

Revisiting Intercultural Team Leadership: A Retrospective Qualitative Analysis on Managerial Competencies and Strategies in a Multicultural Context

Rim BALI

PhD Candidate

Faculty of Economics and Management of Sfax -Tunisia
FSEGS Doctoral School: Department of Management Science
rimabali199@gmail.com

Karim TRABELSI

Associate Professor

Higher Institute of Business
Administration of Sfax
University of Sfax - Tunisia
ktrabelsi2000@yahoo.fr

Abstract

In a globalized business environment, managing multicultural teams has extensively represented a major challenge for organizations. This study assumes a retrospective qualitative perspective to inspect how project managers guide and collaborate intercultural teams. Drawing on semi-structured interviews conducted between 2019 and 2020 with eight project managers from diverse cultural backgrounds working in international companies, the study explores the managerial practices and competencies mobilized to support team effectiveness. The findings recognized a set of essential intercultural leadership competencies, including communication, tolerance, empathy, and self-awareness. Among these, communication appears as the main competence for promoting team unity and avoiding misunderstandings, while tolerance and affective competencies involve keeping coherence and managing ambiguity in culturally diverse contexts. Moreover, the findings further proposed that cultural diversity may work both as a facilitator and as a restraint on team performance, depending mainly on the team leader's capacity to alter managerial behaviors and communication execution. By providing a reflective analysis of intercultural team leadership in a pre-pandemic context, this study presents a profound understanding of the foundational competencies that form effective

intercultural management and provide a guideline for considering how such practices have developed in contemporary international work environments.

Keywords: Intercultural management, multicultural teams, communication, leadership, cultural diversity, empathy, qualitative research, managerial competence, retrospective study, team dynamics, adaptive leadership, behavioral competence, managerial strategies.

1. Introduction

Faced with globalization, international companies are continuously requiring adapting to their new environments. This adaptation presents a management challenge within a various framework containing numerous institutional, human, and cultural features that vary at the socio-cultural level and even lengthen to other facets such as politics, economics, and religion. Legibly, the core of performance repose in surround on a managerial practice, which residues an exceptionally complex challenge for both international and national companies, given numerous components. This is exceptionally accurate in intercultural organizations, where culture is simultaneously the element that differentiates and the common thread uniting all human beings, as everyone possesses and their own unique cultural identity. A well-balanced management system is therefore essential, as cultural conflicts represent one of the major risks that managers of multicultural teams must confront. As Meier (2005) points out, intercultural management is a management style that recognizes and takes cultural differences into account and attempts, through organizational and relational actions, to integrate them into the company's operations to improve its economic and social performance, supported also in other (Stahl, Mäkelä, Zander, & Maznevski, 2010; Stahl & Tung, 2015). Management techniques must be adapted to this international context given the complexity of the system, which is composed of multiple cultures. Managers face a challenge of stimulation, communication, and harmonization to successfully manage an intercultural structure. The cultural factor is sometimes perceived as more problematic than advantageous within organizations, as it may generate difficulties and dysfunctions, as highlighted by recent research on culturally diverse workplaces (Stahl et al., 2010; Guillaume et al., 2017). Several hidden dilemmas arise from managerial practices applied in an intercultural environment and require careful consideration of the fundamental principles that underpin management at both the corporate and managerial levels. Indeed, according to a dominant trend in Intercultural management, it would be profitable to have a group of people from all national backgrounds working together:

"cultural diversity is a phenomenon that brings wealth, the exploitation of which could bring incalculable benefits both in terms of broadening vision and profitability of activities and strategies" (Lewis, 1996, p. 2). Understanding this phenomenon is essential for success, as a deep understanding is the key to intercultural management, this work addresses a current topic, hence the lack of existing theoretical literature on the subject. For this reason, we will attempt to study the following related concepts to establish correlations with our research topic: culture, interculturality, multiculturalism, cultural diversity, intercultural management, organizational culture, the intercultural team manager, and the challenges of managing across cultures in order to construct conceptual correlations and illuminate the dynamics of the intercultural management practices.

2. Theoretical Concepts

2.1 Cultural Diversity

Cultural diversity is a term characterized by its elasticity; in other words, it can be present in multiple domains, times, and spaces. Our research focuses on cultural diversity and its role in business management, and more specifically, from this managerial perspective, on the individuals involved in cultural diversity within the field of business management. Cox (1994) and Stahl et al (2021) define cultural diversity as the representation, within a given system, of individuals and groups with different cultural affiliations. People do not perceive things from the same angle; each has a different opinion and an interpretation contrary to the other. This paradox is explained by the fact that everyone develops individual beliefs and thoughts. *"The conditions of thinking, doing, and acting is different. Thus, conflict can be perceived by one group as healthy, useful, and natural, or, on the contrary, as a destructive evil to be avoided"* (Parkhe, 1991, p. 585). This difference creates the concept of cultural diversity, which is implicated in business strategies because they are a source of strength for companies to meet their customers' needs.

"One of the main potential advantages of cultural diversity would be the achievement of synergies through the creative combination of different cultural approaches in solving given problems" (Loth, 2006, p. 126). Lainé (2004) considers it a source of strength and evolution. Similarly, Barmeyer (2007) perceives cultural diversity as a potential source of synergy and significant opportunities. Consequently, it is necessary to thoroughly analyze and understand cultural diversity. More recent studies confirm that such differences are inherent in culturally diverse settings and must be understood within their organizational and managerial context (Shore et al., 2011).

2.2 Intercultural management

Intercultural management, as its name suggests, is the management of cultural diversity, more specifically in our present study, within the workforce. Large companies do not take cultural differences into account; This can generate a shock (as was the case with the merger between Daimler and Chrysler, where the culture clash was not taken seriously and could be considered one of the factors in the merger's failure). Both cooperating parties experienced difficulties adapting to working in the same environment. It is therefore essential to understand the advantages and problems that diversification can pose. Similar cases keep debating in more modern literature, which affirms that ignoring cultural factors residue a crucial threat in international and multicultural management contexts (Caputo et al., 2019). "In the comparative study conducted by Ouchi (1982), it was reported that American companies encountered insurmountable difficulties in Japan, while the opposite was true for Japanese companies" (Boudabbous, 2004, p. 225). This failure is explained by the Americans' attachment to their management system and their application of it in a different cultural context, completely incompatible with the target market and organization. In contrast, the Japanese are very open and try to find a way to adapt to the environment in which they operate. *"Intercultural management is the set of activities aimed at ensuring the harmonious functioning of an organization, taking into account its particularities or differences compared to other organizations in the same country or in different countries"* (Boudabbous, 2004, p. 233). Since our topic concerns multicultural project teams, Chevrier (2004) provides a more specific definition. According to her, intercultural management essentially consists of leading teams composed of people from several cultures. Therefore, *"the concept of team management has been associated with intercultural management, which gives the manager another role, namely..." interethnic mediation aimed at reducing blockages between individuals and obtaining the minimum consensus"* (Noël Équibey, 2004, p 40). Recent studies strengthen this observation by inspecting that managerial flexibility and cultural intelligence function a critical role in successful cross-cultural operations (Rockstuhl et al., 2018).

3. Foundations of Intercultural Management Theory

We aim to highlight the concepts and practices that can answer our research question, while also considering other aspects and perspectives.

3.1. Geert Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Model (1998)

Geert Hofstede, who began his qualitative research between 1967 and 1970, and then between 1971 and 1973 through an administered questionnaire (116,000 questionnaires sent to employees of the American multinational IBM in more than 72 countries). He launched his research with the publication of his book, "Culture's Consequences," in 1980, which for a long time became a standard reference on the study of cultural differences in organizations. In 1980, he emphasized the importance and advantages of culture in the field of management. Thus, Hofstede (1980/1994) confirmed that everyone is born with a national culture shaped by their family, environment, educational background, social status, and so on. Consequently, each individual living in each environment acquires a culture different from that of an individual living in another environment. What is certain is that everyone possesses a national culture relative to themselves, this results from the cultural diversity among individuals.

Nevertheless, Hofstede (1987) emphasizes that it can happen that a group of individuals shares mental programming with another group, resulting in what he calls collective mental programming. In his initial work, Hofstede developed four dimensions within which countries' value systems could converge. In the late 1980s, he added a fifth dimension, time orientation, to account for the values symbolizing China.

Finally, in 2010, Hofstede introduced a 6-dimension contrasting leniency and severity. Even today, Hofstede's work continues to be cited as a foundational framework in cross-cultural management research, despite the emergence of more dynamic and process-oriented cultural models (Taras, Kirkman, & Steel, 2010; Beugelsdijk, Kostova, & Roth, 2017). The first six dimensions of culture are as follows: **(1) Power distance:** This dimension measures the degree of power inequality between a specific hierarchical level and a subordinate **(2) Individualism and collectivism:** This measures the degree of interaction between individuals within the same work group **(3) The masculine/feminine dimension:** People with a masculinity index believe in success and ambition with very specific behaviors associated with masculinity. However, cultures with a feminine dimension place less emphasis on external achievements **(4) Uncertainty avoidance:** This is a cultural dimension that measures the degree of tolerance a culture can accept in the face of anxiety caused by future events. If tolerance is low, uncertainty avoidance is high, and vice versa **(5) Time orientation (Confucian dynamism):** This dimension refers to the selective promotion of the ethical dimension **(6) Indulgence/severity:** This important dimension concerns the extent to which individuals can satisfy their fundamental

desires such as happiness, leisure, and pleasure. Despite the useful application of Hofstede's studies in management and other fields, they have been accompanied by several criticisms and debates, such as those raised by Cray and Mallory (1998), Tayeb (2001), Holden (2002), and Kwek (2003), who agree that this research leads to statistical conclusions rather than reliable practical studies. Similarly, Baumgartel and Hill (1982), and Lowe (1981) pointed out that the timing of data collection outside of the survey and the research submission period (between 1968 and 1973) affected the validity and reliability of the disseminated research results. These critiques are resonated in more recent research, which underlines that culture is not static and should be inspected as an active and developed construct framed by globalization, technological change, and increased intercultural interaction (Stahl & Tung, 2015; Kirkman, Lowe, & Gibson, 2017; Venaik & Brewer, 2016).

3.2. Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner's Seven Dimensions Model (1980)

Trompenaars developed his model after extensive research in over 20 countries and with 100,000 executives.

In 1998, Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner published a synthesis of the "Seven Dimensions of Culture."

Indeed, misunderstandings can sometimes arise, justifying the crucial importance of understanding cultural differences. Clearly, the seven dimensions identified by Trompenaars serve to analyze and understand cultural differences and to thrive within them. With his collaborator Charles Hampden-Turner, Fons Trompenaars identified seven dimensions of culture in his book entitled "Riding the Waves of Culture" (1997). This work presents 30 analyses of the impact of national cultural differences on management practices; he emphasizes a practical aspect: how to manage this diversity and leverage it. His model also challenges managers who, in their daily responsibilities, must integrate "variable cultures" into their management style to benefit from them.

This remark rest really pertinent in contemporary research on global management and multicultural teams (Baack, & Caprar, 2022). Last studies proceed with Trompenaars' framework for its managerial flexibility, mainly in leadership development, negotiation, and international teamwork (Stoermer et al., 2021). It is composed as follows : **(1)** Universalism/Particularism: Regulation by general rules and principles or by relationships and according to circumstances **(2)** Collectivism/Individualism: People consider themselves as members of a group or as autonomous individuals **(3)** Neutral/Emotional Relationships: Emotions are either contained or expressed **(4)** Specific/Diffuse Culture: The separation between private and public spheres is either strict or porous **(5)** Accomplishment or Status:

Status is based on achievements or on the individual and their integration into the social system **(6)** Sequential or Synchronic Time: Activities are scheduled according to a strictly followed linear sequence or carried out in parallel with last-minute changes **(7)** Internal/External Orientation: Nature is controlled or left to its own devices. This perspective lines up with current perspectives that reflect on culture as dynamic process, needed for constant adaptation by managers in globalized and digitally referee work settings (Beugelsdijk, Kostova, & Roth, 2017).

3.3. Philippe Iribarne's Cultural Logic Approach (1989)

The author analyzed the influence of national cultures on organizational management. He considers culture as a set of concepts that create meaning within the environment in which an individual lives. Furthermore, Iribarne supported the idea of intercultural management, and he acknowledged the necessity of understanding management practices. His approach includes attitudes, behaviors, and knowledge useful for effective management.

The studies are applied to different departments (hierarchical level, service, etc.) in companies belonging to a specific country. This perspective is considered important in contemporary intercultural management research, especially for its emphasis on direction and symbolic systems rather than merely behavioral dimensions (Primecz, Romani, & Sackmann, 2016). The demonstration was carried out in three countries: France, the United States, and the Netherlands. The three companies operate differently, reflecting their respective social values. The author published his work, "The Logic of Honor" (1989), which sheds light on the structures of social relations in these three countries. By comparing three historical metallurgical companies in France, the United States, and the Netherlands, Iribarne identifies three models of organization and hierarchical relationships rooted in cultural and national traditions. (1) A French Model Based on the Logic of Honor French society has long been organized into separate orders (nobility, bourgeoisie, commoners, etc.). Everyone, regardless of hierarchical level, holds a position in society and must perform their duties according to the applicable rules (2) The Contractual Model of the United States of America, in American society, a system of contracts governs relationships between individuals. Hierarchical levels are well-defined. An honest contract organizes relationships between people. Thus, the manager has the right to control the work performed, to be accountable, and is considered part of the work (3) The Dutch model is characterized by the value placed on communication in the workplace. In contrast to the attitudes of the French and Americans, they are more open to one another; each individual is valued for their ideas and contributions. This model eliminates any form of harsh rewards

or punishments. These results are coherent with more present-day studies emphasizing how cultural logics keep forming managerial practices in spite of globalization constraints (Beugelsdijk, Kostova, & Roth, 2017). This framework shape with current research on supportive leadership, low power distance, and psychologically safe work environments (Nardone & Steers, 2018).

3.4. Edward Hall's Context and Communication Approach (1976)

E. Hall is an American anthropologist who primarily analyzed cultural relations between individuals and groups of individuals. His studies, conducted in the 1960s, focused mainly on the United States, Japan, France, and Germany. He considers culture to be the element that defines the image of humankind in its external environment. In his work, he highlighted the first important (1) dimension: the hidden dimension (the silent lagoon). However, there are also hidden, internal behaviors within the individual that can convey meaning and produce a different kind of behavior than what is visible. In 1976, he distinguished between strong and weak cultural concepts.

Strong concepts, which are characterized by informal, non-verbal, and subjective communication used to convey a message, generally lack the information necessary for comprehension. Thus, verbal communication, within a specific context, is accompanied by gestures such as body language, eye movements, coded words, and the use of silence (Wurtz, 2005). Countries characterized by this type of communication include Japan and Arab countries. Weak concepts are generally objective forms of communication, with a message containing complete and explicit information. These are essentially the cultures of the Scandinavian countries (Germany, Switzerland). (2) As a second based on time through two dimensions related to time. Hahn (2008) emphasizes that monochrome time involves completing a well-defined and specific task. Planning is done in detail while keeping track of activities. Thus, in monochrome countries (United States, Great Britain, Germany, Sweden), time is valued and must be used properly, generally in the business world. Polychrome time is very open; there is no planning, nor a deadline for completion. Humans are situated within an open timeframe extending to an unknown date. Generally, this model is applied in African and Asian countries. (3) The third dimension to space, or proxemics, which is simply the physical distance during an interaction between individuals. He observed that this differs from one culture to another, according to his study conducted in several companies. This frame of culture as a silent still organizing settings and remains significant

in communication studies, particularly in highlighting indirect explanation and interpretation (Meyer, 2014), especially in multicultural and virtual cooperations contexts (Sander et al., 2020).

4. Managerial Competencies in Intercultural Team Leadership

According to research findings, cultural diversity requires a highly competent team manager. We concluded that the authors all agree that the manager of an intercultural team must possess more skills and qualities than the manager of a homogeneous team. Given the assigned mission, the project manager must manage their project to achieve the objectives while respecting the three pillars of cost, time, and quality. This examination pursues to be kept up by latest academic work on international project management and multicultural teamwork (Baack & Caprar, 2021).

Based on our field research, we identified the intercultural management skills that were most frequently cited. The following skills were confirmed as essential for intercultural management by team managers. As Lainé (2004) emphasized, communication, listening, open-mindedness, and the ability to manage stress in ambiguous situations without prejudice are essential skills. **(1) Being a good communicator:** In order of importance, communication is the most crucial element. Working with diverse staff, our respondents repeatedly stated that poor communication was a recurring source of conflict that damages relationships. Managers must be aware that communication is practically the key to intercultural management. All our respondents agree on the importance of communication. This confirms E. Hall's approach (1979): there are always hidden behaviors in intercultural interactions that require managerial skills to uncover the invisible. This also validates Trompenaars' study on the nonverbal communication resulting from hidden behavior. This examination is also strengthened by research on implicit communication (Gudykunst, 2018), with the same stream. Therefore, during recruitment, human resources departments emphasize traits and characteristics compatible with preserving the company culture to create a sense of belonging among their employees, foster loyalty, promote the integration of new hires, facilitate communication, and develop motivation (Soutenain & Farcet, 2006). **(2) Tolerance,** As Geert Hofstede (1980) emphasizes, understanding a language facilitates communication and thus reduces interpretation problems. According to Baum et al. (2007), it is essential for managers to be sensitive to cultural differences so that they can refine their own perceptions and behaviors for more precise and effective management; otherwise, these cultural barriers can have negative repercussions on organizational functioning. In terms of balance, all our respondents confirmed that the ability to manage stress and ambiguity, and

having such a level of tolerance, are essential characteristics in intercultural relationships. Ang 2015 confirms that cultural sensitivity and tolerance are the main elements of intercultural competence and are straight connected to team effectiveness and certitude. In order of importance, competence follows communication. As Chevrier (2000) emphasized, those involved in intercultural communication are therefore required in cultural specificities. As we indicated in the theory, individuals who have worked in a multicultural environment have greater tolerance and openness to different cultures. Gauthey & Xardel (1990) call them "intercultural clairvoyants." Individuals who have work experience in multicultural environments be likely to show higher tolerance and openness about different cultures, a discovery also supported by more modern empirical studies (Stoermer et al., 2021).

5. Intercultural Dynamics within Multicultural Teams

Mitchel (2014) helps us understand that team dynamics encompass various aspects. Before going into detail, she provides us with a definition of group dynamics. Group dynamics refers to how a group acts and reacts to situations, thereby modifying its structure and overall characteristics. A group is distinguished by the differentiation among its members. Many studies have shown that a team's performance and success are not explained by the knowledge or skills of its members, nor by everyone's tasks. Rather, this performance is explained by the interaction, synergies, and relationships between members that come together to define the standard of success or the achievement of a specific objective for a given group or work team. Team effectiveness and collaborative performance are so reinforced in previous studies as for the work of Mathieu et al., 2017. Groups are living systems; a group is rarely stable. It is the process that animates it, and its structure continually changes over time. Many authors have sought to identify and model the stages of a group's life cycle. Tuckman (1965) proposes a five-stage model for group development: **(1)** Orientation/Formation: This involves the exchange of information while accepting all opinions and ideas. **(2)** Conflict: Disagreements arise regarding procedures, behaviors, attitudes, individual roles, objectives, and potential leaders. **(3)** Structuring/Emergence of Norms: Following norms that can organize the team's functioning. If members know how to resolve their differences, the group becomes more organized, stable, and cohesive **(4)** Achievement: Members focus on the task at hand and strive to achieve a common goal that enhances the team's image and standing **(5)** Dissolution: The group dissolves either in a planned manner (task completion) or spontaneously when an unexpected problem arises and makes continued collaboration impossible. This phase is characterized by a gradual reduction in member interdependence and commitment **(6)** Conflict: The group dissolves either intentionally (task completion) or

spontaneously when an unexpected problem arises and makes continued collaboration impossible. Such models, which demonstrate a sequence of interpersonal and task-oriented phases, are still examined admissible by many scholars studying team processes, counting in multicultural contexts (Mathieu, & Zaccaro, 2001). For many authors, such models showing a succession of interpersonal and task-oriented stages, would be valid. This perspective has been confirmed by many more studies on project teams and multicultural collaboration, which give value the significance of early interaction patterns in arranging long-term group dynamics (Mathieu et al., 2019).

6. Managing and Resolving Cultural Dilemmas

Communication is, of course, essentially an exchange of information, whether words, ideas, or emotions. Because of cultural differences, misunderstandings can arise from a lack of comprehension of the communicated message. Thus, there is a strong probability that the message communicated may be received or decoded differently depending on the individual's internal thoughts, which are the source of their cultural background. To avoid this pitfall, it is crucial that the manager possesses strong communication skills and tries with the various stakeholders. On the one hand, the manager must build trust among the stakeholders; on the other hand, they must be able to manage concerns and difficulties, which necessitate internal communication. To ensure internal Communication the manager should play the following roles:

Symbolic Role: The manager must instill values and objectives within their team and promote the importance of working together to achieve them.

Leadership Role: Teamwork and helping members overcome any problems they encounter. *Liaison role:* The manager must be the image of his team and thus transfer their efforts and ideas to other relevant authors or other departments. And to ensure the external Communication, team lead should play the following roles:

Observer Role: The leader seeks and receives all information that could strengthen or weaken external consistency. This means they must pay attention to contradictory statements or actions from various members of their team.

Disseminator Role: The leader must ensure that actions and information reach the right people to maintain fruitful relationships between the company and its various partners.

Spokesperson Role: The leader promotes company values, representing themselves to the outside world, their colleagues, and their employees. All these roles are played based on Verbal Communication and Nonverbal Communication. Research has shown that 75% of communication is nonverbal. Eye contact is very important in

Western cultures to confirm interest, but this is not so obvious in other cultures. Other nonverbal dimensions also play a role, such as maintaining physical distance between individuals.

Awareness of Cultural Differences is also one of the main dimensions in intercultural management, becoming aware of cultures means understanding the mindset of the people you meet, as well as your own. It's impossible to have all the information, as there are always hidden elements and misunderstandings. However, this helps provide a framework for better understanding the seven dimensions of Tromperras' culture. The Manager needs to know the cultural differences of other countries to develop cultural awareness. It's legitimate to have a mental model because we are all products of our own culture. Becoming aware of one's own culture, which is automatically a form of mental programming, and accepting the cultures of others. Deardorff, 2006 affirmed that individuals exposed to foreign cultures may isolate themselves and separate their own norms and standards from those of the host culture when faced with a novel cultural. Difference, just like similarity, tells us who we are: I am like A but not like B.

Empathy: This is a communication skill that helps build trust in an intercultural context. Empathy is "the sum of efforts made to welcome others in their singularity, efforts that are undertaken and implemented once awareness of the self-other separation and the communicative illusion of passive identification with others is acquired" (Marandon, 2001, p. 28). Empathy thus condenses into a single skill a set of allocentric abilities comprised of all the psychological traits that allow the transition from self to other, a prerequisite for any interpersonal encounter. As a skill Allocentric empathy can therefore be summarized as three distinct psychological components: allocentric itself, flexibility, and active receptiveness.

Moreover, Intercultural competence, this is an individual skill according to Elo et al. (2015) and Morley and Cerdin (2010). In the field of management, a distinction is made between American and French approaches: Americans view it as a "soft skill" not tied to a specific profession (McClelland, 1973, cited in Bartel-Radic, 2009), while the French approach divides competence into three components: knowledge, know-how, and interpersonal skills (Durand, 2000, cited in Bartel-Radic, 2009).

According to Bartel-Radic's research (2009), a new definition of intercultural competence has been developed that essentially integrates two elements: the "ability to understand the specificities of an intercultural interaction situation and to adapt to these specificities in such a way as to produce behavior that allows the message conveyed to be interpreted in the desired manner" (Bartel-Radic, 2009, p. 5). Multicultural competence does not consider the individual's culture of origin or the culture with which they are exposed. A person must be cultured to accept others

around them. "The multicultural style of identity is based on a fluid and dynamic movement of the self, an ability to enter and exit a context, and an ability to maintain internal coherence across this variety of situations" (Adler, 1997, p. 37). In accordance with those affirmations and previous works, contemporary scholars also confirm that intercultural competence requires flexible and developing a sense of self, distinguished by the capacity to proceed across cultural contexts while keeping internal consistency and originality (Kim, 2017; Ting-Toomey & Dorjee, 2019).

7. Methodology

7.1. Research design

This study adopts a qualitative approach and through the semi-structured interview method. Indeed, the semi-structured interview (Savoie-Zajc, 1997, Creswell, 2013; Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2018) is "a data collection technique that contributes to the development of knowledge, favoring qualitative and interpretive approaches, particularly those within constructivist paradigms" (Lincoln, 1995, p. 264). The researcher must adopt a rigorous and ethical interview approach, as Hopf (2004, p. 336) affirms, using a guide that allows respondents great freedom of expression. The goal is for them to describe work situations in their own words, not in the researcher's terms, and reflect their lived experiences as S. Chevrier emphasized (2000). The interview guide is prepared prior to data collection to ensure consistency across the main constructs. It allows for the establishment of the themes and sub-sub-themes that will be addressed during the interviews. These themes are defined in relation to the research problem and objectives.

7.2. Research Setting

Our research sample was designed to meet two main criteria: **(1)** the participant must be a project team manager and **(2)** he must have experience managing a multicultural team. We did not impose any constraints regarding the respondent's cultural background. However, identifying managers of multicultural project teams proved challenging. Finding managers who actively lead multicultural project teams and convincing them to participate require persistence and networking. We used personal contacts and referrals from these contacts to build our sample. Twenty project managers from different sectors were contacted by phone or mail. These managers have prior experience managing intercultural teams. Only eight managers agreed to participate in this study and completed the semi-structured interview process. Interviews were scheduled at convenience of each participants using the same method (telephone or

email) to determine the time, day, and location of the interview. The interviews took place between September 15 and October 15, 2020. Each interview lasted 45 minutes and was conducted in confidential and professional circumstances to ensure confidentiality and trust.

7.3. Data Collection

The data collected through Semi-structured interviews lasted from 30 minutes to 1 hour. All interviews followed the same procedure. Telephone interviews were conducted for participants who could not meet in person. All discussions were transcribed into a Word document for analysis.

7.4. Interview Guide

The interview guide comprises to explore certain aspects of intercultural management and precise managerial style. Aligning with the research objective, three sections were designed to answer specific research questions. These sections are structured as follows:

- ✓ Section 1: The challenges of project management in a multicultural team.
- ✓ Section 2: The techniques and strategies used by a manager of an intercultural team.
- ✓ Section 3: Negative and positive effects generated by the cultural factor.

This structure allowed participants to reflect on their lived experiences and provide detailed examples.

7.5. Data Processing and Analysis tool

According to Ouellet (1994), the processing and analysis of the results of a qualitative study can be presented in two ways: a semantic or statistical perspective depending on the research objectives (Braun & Clarke, 2021). According to Conchon (2001), in the case of so-called "semantic" analyses, the analysis is conducted manually, the researcher concentrates on interesting ideas and words provided by participants. Several studies conducted by professionals often follow this traditional approach (Morrison et al., cited by Conchon, 2005). In contrast, statistical analyses are performed on computers using word processing software. These analyses involve counting words, sentence fragments, or categories, and performing data analysis. In this research, the data were analyzed manual, using semantic content following the method suggested by Conchon (2001) with the aim the capture meanings and thoughts of respondents.

7.6. Sample configuration

The target population consisted of project managers working in intercultural teams. All participants are managers with experience managing intercultural teams. The respondents who participated in our research are active professionals from diverse cultural backgrounds, representing various sectors with varying degrees of management experience. We conducted a survey of eight individuals.

Cultural origins: 3 Polish; 1 Italian; 1 Turkish; 1 Swiss; and 2 Arabs

Gender: 5 females and 3 males.

Age range: 3 between 20 and 30 years old, 4 between 30 and 40, and 01 between 50 and 60.

Education: 2 held a postgraduate degree, 2 had an undergraduate degree, 4 had a master's degree, and 1 had a doctoral degree.

The following table summarizes the profiles of the respondents:

Table 1: The personal characteristics of the respondents

Respondent	Origin	Gender	Age in years	Education
Respondent 1	Polish	F	32	2 ^d cycle
Respondent 2	Polish	F	35	3 ^d cycle
Respondent 3	Polish	M	32	1 st cycle
Respondent 4	Lebanese	M	33	2 ^d cycle
Respondent 5	Italian	F	55	3 ^d cycle
Respondent 6	Turks	F	40	3 ^d cycle
Respondent 7	Tunisian	M	29	1 st cycle
Respondent 8	Swiss	F	35	2 ^d cycle

Most respondents (four) have five or more years of experience managing project teams. One respondent has between five and fifteen years of experience, and three respondents have two years of experience. This is summarized in the following table:

Table 2: The respondents' experience in managing Project teams

Respondents	Experience in managing intercultural teams in Years
Respondent 1	5
Respondent 2	3
Respondent 3	4
Respondent 4	2
Respondent 5	35
Respondent 6	More than 5 years
Respondent 7	2
Respondent 8	3,5

As previously mentioned, the research is not focused on any sector. The respondents work in various fields. The following table describes the respondents' fields of activity and the companies studied. Regarding location, seven of the eight respondents live in Warsaw, while one resides in Italy.

Table 3: Respondents' Sector of Activity

Respondent	Entreprise	Domain	City
Respondent 1	Frista	Outsourcing	Warsaw
Respondent 2	Hays	Recruitment/Human Resources	Warsaw
Respondent 3	Téléperformance	Customer service / IT	Warsaw
Respondent 4	Accenture	Technology/Digital Security	Warsaw
Respondent 5	Worldwilde	Tourism consulting	Milan
Respondent 6	Tennneco Automotive Polska Sp. Z o.o.	Automobile	Warsaw
Respondent 7	Wisecars	Automobile	Warsaw

Respondent 8	Philip Morris Polska Distribution	Cigarette and Tobacco production	Krakow
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7.7. Research proposition

Previous empirical studies have demonstrated that cultural diversity can sometimes impact team effectiveness by generating conflicts that obstruct communication and collaboration, however threatening the implementation of expected synergies and even the sustainability of projects (Di Stefano Maznevski, 2000; Govindarajan and Gupta, 2001, Taras et al., 2019). The current research builds on the observation that the cultural factor while often perceived as challenge. Additionally, it is important because it can impact on the performance of intercultural teams. Referring to those assumptions, the presence of cultural diversity needs a well-maintained strategy or a very competent team leader ensuring cohesion of intercultural teams. We propose the following general proposition for our research:

Proposition: The effectiveness of intercultural teams is largely shaped by the intercultural competence of the team leader, particularly through the leader's ability to adapt communication practices, manage cultural differences, and maintain team cohesion.

8. Analysis and interpretation of results

The interview guide focuses on three essential aspects; therefore, three variables were addressed in our study:

- ✓ The challenges faced by managers in a multicultural team.
- ✓ The techniques and strategies of managers in a multicultural team.
- ✓ The negative and positive effects of the cultural factors in multicultural teams Management.

8.1. Interpretation of the managerial competencies in multicultural context

The first part of this analysis highlights the key qualities required of a manager leading a multicultural team compromising their skills, and the advantages and disadvantages faced at both relational and technical levels. We began with a parameter in intercultural management related to the qualifications of the manager of an intercultural team. We consulted the respondents' answers in order, starting with the most common response.

- Communicator

All respondents agreed on the critical importance of effective communication. In fact, respondent 2 confirmed that *"thanks to fluency in several languages, communication and understanding among team members is much easier."*

Similarly, respondent 3 confirmed that fluency in several languages brings you closer to multiple cultures, which facilitates the resolution of cultural conflicts. Most respondents stated that being a good communicator is the most important managerial quality.

All respondents understood that communication is the most important element in managing intercultural dynamics. Respondent 6 confirmed that mastery of the common language is essential. *"The manager must speak well, and so must the team members, who must express an explicit and understandable message."*

Respondent 4 added that communication is not solely about language; rather, one must be a good communicator and negotiator, meaning one must uncover hidden ideas or understand the tangible meaning the other person wants to express. All respondents understood that communication is the most important element in managing intercultural dynamics. Respondent 6 confirmed that mastery of the common language is essential. *"The manager must speak well, and so must the team members, who must express an explicit and understandable message."*

Respondent 4 added that communication is not solely about language; rather, one must be a good communicator and negotiator, meaning one must uncover hidden ideas or understand the tangible meaning the other person wants to express.

- Teamwork skills

Another quality that was identified was the ability to work in teams. The first respondent confirmed, *"You shouldn't act like a superior, but like a teammate."*

- Empathy

Most respondents agreed that empathy contributes to creating a more favorable atmosphere, fostering a positive and motivating work environment among team members. Indeed, respondent 5 confirmed that they are always open to the opinions of their colleagues. Several factors can influence the balance within a team, such as differences in language, ways of working, understanding, and misunderstandings, all of which impact the work climate of an intercultural team. This climate, in turn, will have an impact on the entire project, according to Nerstad (2018), team climate reflects

the operating, communication, and working conditions within a team, and these conditions directly influence cohesion, learning, and overall team functioning.

- Technical knowledge

Respondent 8 confirmed that “managing a team requires technical knowledge.” They emphasized that technical knowledge encompasses both the training the manager has received and their prior experience in intercultural settings. From this perspective, the theoretical equality of partners does not preclude the existence of unspoken power dynamics. However, in some cases, the project manager will yield and make concessions to share the project's credit. Respondent 4 also confirmed that *‘providing equality and equity among team members is highly significant practice, ensuring that all team members could participate and freely express their opinions.* One way to achieve this is to encourage members to share their perspectives with other team members (Maznevski, 1994, p. 540). Along the same lines, Roberson, (2019), asserted that ensuring the participation of all members is the first step toward greater appreciation of the Diversity within the team.

A very serious point raised by respondent 4 is that the manager of an intercultural team has a dual role. On the one hand, they are responsible for the tasks to be completed professionally, and on the other hand, they are responsible for the well-being of their team members, more specifically in terms of human resource management for their group. “*I must be a leader in both strands, relational and professional,*” he stated.

- Tolerance

As the second most important skill, almost all participants confirmed the importance of accepting others, their differences, and Open-mindedness is essential for building comfortable relationships between different people. “*It’s also important to learn about the culture in which you work and the codes (of communication, etiquette, etc.) associated with it,*” says respondent 8.

Particularly within a company, it’s crucial to ask about the codes specific to the national culture and those related to the company culture, which are equally important. Discovering and being curious about these two cultures is fundamental for working effectively within a multicultural team.

- Self-Recognition

The quality of self-recognition is highlighted by respondent 3, who stated, “*Self-recognition is an individual’s ability to analyze and understand situations involving contact between people (and groups) from different cultures, and then to manage and leverage them in line with the company’s objectives.*”

“Recognition has become an almost unanimous demand among employees and an essential component of life at the company.” work. It affects all organizations, private or public, and all professions, from the bottom to the top of the hierarchy.” (Jean-Pierre Brun, 2010, p. 150)

In summary, all respondents agreed that communication, open-mindedness, cultural adaptability, and conflict management skills are the most important competencies required for managing intercultural teams.

8.2. Interpretation of the additional managerial competencies in intercultural teams

Respondents emphasized that managing intercultural teams requires traditional skills of a manager of a monocultural team, such as good work organization, monitoring, and goal achievement, but in addition efforts other competencies related to intercultural communication are essential.

Respondent 3 clarified that *“communication is necessary regardless of whether you manage an intercultural or monocultural team.”* However, he added that intercultural communication requires an additional effort, especially when the conversation involves another language, such as English. Therefore, sometimes the meaning and understanding of the message are not clear enough for the receiver, leading to misunderstandings.

Respondent 5 stated that *“sometimes one must be very observant because some people avoid expressing themselves, leading to hidden, invisible messages.* Consequently, it is nonverbal communication, as advocated by Edward T. Hall, that has developed an original theory of intercultural communication based on the analysis of nonverbal communication, paying particular attention to perceptions of space and time. In the late 1950s in the United States, he defined the foundations of an approach that subsequently developed into intercultural communication. intercultural. His seminal work, *“The Silent Language,”* became a huge bestseller. It inspired not only researchers, but also trainers and managers worldwide, and continues to impact contemporary research on intercultural communication and management practices (Meyer, 2014; Gudykunst, 2018).

8.3. Interpretation of Cultural Factors That Challenge Project Managers in Intercultural Context

The results show that five respondents did not mention other cultural factors that can complicate the role. In fact, two respondents confirmed that cohesion is an obstacle. Respondent 1 stated, *“It is very difficult for team members to perceive and interpret things in the same way, to agree on the same actions.”*

Shyness was cited by Respondent 2, who gave us an example to better illustrate their point: "*Interviewing someone from here (Poland) is not the same as interviewing someone from Asia*". The latter is often timider. In more than one interview with an (Asian) candidate, I've asked a question about the organization, for example. The candidate's response was, "I'll do whatever you ask." This doesn't mean the person is overly dependent or incompetent, but rather that it's cultural.

In short, our respondents confirm that several qualities are essential for managing an intercultural team. These qualities are distinct from those of a monocultural team leader. The latter certainly lacks qualities such as language proficiency or tolerance because they share a common cultural background with all team members.

According to all respondents, the most important qualities for an intercultural team leader, in order of importance, are communication and language proficiency, tolerance, and self-awareness. Without these qualities, no one is competent to lead an intercultural team, which presents such complex challenges.

According to the responses, the cultural elements that make managing intercultural teams more difficult are intolerance and shyness. It follows that overcoming these obstacles necessarily requires a good communicator and a tolerant individual. Ultimately, the proposition suggests that the effectiveness of intercultural teams depends on the qualities of the team leader is validated.

8.4. Interpretation of strategies and techniques in intercultural team management

After analyzing the key skills and challenges encountered by multicultural managers, this section explores the strategies and techniques adopted by these managers to ensure the effective functioning of their teams.

8.4.1. Perception of the cultural factor in intercultural team management

The primary aim of this question was to understand how managers perceive culture as component of their management strategies and practices. Two respondents viewed that culture can be an organizational problem. Respondent 5 stated: "*At the organizational level of my team, culture is a problem, especially in terms of dysfunction and misunderstanding.*" The second respondent stated, "*I would say there is a tension in the work we do, between an excessive recognition or reminder of the other's differences, sliding towards stereotypes and prejudices.*"

However, all respondents perceived this factor as an element that must be included in your strategy.

For respondent number 8, it is *“an asset that allows you to access new projects for your team and a source of advantage, recognition, and learning.”* Respondent number 2 confirmed that intercultural issues can sometimes also take on an intergenerational dimension. *“Companies must learn to value the human resources of each individual in order to convert this diversity into an asset. To do this, it becomes a competitive advantage for companies. We must know how to make cultural diversity in the workplace a strength, not a liability!”* “Affirms respondent 3.”

A very original viewpoint expressed by respondent 7 is that corporate culture represents a set of shared values (rites, traditions, values, ethics, conviviality) that make a company unique and distinctive.

Indeed, a corporate culture is specific to a particular company. This culture will, of course, share common traits with companies in the same industry, but at the same time, it will also be a unique combination, shaped by history, people, and events. And this culture then reflects the specific identity of the company in question (Ivanov, Ivan, 2015).

8.4.2. The stages in the intercultural learning process

This question explored the process of intercultural learning, explained in our literature review, which involves three main stages: the use of affective competence, cognitive competence, and behavioral competence. Before discussing each dimension, these concepts were explained to the respondents to ensure shared understating.

Affective dimension

Three respondents confirmed that they do not use their affective competence. Respondent 4 said: *“But by saying or knowing too much about your colleagues, you risk, in the worst-case scenario, being perceived as intrusive; in the best-case scenario, as an equal or a friend.”*

Respondent 6 stated: *“Using affective competence can be perceived differently depending on the members’ position.”*

Everyone has their own personal expenses, and for some, this can be a source of disruption.

Similarly, the first respondent confirms, *“It can cause misunderstandings, as some members may believe I have much better relationships with other members than with myself. This can create a climate of discrimination among my members, so I prefer to ignore this skill and remain neutral in my relationships with my colleagues.”*

On the other hand, all the other respondents agree with the importance of emotional competence. Respondent 5 states, *“Before being managers and collaborators, we are first and foremost human beings, and we cannot hide our feelings”’.*

Culture can offer experiences that are emotionally or intellectually impactful, whether pleasant or unsettling, that invite celebration or other forms of engagement.

In line with anthropological theory, and as Demorgon (2002) emphasized, affective competence is based on goodwill, which allows individuals to overcome their inherently human emotional reactions, also supported by more recent research on intercultural competence (Deardorff, 2006). Transparency and frankness in communication appear to be within everyone's reach, regardless of their national culture.

Respondent 7 presents a different perspective, stating, "*It is crucial to cultivate affective competence to be closer to members, to understand their human nature, which helps in understanding their ways of thinking and speaking a very significant factor from an organizational standpoint.*"

Respondent 8 added, "*This competence is very important for harmonious integration. It involves borrowing and letting go, and it provokes emotional reactions linked, on the one hand, to cultural references, and on the other hand, to resilience.*"

Cognitive dimension

All respondents agree with the concept of cognitive competence. Therefore, a tool for testing knowledge and understanding of one or more foreign cultures is "It allows for cultural assimilation," affirms the second respondent.

Respondent 7 confirmed that it is very important to have intellectual knowledge of others. "*This helps overcome culture shock.*"

Cognitive competence is seen as a categorization of information stored in memory that serves to identify and be familiar with a particular behavior. In a foreign environment, the individual must cognitively and emotionally assimilate information that influences their behavior (Martin, 2000; Sternberg, 1997). They must observe, reflect, organize, conceptualize, and act, a perspective that is also supported by more recent research on intercultural cognition and adaptation (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009).

Behavioral competence

Behavioral competence is an essential element for all managers. "*You have to avoid letting your personality show, be someone else,*" affirms respondent 4. According to this response, one must always be very careful in behavior and relationships. Furthermore, respondent 6 states that behaviors must be shaped and the quality of relationships between individuals improved.

A particularly important point is confirmed by respondent 5, who justifies the intercultural learning process by confirming that behavior is related to cognitive and affective competence, because without knowledge of the other

person, without feeling towards them, one cannot react in a certain way. In this sense, the second respondent states that one must sometimes behave differently with each individual. This refers to the cognitive concept that the manager holds in their prior thoughts about the other person.

In conclusion, we can say that the cognitive component influences behavior. The intercultural learning process is a blend of skills: applying cognitive knowledge, communication skills, the ability to put linguistic knowledge into practice, meta-communication skills, behavioral flexibility, and self-discipline (Barmeyer 2007, Ogay 2000).

The third respondent confirms that behavioral competence is not related to affect or cognition but rather is a variable engagement behavior that depends on the situation and environment. *"I behave according to the working conditions or the situation I find myself in,"* the respondent states.

While most managers report having adapted their work style and developed new behaviors, *"intercultural surprises"* regularly arise because the environment is culturally diverse. In this environment, the national character of behavior is difficult to identify or precisely define, as mutual adaptation processes are taking place.

8.4.3. Techniques for addressing intercultural situations

Managers were asked whether their organizations provide adequate support tools to manage intercultural challenges.

Informal and relational strategies

Three respondents confirmed that they occasionally organize informal gatherings outside of workplace.

Respondent 2 confirmed, "I offer my team dinners, especially to integrate a new team member from a cultural minority." Respondent 5 stated, *"Changing the atmosphere and the setting can allow the person to express themselves much better outside the company."*

"I discover amazing personalities in people who have worked with me for a long time. The informal mode of communication outside the company helps to recognize the person's true personality."

These findings suggest that informal relationship-building is a powerful technique for strengthening cohesion and encouraging authentic communication.

Organizational support and training

On a technical level, respondents 6, 2, 4, and 3 mentioned that their companies provide training programs on intercultural management. These programs include language courses, ethics sessions and cultural awareness workshops. Respondent 6 explained *"This awareness of the other culture and one's own culture brings individuals*

closer together and strengthens professional ties by reducing the “Misunderstandings and cultural incidents can hinder the smooth running of a project,”.

Respondent 2 added: *“English is the universal language used in international exchanges. Therefore, proficiency in English is essential for managing in an international environment. Language courses are offered by the company where I work.”*

We are well prepared to face cultural diversity. The company offers its project team managers ethics courses and adheres to a culture of sharing and collaboration that is respected by all its employees.” Respondent 3.

“My experience as a coach has shown me that this has a definite impact on the way of managing, cooperating, and dealing with conflicts specific to any large organization.” Respondent 4.

However, some respondents confirmed that their companies lack formal training programs. These managers rely on their own experience and intuition to manage cultural challenges but expressed a need for greater organizational support.

8.5. Intercultural teams development and dynamics

This question aimed to analyze the three levels of communication skills to be integrated into an intercultural relationship, as identified by Tuckman (1965), who proposed a five-stage model for group development. And the idea is to be evaluated in a more modern environment. The results show that, notably, not all respondents follow one or more of the five steps of this model to develop their intercultural teams. Some respondents confirm that they prefer to establish a single, well-defined standard plan with a common objective that everyone must follow identically.

The second respondent specifies that *“it is much easier to establish a common plan for all members; this facilitates the task, unidirectional communication, and saves time.”*

For respondent 5, *“establishing a common work plan avoids misunderstandings and ulterior motives. As a result, members feel a greater sense of equality.”* To this end, using brainstorming, which is a kind of intercultural negotiation, to elicit each member's opinion is essential. Furthermore, *“intercultural negotiation is one of the practices in which the issue of cultural differences is fully at play, due to the existence of values and behavioral styles specific to each party”* (Olivier Meier, 2019, pages 143 to 175).

These findings demonstrate that intercultural team development is not fixed sequence, but rather dynamic adaptive process shaped by communication, negotiation and mutual adjustment.

Conclusion

This retrospective qualitative study demonstrated that intercultural team effectiveness is not about “culture” rather it is more about the way leaders interpret cultural dissimilarities into practicable collaborations. Across the 8 project managers, communication appears as an important competence, not only language fluidity, but the capacity to construct senses, discover “hidden” motives, and prohibit misunderstandings from pushing them into relational rub. The findings support the proposition that the leader’s intercultural competence is controlled through the caliber of communication: when communication is understandable, adaptive, and attentive to indirect signals, cultural diversity becomes an asset for studying and synergy, when it is feeble, diversity becomes a prompt for misunderstandings and conflict. A second contribution is the study’s highlighted the tolerance and openness as operative leadership measurements rather than theoretical attitudes. Managers reported tolerance as the potential to remain effective under ambiguity and to avert untimely stereotyping particularly when teams analyze the same occurrence differently. In experimental terms, tolerance emerges to perform as a stabilizer of team climate, it supports leaders to maintain disputes and focuses on psychological welfare so that members can speak up. Third, the findings point out empathy and self-awareness as relational instruments that support coherence. Empathy was expressed as producing a supportive environment and authorizing managers to interpret team signals (silence, hesitance, shyness) that may vary across cultures. Self-awareness is too laced as a leadership “meta-skill”: managers who comprehend their own assumptions and default communication style are better able to alter behaviors, conserve balance, and control power dynamics. Furthermore, the results also refined the literature by proofing that affective involvement is not always recognized as positive: some managers averted affective proximity affirming that the “right distance” is culturally and contextually accidental. Finally, the study fortifies cultural diversity as a generator of barriers (misunderstanding, stereotypes, cohesion difficulties) and as a generator of benefits (learning, competitive positioning) hanging on leadership practices and organizational support (training, language support, culture workshops, integration moments). This “both advantage and challenge” shape one of the powerful profiles of team leader across cultures.

This study has several limitations that should be perceived when interpreting the findings. First, the sample size is small ($n=8$) and was constructed through contacts and referrals, which encourage profundity but borderline the representativeness. Second, despite the fact that the respondents come from different cultural backgrounds and sectors, most interviews are maintained in the Warsaw context, which may form a sort of intercultural situation narrated and

limit the conversion to other institutional environments. Third, the interviews were led in English, which is not the native language for most participants and the researcher; this may have affected shades, emotional declaration, and the exactness of meaning in responses. Fourth, the study is retrospective and depends on self-reported managerial perceptions, which may establish bias and socially advisable surrounds. Finally, the data were collected between 2019 and 2020, meaning that the findings may not completely mirror the post-2020 speeding of hybrid/remote work and digitally mediated intercultural alliance, which could change communication motifs and team dynamics.

For more managerial and practical techniques, this study reflects on how important communication capability is in leadership and leads to thinking further about leadership development and training, especially for multilingual teams. A creation of an Institutionalize incorporation practices is also a good insight by implementing practices that ensure voice and participation especially for members who may be culturally less direct or “shyer” in group settings. Developing and work on Building the intercultural competence as a skill set, not a trait is also an important practice for multinational companies, merge cultural awareness, tolerance under ambiguity, empathy, and self-awareness training with pragmatic scenarios.

Human resources departments, particularly in multinational, could extend the organizational support by developing and offering the language courses, ethics programs, cultural workshops, and coaching should be perceived as performance variables.

For a recommendation related to the direction of this research, a larger sample could be possible, including not only managers but also team members to constant how leadership behaviors are accomplished versus deliberated.

The research could be bordered by Comparing contexts and systems of work for example across countries and industries and compare co-located vs. hybrid/remote multicultural teams.

The potential to extend this retrospective study is high, in a way to examine the proposed mechanism more directly: examine whether communication quality mediates the relationship between leader intercultural competence and team effectiveness using mixed methods qualitative and quantitative methods using scales.

Future research could replicate this study but using recent data to compare managerial competencies and challenges in intercultural work environments, means before and after 2020. Expanding the sample and including team members,

not only managers, could give a better understanding and a larger picture on intercultural dynamics. Realistically, organizations should sustain investing in communication and intercultural training, using diversity as strategic advantage rather than a constraint.

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