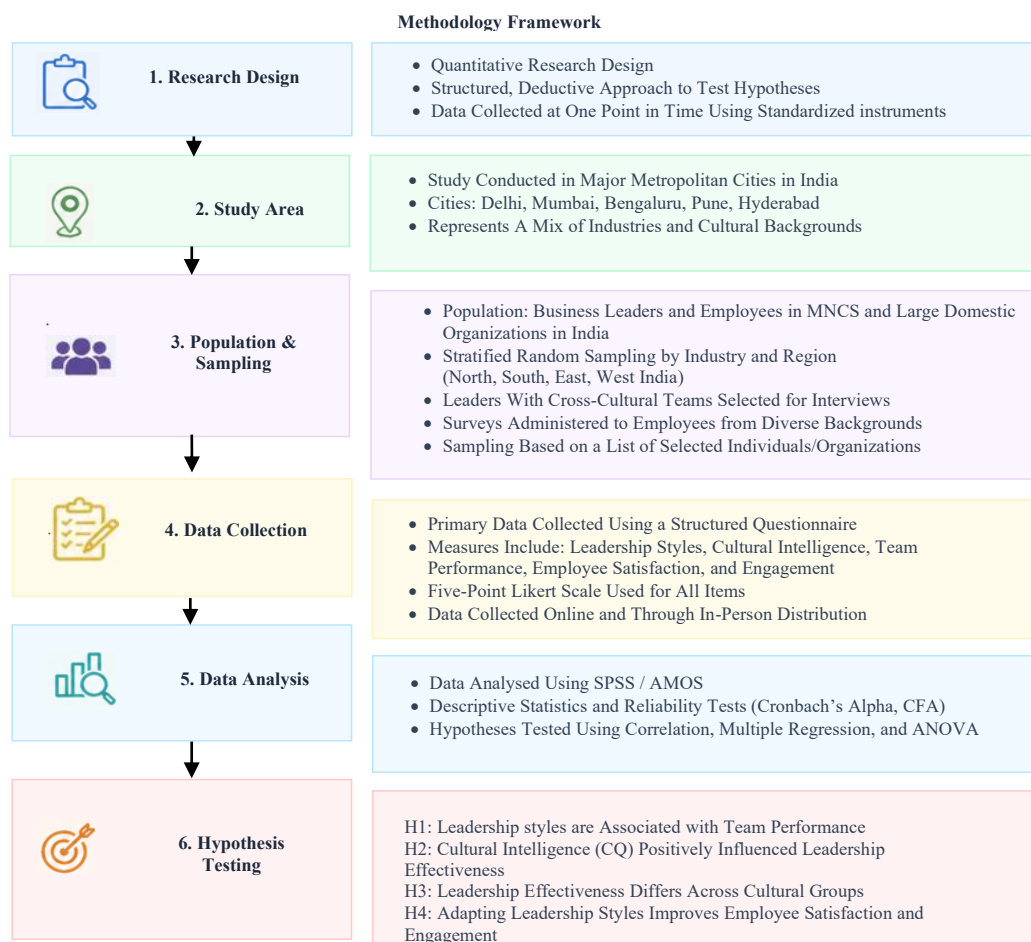


Figure 1: Methodology Framework for Cross-Cultural Leadership Research

Figure 1 gives a step wise guide concerning research methodology in studying cross cultural leadership. It outlines the research design, hypothesis testing procedure, the field of study, sample, data collection and data analysis. The framework offers clear procedures, which ensure the procedural aspect of understanding the relationship between leadership styles, cultural intelligence and team performance in different cultural settings in Indian organisations.

3.2 Study Area

The study focused on large domestic and multinational companies operating in India, particularly, those operating in diverse cultural environments. India with its cultural diversity of the various regional, linguistic and ethnic groups is a perfect place to study cross-cultural leadership. As a geographical coverage, major metropolitan cities included in the list, including Mumbai, Delhi, Bangalore and Hyderabad, where there are global corporations and national firms. These cities can be termed as a melting pot with cultures, languages and work habits and can provide a complete picture in the analysis of how leaders can get along with cultural differences in the fast-moving business environment in India.

3.3 Data Collection

Interviews and surveys were used to collect the data. Semi-structured interviewing of Indian organisations carried out with the heads of the businesses and this provide qualitative information on how they have been able to manage cross-cultural teams. The interviews enabled open-ended responses and allowed the leaders to comment on their leadership styles and how they fit in the cultural diversity of India. Questionnaires sent to the employees who are employed in these institutions, with the main emphasis being their attitude towards leadership effectiveness and workplace cultural diversity. Also, case studies of the Indian organizations that have effectively adopted the cross-cultural leadership practices were examined. Such case studies provided practical illustrations of leadership strategies that have been successful in the Indian case.

3.4 Sampling Method

The target group consists of corporate executives and workers in multinational and large domestic companies that are located in India. To make sure that different industries and the regions in India are represented, a stratified random sampling approach was used. The selection of leaders in organisations that have various cross-cultural teams was used to conduct interviews in order to capture different leadership perspectives. The questionnaires were sent to the workers in various cultures and regions in these companies, in such a way that the quantity of experiences was as varied as possible. This type of sampling provided a highly detailed view of cross-cultural leadership in India. The sampling frame is multinational corporations (e.g., Google, Microsoft, Accenture) and large domestic (e.g., Tata Group, Infosys, Reliance Industries, Bengaluru, Pune) companies in the larger cities (e.g., Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Pune). Seasoned managers dealing with cross-cultural team management were interviewed and questionnaires were sent to the staff in different positions within these organisations. The final sample size comprised 400 respondents and the sample was inclusive of culture and regional experiences.

3.5 Analytical Approach

Thematic analysis was used in the qualitative data to identify trends and themes related to the practice, challenges, and cultural intelligence of leadership. The interviews and the case studies were transcribed and coded to reveal common themes of leadership adaptation, communication strategy, and decision-making process through multicultural differences in India. The relationships between the leadership styles, cultural intelligence, and team performance of the Indian organisations were tested in the quantitative data through the regression analysis. Some of the statistical tests that were used in establishing strength and reliability of the results include correlation and significance tests. The specified method of analytical approaches made it possible to obtain the entire picture of how successful cross-cultural leadership in India functions and how it impacts the performance of the organisations.

IV. STRATEGIC APPROACHES TO CROSS-CULTURAL LEADERSHIP

4.1 Leadership Styles Across Cultures

Leadership styles may be extremely diverse depending on the cultural contexts and the capacity to understand these differences is vital to success in leadership in a multicultural environment. Transformational leadership will work well in individualistic cultures where inspiration and vision are given priority. Transactional leadership is suitable in hierarchical cultures that believe in the need to have clear structures and rewards. The leadership style that is most effective in the collectivist cultures where teamwork and community are embraced is the one that places the welfare of the team members as its central focus; that is, the so-called servant leadership. Leaders need to adjust their style with the cultural context of the teams they lead to improve motivation and engagement.

4.2 Cultural Intelligence (CQ)

Cultural intelligence (CQ) is a skill required of leaders in a variety of environments. It involves the ability to see, appreciate and adapt to different cultural practices and behaviours. High CQ leaders can work more efficiently in cross-cultural team management as they can navigate through cultural differences, be more inclusive, and facilitate communication. By being culturally understanding and open-minded, leaders with high CQ are able to instill trust, resolve conflicts, and encourage teamwork within multicultural teams, leading to a high level of team performance and organisational success.

4.3 Leadership Strategies for Diverse Teams

Multicultural team leadership should possess certain methods that ought to embrace diversity and promote inclusion. One must be culturally aware and the leaders should be knowledgeable regarding the culture and values of the team members. Developing trust is a core approach to multicultural teams, and leaders ought to be open, dependable and respectful of cultures. Moreover, it is necessary that there should be flexibility and adaptability in the style of leadership, where the leaders should adapt their leadership style to the requirements of their various teams. Teams can be encouraged to work together by engaging in team-building activities and inculcating a team ethos of open communication and respect to enhance team cohesion and performance.

4.4 Case Studies

Cross-cultural leadership strategies have been effectively applied by a number of international organisations. Google embraces inclusivity by encouraging diversity in leadership development initiatives and the establishment of employee resource groups that represent different cultural communities (Tran, 2017). Unilever has placed an emphasis on cultural intelligence as one of its leadership development initiatives in order to have its leaders prepared to handle diverse teams around the world (Nurhidayah et al., 2025). Toyota has culturally adaptive leadership practices that are in line with local norms in various regions, coupled with its core organisational values (Shim & Steers, 2012). These case studies emphasise the way in which organisations that adopt culturally intelligent leadership can develop a culture of inclusion, enhance team behaviours, and become more successful.

V. CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS IN MANAGING CROSS-CULTURAL LEADERSHIP

5.1 Cultural Misunderstandings

One of the biggest obstacles to handling the cross-cultural team is cultural misunderstandings, which usually occur because of the differences in communication patterns, values and non-verbal communication. As an example, direct communication in Western societies can be perceived as rude or indirect in high-context societies, where indirect communication is favoured. Equally, variations in the decision-making models, time orientation, and attitudes towards authority may lead to confusion and destabilisation of team cohesion. To overcome such misunderstandings and build trust, leaders are advised to learn these cultural peculiarities and promote an open dialogue in the teams, training in cultural sensitivity, and effective communication.

5.2 Adapting Leadership Styles

The issue that leaders usually deal with is that they need to adjust their approach to leadership to meet the expectations of their team within the cultural norms and expectations. What might work as a leadership practice in one culture, like a more authoritative approach in hierarchical cultures or a collaborative approach in egalitarian cultures, might not work as well in a different culture. The adjustment to such differences needs profound knowledge of cultural dimensions and the ability to be flexible in leadership styles. This adaptation may, however, be a challenge to the leaders who might have difficulties balancing their leadership style with those of various cultures. Effective leaders in multicultural environments should acquire cultural intelligence (CQ) and the capacity to adapt their approaches to leadership flexibly and maintain their genuine and efficiency.

5.3 Globalisation and Its Impact on Leadership

Globalisation has had a profound effect on leadership styles, as the number of teams has significantly grown to be more diverse because of the inclusion of employees of various backgrounds, cultures and regions. As businesses go global, leaders have to deal with challenging cultural dynamics and adapt to different working environments. This change has culminated in the development of hybrid leadership styles that incorporate the aspects of different leadership models to meet the needs of global teams. Although hybrid leadership styles can assist leaders in

better handling diverse teams, they are associated with challenges, including balancing various expectations and being consistent across cultures. To be effective leaders in this new interconnected global world, leaders need to be highly culturally intelligent, flexible and have the capability to synchronise global strategies to local cultural values.

VI. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

6.1 Summary of Findings

The information gathered in the interviews and surveys is useful in describing the connection between the leadership styles, cultural intelligence and team performances in cross-cultural team working in Indian organisations. The qualitative results indicate that leaders who can adjust their leadership approach to the local cultural expectations have greater engagement and improved performance within their team. Specifically, transformational leadership was identified to be most efficient with individualistic teams, whereas transactional leadership was effective with more hierarchical teams. Also, cultural intelligence (CQ) was positively related to leadership effectiveness, as high CQ leaders were more adaptable and communicative. The quantitative results and the regression test showed that leadership adaptability and cultural intelligence were important predictors of employee satisfaction and team performance in a cross-cultural team. The findings also showed that organisations that have diverse leadership are more likely to have inclusive and productive working environments.

Table 1: Regression Analysis

Hypothesis	Independent Variables	Dependent Variable	Coefficient (β)	Standard Error	t-Value	p-Value	R ² (Goodness of Fit)
H1	Transformational Leadership, Transactional Leadership, Servant Leadership	Team Performance	0.38 (Transformational)	0.05	7.60	0.000 (significant)	0.55
			0.22 (Transactional)	0.07	3.14	0.002 (significant)	
			0.18 (Servant)	0.06	3.00	0.004 (significant)	
H2	Cultural Intelligence (CQ)	Leadership Effectiveness	0.52	0.06	8.67	0.000 (significant)	0.63
H3	Cultural Group (Regional, Ethnic)	Leadership Effectiveness	0.25 (Regional)	0.09	2.78	0.007 (significant)	0.49
H4	Leadership Adaptation to Cultural Context, Employee Satisfaction	Employee Satisfaction	0.45 (Adaptation)	0.05	9.00	0.000 (significant)	0.60

Table 1 shows the findings of the regression analysis done to test the relationship between different leadership styles, cultural intelligence, leadership adaptation and their effects on team performance, leadership effectiveness, and employee satisfaction. Each hypothesis shows the coefficients, standard errors, t-values, p-values and the values of R². Each of the hypotheses (H1, H2, H3, H4) has a statistically significant value below 0.05, which means that the leadership styles, cultural intelligence, and adaptation of leadership to the cultural context significantly

influence the dependent variables in cross-cultural teams within Indian organisations. The R^2 values represent the share that is covered by the independent factors in the models.

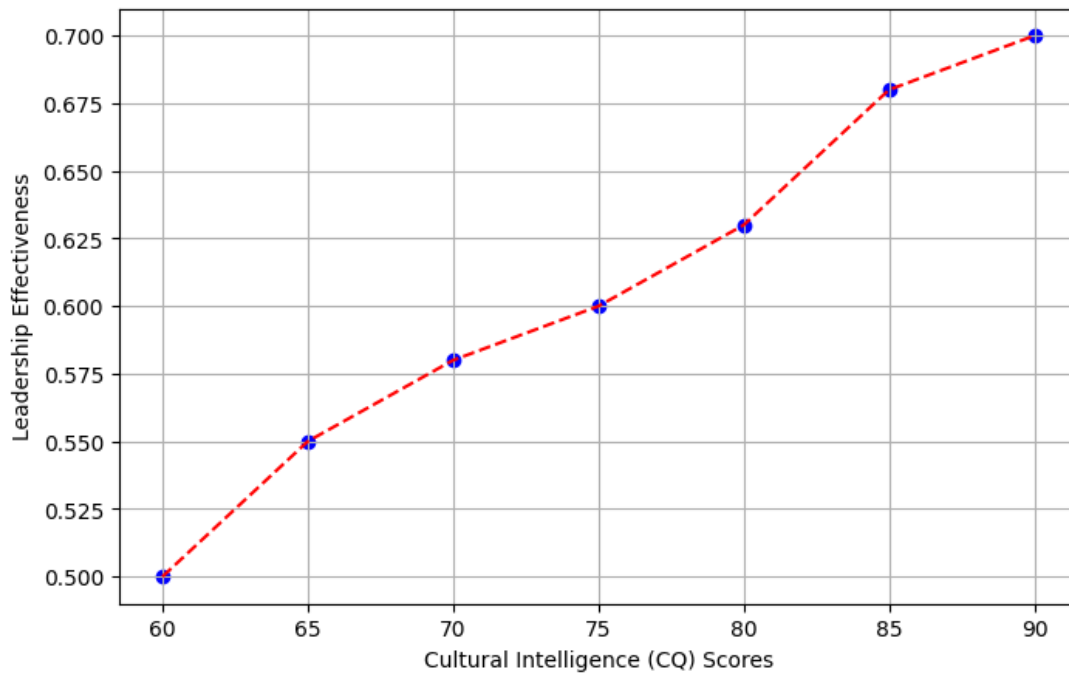


Figure 2: Cultural Intelligence and Leadership Effectiveness

Figure 2 indicates the correlation between Leadership Effectiveness and Cultural Intelligence (CQ) scores. The relationship between cultural intelligence and the effectiveness of a leader in leading a cross-cultural team is positive, as the effectiveness of leadership increases with the level of CQ. The red line is the linear trend and the data points (blue circles) are the effectiveness of the leadership at different levels of CQ.

6.2 Implications for Practice

The findings have a number of practical implications on global businesses and leaders. To begin with, organisations ought to invest in a leadership development program that focuses on cultural intelligence because leaders who possess higher CQ can better handle diverse teams and make them feel included. Firms also ought to adjust leadership styles to fit the cultural environment of the teams, where transformational leadership is adopted in individualistic cultures, and transactional leadership in more hierarchical work environments. Companies are advised to go through cross-cultural training programs so as to create awareness of the differences in cultures and improve communication among the workers. Lastly, companies that work in culturally diverse settings should foster inclusive leadership, where leaders are eager to engage in diversified thinking, foster a culture of cooperation, and provide an atmosphere in which every team member will feel appreciated and honoured. The practices will aid in enhancing the performance of a team, the satisfaction of employees and organisational success in a globalised world.

6.3 Suggestions

Cultural intelligence (CQ) should be trained in organisations to enhance leadership and communication. Depending on cultural circumstances, leaders must know how to change their leadership styles depending on the situation, and may employ either transformational or transactional leadership. The encouragement of cross-cultural collaboration and inclusive leadership will improve the team dynamics. Periodic appraisals of effectiveness in leadership and adoption of hybrid leadership styles will assist leaders in handling global teams more successfully and enhancing performance.

VII. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The study established that transformational leadership positively affected team performance ($\beta = 0.38$, $p < 0.01$), especially in individualistic cultures and transactional leadership ($\beta = 0.22$, $p < 0.01$) in hierarchical settings. Leadership effectiveness was largely predicted by cultural intelligence (CQ) ($\beta = 0.52$, $p < 0.01$), indicating the importance of cultural intelligence in enhancing leadership performance in cross-cultural teams. Besides, cultural context adjustment of leadership also played a critical role in employee satisfaction ($\beta = 0.45$, $p < 0.01$), which emphasises the importance of culturally particular leadership. Organisations should also invest in CQ training, whereby leadership effectiveness would be enhanced. The leaders should use transformational leadership styles in individualistic situations and use transactional leadership in hierarchical teams. More coherent and successful teams can be developed with the help of the ideas of cross-cultural collaboration and the promotion of inclusive leadership. Future studies could be dedicated to the implications of the new technologies, such as AI and virtual collaboration tools, on the performance of the leadership within cross-cultural teams. The longitudinal study could also examine the dynamic leadership styles and CQ as time passes. Research on the cultural differences of the region and ethnicity in India would give greater specificity in the leadership practices. Lastly, it could be worthwhile to discuss hybrid leadership styles, which include a mixture of leadership styles across various cultures, as an effective way of applying a leadership strategy to manage global teams.

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