Impact of Cultural Diversity on Team Performance: A Meta-Synthesis

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ABSTRACT

Cultural diversity has long been acknowledged as a defining feature of contemporary teams, particularly in globalised work environments. In recent decades, cultural diversity has attracted growing attention within academic research on team dynamics and performance. However, the existing body of literature remains diverse, methodologically disjointed, and conceptually inconsistent. Limited attempts have been made to synthesise qualitative findings in a way that captures the complex interplay between diversity and team performance. Thus, the field will benefit from a holistic and process-oriented understanding of how cultural diversity shapes team outcomes.

This study aims to address this gap by conducting a qualitative meta-analysis of empirical research on cultural diversity in teams across different sectors. Specifically, it seeks to synthesise thematic insights across studies, highlight recurring patterns and barriers, and identify directions for future research. The study is guided by two interrelated research questions: (1) How does cultural diversity influence team performance, especially team dynamics and communication? and (2) What are the key mechanisms of cultural diversity that impact team performance, especially on team dynamics and communication?

To achieve these objectives, a meta-synthesis method was applied, drawing on twelve peer-reviewed qualitative studies published in the last 10 years. Thematic synthesis was used to identify and cluster key patterns across studies, progressing from primary-cycle coding of participant quotes to higher-order conceptual categorisation. The analysis was conducted inductively, and the resulting themes were interpreted through the Input–Process–Output (IPO) model to contextualise how cultural diversity shapes team inputs, interactional processes, and performance outcomes. The findings reveal that cultural diversity impacts team performance through relational, structural, and practice-based dynamics. Eight core themes emerged, grouped into three overarching conceptual categories: Relational Conditions that Enable Inclusion, Structural and Normative Barriers to Inclusion, and Practices that Translate Diversity into Performance. From this synthesis, the concept of Cultural Attunement was developed. Cultural Attunement is a process of cultural negotiation and relational reflexivity that allows diverse teams to build trust, adapt meaningfully, and optimise collaborative performance.

This research makes several contributions. Theoretically, it advances a process-oriented understanding of cultural diversity by proposing Cultural Attunement as a central mechanism in diverse team functioning. It also bridges fragmented strands of literature by offering a cohesive thematic framework grounded in lived team experiences. Practically, the findings offer actionable insights for leaders and organisations seeking to foster inclusion and leverage diversity. Finally, the study proposes future research directions, including longitudinal and ethnographic approaches, to further examine how cultural attunement develops in real-time, high-stakes team environments.

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ATTESTATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor used artificial intelligence tools or generative artificial intelligence tools (unless it is clearly stated, and referenced, along with the purpose of use), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In the current world that is increasingly shaped by global collaboration, cultural diversity has become both a strategic requirement and a practical challenge for organisations operating across regions and sectors. As teams become increasingly multicultural, whether through virtual collaborations, cross-border projects, or the demographic evolution of countries' workforces, the question of how cultural diversity shapes team performance has shifted from theoretical assumptions to operational urgency. While cultural diversity is widely celebrated for its potential to enhance innovation, broaden perspectives, and increase good decision-making, it also introduces different levels of complexity into how teams communicate, coordinate, and function under pressure (Knippenberg et al., 2004; Stahl et al., 2010).

Academic literature on cultural diversity reflects these complexities in different ways. While some studies confirm that diversity can enhance team functioning through access to diverse knowledge systems and adaptive thinking (Manbaeva et al., 2021; Zhang, 2021), others highlight challenges such as miscommunication, subgrouping, and misaligned expectations, particularly when cultural differences are poorly managed or inclusion mechanisms are absent (Pieterse, 2013; Cherian et al., 2020). Hence, the impact of cultural diversity is not inherently positive or negative; rather, it is contingent on situational, structural, and relational factors that influence how diversity is experienced within the team. This dissertation emerges from the need to critically examine these conditions. Through a qualitative meta-analysis of empirical research, the study investigates how cultural diversity influences team dynamics and communication, with particular attention to high-stakes work settings where cooperative functioning is essential. Drawing on frameworks such as the Input–Process–Output (IPO) model (Ilgen et al., 2005) and established cultural typologies (Hall, 1976; Hofstede, 1980), the study aims to identify key mechanisms that determine whether diversity becomes a performance enabler or constraint. The rest of this chapter introduces the conceptual underpinnings of the study, clarifies the research purpose, and presents the guiding research questions that shape the scope of the synthesis and meta-analysis.

Diversity is a broad phenomenon encompassing a wide range of differences in humans' physical and non-physical make-up, socially constructed to identify people by culture, race, ethnicity, gender, and age, amongst others (Kalev et al., 2006). These differences in humans can manifest in both physical and non-physical settings and physical locations, bolstering performance in teams or organisations (Chua et al., 2023; Hennekam et al., 2017). Diversity plays complex roles in team or organisation performance, which can be better understood through a multi-faceted approach that clearly defines the types of diversity. This can be divided into surface-level diversity (i.e., easily observed identifiers such as culture, ethnicity, and age) and deep-level diversity (i.e., less observable characteristics such as values

and beliefs; Stahl et al., 2009). Such a division also aligns with Crenshaw's (1989) concept of intersectionality, which guides the understanding of the interconnectedness of diversity's demographic characteristics and how they shape an individual's experiences.

Intersectionality can be defined as the lens to understanding how different aspects of a person's identity – e.g., culture, race, gender, or sexuality, amongst others, interconnect and contribute to shaping their experiences and opportunities (Crenshaw, 1989; The Lancet Regional Health – Americas, 2025). Such interconnectedness can impact how employees interact, communicate, and contribute to an organisation or team's goals (Turi et al.,2022). Hence, given that a single identity does not shape an individual's experience and disposition, diversity cannot be a monolithic concept but encompasses a wide range of unique perspectives, experiences, and identities (Cho et al., 2013). That said, considering intersectionality in research discourse also poses challenges, such as complexity, nuances in dynamics, and generalisability (Rašković et al., 2024; Atewologun et al., 2016; Rodriguez et al., 2016; Syed & Özbilgin, 2009), measuring cultural diversity's impact on individual and team performance remains a significant area of discourse in international business (IB) for decades.

The impact of cultural diversity on performance has been widely studied, with evidence showing both beneficial and detrimental effects depending on how it shapes team dynamics and communication. Numerous studies (Knippenberg et al., 2004; Stahl et al., 2010; Pieterse, 2013; Cherian et al., 2020; Manbaeva et al., 2021; Stahl & Maznevski, 2021; and Zhang, 2021) have confirmed that cultural diversity impacts team performance both positively and negatively through effectiveness, productivity, team dynamics, and communication. For instance, Knippenberg et al. (2004 and Stahl & Maznevski (2021) found that the impacts of cultural diversity on team performance manifest through both social and systemic interactions within a team, leading to the presence of diverse perspectives, experiences, and problem-solving techniques, which can stimulate creativity and innovation. This is particularly advantageous in complex work environments or globalised contexts (Pieterse, 2013; Zhang, 2021). However, cultural diversity also presents the drawbacks of complication in communication due to differences in communication style or language in use, non-verbal cues, and decision-making norms (Stahl et al., 2010). In some cases, misunderstandings or misalignments in expectations can impede cohesion and efficiency (Cherian et al., 2020).

Despite the extensive research, the impact of cultural diversity on team performance remains contested, with prior studies offering mixed findings and sector-specific insights that lack broader generalisability. The findings from cultural diversity impact studies have largely remained inconsistent. These inconsistencies exist in the dual nature of the findings from previous studies. These studies suggest that outcomes are not uniformly positive or negative; rather, they tend to be mixed. Some studies highlight performance improvements linked to increased diversity (Manbaeva et al., 2021), while others observe neutral or even negative effects under certain conditions, especially where integration and inclusion

mechanisms are weak or absent (Stahl et al., 2010; Pieterse, 2013). Thus, the impact of cultural diversity appears to depend heavily on situational and managerial factors. Previous reviews (Dulaimi & Hariz, 2011; Misoc, 2017; Selvadurai & Dasgupta, 2016; Gumede, 2016) have often examined these impacts on a specific single sector, lacking a comprehensive synthesis that considers the generalisability of these impacts to broader work contexts, including high-stakes work environments.

Therefore, this dissertation addresses the identified gap by integrating and critically analysing the most relevant and recent studies conducted on the impacts of cultural diversity on team performance, with particular attention to communication and dynamics within the team. It seeks to develop a conceptual model for the key components of cultural diversity that influence team performance for multicultural teams, including those operating under a high-pressure work environment.

1.1 Research Questions

Well-formulated research questions can help comprehend the literature to be reviewed and shape the trajectory of the reviews (Paré et al., 2016). Hence, the research questions of this dissertation were constructed to address:

1. How does cultural diversity influence team performance, especially team dynamics and communication?
2. What are the key mechanisms of cultural diversity that impact team performance, especially on team dynamics and communication?

These research questions guide the scope of the literature review and effectively determine the selection of relevant studies.

1.2 Conceptual Clarification of Key Terms

To ensure conceptual clarity and coherence throughout this dissertation, it is important to define the key constructs underpinning the study from the outset. This is particularly relevant given the contested nature of constructs such as cultural diversity, inclusion, and team performance in multidisciplinary literature. These definitions guide the study's analytic focus and interpretive process, particularly as it draws on qualitative meta-synthesis methods that require consistent conceptual grounding across diverse empirical sources.

Cultural diversity, team performance, and team dynamics form the central analytical constructs framing this study, while supporting concepts such as psychological safety, inclusion, and multicultural team functioning are employed as interpretive lenses for understanding interpersonal team processes. Furthermore, intersectionality and reflexivity are introduced to acknowledge the complex socio-cultural dimensions that influence team members' lived experiences and the researcher's analytical stance.

These conceptual definitions form the basis for the theoretical and empirical discussions in Chapters 2 and 5 and inform the coding and synthesis procedures in the meta-analysis. Table 1.1 below provides a summary of these key terms and outlines their specific relevance to the study.

Table 1.1: Conceptual Clarification of Key Terms Relevant to the Literature Review

Term	**Definition**	**Reason for Inclusion**
Cultural Diversity	The presence of team members from different cultural backgrounds, shaped by ethnicity, nationality, language, and socio-cultural norms, which influence how they interact, collaborate, and function within the team (Stahl et al., 2010; Ang & Van Dyne, 2015).	Fundamental to the research focus and Input-Process-Output (PO) model inputs, must be distinguished from mere demographic representation to account for interactional and meaning-making dynamics within teams, Ilgen et al. (2005)
Team Performance	The collective achievement of task goals and the quality of relational outcomes within a group, including efficiency, innovation, cohesion, and the inclusivity of team processes (Ilgen et al., 2005; Mathieu et al., 2008).	Core outcome variables need to be conceptualised to include both task and relational elements, given the dissertation's focus on communication and dynamics.
Team Dynamics	The relational, cognitive, and structural processes that evolve during collaboration, including communication, power negotiation, conflict resolution, and mutual adaptation (Jehn et al., 1999; Edmondson & Lei, 2014).	Explains what is being examined in team interactions and enables consistent interpretation of mechanisms across culturally diverse teams.
Input–Process–Output (IPO) Model	Describes team functioning as a transformation system where inputs (e.g., diversity, leadership) are converted into outputs (e.g., performance) via mediating processes such as cohesion, communication, and adaptation (Ilgen et al., 2005).	Sets the analytical structure of the dissertation; used to evaluate how team-level mechanisms mediate and moderate the influence of cultural diversity.
Inclusion	Inclusion is the deliberate creation of equitable structures, norms, and interactions that ensure all team members, particularly those from minority or non-dominant groups, feel recognised, respected, and able to participate fully (Shore et al., 2011).	A key concept in evaluating the success or failure of diversity distinguishes between performative and substantive team engagement (Nishii, 2013; Ely & Thomas, 2001).

Psychological Safety	Psychological safety is a shared belief that the team environment allows for interpersonal risk-taking without fear of embarrassment, rejection, or penalty, enabling open expression and learning (Edmondson, 1999).	Foundational to adaptive learning, inclusive communication, and performance in multicultural teams, it frequently emerges in findings.
Multicultural Teams	Multicultural teams are workgroups that are comprised of members from different cultural backgrounds whose interactions are shaped by diverse assumptions, norms, and communication styles (Stahl et al., 2010).	Used interchangeably with cultural diversity in the dissertation.
Cultural Typologies	Frameworks that categorise cultures along different dimensions by different scholars, such as Hall (1976), Hofstede (1980), and House et al. (2004).	Used to analyse how specific cultural logics influence team behaviour, interpretation, and leadership dynamics; provides theoretical scaffolding for discussion in Chapter 5.
Intersectionality	Intersectionality refers to how overlapping social identities—such as race, gender, ethnicity, class, and migration status—interact to create complex modes of advantage and disadvantage (Crenshaw, 1991; Collins, 2015).	Highlights that team experiences cannot be understood through culture alone; vital for understanding how power, voice, and inclusion operate differently across team members based on intersecting identities.
Reflexivity	Reflexivity involves the critical examination of one's own assumptions, positioning, and influence on the research process or team dynamic, especially when interpreting culturally diverse experiences (Finlay, 2002; Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2018).	Essential for a qualitative synthesis; supports transparency and analytical integrity when interpreting meaning across studies involving complex sociocultural differences.

Table 1: Conceptual Clarification of Key Terms Relevant to the Literature Review

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter critically reviews key theoretical and empirical contributions on cultural typologies and their influence on team performance. It first synthesises the major typological approaches to understanding culture, highlighting foundational, values-based, and emerging contextual models. The review then evaluates how these cultural frameworks intersect with communication, leadership, and team dynamics, drawing on cross-disciplinary literature. Finally, the chapter reviews mechanisms through which cultural diversity shapes team processes and performance outcomes, thereby laying the conceptual foundation for addressing the dissertation's research questions. The discussion begins by engaging with how "culture" has been conceptualised through typologies and the implications of these models for understanding multicultural team interactions.

2.1 Conceptualisation of Cultural Typologies

Understanding how cultural diversity influences team performance requires first engaging with the cultural typologies that underpin our conceptualisation of "culture" in organisational settings. The following four core categories of cultural typologies are examined in this section: (1) Foundations and Expansion of National Culture Typologies (e.g., Hofstede, 1980; House et al., 2004), (2) Cultural Logics in Interpersonal Behaviour and Conflict such as the Honour–Face–Dignity model (Leung & Cohen, 2011), (3) Values-Based Typologies – Bridging the Individual and Collective which bridge individual and societal orientations (Schwartz, 2014; Magun et al., 2017), and (4) Contextual Shifts in Cultural Typologies, including intersectional and discursive perspectives (Dervin et al., 2020; Correa, 2020). These typologies offer complementary ways of understanding culture, not only as a national or structural phenomenon, but as something dynamic and evolving, relational, and negotiated across different contexts. This has implications for communication, conflict resolution, and leadership within diverse teams (Stahl & Maznevski, 2021; Pieterse et al., 2013).

Many scholars from diverse academic fields such as anthropology (Hall, 1976), sociology (Inglehart & Welzel., 2020; De Benedictis et al., 2020), cross-cultural psychology (Stankov et al., 2014; Hofstede, 1980; Minkove & Kaasa, 2022), political science (Huntington, 1993), management and organisational behaviour (House et al., 2004) and international business (Hofstede, 1980) have studied culture and developed different frameworks for categorising and understanding cultures globally. Despite this, the relevance of these typologies extends beyond discipline. For instance, Hofstede's cultural typology is grounded in organisational psychology, but has been fundamental in the study of cross-border management and behaviour within international business because of its practical applicability. Likewise, the GLOBE study (House et al., 2004) is rooted in leadership and organisational behaviour, yet uses both psychological and sociological theories to explain how cultural values influence

leadership expectations globally. These trajectories break the confinement of cultural typologies to their disciplinary origins. They also confirm conceptual connections across fields, aimed at better understanding human behaviour and cultural diversity in diverse settings (Rašković et al., 2025; Correa, 2020). These studies, spanning 50 years' research, present different perspectives on understanding the world's cultures through the lenses of national culture dimensions (Hofstede, 1980), communication and behavioural context (Hall, 1976), the three-culture model (Leung & Cohen, 2011), value base (Witte et al., 2020), and civilisation and micro-culture view (Huntington, 1993).

In summary, "culture" refers to the common visible or non-visible way of life of a group of people, which can be learned or transferred over time from person to person and may influence the pattern of behaviour of the person or the group they belong to. Cultures can be understood, interpreted, and categorised in different forms depending on the dimension one is able to observe. These varying understandings, interpretations and categorisations of cultures are termed *cultural typologies* in social research. The concepts and components of these typologies will be examined in the context of this dissertation. The next section of this review will explore each of these cultural typologies in detail in order to critically assess how cultural norms and value dimensions influence communication styles, power dynamics, and team processes, thereby informing the mechanisms through which cultural diversity affects team performance and interaction, which is a central concern of this dissertation's research questions.

2.2 Cultural Typologies

Cultural typology originates from the broad concept of typology, which is rooted in the systematic social classification of culture based on similar features such as communication style, values, norms, and practices (Hall, 1976; Hofstede, 1980; Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1997; Machado & Carvalho, 2008). The term has been in use in the field of anthropology and social science for over a century. Its application as a tool for studying cultural phenomena in social research by Pitt-Rivers in 1891 signified the first crucial moment in the conceptualisation of the term (Bowden, 1991; Gosden & Larson, 2007; Gere, 2012). However, its modern application in cross-cultural research was made popular by Hofstede (1980), Triandis (1994), and Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner (1997) through their respective models of cultural dimensions.

2.2.1 Foundational and Expansion of National Culture Typologies

Foundational cultural typologies conceptualise culture at the national or civilizational level through structural dimensions (Hofstede, 1980; 2001; House et al., 2004), treating culture as measurable and quantitatively comparable across nations, while acknowledging that change can occur. Hofstede's

dimensions, based on survey data from IBM employees in over 50 countries between 1967 and 1973, remain one of the most cited frameworks in cross-cultural research. The six-dimensional models are:

1. Power Distance: The degree of acceptance of unequal power distribution by the less powerful members of a society.

2. Individualism vs. Collectivism: The extent to which individual goals are prioritised over collective goals by the people of a society.

3. Masculinity vs. Femininity: The preference for achievement and competitiveness over care and quality of life.

4. Uncertainty Avoidance: The degree to which risk and ambiguity are avoided or tolerated by the people of the society.

5. Long Term vs Short Term Orientation: The extent of a society's focus on immediate results or gain versus future rewards. This was developed based on the Chinese Value Survey (CVS) and formally added as the fifth dimension in 1988 (Hofstede & Bond, 1988, as cited in Hofstede, 1991).

6. Indulgence vs. Restraint: The extent to which societies allow gratification of basic human desires. This was introduced in 2010 based on analysed data from the World Values Survey across 93 countries (Hofstede et al., 2010).

The datasets used have been expanded and periodically updated, with the most recent being in 2023, forming one of the most enduring and accessible cross-national comparative datasets in the social sciences (Hofstede Insights, 2023). However, the underlying dimensions themselves have remained largely unchanged, reinforcing ongoing concerns about their ability to capture the evolving and dynamic nature of culture. Hofstede's cultural typology has been fundamental for understanding value-based cultural variation at the national level using national averages.

The GLOBE project rejected some of Hofstede's earliest assumptions on the universality and static nature of cultural dimensions, particularly the treatment of culture as a fixed and national-level variable. They built on this work by introducing dimensions related to leadership and differentiating values ("what should be") and practices ("what is"), thereby moving beyond Hofstede's reliance on repurposed organisational survey data to develop a large-scale, explicitly designed cross-cultural study. (House et al., 2004). Unlike Hofstede's model, which focused on national cultural differences affecting workplace behaviour through existing IBM datasets, the GLOBE project aimed to examine how societal culture shapes leadership expectations and organisational behaviour across 62 countries, using mixed methods

and a purpose-built research design rooted in both psychological and sociological theory (House et al., 2004; Javidan et al., 2006).

The six leadership dimensions—charismatic/value-based, team-oriented, participative, humane-oriented, autonomous, and self-protective—highlight how culture shapes perceptions of leader effectiveness. These distinctions help explain how leadership style may influence communication, trust, and cohesion in multicultural teams (Stahl et al., 2010; Stahl & Maznevski, 2021).

GLOBE also introduced refinements such as Institutional and In-Group Collectivism, offering more granular insights than Hofstede's singular scale. Its Humane Orientation dimension builds upon Hofstede's masculinity–femininity continuum by addressing compassion and generosity in leadership expectations. The GLOBE project is grounded in empirical data from over 17,000 managers across 62 countries and separates "what ought to be" from "what is," offering a more dynamic lens on cultural influence (Javidan et al., 2006; Dorfman et al., 2012).

Similarly, Hall's (1976) High vs. Low Context theory, though more theoretical and qualitative, provides foundational insight into communication styles. High-context cultures rely on implicit cues and shared understanding, while low-context cultures prioritise explicit and structured communication. This framework is often used to explain communication breakdowns in multicultural teams. Hall's theory is particularly important for this study, as it provides an analytical tool for analysing how culturally diverse teams navigate communication styles that vary in directness, clarity, and relative dependence. Given that this dissertation examines the mechanisms through which cultural diversity influences team dynamics and communication, Hall's framework enables a deeper exploration of how misunderstandings emerge in teams composed of members from high- and low-context cultures. These communicative mismatches can impact psychological safety, trust, and collaborative decision-making—key components of team performance explored in the subsequent chapters.

2.2.1.1 Common Critiques of the Foundational Typologies

Despite their widespread use, these early frameworks have drawn substantial critique. Hofstede's model, for instance, has been challenged for treating culture as static and nationally bound (Fang, 2003) and for overgeneralising individual behaviours from national averages (McSweeney, 2015). Taras et al. (2010) questioned its predictive validity for workplace behaviour, while Baskerville (2003) and Ailon (2008) argue that these typologies reflect Eurocentric and managerial assumptions, limiting their relevance in non-Western contexts.

Similarly, GLOBE's framework has been criticised for assuming universal leadership prototypes (Orr & Hauser, 2008), and Hall's high–low context theory has faced scepticism for oversimplification and lack of empirical support (Gudykunst & Nishida, 1986; Cardon, 2008). Fang's (2003) critique of

Hofstede's Long-Term Orientation dimension as overly binary and culturally insensitive is particularly relevant to this dissertation, as it aligns with scholars like Dervin et al. (2020) and Rašković et al. (2025) who call for more dynamic, relative, and relational understandings of culture.

In response to such critiques, Minkov and Hofstede (2014) revised several earlier dimensions and acknowledged empirical weaknesses in measures such as indulgence–restraint. Nonetheless, these typologies continue to feature prominently in research on team performance and cultural diversity (Waldman et al., 2006; Stahl et al., 2010; Rockstuhl et al., 2011), due to their conceptual accessibility and lack of universally accepted alternatives. When applied reflexively and triangulated with qualitative evidence, they offer a valuable interpretive framework for synthesising studies while remaining attentive to complexity and interpersonal dynamics. This aligns with the approach adopted in this dissertation.

2.2.1.2 Refinement of the Foundational Typologies: Towards Enhanced Empirical and Contextual Rigour

In response to the limitations of foundational cultural typologies, more recent scholars (De Benedictis et al., 2020, 2023; Minkov & Kaasa, 2022; and Inglehart & Welzel, 2020) have developed more refined frameworks as a push toward better empirical rigour and in alignment with social changes (De Benedictis et al., 2020; 2023; Minkov & Kaasa, 2022). De Benedictis et al. (2020, 2023) introduced a network-based model that treats cultural characteristics as interconnected rather than independent variables, offering a more dynamic analysis of cultural distance and internal cohesion between societies. Likewise, Minkov and Kaasa (2022) applied a broader set of modern indicators and improved statistical validation to test the cultural dimensions of Hofstede and Schwartz across different countries. This increased the comparability, reduced sampling bias, and redefined key dimensions such as indulgence and flexibility (Minkov & Kaasa, 2022). Meanwhile, Inglehart & Welzel (2020) improved on earlier World Values Survey research by combining historical development and modernisation theory while acknowledging the evolving nature of societal and national values (Inglehart & Welzel, 2020). These evolving studies have contributed to the analytical approach of this dissertation by supporting a more dynamic and real experience interpretation of cultural diversity within culturally diverse team performance.

2.2.2 Cultural Logics in Interpersonal Behaviour and Conflict

As a shift from national conceptualisation of culture, Leung and Cohen (2011) introduced the Three-Culture Model – dignity, honour, and face cultural logic. This model conceptualises culture as a dynamic interactive system in which Cultural logic, Individual differences - person, and Situations - context

determine the behaviours of individuals (Leung & Cohen, 2011). Leung and Cohen posit that behavioural logics are embedded in cultural systems and are available to all individuals. Successively, the Three Culture model was expanded to reveal the crucial role of cultural logics in strategic decisions, especially in cross-cultural negotiations (Aslani et al., 2016; Ramirez-Marin, 2016) and conflict resolution (Pely & Shimoni, 2019; Minkov et al, 2019). This model provides insight into how cultural values manifest in everyday team behaviours, especially during negotiation or conflict, which are key mechanisms relevant to the second research question for this study.

Notably, besides social hierarchy and reputation, the premise of the honour-based culture falls within the collectivist context, which is comparable to Hofstede's Individual vs Collectivism dimension (Aslani et al., 2016). However, the distinction is that while Honour cultures emphasise social standing, reputation, and retaliation, often needing public defence of self-worth (Leung & Cohen, 2011), collectivist cultures prioritise loyalty and group harmony, discouraging confrontation even when personal honour is challenged (Hofstede, 2001). The context-sensitive and interactional view of culture in this framework may be useful in unpacking how cultural diversity influences team performance, especially in conflict resolution, negotiation, and decision making, which are important aspects of communication.

2.2.3 Values-Based Typologies: Bridging the Individual and Collective

Schwartz's (2014) theory of basic human values, refined by scholars like Witte and Czupryna, offers multidimensional interrelated models that can be applied at personal and national levels alike. The value-based typology offers a better option to the evolutionary typologies and has been widely employed through national aggregates, shedding light on broad societal priorities such as egalitarianism versus hierarchy. However, this theory's macro-level focus may limit its applicability to this dissertation, which seeks to explore team-level dynamics and intercultural interaction. Such a level of nuanced enquiry often requires attention to intra-national variation or intersectional variations that may influence how cultural values play out in team-level interactions, especially in diverse multinational teams, which are less easily captured by national averages (Schwartz & Bardi, 2001). The same omission occurred in Magun (2017), which explores the cultural value orientations of Russians in the context of broader European values with the goal of refining the understanding of cultural variation through both traditional national boundaries and value-based typologies that echo institutional, social, and ideological influences. Nonetheless, its flexibility, value-centred foundation, and empirical applicability at both individual and national levels position it as a counterpoint to the more static, nation-based typologies. This discussion contributes directly to Research Question 1 by highlighting how value-based cultural frameworks can shape, constrain, or enable intercultural communication and team-level performance, particularly by revealing how individual and collective values interact within multicultural team settings.

2.2.4 Contextual Shifts in Cultural Typologies

In recent years, a newer line of thought has emerged, reinforcing the call for the understanding of culture as a fluid and contextual phenomenon rather than static (Dervin et al, 2020; Correa, 2020; Rašković et al., 2025). This theme stresses the importance of intersectionality, reflexivity and critical theories in cultural research. Dervin et al. (2020) challenge static and essentialist interpretations of culture by previous authors like Hofstede and Hall, advocating for a discursive and reflexive approach that recognises fluidity and rational characteristics of culture. Their work emphasises the importance of the lived experience, power relations, and positionality of the researcher. Similarly, through a decolonial and intersectional framework, Correa (2020) urges scholars to cross-examine the role of race, gender, and historical marginalisation on cultural expressions, especially in the context of surging global migration and hybrid workplaces. Rašković et al. (2025) extend this critique by proposing a relational and context-sensitive model of cultural logics, particularly within IB environments. Together, these scholars' emphasis on reflexivity and hybridity prompts the re-evaluation of conventional cross-cultural management research, which has too often treated culture as a stable national variable. This serves as a repositioning of culture as a dynamic process that is deeply rooted in systems of power and identity. The next section looks at how cross-cultural management studies have responded to this reconceptualisation.

2.2.5 How Cultural Diversity Influences Cross-cultural Management

Cultural diversity is a key driver of cross-cultural management, prompting organisations to develop frameworks and practices that address the complexities of working across cultures (Aureli, 2020; Stahl & Maznevski, 2021; Stan & Jongboom, 2023), and while universal cross-cultural management solutions do not exist across organisations (Seymen, 2006), recent studies show that cross-cultural communication training is common and accessible (Holcomb, 2023; Szkudlarek et al., 2021). As such, recent scholars advocate a shift from managing diversity as a compliance-driven concept to managing for inclusion, which aims to foster equitable participation and collaboration among diverse individuals (Kuknor and Bhattacharya, 2021a, 2021b). This gap is increasingly evident in today's global and culturally complex contexts, where the evolving business environment demands more adaptive strategies. In summary, cultural diversity drives cross-cultural management by prompting the advancement of inclusive strategies, adaptive leadership, and cultural competence training (Stahl et al., 2010; Thomas & Peterson, 2017). This distinction is essential for this dissertation, which does not merely focus on how management responds to diversity, but on how diversity itself shapes interpersonal dynamics, team communication, and performance outcomes. Making this distinction of focus on diversity as a structural and relational condition in this review better supports my dissertation in its aim.

My research seeks to contribute to this by identifying the key components of cultural diversity that influence collaboration, communication and dynamics within teams.

In conclusion, while these cultural typologies help in a better understanding of cultural differences, the benefit from this can be most valuable when their impact on shaping team performance is fully understood. With a clear conceptual foundation of cultural diversity established so far, the next section of this review will examine the material effects of it on the collective performance or effectiveness of teams.

2.3 Team Performance

Performance is a crucial and complex concept that has evolved in meaning over the years from mere evaluation of success and failure to trying to understand and learn from what can result in either of them. In a broad sense, within a workplace context, performance refers to the extent of achievements or outcomes of an employee, a group or an organisation in comparison with a desired achievement or results. This section directly responds to RQ1 and RQ2 by examining how cultural diversity, as conceptualised above, translates into team-level processes and performance outcomes. It presents literature on team performance, its determinants, and the role of cultural diversity in shaping it, as well as communication, conflict management, trust, leadership, subgroup dynamics, and team development. This section highlights how team performance must be understood not only in terms of outcomes but also in relation to interpersonal dynamics that emerge in culturally diverse environments. This understanding addresses the research questions by first exploring how cultural diversity influences team performance, particularly through its impact on team dynamics and communication, and identifying the specific mechanisms through which these influences are enacted.

While individuals' efforts towards outcomes are measured solely against the individuals' set targets, teams' outcomes are seen and measured as a collective against the shared efforts towards achieving a set of often interdependent goals within team contexts. Team performance includes both task-oriented outcomes, such as productivity, efficiency, and quality, as well as process-related forces such as communication, cohesion, leadership, and coordination (Ilgen et al., 2005; McKinsey & Company, 2024). Therefore, besides measuring what a team achieves, organisations also examine how teams achieve their set goals, as it helps to explain the reason for the differences in achievements across teams.

2.3.1 Determinants of Team Performance

Studies have shown that team performance is a multifaceted concept with layered attributes. Typically, team performance includes teams' ability to achieve deliverables, i.e. task performance, ability to

respond to change, i.e. adaptive performance, and teams' contributions to the overall social and cultural environment, i.e. related performance (Bennett et al., 2014; Koopmann et al., 2016). It has also been argued that the increasing impact of globalisation and diversity in workplaces has made it ineffective to measure performance solely through the conventional output-based metrics; instead, it is imperative to account for both hard and soft performance metrics such as interpersonal processes which, includes communication, trust, mutual respect, and cultural intelligence (Mathieu et al., 2017; Carucci, 2024). Key themes that have emerged from this literature review show that high-performing teams are those that not only exhibit clear and effective communication (Carucci, 2024) but also display shared goals (Sonnentag & Frese, 2009), psychological safety (Fourrage, 2024), and adaptability (Landy & Conte, 2010).

These interpersonal and situational factors are critical in multicultural teams, where diverse expectations, values, and communication styles must be continually negotiated. As team diversity increases, so does the need for deliberate structures that promote inclusion, flexibility, and cohesion. In such environments, team performance cannot be separated from relational dynamics such as trust-building, conflict resolution, and leadership responsiveness, all of which become central mediators (Stahl et al., 2010; Brett et al., 2006). Research shows that psychological safety plays a crucial role in enabling voice, learning, and collaboration in diverse teams (Edmondson & Lei, 2014). Therefore, understanding what enables high-performing teams requires not only evaluating outputs but also examining the social mechanisms through which diverse individuals collaborate to achieve them (Joshi & Roh, 2009; Mathieu et al., 2008).

2.3.2 Impact of Cultural Diversity on Team Performance

The Input–Process–Output (IPO) model remains one of the most cited models in evaluating team performance, which has been adapted to include feedback cycles and emergent states such as shared psychological safety, mental models, and collective efficacy (Marks et al., 2001). This framework shows cultural diversity as a vital input that influences team processes, which in turn impact performances. As noted by Stahl et al 2010, cultural diversity operates like a double-edged sword; its existence in a team may result in different perspectives and problem-solving skills that are crucial for innovation, but it may also present conflicts or communication barriers, which can subvert performance if not managed effectively.

In line with the call by scholars like Dervin et al.(2020), Correa (2020), and Rašković et al. (2025), to consider the importance of intersectionality and reflexivity in cultural research, recent discussions on team performance have also moved towards a more context-sensitive and flexible perspective, acknowledging how performance is shaped by both internal factors, such as team cultural mechanics and external factors such as organisational or societal influences. Increasingly, multicultural teams'

performance is being evaluated through soft skills attributes that are not present in the conventional productivity metrics, such as cultural competence, learning capability, and teamwork effectiveness, which are vital in sustaining team cohesiveness (Cheung et al., 2016).

To summarise, the multi-layered concept of team performance describes more than the measure of success or failure. Within the context of a culturally diverse team, team performance must be assessed in consideration of both outcomes and the interpersonal processes that facilitate the outcomes. This shift shows a wider recognition within the team performance studies that multicultural teams require tailored, integrative models of performance that recognise cultural complexity and interpersonal dependence.

2.3.3 Mediating Mechanisms of Cultural Diversity to Team Performance

Empirical studies have steadily shown that the key mediating mechanisms that shape how multiculturalism impacts team performance are communication style and misunderstanding (Brett et al., 2007), trust formation and cohesion (Stahl et al., 2010), leadership and conflict management (Feitosa et al., 2017), rule-setting, subgroup dynamics, and language fluency (Vigier & Spencer-Oatey, 2018). Each of these elements plays a critical role in determining whether members' cultural differences translate to positive outcomes or result in friction within diverse teams. Each of these mechanisms is examined in turn below, drawing on empirical findings to illuminate their impact on multicultural team performance. By exploring how cultural diversity interacts with these team-level mediators, this section directly addresses RQ 2 of this dissertation, which seeks to identify the key mechanisms through which cultural diversity influences team dynamics and communication. This analysis strengthens the explanatory power of the meta-synthesis and informs the conceptual model being developed in this dissertation by mapping how cultural differences are operationalised into team processes and relational outcomes. Differences in communication styles due to cultural differences often lead to misunderstandings and misinterpretations of intent, especially when there is a clash between direct and indirect communication norms, undermining team coordination and, in turn, performance (Brett et al., 2007). This is particularly evident in multicultural teams where assumptions about clarity, politeness, or assertiveness vary widely. Hence, communicative misalignments can accumulate over time, and if left unaddressed, can affect trust and collaboration.

While cultural diversity can enhance creativity and innovation when nurtured to harness differences in culture through interpersonal integration, it also obscures the formation of trust while weakening cohesion without supportive leadership because trust formation takes a lengthy time and process (Stahl et al., 2010). This challenge is heightened when teams operate under pressure or in high-stakes tasks, which reduce prospects for relational development. Therefore, promoting an environment of psychological safety becomes essential for mitigating trust-related setbacks in diverse teams.

Feitosa et al. (2017) argued that leadership effectiveness in multiculturally diverse teams depends on teams' cultural alignment and flexibility, i.e. the ability of the team leaders and members to recognise, respect, and adapt to cultural values, expectations, and communication styles of others within the team. This is vital in managing conflicts that may arise from value differences, which can weaken team harmony and performance. Moreover, culturally attuned leadership plays a crucial role in mediating misunderstandings and promoting shared norms, which helps in sustaining cohesion throughout the team lifecycle.

The study conducted by Vigier and Spencer-Oatey (2018) showed that language-fluency imbalances and rigid rule-setting reinforce subgroup divides, affecting inclusion and collaborative dynamics in multicultural teams. Hence, this can be tackled through inclusive rule-setting that promotes equal participation and mutual understanding. Such practices not only support fair engagement but also serve to balance power dynamics that may be rooted in linguistic or cultural privilege.

Collectively, these translational mechanisms address research question two of this dissertation, which seeks to identify the key mechanisms of cultural diversity that impact team performance, especially team dynamics and communication. Their inclusion in the meta-synthesis ensures that the analytical model accounts for both interpersonal and structural variables that shape culturally diverse team outcomes.

2.3.4 How Teams Develop in Culturally Diverse Contexts

Studies suggest that the impact of cultural diversity shifts over time, shaped by team development, context, and adaptive responses (Feitosa et al., 2017; Vigier & Spencer-Oatey, 2018). At the formation stage, multiculturalism in teams often shows as a liability, mainly due to unfamiliarity, stereotyping, and divergent expectations around communication norms and hierarchy (Dau, 2015). This often results in relational conflict, as team members contend with cultural ambiguities and struggle to find common ground (Yousef, 2024; Arman et al., 2025). However, this formative stage conflict can also prompt explicit dialogues around roles, values, and norms, laying the foundation for sustained clarity and relational dispute resolution (Vigier & Spencer-Oatey, 2018).

As the team progresses into task execution, the double-edged nature of cultural diversity starts to manifest. On one hand, divergent cultural sense-making can delay smooth collaboration, especially when leadership fails to accommodate different expectations for decision-making or conflict resolution (Feitosa et al., 2017; Ponomareva et al., 2022). On the other hand, various studies show that cultural diversity promotes creativity and innovation when teams actively engage in learning and reflection (Welsch et al., 2023; Granow & Asbrock, 2021; Bouncken et al., 2016).

Lastly, cultural diversity may fade into the background or convert into inherent team competencies during the team integration and norm consolidation stage. Tingvold and Munkejord (2020) and Nickerson and Goby (2018) demonstrate how long-term engagement leads to deeper intercultural trust, shared narratives, and co-created meaning. However, these outcomes would not materialise without sustained investment in psychological safety and inclusive leadership structures (Zakari et al., 2019; Leifels & Zhang, 2023). Instead, unresolved tensions may continue beneath the surface, leading to burnout or passive disengagement, especially for minority team members (Woodhead et al., 2022).

Collectively, these findings point to a progressive track in which cultural diversity initially displays relational and communicative challenges. However, under the right situation, cultural diversity transforms into a performance asset. This transformation is neither automatic nor certain; rather, it hinges on the ability of the teams to build structural support, engage in intercultural sensemaking, and embrace learning over time (Feitosa et al., 2017; Kraus et al., 2022).

These findings contribute directly to RQ1 by tracing how multicultural teams evolve over time from initial relational strain to the potential for creative synergy. This section underscores the conditional nature of diversity's impact. It also reinforces RQ 2 by identifying key mechanisms which mediate this trajectory, offering insight into how structural and relational conditions shape whether diversity becomes a liability or a strategic asset.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN, METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

The last chapter presents a literature review of cultural typologies and the impacts of cultural diversity on team performance. This chapter outlines the research design, methodological framework, and data analysis procedures adopted for this qualitative meta-synthesis. Building on the theoretical and empirical gaps identified in Chapter 2, this chapter justifies the constructivist–interpretivist paradigm underpinning the study, which acknowledges multiple co-constructed realities shaped by cultural and situational experiences. The chapter details the application of qualitative meta-synthesis methodology, combining thematic synthesis (Thomas & Harden, 2008), iterative thematic analysis (Tracy, 2013) to interpret conceptual patterns across 12 empirical studies.

A systematic and rigorous search strategy was used to select articles based on quality, relevance, and methodological transparency. Inclusion criteria were guided by journal rankings (ABCD and Scimago), publication recency, and empirical focus on team dynamics and cultural diversity. The meta-synthesis aimed to uncover how cultural diversity influences team communication, trust, leadership, and performance in high-stakes environments—issues inadequately addressed in prior single-sector reviews.

The data analysis section describes how 151 primary-cycle codes were generated from participant quotes, then consolidated into 40 merged codes and finally abstracted into eight core themes. These themes were further synthesised to reveal three overarching patterns that illuminate the mechanisms and conditions under which cultural diversity shapes team performance. Analytical saturation was achieved through constant comparison, memo-writing, and conceptual mapping. This methodological approach ensures that the findings are both context-sensitive and theoretically grounded, providing robust interpretive insights that directly respond to the research questions.

3.1 Philosophical Background

This dissertation adopts a constructivist–interpretivist paradigm with the assumption that reality is socially constructed and that several points of view co-exist depending on individuals' cultural and lived experiences (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). This is reinforced by a relativist ontology, which recognises that there is no single objective reality but rather multiple, co-constructed truths, and a subjectivist epistemology, where knowledge is shaped through human interaction and interpretations (Creswell, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Influenced by a constructivist-interpretivist paradigm, this study applies a qualitative methodology to explore how cultural diversity impacts team performance, prioritising rich, contextual understanding over broad, generalisable principles (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

3.2 Methodology

To answer the research questions using secondary data, this dissertation uses a qualitative meta-synthesis methodology (Thomas & Harden, 2008) and iterative thematic analysis (Tracy, 2013). This approach is appropriate considering the aim to understand how the effects of cultural diversity on team performance, dynamics, and communication have been interpreted by different qualitative studies. Recognising the array of views and context-dependent nature of team interactions, this methodology aligns well with the constructivist-interpretivist paradigm underpinning the study. The secondary data consists of previous empirical qualitative studies on the impacts of cultural diversity on team performance that directly or indirectly address the two research questions. Thus, meta-synthesis has been selected for this dissertation to guarantee rigour, transparency, and reproducibility while qualitatively assessing their effect sizes across studies (Page et al., 2021; Tranfield et al., 2003; Higgins et al., 2022; Lipsey & Wilson, 2001).

3.2.1 Meta-Synthesis

Qualitative meta-analysis, also known as meta-synthesis, is an approach that offers a structured means of bringing together and interpreting insights from primary qualitative studies for purposes such as development of comprehensive theoretical frameworks, the organisation of recurring themes or findings, the creation of evaluative tools, and the critical appraisal of existing research within a particular domain (Levitt, 2018). While the terms qualitative meta-analysis and meta-synthesis are occasionally used interchangeably in the literature, this study adopts meta-synthesis as the preferred term, given its emphasis on interpretive integration over aggregation, which aligns more closely with qualitative research traditions. In contrast to quantitative meta-analysis aggregates statistical data to identify effect sizes and general trends, qualitative meta-synthesis interprets patterns across lived experiences to generate conceptual insights (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2007; Paterson et al., 2001; Finfgeld, 2003). This approach emphasises depth and richness of meaning, enhancing inductive reasoning and methodological rigour (Levitt, 2018).

Within the international business literature, quantitative meta-analysis has previously been employed to examine complex organisational phenomena, such as the relationship between multinationalism and performance (Kirca et al., 2012) and the effects of country of origin on consumer perceptions (Peterson & Jolibert, 1995), and to examine cultural diversity and team performance (Stahl et al., 2010; Feitosa et al., 2017; and Tasheva & Hillman, 2019). In contrast, the use of qualitative meta-analysis for the same area is limited. This is partly because the available qualitative studies on cultural diversity in teams vary widely in their theoretical frameworks, definitions of diversity, and methodological approaches, making it challenging to synthesise across different studies. These differences make it difficult to integrate findings into a generalisable model of the processes through which cultural diversity shapes

team outcomes. However, when meta-synthesis is applied, it can still offer substantial value because it allows for the integration of rich, interpretive insights from different studies, capturing the nuances of communication, trust, and leadership within multicultural teams (Levitt et al., 2018; Bondas & Hall, 2007). This method also enables an in-depth analysis of the context-specific moderating variables of cultural diversity that impact team dynamics and performance, rather than aiming to generalise outcomes across different settings (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2007). This approach is in line with the dissertation objective to understand *how* cultural diversity impacts teams, not simply *whether* it does.

3.3.0 Research Method

In this section of the chapter, the adopted research method for this qualitative meta-synthesis is outlined, including the database search strategy, keyword formulation, article screening and selection based on defined inclusion and exclusion criteria, the use of ranking frameworks (ABCD and Scimago), risk of bias assessment using trustworthiness principles, and the data analysis process involving thematic coding and synthesis across selected studies.

3.3.1 Search Strategy and Database Selection

The article search began with a structured digital search conducted via the AUT Library, which provided access to a range of scholarly databases, including EBSCOhost, Scopus, and Google Scholar. These databases were selected due to their comprehensive coverage of peer-reviewed journals relevant to business, organisational behaviour, and cross-cultural management. The initial search strategy combined Boolean logic—a method of connecting keywords using operators such as AND, OR, and NOT to narrow or broaden results—with concept mapping, a technique that visually breaks down the research question into key themes and related terms (Denyer & Tranfield, 2009).Core search terms were derived from the two main concepts underpinning this research: “cultural diversity” and “team performance”. This yielded a large number of potential studies across journals of varying quality and relevance. In conducting a thorough meta-synthesis, choosing the right keywords is important as it enhances the effectiveness of the search (Denyer & Tranfield, 2009). Alternative keywords used are displayed in Table 3.1 below.

Table 2: Topic and Research Questions, Concepts and Corresponding Keywords

Table 3.1: Topic and Research Questions, Concepts and Corresponding Keywords	
Concept 1	**Concept 2**

Cultural Diversity	AND Team Performance
OR cultural differences	OR productivity
OR multicultural teams	OR group performance
OR diverse teams	OR team outcomes
OR cross-cultural teams	OR team efficiency
OR cultural heterogeneity	OR team effectiveness
	OR team success
	OR group efficiency
	OR dynamic
	OR communication

3.3.2 Initial Database and Journal Screening

The next step involved preliminary journal screening of the search results based on the Australian Business Deans Council (ABDC) rankings and the Scimago Journal Rank. Journals ranked A*, A or Q1 were prioritised, while Q2 journals were included only if they provided direct relevance to the research questions. Journals in which methods or findings were not clearly presented, or that had minimal relation to organisational team settings, were excluded at this stage.

Following journal screening, an initial pool of 159 articles was generated from the database search results. The titles and abstracts of these articles were reviewed to assess their methodological design, thematic focus, and relevance. Articles were then excluded if they were found to be quantitative in nature, did not focus on cultural diversity in teams, or lacked primary empirical data. This stage of screening was critical in reducing the number of articles that did not meet the inclusion criteria for a meta-synthesis. From the 159 initially identified articles, 143 were excluded primarily for failing to meet the methodological or situational thresholds. For instance, studies based solely on statistical models without any qualitative interpretation of team processes, or those focused on unrelated domains (e.g., consumer behaviour), were removed. This left 16 articles that aligned with the meta-synthesis objectives and addressed at least one of the two research questions.

To ensure coverage of foundational and overlooked literature, a backwards citation search was conducted using the reference lists of the 16 initially selected studies. This process, which involved

tracing relevant sources cited within the primary studies, yielded an additional five articles. These new studies were then screened using the same inclusion criteria. The backwards search was critical in uncovering studies that had informed the conceptual framework of the field but were not retrieved through a keyword search.

A total of 21 articles were identified for full review. Each was read in full, and their methodological orientation and empirical grounding were evaluated. Studies that were conceptual in nature or did not report findings based on participants' voices were excluded. This full-text review stage ensured that only studies offering rich qualitative insights were retained. Five of the 21 articles were excluded at this stage because they did not present primary empirical data. These included literature reviews, conceptual papers, or editorials that did not include findings from fieldwork or participant narratives. The remaining 16 were then cross-checked for quality, transparency, and relevance. Following this multi-step screening and selection process, a final total of 12 empirical qualitative studies were included in the meta-synthesis. These studies spanned diverse organisational settings from healthcare to construction, IT, and manufacturing, and collectively addressed the dynamics of team functioning in multicultural contexts. Each article contributed meaningful empirical data toward answering the two research questions guiding this dissertation. Table 3.9 below shows the characteristics of the 12 included articles.

The inclusion criteria are articles that relate to or contribute directly or indirectly to at least one of the research questions, are published between 2015 and 2025, and lastly, qualitative or mixed methods articles where the qualitative parts are clearly stated. The boundaries of qualitative meta-analysis can be drawn flexibly to accommodate studies that, while not purely qualitative in design, contribute meaningful interpretive data i.e., it is allowed for mixed methods studies to be included in a qualitative meta-analysis if their qualitative components are sufficiently rich and analytically robust (Levitt, 2018; Sandelowski & Leeman, 2012) Thus, the selected mixed-methods articles were included based on the depth and applicability of their qualitative insights, which warranted integration alongside purely qualitative studies and the prioritisation of data quality and relevance over rigid methodological categorisation. However, mixed-methods studies are limited to only 2.

3.3.3 Final Empirical Articles Included

Table 3.2: Characteristics of the included articles

Author(s) & Year	Methodology	Country Context	Sample	ABCD/Scimago Ranking
Bouncken et al. (2016).	Mixed-Methods	Germany	Managers and staff in diverse teams	Q2
Zakari et al. (2019).	Qualitative	Saudi Arabia	Healthcare professionals	Q2
Vigier & Spencer-Oatey (2018).	Qualitative	France	Car manufacturing staff	Q1
Tingvold & Munkejord (2020).	Qualitative	China	Engineering professionals	Q1
Hajro et al. (2017).	Qualitative	UK	Multinational team workers	A*
Granow & Asbrock (2021)	Qualitative	Germany	Car manufacturing staff	Q1
Tenzer et al. (2021).	Qualitative	USA	International managers	Q1
Welsch et al. (2024).	Qualitative	Germany	IT Professionals	A*
Yousef (2024).	Qualitative	Hungary	Mixed sample – virtual/face-to-face	Q1
Eyiah et al. (2025).	Qualitative	Global	Multiple studies	Q1
Leifels & Zhang, (2023).	Mixed-Methods	Global	Academic staff	Q2
Woodhead et al. (2022).	Qualitative	UK	Healthcare Professionals	Q1

Table 3: Characteristics of the included articles

The multi-level selection process applied ensured that only studies meeting stringent inclusion criteria, namely, empirical focus, qualitative or mixed-method design, relevance, and publication quality, were retained for synthesis. The systematic approach enriched transparency and rigour in aligning the final dataset with the philosophical and methodological positioning of this dissertation. To provide a clear visual summary of the steps undertaken, Figure 3.1 below illustrates the complete article searching and selection procedure, from the initial database screening to the final inclusion of the 12 empirical studies.

Figure 1: Articles Searching and Selection Process

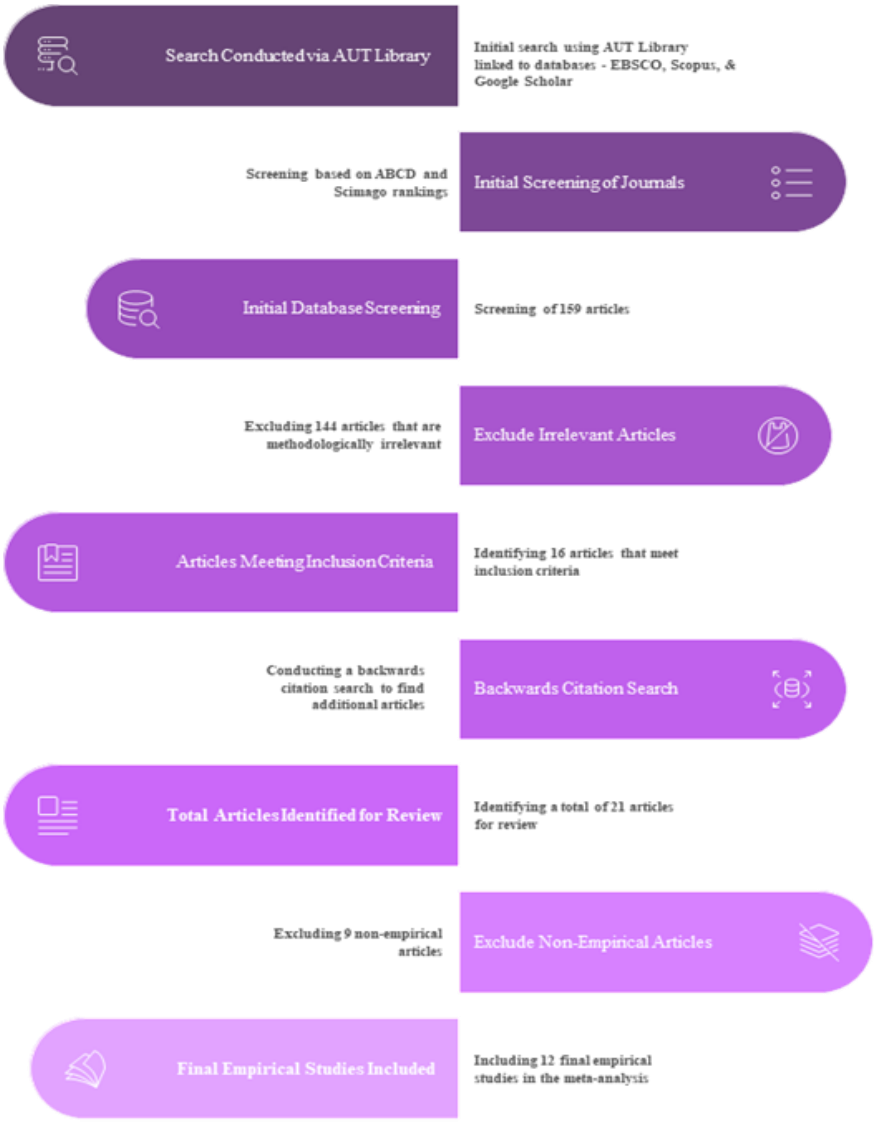


Figure 3.1: Articles Searching and Selection Procedure

3.4 Data Analysis

An integrated approach to data analysis is adopted for this study due to the large number of texts involved in the codes. Grounded primarily in iterative thematic analysis as outlined by Tracy (2013). This approach was chosen for its suitability in capturing both semantic and latent meanings across diverse empirical contexts. While the original studies employed varied qualitative designs, the synthesis process in this dissertation adhered to a structured thematic framework, enabling analytical saturation without compromising the interpretive depth required in qualitative meta-analysis (Levitt, 2018; Sandelowski & Barroso, 2007). Thematic analysis was applied flexibly and reflexively to ensure that meaning was generated both inductively from participant narratives and deductively with reference to

the overarching research questions. This section outlines how the data was prepared, coded in cycles, synthesised thematically, and eventually transformed into a coherent analytical model.

Data preparation involves the systematic organisation and formatting of selected empirical studies to facilitate structured analysis (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2007; Levitt, 2018). In line with Sandelowski & Barroso (2007)'s approach, the included 12 empirical peer-reviewed articles were first catalogued and labelled using the Microsoft EndNote reference management system. The findings, results, and discussion sections of each article were extracted into a working document. This organised structure ensured transparency and supported a rigorous and traceable analytic process aligned with the standards for trustworthy qualitative synthesis.

3.5 Thematic Coding Process

This qualitative meta-analysis followed Tracy's (2013) iterative framework for data analysis, comprising three connected stages of coding of primary, secondary, and theme generation. Each stage progressively condensed and abstracted data to reveal conceptually rich and thematically coherent insights regarding the influence of cultural diversity on team performance. This process ensures the preservation of the lived experiences of participants while systematically uncovering recurring patterns across studies.

3.5.1 Primary-Cycle Coding

Data immersion is the intensive, repeated engagement with qualitative data to develop a deep understanding of its content, context, and meaning (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2007; Tracy, 2013). For this study, data immersion was achieved through multiple close readings of the findings, results, and discussion sections of the 12 selected empirical articles. Each article was read line by line, and reflective memos were written to capture emerging impressions, significant phrases, and researcher observations. Special attention was paid to participants' direct quotes and the contextual framing provided by the original authors. This phase laid the groundwork for the primary-cycle coding, as immersion helped the researcher become attuned to subtle patterns, contradictions, and recurring concepts relevant to the research questions.

In this stage, each meaningful phrase, sentence, or paragraph that conveyed participants' lived experiences in culturally diverse teams was independently coded. Each excerpt reflected lived realities such as emotional tension, leadership impact, miscommunication, or collaborative breakthroughs. A comprehensive primary coding table was created in Microsoft Excel, with headings such as study title and citation, codes, short description of the codes, direct quotes of participants from the study, and page

number of the quotes. This produced a total of 151 unique codes (labelled from C3 to C151), all directly linked to primary data, which are all the participants' voices across the 12 studies (See Appendix 1 for primary cycle coding)

To ensure proper clustering during interpretation, the 151 codes were first subjected to a merging process by consolidating repetitive or overlapping codes into conceptually unified expressions while reflecting on the research questions and populating the codebook (Tracy, 2013). For example, "cultural awareness" (C4), "intercultural learning experience" (C94), and "cultural intelligence" (C98) were conceptually merged into a single label as "cultural awareness". This consolidation process resulted in 40 merged codes (labelled H1 to H40), each capturing a distinct but broader analytical construct (See Appendix 2 for consolidated primary-cycle codes). The merging process enhanced thematic clarity without compromising the integrity of participants' lived experiences.

3.5.2 Secondary-Cycle Coding into Conceptual Categories

During primary-cycle coding, studies were kept analytically separate to ensure contextual fidelity and maintain the integrity of participants' voices within their original empirical settings. Cross-study comparisons and conceptual clustering began at the secondary-cycle stage, allowing for emergent patterns to be identified while preserving the distinctive features of each study's unique contributions.

Following the initial code consolidation, the 40 merged codes (cells H1 to H40) were re-examined for hidden broader conceptual patterns by constant comparison and interpretive clustering. At this stage, the analytic objective was to identify meaningful relationships among merged codes, typically by assessing shared meaning, function, and looking for codes that collectively point to help answer one or both research questions. Each consolidated code was reviewed in relation to others, and all conceptually similar codes were categorised together into higher-order clusters. For example, codes like "cultural curiosity (H32)", "learning from differences (H2)", and "openness to diversity (H3)" were categorised under a broader conceptual category related to "cultural learning and reflexivity". These clusters served as an intermediate layer between the quotes of participants and the final thematic structure, advancing from descriptive coding to finding conceptual agreement across the studies. The relationships between constructs were explored through constant comparison methods, memo-writing, and reflecting through questioning (Tracy, 2013).

The significance of the coding outcomes lies in the analytical depth and conceptual clarity achieved through this iterative, multi-stage process that spanned across the 12 included empirical studies. Applying secondary-cycle consolidation and thematic generation allowed for the abstraction of patterns that were not only frequent but conceptually rich. Significance was established through both frequency

(how often certain patterns appeared) and resonance (how conceptually meaningful or theoretically compelling those patterns were across studies).

Saturation was attained through the iterative re-coding of consolidated themes and the constant comparison of meaning units across studies. No new concepts or mechanisms were identified during the final rounds of synthesis, indicating thematic saturation had been reached. This is consistent with meta-synthesis standards, where saturation is defined as the point at which no additional insights emerge despite reviewing data from multiple contexts (Levitt, 2018; Sandelowski & Barroso, 2007). The convergence of codes into eight distinct themes—each supported by multiple primary data excerpts and cross-study alignment—reinforces the robustness and interpretive saturation of the findings.

3.5.3 Theme Generation Through Iterative Coding

A theme is defined in this context as a recurring, patterned response or meaning across the dataset that addresses at least one or both research questions of this dissertation (Levitt, 2018). Building on the conceptual categories, the theme generation stage synthesised broader, cross-study themes. This stage marks a crucial transition from descriptive coding toward interpretive abstraction, where the researcher starts to actively engage in meaning-making from the codes by clustering and collapsing the codes into thematic constructions that directly address the guiding research questions (Tracy, 2013). This guideline was followed to derive the eight thematic categories (cells M1-M8 in Excel) that address the research questions and convey the most salient dimensions of how cultural diversity shapes team performance. Each theme contains multiple subthemes that capture the intricate dimensions of participants' lived experiences. For example, the theme "power asymmetries and symbolic diversity (M3)" included subthemes on power distance (H13), recognition (H22), and symbolic inclusion (H23). These themes emerged inductively from the data, supported by extensive engagement with the primary materials and peer debriefing.

Themes were not organised by their frequency, but for their explanatory power and relevance to the research questions. Table 3.3 below shows the eight themes that emerged from this stage.

3.5.4 Analytical Synthesis

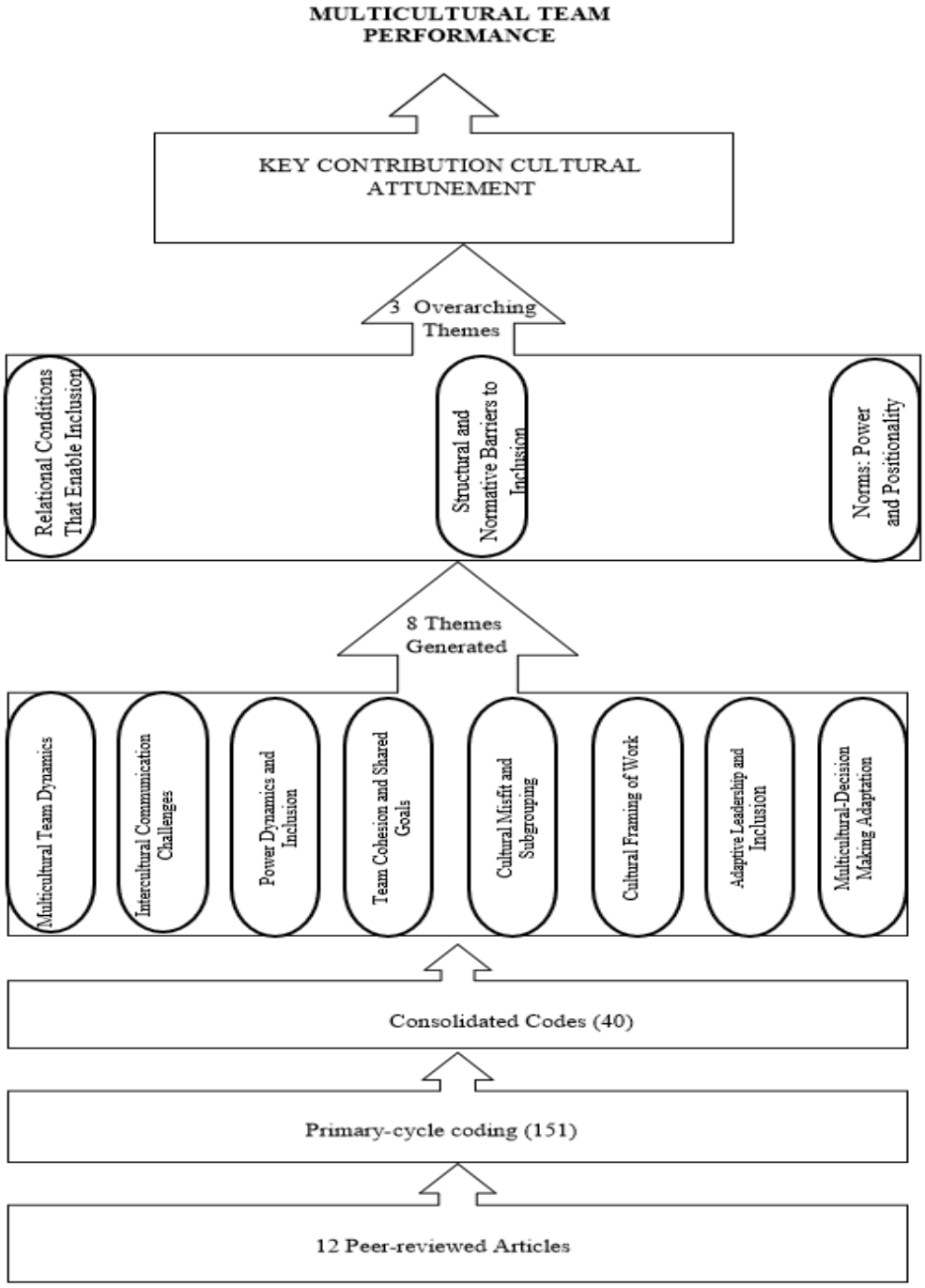
After the emergence of the eight detailed themes from the last stage, an analytical synthesis was undertaken to advance from data-driven thematic findings to broader conceptual insights. The analytical synthesis phase focused on identifying interconnected patterns that captured the deeper mechanisms and organising principles underpinning the data. As described by Tracy (2013), this process involves formulating and theorising by linking and converting themes into a meaningful whole to achieve

coherence, depth, and theoretical significance. It goes beyond summarising into integration, wherein the goal is to interpret how themes interact to explain the phenomenon of interest (Tracy, 2013).

As a result, I revisited each of the eight themes, re-examining their frequency, salience, and conceptual overlaps across the twelve included empirical studies. This led to the emergence of three overarching patterns, derived by following the recommendations of Sandelowski &Barroso (2007) and Tracy (2013) on how to use thematic outputs to compare iteratively using tables, memos, and visual maps to facilitate translation of themes across studies. Through a reciprocal translation, I sought for how one theme's explanatory value enriched or reframed another (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2007). This approach parallels Thomas and Harden's (2008) guidance on thematic synthesis, which emphasises identifying higher-order constructs that "go beyond the content of the original studies" (p. 6). Collectively, this demonstrates that the findings are both empirically grounded and theoretically significant, providing a comprehensive understanding of how cultural diversity shapes team dynamics, communication, and performance in complex organisational contexts.

A summary of the stages of data analysis is shown in Figure 3.1 below:

Figure 2: Summary of the stages of data analysis



CHAPTER 4: RESULTS, FINDINGS

This chapter presents findings of the meta-syntheses conducted on how cultural diversity influences team performance, with a particular focus on team dynamics and communication. The findings present three overarching themes which emerged from the identified patterns across the eight secondary-cycle coding themes and 40 subthemes (see Table 4.1 in Appendix 3), and one key contribution which emerged from the interpretive synthesis of themes across the eight studies.

The themes are illustrated by examples from the empirical studies included in the review. This framework enables an iterative exploration of how organisational circumstances, relational behaviours, informal norms, and shared systems act together in shaping the performance or outcomes of culturally diverse teams. To achieve this, it is essential to show a clear connection between the two research questions of this dissertation and the thematic insights derived from the analysis, showing how each theme answers the research questions:

1. How does cultural diversity influence team performance, especially team dynamics and communication?

2. What are the key mechanisms of cultural diversity that impact team performance, especially on team dynamics and communication?

The findings from the meta-synthesis present eight themes within the three overarching themes of relational conditions that enable inclusion, adaptive leadership and inclusion, and structural and normative barriers to inclusion (See Appendix 3 for tables.)

4.1 Relational Conditions That Enable Inclusion

Relational conditions that enable inclusion reflect the interpersonal and social dynamics that make cultural diversity beneficial rather than conflictual. This theme stresses how mutual respect, shared goals, inclusive leadership, and cultural learning work together to support team cohesion and performance. Multicultural teams were most effective when relationships were intentionally nurtured and when diversity was actively integrated into team interactions. Across the 12 studies, three distinct but interconnected subthemes emerged: Multicultural Team Dynamics (MTD – M1), Team Cohesion and Shared Goals (TCS – M4), and Adaptive Leadership and Inclusion (ALI – M7). These subthemes illustrate the various ways inclusion is operationalised through interpersonal engagement, trust, and leadership flexibility.

4.1.1 Multicultural Team Dynamics (MTD)

Multicultural team dynamics identified in eight out of the twelve studies explore how culturally diverse teams evolve through ongoing interactions shaped by cultural awareness, openness, and reflexive adaptation - the continual adjustment of behaviours, assumptions, and interactions in response to others and changing situations. These processes influence how team members communicate, negotiate meaning, and collaborate across cultural differences. When intentionally supported, teams reported enhanced interpersonal relationships and stronger collaboration.

Participants in the reviewed studies highlighted that intercultural tensions were minimised when individuals developed awareness of diversity and took active steps to understand differing perspectives. Curiosity and openness enabled learning, challenged assumptions, and supported more balanced interactions. For instance, in Bouncken et al. (2016), a participant noted:

> *"I never understand Peter's jokes. So it is just about... saying 'Oh she is French, that's normal. She doesn't understand.' Then I keep asking 'No, no, no, I want to understand. I want to be part of the team.' And that is how it is...just because people explain stuff like that. A kind of creativity*" (p.11).

Across different studies, such reflection marked a shift from rigid interpretations of difference to relational openness.

Participants also described how team members who exhibited cultural humility or a willingness to learn were perceived as more approachable. When cultural sensitivity was embedded in interaction, misunderstandings diminished, and inclusive engagement emerged. Two participants in Yousef, (2024) and Granow & Asbrock (2021) explained, respectively:

> *"We basically had to talk and share our understandings. I am a student from China and having such a team project helped me to participate since my teammates were curious about everything related to my culture"* (p. 420*).*

> *"I am about putting myself in the shoes of others. 2010 my partner, I do put myself in his shoes, very hard, okay. You know I try to think like he would think, just to understand, where he is coming from. Why is he doing, what he is doing, why is he hiding something, or telling something that doesn't make sense, or what is behind?" – IP*, (p. 54).

Lastly, participants reported that teams improved when they embraced sensitivity as a proactive stance rather than ignoring discomfort. This approach helped teams interpret intentions more generously and work through ambiguity. One participant in Hajro et al. (2017) described how cultivating a non-blaming culture and encouraging open dialogue helped shift their team dynamics. Rather than allowing criticism to be taken personally or defensively, they implemented strategies to promote psychological safety and accountability without shame.

This account illustrates how sensitivity, when practised intentionally, can lead to tangible improvements in team dialogue and inclusivity. By incorporating emotional awareness and responsiveness into interactional norms and leadership practices, teams moved beyond defensiveness to create safer, more generative spaces for communication and learning.

4.1.2 Team Cohesion and Shared Goals (TCS – M4)

Nine out of the twelve studies emphasised the foundational importance of communicating a shared purpose and building trust in order to create a stable emotional and cognitive base for navigating difference and fostering cohesion. Trust not only encouraged individuals to contribute openly but also helped establish psychological safety, which supported stronger relational bonds across cultural divides.

Trust and openness were intentionally cultivated by leaders through both structured and informal opportunities for connection. Smaller team sizes and consistent dialogue were found to support cohesion by enabling more meaningful interpersonal engagement and fostering collective learning, particularly when compared to the dynamics often observed in larger teams. One participant in Eyiah et al. (2025) reflected on how their team fostered inclusion and alignment through open communication and mutual respect:

> *"We have a small, dedicated team, and it is easier to work with them and explain the ex-pat culture to them. The real thing is being respectful and engaging. The way we have worked is to get our team together and have open discussions -SPV2"* (p. 659).

These accounts show that integration practices—both informal and structured—play a crucial role in bridging interpersonal divides and building a foundation for cohesion. In teams where mutual respect and cultural openness were actively practised, participants reported greater ease in building shared understanding and maintaining strong working relationships.

Participants also reported that building a shared purpose in teams helped multicultural teams overcome cultural barriers. When goals were collectively owned, individual cultural identities were embraced as assets. As one participant in Granow & Asbrock (2021) explained:

> *"At the beginning we need a clear event, a kick-off, where everybody come together to have the common understanding of the working methodology and the agreement to be very transparent. – IP19*" (p. 56).

This emphasises that shared meaning-making processes enable multicultural teams to operate more cohesively and deliver improved performance outcomes.

In contrast, participants noted that when trust was lacking, particularly among minority or marginalised members, fear of speaking up hindered collaboration and weakened team unity. As one team member

observed in Woodhead et al. 's (2021) study of multicultural nursing workers: "*BME staff …are very reticent about speaking up about things that happened to them which is a concern … because people feared the consequences for themselves, they fear being called a snitch*" (p. 283).

This illustrates how unaddressed fear can isolate diverse team members and erode the interpersonal openness necessary for shared goals and team cohesion.

4.1.3 Adaptive Leadership and Inclusion (ALI – M7)

This subtheme explores how leadership styles, structural design, and interpersonal respect influenced team functioning. It emerged in 7 of the 12 studies. Inclusive leadership and agile team structures were identified as key enablers of psychological safety, innovation, and team resilience. Leaders who were emotionally attuned and culturally adaptive empowered teams to harness their diversity.

Participants emphasised that leaders who actively solicited input and fostered inclusive decision-making enhanced team engagement. For example, a participant in Hajro et al (2017) reported:

> "*…And we did not like the way discussions were carried out. He asked for our opinions but made the decision all by himself. We addressed this issue; we told him that we wanted this to be changed. And it did."* (p. 28).

This highlights the value of leadership that adjusts to accommodate diverse communication and participation styles.

In several studies, agile work styles enabled diverse teams to co-construct flexible, hybrid practices. One participant in Yousef (2024) shared:

> *"It was interesting because we had our unique cultural heritage. However, somehow, we decided to work in a way that the local Hungarian culture works. It seemed logical that way. We had two Hungarians in our team, and the rest of us were from all over the world. Attending a Hungarian university made us use the Hungarian way of work as a standard. It was a wise solution". (FF51)."* (p. 423).

This shows how flexible structures enabled teams to transcend rigid norms and adapt practices in ways that aligned with their context while respecting cultural variation.

4.1.4 Conclusion

The theme of Multicultural Team Dynamics demonstrates how cultural diversity influences team performance by shaping relational processes such as trust-building, shared purpose, and communication

style, directly answering RQ1. These dynamics highlight that inclusion is not incidental, but a product of sustained interpersonal and leadership practices that affirm respect, foster cohesion, and psychological safety. In relation to RQ2, the findings identify specific mechanisms, including culturally adaptive leadership, mutual learning and relational respect, enabling teams to transform diversity into a strength. Together, these relational enablers show how culturally diverse teams can foster inclusive climates and develop high-performance outcomes through intentional social processes.

4.2 Structural and Normative Barriers to Inclusion

Structural and normative barriers to inclusion reflect the systemic and discursive constraints that impede meaningful inclusion within culturally diverse teams. These barriers are embedded in both formal structures (e.g., communication norms) and informal team cultures (e.g., assumptions, stereotypes), shaping who feels heard, whose contributions are legitimised, and how decisions are made. These normative and structural misalignments often lead to exclusionary dynamics, miscommunication, and emotional disengagement, which directly undermine team cohesion and performance. Across the twelve studies, three interconnected subthemes emerged to make up this theme: Intercultural Communication Challenges (ICC – M2), Cultural Misfit and Subgrouping (CMS – M5), and Cultural Work-frame Misalignment (CWM – M6). They are demonstrated through participants' quotes as shown below.

4.2.1 Intercultural Communication Challenges (ICC – M2)

Intercultural communication challenges have the highest number of studies (10) revealing how communication in culturally diverse teams frequently breaks down not only due to language barriers, but also differences cultural assumptions, implicit norms, and team members' styles of interpretation. These differences often resulted in miscommunication, silence, or false agreement, which undermines collaboration and decision-making. The meta-analysis revealed that cultural norms around directness, emotional expression and tone significantly shaped how communication was perceived and evaluated within diverse teams. Participants particularly noted that directness was not universally embraced, and what is considered assertiveness or clarity in one cultural context could be perceived as insensitivity or abruptness in another. For organisations where direct communication was upheld as the normative standard, individuals from less direct or more relational cultures often felt pressured to conform, frequently at the cost of authenticity or psychological ease. While such preferences reflect culturally embedded norms, privileging directness as the benchmark for competence subtly reinforces Western task-focused ideals, thereby marginalising equally legitimate alternative approaches to communication. One participant explained in Hajro et al (2017):

"Straight talk is a competence, something that's valued here, a leadership competence... It is an imperative for action. Straight talk is a norm and an important aspect of AGEC's." (p.20).

This quotation exemplifies how workplace expectations around tone and delivery style are often normalised through dominant cultural frameworks while member of the minority culture continues to struggle to conform with uncomfortable communication styles. Such mismatches contributed to misjudgements about competence, hindered collaboration, and at times led to the exclusion of diverse voices.

Several studies showed that teams often defaulted to surface-level consensus, avoiding confrontation due to cultural discomfort or politeness norms. This illusion of agreement delayed decision-making, created misaligned expectations, and contributed to project inefficiencies. As one participant in Tenzer et al (2021) explained:

> *"If a German says 'Yes', this means that a contract is finished. If a Chinese says yes... it just means I am willing to negotiate."* (p. 7).

Such divergences in communicative intent often led teams to assume alignment where none truly existed, weakening trust and complicating collaboration.

Participants across multiple studies noted that multicultural teams often failed to address unspoken assumptions unless tensions intensified. When deliberate cultural negotiation was lacking, members relied on their own norms to interpret silence or lack of feedback. This naturally led to breakdowns in communication, misaligned timelines, and stalled decisions. Another from the same study explained:

> *"...The Germans think that the Japanese agrees, because he isn't saying anything. Then after one week, the Japanese sends a mail to them saying 'I don't agree to this, to that'. Then they have lost one week!"* (p. 10).

Incidents such as this stress the risk of assuming shared understanding in high-context and low-context team interactions. Pre-emptive clarification and explicit discussions around expectations are essential to avoid misinterpretations and delay in decision-making processes.

4.2.2 Cultural Faultlines and Subgrouping (CFS - M5)

This subtheme emerged from 9 studies which emphasized how unacknowledged cultural diversity and identity-based clustering can undermine team cohesion, resulting to fragmentation and decreased collaboration. This theme illustrates how exclusionary dynamics, be it explicit or subtle, can lead to fault-lines that hinder team integration and undermine multicultural team performance. The three

subthemes describe how these dynamics are experienced and interpreted within diverse teams. This theme encompasses the subthemes below.

This subtheme revealed how implicit assumptions about what was considered normal behaviour for some often led to divisions between team members who aligned with dominant cultural norms and those who did not. When these differences were left unaddressed, it created identity-based subgrouping, in which trust, and collaboration were restricted to within-culture cliques. As one respondent shared in Vigier & Spencer-Oatey (2017):

> *"Team A's language-fluency faultline coupled with the alignment of other attributes may have strengthened the social identity categorizations"* (p. 172).

This finding suggest that cultural unexamined misfit can erode the collective identity required for productive teamwork.

When diversity was present but not actively managed, teams reported high levels of interpersonal friction, misunderstandings, and conflict. This was particularly evident when roles and expectations were vague or unevenly applied across cultural lines. Some participants noted in Tingvold & Munkejord (2020) and Granow & Asbrock (2021) respectively:

> *"Some people think it's important that the sterilization room is clean, others prioritise spending time chatting in the sofa…"* (p. 960).

> *[…] we have different levels of knowledge, we have different views of what it is to be achieved and what it is not." – IP5 (translated) (*p. 54).

These accounts suggest that when cultural diversity is present but not actively managed, teams may experience friction, misunderstandings, or ambiguous expectations, particularly when roles and task priorities are perceived differently across cultural lines.

Although these quotes offer insight into team tensions, they may also reflect culturally biased interpretations rather than objective accounts of mismanagement. As such, they should be understood as perspectives shaped by the speaker's cultural assumptions, which may unintentionally reinforce stereotypes. Nevertheless, the data indicate that without intentional coordination and culturally sensitive clarification of expectations, such perceptions can lead to fragmentation, reduced trust, and a weakening of team cohesion. Intentional role clarity and inclusive facilitation remain key strategies in mitigating these risks.

Lastly, a key finding in this subtheme demonstrated how subtle exclusionary practices—such as repeated misinterpretation of communication, overlooking contributions, or making culturally insensitive jokes—fostered emotional withdrawal among team members. These cumulative micro-exclusions often led individuals to disengage psychologically, even while remaining physically present

in the team. One participant in Woodhead et al. (2021) described how persistent misrecognition and negative non-verbal cues from colleagues, such as facial expressions signalling impatience or dismissal left them feeling demoralised and disconnected. They compared this with the comfort and ease of interacting with other minority colleagues, where shared understanding enabled a greater sense of belonging. This illustrates how emotional withdrawal can emerge as a coping response to subtle but persistent forms of cultural exclusion:

> *" The way you pronounce things will be different from all people, but there are some among them, no matter how you say it, they wouldn't understand you […] And the way they will behave or squeeze their face, you know it will have an impact on you, it will be down on you […] And in most cases when you come um, across people from the minority, actually, you enjoy more because they all understand you."* (p. 281).

This detailed personal account highlights how cultural exclusion is often enacted through subtle social cues and non-verbal reactions, which can deeply affect individuals' sense of belonging. Over time, such marginalisation fosters disengagement, emotional withdrawal, and reduced team participation and performance. This reinforcing the need for inclusive norms that validate all forms of cultural expression.

4.2.3 Cultural Work-frame Misalignments (CWM – M6)

This subtheme explores how cultural norms shape assumptions around hierarchy, participation, time, and work roles in teams. Findings from four studies reveal that the way team members interpret "how work should be done" is deeply influenced by culturally embedded expectations and when these expectations are misaligned, team collaboration and authority structures can be disorganised. The subthemes are as below.

Team members demonstrated divergent preferences for autonomy, task execution, and communication styles. In several cases, individuals from hierarchical cultures preferred clearer authority and decision-making instructions, while those from egalitarian backgrounds expected participatory approaches. In one study, a participant in Hajro et al (2017) reflected on the challenge of aligning their leadership approach with team members' expectations for directive communication. They described the difficulty of balancing clarity with their own preference for a more collaborative style:

> *"… want you to tell them what to do and how to do it. It requires being forthright about your wants and needs… But as I said, it is not my style to yell at someone. Balancing was indeed a big challenge. I would tell them what my expectations are, what they need to do and by when...."* (p. 27).

This account underlines the cultural tension leaders may encounter when navigating directive versus collaborative expectations. The challenge of balancing leadership authenticity with culturally appropriate structure reflects how differing norms around authority and autonomy can lead to reduced, clarity, friction, and potentially stifle cohesion if not managed with awareness and flexibility.

Work–family expectations occasionally clashed within multicultural teams, especially where culturally driven commitments to family and communal obligations were interpreted through dominant workplace norms as disengagement or lack of professionalism. These interpretations risked oversimplifying complex value systems and obscuring systemic issues. For example, in healthcare settings, some participants described how the cultural expectation of women, particularly in nursing roles, to fulfil extensive social duties outside work was misunderstood as unreliability. One participant in Zakari et al (2019) observed:

> *"Saudi nurses place a high value on flexible working arrangements to fulfill their social duties; lack of work engagement and absenteeism are high. This impacts a patient's needs and the quality of nursing care. It has a considerable impact on those newest to the workforce. It also puts pressure on those who remain in the field, resulting in decreased morale and, potentially, further disengagement."* (p. 50).

While framed as a performance issue, this quote reflects deeper tensions around gendered expectations and the lack of culturally responsive support structures. When such responsibilities are not recognised as legitimate demands on team members' time and energy, particularly for women, they are more likely to be penalised rather than accommodated, thereby reinforcing inequity in multicultural work settings.

While team members brought divergent assumptions about what counts as valid work, especially in tasks involving emotional labour and social interaction. In many cases, individuals from high-structure cultures expected formally defined duties, while others operated with informal, tacit norms. For instance, in a healthcare setting, nurses described how informal social activities, such as initiating conversations or creating a positive social environment for patients, were not always formally acknowledged as work. A participant in Tingvold & Munkejord (2020) explained:

> *"I don't think there's any written description of what work to improve the social environment consists of or initiating social interaction or organizing a get-together … no, I don't think there's any written description anywhere. But I would say that it's sort of understood. Just sitting there talking to residents, no, there's nothing about that anywhere"* (p. 961).

This ambiguity often led to unequal recognition of contributions, particularly for culturally embedded behaviours that were not explicitly valued or documented, reinforcing disparities in how work is defined and rewarded.

4.2.4 Conclusion

The theme structural and normative barriers to inclusion answers directly RQ1 by showing how subtle but persistent structural and normative barriers such as miscommunication, subgrouping, and unequal recognition, undermine inclusion and lead to emotional withdrawal among culturally diverse team members. These dynamics weaken trust, limit engagement, and reduce cohesion. In response to RQ2, the findings show that such barriers disrupt team performance by fragmenting team identity, misaligning communication, and reinforcing unequal work norms. Without intentional efforts to address these tensions, teams risk marginalising contributions and underutilising diversity. Effective performance in multicultural teams requires more than diverse membership—it depends on inclusive communication, shared understanding, and equitable recognition across cultural lines.

4.3 Practices That Translate Diversity into Performance

Practices that translate diversity into performance capture the crucial link between structural inclusion and the performance outcomes of multicultural teams. This theme synthesises findings that show how team practices, particularly around power distribution and decision-making either enable or suppress the potential of cultural diversity. Where teams engaged in deliberate, inclusive processes that challenged dominant norms, they were more likely to harness the strengths of their diversity for improved cohesion, trust, and task outcomes. Conversely, where symbolic inclusion, rigid hierarchies, or unsafe decision spaces prevailed, performance suffered through disengagement and silencing. The following subthemes elaborate how these dynamics were experienced and addressed in multicultural teams.

4.3.1 Power Dynamics and Inclusion (PDI – M3)

This subtheme, drawn from six studies, reveals how organisational hierarchies, symbolic inclusion practices, and structural inequalities restrict participation in culturally diverse teams. Participants consistently described how power imbalances limited whose voices were heard and whose norms were legitimised. These patterns shaped team cohesion, belonging, and the equitable sharing of responsibility.

One category that emerged was how high power-distance norms discouraged open communication and mutual problem-solving. In teams with rigid hierarchies, members with valuable insights often withheld input to avoid challenging authority, undermining psychological safety and efficiency. For instance, one participant in Bouncken et al (2016) observed:

> *"The engineer feels that things should be done in a certain way. Even though the technician knows that if we go this way, it does not work, he does not want to contradict his boss* (p. 20).

Such deference to authority that are driven by cultural norms around respect and seniority undermines full participation and restricts the free exchange of ideas essential for effective multicultural collaboration and task outcomes.

The data showed that many culturally diverse team members hesitated to raise any disagreement particularly when they felt vulnerable to stereotype or stigma threat. When there is absence of an established cultural safety in a multicultural team, members from minority backgrounds endured unfair treatment rather than voice disagreement. One participant in Woodhead et al (2021) recalled a conversation with a colleague:

> *"One of the midwives I was speaking to, she's African, Black African, and she said to me that I said to her, like, you need to make a complaint because there's a couple of things that, that were being said about her at work. About her being difficult and stuff. And she goes, "oh, yeah, oh, yeah, and then I escalate it and you think that that, that stigma's going to be taken away from me or get worse?"* (p. 273).

This account underscores how perceived power imbalances and racialised stereotypes influence the willingness of minority team members to speak up. The fear of being further stigmatised or labelled as 'difficult' demonstrates how organisational hierarchies and exclusionary narratives restrict voice and reinforce silence. Rather than feeling safe to challenge discriminatory behaviours, marginalised individuals must weigh the potential consequences of asserting their rights. This reinforces how structural power dynamics—particularly those shaped by race and status—undermine psychological safety and limit meaningful participation in culturally diverse teams.

Participants also highlighted the harm of symbolic inclusion practices, where recognition was superficial or biased by in-group dynamics rather than merit. Informal networks of favouritism created barriers for marginalised team members, reducing motivation and participation:

> *"You tend to get groups that are very close to the managers... they get booked on it really quickly* (Woodhead et al., 2021, p. 277).

Such exclusion was compounded by organisational diversity strategies that lacked genuine accountability. Participants described how racialised stereotypes and inequitable task allocations persisted beneath surface-level commitments to inclusion:

> *"...My work has no meaning to me. I was treated unfairly and not rewarded, and I did not have good relationships in the workplace. Some policies or regulations resolve work conditions on paper, but I don't always get that reinforcement in practice"* (Zakari et al., 2019, p.50).

These findings illustrate how structural power relations must be actively dismantled through inclusive leadership, equitable distribution of work, and bias mitigation if diversity is to translate into meaningful participation and outcomes.

4.3.2 Multicultural Decision-Making Adaptation (MDA – M8)

MDA was evidenced in two studies, focuses on how decision-making processes influence inclusion and performance in multicultural teams. Participants reported that rigid decision protocols often excluded voices, especially those from collectivist or high-context cultures by disregarding relational norms and preferences for consensus-building.

For example, one participant in Tingvold & Munkerjord (2020) highlighted how team members from minority backgrounds complied with structured expectations even when adaptation was more sensible:

> *"It's got to do with understanding what comes first. But many of those with a minority background who come here to work are very conscientious so if the schedule says 'Shower', that maybe means that they will carry out this task without thinking that it might be smart to do it another day. In other words, they do their job, that's for sure [the informant chuckles]* (p. 960).

Disengagement also occurred when dissent was perceived as personally risky. Several participants described how the fear of negative repercussions—such as being labelled disruptive or disloyal—led them to suppress concerns and conform to dominant expectations. In such cases, individuals internalised exclusion by withholding feedback or critique, even when decisions were ineffective or unfair. This passive compliance reflected not agreement, but a protective response to culturally unsafe environments. These accounts demonstrate that inclusion cannot be assumed simply through demographic diversity. Instead, it must be enacted through culturally responsive processes that validate difference, encourage dissent, and foster psychological safety.

Implications for Research Questions

4.3.3 Conclusion

This theme directly addresses RQ1 by illustrating how specific practices such as equitable decision-making, inclusive leadership, and power-sensitive communication shape the experience of inclusion in multicultural teams. It also directly answers RQ2 by showing that where such practices were present, teams reported improved cohesion, trust, and performance; whereas the absence of these practices led to disengagement, silencing, and structural exclusion. The findings suggest that the translation of diversity into performance is contingent not on demographic composition alone, but on the deliberate enactment of inclusive norms, decision protocols, and leadership strategies that empower all voices.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

This chapter draws together the findings presented in Chapter 4 and interprets them in light of the research objectives and relevant theoretical frameworks. The overarching aim of this study was to explore how cultural diversity influences team performance, with a particular focus on the dynamics of team communication and interaction. In line with this aim, two research questions guided the investigation:

1. How does cultural diversity influence team performance, especially team dynamics and communication?
2. What are the key mechanisms of cultural diversity that impact team performance, especially on team dynamics and communication?

In addressing these questions, the study conducted a qualitative meta-analysis of twelve empirical articles published in high-ranking peer-reviewed journals. The findings revealed three overarching themes which emerged from the identified patterns across the eight secondary-cycle coding themes and 40 subthemes (see Table 4.1 in Appendix 3).

The purpose of this chapter is twofold. First, it interprets the thematic findings in relation to established theoretical models, specifically, the Input-Process-Output (IPO) model of team performance (Ilgen et al., 2005) and selected cultural typologies that explain variations in team interactions across cultural contexts, linking them back to the two research questions. Second, the chapter introduces and elaborates the study's main conceptual contribution: Cultural Attunement. This concept summarises the dynamic, ongoing, and reciprocal adjustments team members make to navigate cultural differences, foster inclusion, and enhance collective performance. The chapter further discusses how this construct advances current understanding of multicultural team dynamics and offers a basis for future theoretical and practical applications.

5.1 Theoretical Interpretation of Findings

Cultural diversity impacts team performance in complex ways because it influences how team members relate, communicate, and collaborate across differences. To interpret these dynamics, this section draws on the Input–Process–Output (IPO) model, Hofstede's cultural dimensions, Hall's high- and low-context communication theory, and Dervin's dialogical approach to culture. These theoretical lenses help explain how team processes are shaped by both visible and invisible cultural forces because they account for patterns in behaviour, power, and meaning-making. However, the findings also highlight limitations in these models, especially when they overlook lived experience, structural inequality, and the co-construction of culture in real time.

Each of the themes, Relational Conditions that Enable Inclusion, Structural and Normative Barriers to Inclusion, and Practices that Translate Diversity into Performance, is interpreted through these frameworks because they offer insight into how cultural diversity is either activated as a resource or constrained by team and organisational dynamics.

The next sections below unpack each of the three synthesised themes in turn, interpreting their theoretical significance and exploring how they illuminate, complicate, or extend prevailing models of team functioning in multicultural settings.

5.1.1 Relational Conditions that Enable Inclusion

To answer RQ2, relational mechanisms play a foundational role in mediating the link between cultural diversity and team performance because they shape how differences are navigated, negotiated, and transformed into collective strengths.. While the IPO model acknowledges that team processes are important, it typically lacks the granularity to explain how diverse teams navigate complex interpersonal dynamics in practice. By specifying mechanisms such as reflexive communication, trust calibration, empathic leadership, and shared purpose alignment, this study contributes a finer-grained understanding of what effective multicultural teamwork looks like on the ground. Within the Input-Process-Output (IPO) framework (Ilgen et al., 2005), relational enablers such as trust, inclusive leadership, mutual respect, and psychological safety are situated within the process phase which is the mediating space through which team inputs (e.g., diverse cultural backgrounds, skill sets, identities) are transformed into outputs (e.g., performance, cohesion, innovation). The findings reinforce that in multicultural teams, these interpersonal processes are not just additive facilitators; they are foundational for overcoming the communicative, emotional, and structural tensions that cultural diversity may introduce.

In particular, the role of psychological safety as theorised by Edmondson and Lei (2014), emerged as a critical mediator that allows culturally diverse team members to share perspectives, take interpersonal risks, and engage in learning without fear of marginalisation. This suggests that in multicultural contexts, psychological safety is not a by-product of good team functioning, but a precondition for it. It enables the transformation of cultural difference from a potential liability into a resource for creativity and collective intelligence.

From a cultural typology perspective, the findings challenge Hofstede's (1980) assumption that national-level cultural values such as individualism vs collectivism or low vs high power distance deterministically shape team dynamics. While such dimensions provide a useful starting point, the findings illustrate that cultural distance can be bridged through situated, intentional relational strategies.

Intentional relational strategies are the thoughtful and proactive ways that members of multicultural teams connect, build trust, and strengthen relationships by respecting and working through cultural differences. In teams where leaders enacted cultural humility and team members engaged in mutual learning, national-level differences became less salient. This suggests that the lived experience of culture in teams is more elastic and negotiable than Hofstede's model implies.

These findings also align strongly with Dervin's (2020) dialogical approach to interculturality, which views culture as co-created through discourse and interaction, rather than as a fixed trait. The iterative processes of explanation, curiosity, and collective meaning-making described by participants reflect Dervin's emphasis on relational reflexivity, which is ability to engage with diverse perspectives and co-construct meaning through open, dialogic interaction. In this way, culturally inclusive team processes were shown to rely less on pre-learned 'cultural facts' and more on a willingness to listen, adapt, and adjust expectations over time.

In sum, this theme offers a nuanced interpretation of the Input-Process-Output (IPO) framework by underscoring the dynamic and evolving nature of inclusion and its centrality to performance in culturally diverse teams. Rather than treating diversity as a static input variable, the findings underscore that it is quality of team interactions, specifically, how intentionally and adaptively team members engage with cultural differences that determines whether diversity becomes a source of strength or a source of tension. This reconceptualisation moves the focus from who is on the team to how the team co-constructs trust, voice, and mutual respect through culturally responsive interactions. It highlights that inclusive performance is not guaranteed by demographic diversity alone, but must be actively cultivated through reflexive, equitable, and emotionally intelligent practices.

This theme further contributes to theory by positioning culture not as a fixed attribute brought into the team from outside, but as something dynamic that develops through ongoing negotiation, shared interactions, and collaborative meaning-making within the team. It supports dynamic and discursive understandings of culture (Dervin, 2020), suggesting that what matters most is not cultural background per se, but how team members make sense of, respond to, and engage across cultural differences in real time. By grounding this argument in empirical patterns across multiple studies, the theme offers a more situated, interactional account of team performance—one that complements and extends the IPO model's explanatory power in multicultural settings.

This theme addresses directly RQ1 by identifying the specific relational conditions such as trust, psychological safety, and inclusive leadership, that enable cultural diversity to contribute positively to team dynamics. Rather than assuming performance outcomes arise naturally from diverse inputs, the findings show that high-functioning multicultural teams rely on intentional relational strategies to transform diversity into collaborative advantage.

5.1.2 Structural and Normative Barriers to Inclusion

Structural and normative barriers hinder inclusion in multicultural teams because they shape who feels heard, respected, and able to contribute meaningfully. Structural and normative barriers to inclusion were identified as how communication norms, role ambiguity, and symbolic exclusion hinder participation in culturally diverse teams. Misaligned expectations about work, hierarchy, and voice created exclusionary dynamics that affected collaboration and morale. For instance, in one study, team members from hierarchical cultures expected clear instructions from leaders, while others from egalitarian backgrounds anticipated open discussion and shared decision-making. This mismatch led to confusion about who should lead tasks and how input should be given. As a result, some members withdrew from contributing altogether, feeling their voices were either unwelcome or misunderstood, which is ultimately a deterrent to team trust and collaboration.

The IPO model's process framework is limited in multicultural contexts because it fails to account for the sociocultural and institutional environments in which team interactions unfold While the IPO framework acknowledges that team inputs (e.g., diversity) influence processes (e.g., communication, coordination), it often assumes a relatively neutral or uniform environment in which these processes occur. However, the findings from this meta-synthesis show that cultural diversity does not operate in a vacuum; rather, it is shaped by asymmetrical power relations, historical exclusions, and normative expectations that are deeply rooted within organisational structures. These factors obstruct team processes by making some forms of knowledge, expression, and participation more legitimate than others, therefore reproducing hierarchy even in ostensibly diverse teams.

However, Hofstede (1980)'s dimensions, particularly power distance and uncertainty avoidance, remain relevant in interpreting how certain structural barriers manifest. For instance, high power distance cultures may discourage dissent or questioning authority, while high uncertainty avoidance may resist ambiguous or unfamiliar modes of collaboration. However, the findings demonstrate that structural barriers to inclusion are not simply reflections of national cultural tendencies. Instead, they are institutionally produced and relationally enacted. That is, they emerge from how organisational norms, leadership practices, and team cultures privilege certain communicative behaviours and marginalise others often in ways that are subtle and taken-for-granted. Therefore, the limitations of Hofstede's typological approach lie in its tendency to decontextualise culture, reducing it to a set of national characteristics, rather than understanding it as a dynamic, discursive, and structurally mediated phenomenon.

Also, Hall's (1976) theory of high- and low-context communication reveals interactional misalignments because cultural expectations about what is said or unsaid can create misunderstanding and conflict. The theory offers a more interactional lens through which to examine the findings. Miscommunication

in multicultural teams was often less about language fluency and more about divergent assumptions regarding what is said, how it is said, and what is left unsaid. For example, in high-context cultures, meaning is often conveyed implicitly, through tone, silence, or shared understanding. When members from low-context cultures interpret silence as agreement, rather than hesitation or indirect disagreement, this can lead to false consensus, breakdowns in planning, and eventually conflict. The findings suggest that these misalignments are not merely cognitive errors but are underpinned by culturally conditioned habits of interpretation—habits that can have material consequences for team effectiveness. Thus, Hall's framework helps explain the interactional symptoms but does not fully capture the power dynamics that underlie which communication norms become dominant or institutionalised.

This finding reveals that structural barriers to inclusion are best understood through Dervin's dialogical lens because they are rooted in systems of inequality rather than individual cultural misunderstandings. This theme significantly extends Dervin's (2020) dialogical critique of essentialist approaches to culture by illustrating how structural and communicative inequalities—not individual "cultural deficits"—serve as primary inhibitors of team performance. Essentialist views often frame cultural misunderstandings as a failure of individual team members to adequately 'understand' or 'adjust to' cultural difference, reinforcing the idea that diversity challenges can be solved through cultural competence training or static typological awareness (e.g., knowing about Hofstede's dimensions). However, this research reveals that the real barriers lie not in individuals' lack of cultural knowledge, but in the structural and discursive arrangements that regulate whose voices are normalised, whose ways of working are legitimated, and whose contributions are routinely overlooked or misunderstood.

The findings align with Dervin's call for a shift away from static, container-like models of culture toward a more situated, reflexive, and power-conscious understanding of intercultural communication. In doing so, this study reinforces the idea that culture is not a fixed attribute that team members carry with them, but an emergent, negotiated, and often contested phenomenon shaped by institutional norms, symbolic hierarchies, and discursive framing. It brings into view how power operates not only through formal hierarchies but also through everyday communicative practices—such as who is interrupted, who receives feedback, or whose silence is interpreted as incompetence.

By documenting how cultural marginalisation is often reproduced through normative communication practices and unexamined assumptions, the theme invites a more critical and systems-oriented approach to team performance. It advocates for inclusive strategies that go beyond surface-level representation to address the deeper, structural roots of exclusion—whether in the form of rigid decision-making processes, privileging of direct speech, or the subtle invalidation of emotional and effort and the interpersonal work required to build understanding and trust in diverse teams. In this way, the theme supports Dervin's critique and adds to it by grounding the argument in empirical evidence from team-

based contexts, offering insight into how cultural inclusion may be understood as an ongoing and collective responsibility within the team process.

This theme answers RQ1 directly by identifying the specific structural and normative dynamics such as role ambiguity, exclusionary communication norms, and symbolic marginalisation—that hinder inclusion in multicultural teams. It indirectly addresses RQ2 by revealing how these barriers weaken team performance through miscommunication, disengagement, and the reproduction of power imbalances. Although performance outcomes were not always the primary focus, the findings consistently showed that unresolved structural exclusions undermine trust, collaboration, and effectiveness. In doing so, the theme highlights the need for deeper structural and communicative reform in diverse teams to enable more equitable and high-performing collaboration. While this theme highlights important relational mechanisms, its broader conceptual implications are more fully explored in Chapter 6.

5.1.3 Practices that Translate Diversity into Performance

Inclusive practices are the key to unlocking the performance benefits of cultural diversity because they actively convert difference into functional value. Deliberate inclusive practices such as equitable decision-making, power-sharing, and responsiveness to minority voices unlock the performance potential of cultural diversity.

The Input-Process-Output model by Illgen et al. (2005) helps illuminate this process because it positions inclusion as a mechanism that links diversity to team outcomes. The deliberate inclusive practices enrich the process-output link by foregrounding inclusion not as a moral imperative alone, but as a functional necessity for multicultural teams. Rather than assuming that diversity inherently results in improved creativity or innovation—as often claimed in surface-level diversity discourses—the findings assert that inclusive practices such as power-sharing, consensus-building, and recognition of minority voices are the enabling conditions through which the potential of diversity can be realised. In other words, inclusion is not incidental to performance—it is constitutive of it.

This interpretation directly challenges the instrumentalist logic underpinning many diversity initiatives, which often frame inclusion as a one-off intervention or compliance exercise. The findings suggest that inclusive functioning in diverse teams requires an ongoing negotiation of norms, meanings, and decision-making frameworks. These negotiations are not merely technical; they are cultural and affective, involving the redistribution of voice, authority, and recognition. The process of inclusion thus becomes a site of cultural negotiation, where dominant practices are de-centred, and diverse epistemologies are brought into dialogue.

This theme also builds upon and problematises conventional models of cultural competence. While cultural competence frameworks focus on increasing individuals' ability to navigate cross-cultural differences (e.g., through training or knowledge of cultural facts), they often overlook how organisational systems and leadership behaviours reproduce inequality even in culturally competent environments. The findings show that symbolic gestures of inclusion—such as diversity statements or multicultural branding—are insufficient when unaccompanied by mechanisms that hold power structures accountable. Participants described instances where superficial inclusion masked deeper exclusionary practices, such as favouritism, informal gatekeeping, or unequal workload distribution. This highlights the gap between policy-level inclusion and experiential inclusion.

The theme also resonates strongly with emotionally intelligent leadership models, which emphasise the importance of empathy, self-awareness, and social sensitivity in managing teams (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2008), and with employee voice theory (Morrison, 2014), which underscores the role of psychological and emotional safety in enabling dissent and innovation. However, this study builds on those frameworks by explicitly linking emotional safety to the fair recognition of knowledge contributions, emphasising that individuals from marginalised cultural backgrounds must be seen as credible and valued sources of insight within the team. Inclusion, therefore, is not only about emotional belonging, but about redistributing whose knowledge counts in decisions and deliberations.

This theme makes a critical contribution to both team performance and diversity management literature by reframing inclusion as an active, structural, and ongoing practice, rather than a static organisational value or attitude. The study demonstrates that performance outcomes in diverse teams are not simply contingent on having the "right" mix of people or a charismatic leader, but on whether inclusive mechanisms are deliberately embedded into everyday team operations—such as in how decisions are made, how dissent is handled, and how power is distributed.

By doing so, this theme advances theoretical conversations on inclusion in two key ways. First, it challenges the over-reliance on managerial goodwill or interpersonal tolerance as the primary vehicles for inclusion. While well-intentioned leadership is important, the findings show that without institutional accountability and procedural equity, exclusion can persist under the guise of diversity. Informal networks, implicit bias, and symbolic participation are all mechanisms through which teams can appear inclusive while reproducing existing hierarchies.

Second, the theme problematises the assumption that diversity is automatically a performance enhancer. It introduces a critical distinction between representational diversity (the demographic presence of different groups) and functional inclusion (the actual participation and influence of those groups). This distinction invites a rethinking of current models that conflate the presence of diversity with its benefits, thereby masking the work required to cultivate genuinely inclusive cultures. The theme ultimately

asserts that diversity becomes an asset only when the structures and cultures of the team are actively reconfigured to support equitable participation.

In sum, the theme offers a different perspective on inclusion as an ongoing process of building meaningful interpersonal relationships and making intentional changes to team practices and systems—something that must be performed, sustained, and institutionally supported. It provides a sharper theoretical lens for understanding why diverse teams may underperform when inclusive practices are absent, and why even well-meaning diversity initiatives can fail when they do not interrogate and transform underlying power asymmetries.

This theme directly answers RQ1 by identifying the specific inclusive practices—such as equitable decision-making, power-sharing, and recognition of minority voices—that enable cultural diversity to be meaningfully integrated into team dynamics. It also directly addresses RQ2 by showing how these practices translate diversity into enhanced performance outcomes. Rather than assuming diversity is inherently beneficial, the findings reveal that it is the deliberate embedding of inclusive mechanisms into everyday team processes that determines whether diversity contributes to innovation, cohesion, and effectiveness. This underscores that inclusion is not incidental but essential to realising the functional value of cultural diversity in team performance.

Together, the insights from the findings call for a more integrated conceptual lens that captures the fluid, relational, and equity-driven processes through which multicultural teams navigate difference and co-create effective collaboration. This study offers such a lens through the concept of Cultural Attunement, which now forms the focus of the next section.

5.2 Cultural Attunement as a Key Theoretical Contribution

From the complexity of multicultural team dynamics, one unifying insight emerged across all three synthesised themes. Most effective teams were not those that avoided cultural differences, but those that engaged them with intentionality, humility, and adaptability. Building on this insight, this study proposes Cultural Attunement as its central conceptual contribution that is integrative and grounded in the three overarching themes. While the term Cultural Attunement is not an entirely novel concept, having been used in different fields in relation to an individual's cultural humility (Tervalon & Murray-García, 1998) and multicultural competence (Sue et al., 2009), this dissertation's contribution advances its existing understandings by translating and conceptualising the concept within the domain of team performance and group dynamics. Cultural Attunement is operationalised here not as an individual trait, but as a team-level mechanism. It goes beyond a person being culturally aware or competent into how culturally diverse teams co-create shared meaning, relational safety, and adaptive structures through mutual responsiveness. Cultural Attunement is defined as *a dynamic, continuous, and reciprocal*

process in which team members continuously adapt, interpret, and respond to cultural differences with humility, curiosity, and contextual awareness in order to foster inclusion, relational trust, and high performance.

This definition repositions cultural diversity from a static input—often categorised, managed, or minimised- to a lived experience that requires continuous co-creation. Rather than reducing culture to national typologies or treating cultural diversity as a management challenge, Cultural Attunement frames team performance as contingent upon the quality of cultural negotiation and relational reflexivity embedded in team processes. Cultural negotiation is the active process of navigating and reconciling different cultural norms and expectations, while relational reflexivity is the ongoing practice of examining one's own assumptions and behaviours in relation to others in the everyday dynamics of team interaction. This approach aligns with Dervin's (2020) critique of essentialist cultural models and supports recent empirical findings (e.g., Eyiah-Botwe et al., 2021; Leifels & Wessel, 2022), which demonstrate that high-performing diverse teams engage in iterative, co-constructed dialogue that recognises power, context, and identity as central to collaboration It is grounded not in technical competence but in the social, emotional, and political labour of bridging difference with care, awareness, and equity.

While models such as cultural competence often emphasise acquiring knowledge about "other cultures," Cultural Attunement centres on the situated, relational, and emotionally intelligent responses required to adapt and engage difference situationally. It aligns with, but significantly extends, Dervin's (2020) dialogical interculturality by offering a team-based, empirical articulation of what dialogic engagement looks like in practice. It also responds to critiques of diversity discourses that focus on representation without addressing inclusion (Ahmed, 2012), by offering an actionable framework grounded in real team dynamics.

5.2.1 Four Underlying Mechanisms of Cultural Attunement:

1. **Relational Humility**: This refers to the disposition of approaching difference with openness and the recognition that one's cultural framework is not universal. It involves a willingness to decentre one's assumptions and remain receptive to perspectives that may initially appear unfamiliar, ambiguous, or uncomfortable. Unlike tolerance, which may imply passive acceptance, relational humility is active, seeking to learn from others and validate diverse epistemologies. It was particularly evident in Theme 1, where teams that prioritised empathy and suspended judgment were more successful in building cohesion and trust across cultural boundaries.
2. **Iterative Learning**: Iterative learning emphasizes the processual and reflexive nature of intercultural engagement. It is premised on the understanding that mistakes, misunderstandings,

and discomfort are not signs of failure, but entry points for learning and adaptation. In contrast to models that promote cultural mastery or rigid guidelines, iterative learning involves dialogic improvisation, which is simply adapting one's behaviour based on ongoing feedback, relational cues, and changes in situations. This mechanism was visible across all themes but particularly in teams that were able to recover from communication breakdowns and realign expectations through shared reflection.

3. **Equity-Conscious Leadership:** Leadership within the framework of Cultural Attunement goes beyond inclusive intent. It involves actively identifying and dismantling power asymmetries that silence minority voices or devalue alternative ways of knowing. Equity-conscious leaders are attuned to both symbolic and structural exclusion and take deliberate action to redistribute influence, legitimise diverse contributions, and create conditions for psychological safety. This was especially visible in Theme 3, where inclusive performance outcomes were closely linked to leaders' ability to challenge status hierarchies and support shared authority in decision-making.

4. **Emotionally Intelligent Communication**: This mechanism focuses on how team members manage emotional complexity, read situational cues, and build interpersonal trust across cultural divides. It involves active listening, sensitivity to non-verbal expressions, and the capacity to respond with empathy when communicative intent is misaligned. Emotionally intelligent communication is not only a skill but a relational ethic—it shapes how team members navigate tension, resolve ambiguity, and interpret silence or disagreement. Across Theme 2, it emerged as a crucial counterbalance to high-context/low-context mismatches and the tendency to default to dominant norms of clarity or directness.

These four mechanisms were not bound to any one theme but interwove across all three. In Theme 1, relational humility and emotionally intelligent communication fostered psychological safety and collective belonging. In Theme 2, equity-conscious leadership and iterative learning helped mitigate the effects of exclusionary norms, role ambiguity, and communicative dissonance. In Theme 3, all four mechanisms collectively underpinned the translation of cultural diversity into high performance, particularly by enabling voice, challenging symbolic inclusion, and embedding inclusive decision-making.

Taken together, these mechanisms operationalise Cultural Attunement as both an analytical concept and a practical orientation. They offer a grounded, empirical response to the gap in literature around how culturally diverse teams can move beyond surface-level diversity to foster deep inclusion, equitable collaboration, and sustainable performance outcomes.

Cultural Attunement offers a significant theoretical departure from earlier frameworks that attempt to explain or manage cultural diversity in teams—particularly those grounded in the logic of cultural

competence and static typologies. While cultural competence frameworks have played an important role in sensitising individuals to cultural difference, they have often been criticised for their tendency to reduce culture to a fixed body of knowledge to be mastered. This approach typically emphasises knowing about the practices, values, or communication styles of different cultures—frequently through lists, training modules, or typological guides—thus promoting a form of cultural essentialism (Dervin, 2020). In such models, competence is construed as the acquisition of facts rather than the cultivation of relational awareness or responses to changing situation.

In contrast, Cultural Attunement is not a competency to be acquired but a relational and emergent process to be practised. It reframes the task of working in culturally diverse teams from the accumulation of cultural knowledge to the ongoing, situated engagement with difference as dialogue. This involves learning with others, not merely about them, and requires sustained reflexivity, emotional intelligence, and responsiveness to power and context. Rather than seeking to minimise difference for the sake of uniformity or efficiency, Cultural Attunement encourages teams to navigate, interpret, and adapt to difference in ways that are inclusive, generative, and co-constructed in real time.

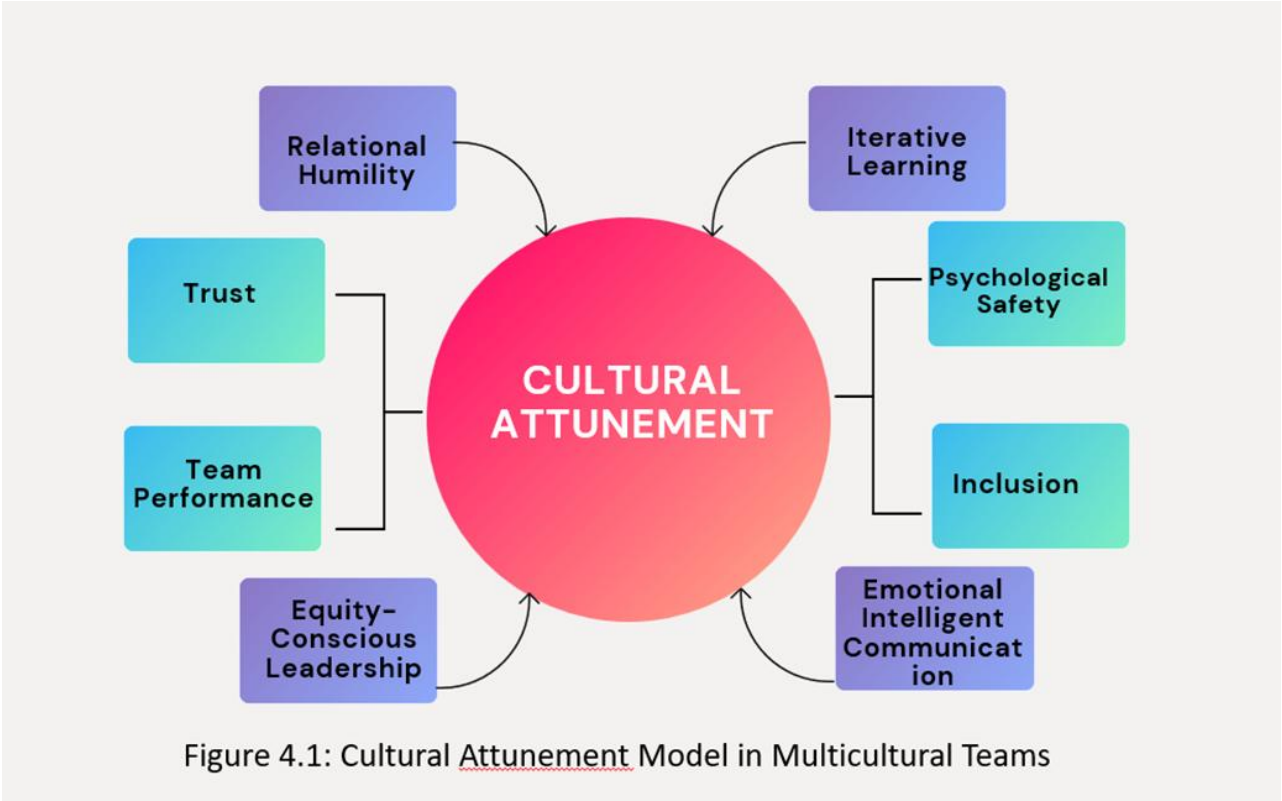
Similarly, Cultural Attunement distinguishes itself from dominant cultural typologies such as those proposed by Hofstede (1980) or the GLOBE project (House et al., 2004). While these models offer useful generalisations about national cultural tendencies—such as individualism versus collectivism, or high versus low power distance—they operate primarily at the macro level and often risk reifying culture as stable, bounded, and homogeneous. These static representations may obscure the micro-level, dynamic, and intersectional ways that culture is enacted and negotiated in team settings. Moreover, they offer limited guidance on how to respond to intra-cultural variation, hybrid identities, or the fluidity of intercultural encounters shaped by globalisation, migration, and shifting team compositions.

Cultural Attunement bridges this gap by offering a process-oriented and reflexive alternative that is grounded in the lived realities of multicultural teamwork. It captures the complexity, ambiguity, and emotional texture of working across difference—emphasising not what culture is, but what it does in interaction. It highlights how cultural diversity becomes meaningful through everyday relational practices such as listening, explaining, negotiating, withdrawing, or speaking up. Importantly, it also recognises that such interactions are shaped by asymmetries of power, legitimacy, and voice—elements often absent from traditional models.

In doing so, Cultural Attunement complements the critique of essentialist frameworks by scholars such as Holliday (2011), Dervin (2020), and Nkomo and Hoobler (2014), who have called for more consideration for situational changes, decolonial, and critical approaches to intercultural understanding. It does not discard earlier models entirely but repurposes them as background tools rather than definitive explanations. Its unique contribution lies in reframing cultural work as relational labour—a shared responsibility that is continually redefined through the shifting dynamics of team interaction,

institutional norms, and interpersonal intent. Figure 4.1 below is a visual presentation of Cultural Attunement model in culturally diverse teams.

Figure 4.1: Cultural Attunement Model



This chapter has interpreted the findings through theoretical frameworks and introduced Cultural Attunement as the study's central conceptual contribution. Through the lens of the IPO model and critiques of cultural essentialism, the three synthesised themes reveal that multicultural team performance is not determined by diversity alone, but by how teams navigate it relationally, structurally, and procedurally. Cultural Attunement synthesises these dynamics into a coherent framework that advances our understanding of team inclusion and communication. In doing so, it offers a more situated, humanised, and actionable perspective for theory, practice, and future research.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS

This dissertation set out to explore how cultural diversity influences team performance, with a particular focus on team dynamics and communication. Two key research questions guided the study: (1) How does cultural diversity influence team performance, especially team dynamics and communication? and (2) What are the key mechanisms of cultural diversity that impact team performance, especially on team dynamics and communication? Through a qualitative meta-analysis of twelve empirical studies, this research synthesised emerging patterns across diverse contexts to generate original insights into how multicultural teams function and flourish.

Three overarching findings were identified. First, Relational Conditions that Enable Inclusion highlight the foundational role of trust, adaptive leadership, and shared goals in fostering inclusive climates that transform diversity into strength. Second, Structural and Normative Barriers to Inclusion expose how unexamined norms, power hierarchies, and communicative mismatches hinder participation, especially among minority team members. Third, Practices that Translate Diversity into Performance emphasise the need for procedural fairness, power-sharing, and voice redistribution to activate the potential benefits of diversity. Across these themes, Cultural Attunement emerged as the central conceptual contribution, offering a processual, relational, and equity-oriented lens to understand and cultivate effective multicultural teamwork.

6.1 Limitations

This study is based on a qualitative meta-analysis of twelve peer-reviewed journal articles, all published in English and drawn from recognised academic databases. While this ensured a high level of rigour and credibility, it also limited the dataset to studies that met specific publication and language criteria. As such, valuable insights from grey literature, non-English sources, or practitioner-based case studies may have been excluded. Additionally, by relying on secondary data rather than conducting primary interviews or observations, the study was constrained in its ability to probe deeper into participant context or follow up on emerging insights. The meta-synthesis approach prioritised interpretive depth and thematic integration, but it may not capture the full heterogeneity of experiences found in real-world team environments.

The studies analysed were conducted across a range of institutional and geographic contexts but are nevertheless situated within specific socio-economic, political, and organisational frameworks that shaped the reported experiences. Most of the studies reflect contemporary workplace dynamics in high-

income or Westernised settings, potentially overlooking how historical legacies, local power structures, or resource disparities shape team dynamics in other regions. Furthermore, the temporal window of the analysed literature—though spanning one decade—may not fully reflect emerging trends in hybrid or remote work, post-pandemic shifts in communication practices, or the evolving socio-political discourses around inclusion and diversity. As such, while the findings provide robust insights into multicultural team functioning, they are anchored within a particular temporal and institutional moment.

While qualitative meta-synthesis prioritises conceptual richness and theoretical generalisation, its findings are not intended to be universally generalisable. The insights generated, particularly the conceptual framework of Cultural Attunement, are grounded in specific team-based contexts and may not directly translate to all organisational levels, sectors, or cultural settings. For example, while Cultural Attunement offers an adaptable lens, its application may vary significantly across hierarchical, collectivist, or informal work environments. Teams operating in crisis settings, low-trust environments, or highly technical roles may face distinct challenges that were not fully represented in the reviewed studies. Therefore, users of this framework should consider the situated nature of their own team cultures and apply the findings with reflexivity and situational awareness.

6.2 Theoretical Implications

The findings offer several theoretical contributions to existing frameworks of team performance and cultural diversity. They build upon the Input-Process-Output (IPO) model (Ilgen et al., 2005) by re-emphasising the mediating role of inclusive team processes—particularly trust, adaptive leadership, and shared interpretation—in transforming diversity into performance outcomes. However, unlike traditional applications of the IPO model, this study centres cultural inclusion as a dynamic and relational practice rather than a static process phase. In doing so, it reframes the 'process' component as one deeply shaped by power asymmetries, emotional labour, and communicative negotiations.

Moreover, the study refines typological models such as Hofstede's cultural dimensions by shifting attention from national-level generalisations to situated, interpersonal interactions. While Hofstede's work remains useful in outlining broad cultural patterns, the findings of this study illustrate how cultural diversity is continuously reconstituted through team discourse, power structures, and contextual adaptation. In this way, the concept of Cultural Attunement does not reject prior models but extends them by emphasising the ongoing, reflexive, and co-constructed nature of cultural interaction in teams.

Future research should further test and elaborate the Cultural Attunement framework in empirical settings. One potential direction is to examine its application across different organisational levels, such as between teams and leadership tiers. Another avenue would involve longitudinal studies to investigate

how Cultural Attunement unfolds over time and in response to organisational change. Finally, more comparative research across underrepresented global contexts could assess the cross-cultural transferability of the framework and refine its mechanisms accordingly.

6.3 Practical Implications

For organisations seeking to improve multicultural team performance, the findings suggest several actionable principles:

1. Organisations should explore cultural attunement through longitudinal and ethnographic studies to capture how it evolves within teams over time. Particular attention could be paid to high-stakes, fast-paced sectors such as call centres and technology firms, where team performance depends heavily on real-time communication and rapid decision-making under pressure. These sectors have been noted in prior studies (e.g., Holman, 2003; Deery & Kinnie, 2004) as sites of intense coordination demands and emotional labour yet remain underexplored in diversity literature. Examining cultural attunement in such environments may reveal how inclusion and cohesion are negotiated when cultural differences intersect with speed, hierarchy, and performance expectations.
2. In high-stakes, fast-paced environments where multicultural teams operate under intense pressure and manage complex risks, cultural attunement offers a practical framework for enhancing team performance by fostering relational awareness, adaptive communication, and inclusive decision-making. When team members and leaders engage in cultural attunement, they move beyond surface-level cultural awareness to actively co-construct understanding through reflexive dialogue, empathy, and responsiveness to diverse ways of working. This practice enables more accurate interpretation of alerts and client behaviours, reduces miscommunication across culturally diverse staff, and strengthens psychological safety, particularly critical in high-pressure situations where rapid yet collaborative responses are essential. By embedding attuned relational processes into daily operations, EM teams are better equipped to sustain trust, minimise operational errors, and make more equitable, culturally informed decisions under pressure.
3. Centre Relational Inclusion in Team Development: Invest in trust-building, psychological safety, and inclusive leadership practices as foundational to high-functioning diverse teams. These are not ancillary 'soft skills' but central to sustaining cohesion and enabling performance.
4. Disrupt Structural Inequities and Communication Norms: Critically examine which communicative behaviours, decision-making protocols, and leadership styles are being

privileged in teams. Make space for diverse ways of expressing ideas, negotiating roles, and engaging in conflict.

5. Embed Equity-Conscious Decision-Making: Ensure that team processes—such as setting agendas, allocating tasks, or recognising contributions—are transparent and inclusive. Create explicit norms that challenge symbolic participation and empower all voices.
6. Cultivate Ongoing Reflexivity and Cultural Responsiveness: Move beyond one-off diversity training towards sustained learning practices that encourage reflexivity, dialogue, and co-creation of team norms. Equip team members and leaders to continuously adapt to and engage with differences.

These recommendations are not exhaustive, but they point to the structural and relational shifts needed for genuine inclusion to take root and flourish in multicultural teams.

6.4 Conclusion

This dissertation demonstrates that effective multicultural teamwork is not simply about assembling a diverse group of individuals. It is about the relational and structural processes through which inclusion is enacted and sustained. Through a meta-synthesis of twelve empirical studies, it shows that team performance in diverse contexts depends not on cultural sameness or managerial control, but on the capacity of teams to navigate difference through empathy, equity, and reflexive engagement. Cultural Attunement offers a lens to understand this work: a dynamic, ongoing practice that foregrounds humility, learning, and structural justice. Its value lies not only in what it explains, but in how it invites teams, organisations, and scholars to reimagine inclusion as a shared, evolving responsibility—essential to both human dignity and collective success.

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Appendices
Appendix 1: Primary-Cycle Codes

Code No	Studies	Codes	Descriptions	*Direct Quotations/Paraphrases*	Pages	
C3	*1. Bouncken et al. (2016)*	Creative control	Having some control to drive creativity	*"...In some cases you want to have creativity. So if you want to have creativity, you need to control maybe a little bit these people."*	13	
C4		Cultural awareness	Teams adjust behaviours and attitudes, reducing early conflicts.	*"Other cultures are much more relaxed. And then sometimes there is a conflict out of that. Timelines are not met...Now if someone says 'in the beginning of June I am planning a meeting', I know now, that it will take place later. Only in the beginning I interpreted it [being unpunctual] as unreliability. Now I think that's just the way it is. I think the mentality is just different... if it doesn't work out now, then he will do it some other time."*	16	
C5		Adapting	Team members develop new communication and collaboration skills.	*"To be on time. That is what I learned here [in Germany]."*	16	

C6		Adapting	Adjusting the style to ensure better workflow	*"They learned how to work with women in a better way and... were now less uncomfortable."*	23	
C7		knowledge differences	Understanding and appreciating the difference in knowledge of different team members	*"You put people together and ask to think about issues. Of course different characteristics, different behaviours, different knowledge can help engineering more brilliant ideas."*	10	
C8		Learning from differences	Learning from team members with different cultural background	*"I go to Hungary and Russia and I work with people from these countries so they give a lot of input and also more understanding of the product."*	11	
C9		Openess to learn	Openess of team members to other culture	***"I never understand Peter's jokes. So it is just about... saying 'Oh she is French, that's normal. She doesn't understand.' Then I keep asking'No, no, no, I want to understand. I want to be part of the team.' And that is how it is...just because people explain stuff like that. A kind of creativity .."***	11	
C10		Lacking shared understanding	High vs. low context communicatio n leads to	*"Others interpret being on time or deadlines differently... it has*	15	

			misunderstandings.	*an effect on work morale."*		
C11		Lacking Cultural awareness	lacking the understanding of cultural differences	*"Somebody from the Netherlands was so blunt that other people were quite offended."*	15	
C12		Cultural dominance	When one culture outnumbers all other cultures in a team	*If Germans are in one team, they always try to be dominant... [this means] absorbing a lot of time to talk, not letting others finish their arguments, and trying to assert their own biased opinions"*	19	
C13		Indivdualistic	individual vs collectivism culture	*"I don't find the US guys particularly conducive to team working. They are very individualistic; they are very ambitious, self-centred*	23	
C14		Work style	How culture shapes the way team members work	*"Switzerland is very conservative and France... has a high experience in changing products permanently."*	24	
C15		Tension due to language	tension that can occure from cummunication style	*"Sometimes people get very mad and upset about this word 'enseguida'."*	14	
C16		Power distance	The degree of respect and reverence accorded to a leader by a team member	***"The engineer feels that things should be done in a certain way. Even though the technician knows that if we go this way, it does not work he does not***	20	

				want to contradict his boss."		
C17		Multicultural experience	Prior exposure of team members	*"If you already have those kinds of demands to work on an international team it is easy to get used to each other."*	12	
C18		Openness to differences	Open-mindedness helps team members accept and integrate cultural differences.	*"People already have this [open] kind of mindset."*		
C19		Dominant culture	One culture dominating the team suppresses minority voices.	*"If most of the team members are German or Dutch they may have this kind of strong influence."*	13	
C20		Team composition	The matching of team members from different culture into a team	*..."Also if you have several people from the same background their interaction… you can easily promote something...Because if you have the same kind of background or culture."*	13	
	Studies	***Code***	***Description***	***Direct Quote***	***Page***	
C23	***Zakari et al. (2019)***	Social duties over engagement	Prioritising social requirements over work commitment	***Saudi nurses place a high value on flexible working arrangements to fulfill their social duties; lack of work engagement and absenteeism are high. This***	49	

				impacts a patient's needs and the quality of nursing care. It has a considerable impact on those newest to the workforce. It also puts pressure on those who remain in the field, resulting in decreased morale and, potentially, further disengagement."		
C24		Family comitment Over work	Highlights how patriarchal family structures and dependency on male family members for transportation reduce female nurses' ability to engage at work.	*"Since I got married, my work commitment has diminished... Dropping me off at work falls to my husband; often, he refuses to do so, which affects my engagement..."*		
C25		Lack of cross-gender engagement	Describes how cultural discomfort with women working alongside men leads to emotional distress and disengagement among Saudi nurses.	*"They do not consent to my working, in particular, my interacting with the opposite gender... I constantly feel helpless because of my family's lack of understanding."*		
C26		Interpersonal	Indicates that personal beliefs, energy, and social norms shape how nurses perceive and commit to their roles.	*"My engagement is mainly influenced by the social environment and interpersonal relationships, combined with social norms... This is my engagement."*	49	

C27		Absenteesm impacts engagement	Impact of absenteeism on team engagement and bonding	*"Saudi nurses place a high value on flexible working arrangements... lack of work engagement and absenteeism are high... It also puts pressure on those who remain in the f ield, resulting in decreased morale and, potentially, further disengagement."*	50	
C28		Poor work relationship	how poor treatment impact work relationship	*I was treated unfairly and not rewarded, and I did not have good relationships in the workplace.*	50	
C29		Symbolic policies	how organisational policies are different from from management actions	*Some policies or regulations resolve work conditions on paper, but I don't always get that reinforcement in practice. In addition, I want more balance between my life and work."*	50	
C30		Lack of shared meaning.	Shows absence of open dialogue and shared understanding in the workplace, which hinders collective engagement and improvement.	*" If we have a system to share meaning and understanding, we can positively distinguish ourselves from other hospitals."*	50	
C31		Leadership support	How leadership support motivates team engagement	*the workplace stimulates personal and professional growth. I am rarely ever put on the defensive . . .*	50	

				In theory, . . . essentially, she supports our autonomy. This encourages optimism and emotional stability."		
	Studies	***Code***	***Description***	***Direct Quote***	***Page***	
C34	*Woodhead et al. (2021)*	Fear of escaltion	Act of avoiding speaking up or expressing disagreement due to fear of reinforcing negative stereotypes or experiencing further marginalisation	*"One of the midwives I was speaking to, she's African, Black African, andshe said to me that I said to her, like, you need to make a complaint because there's a couple of things that, that were being said about her at work. About her being difficult and stuff. And she goes, "oh, yeah, oh, yeah, and then I escalate it and you think that that, that stigma's going to be taken away from me or get worse?"*	273	
C35		Public shaming	Disregard for others' personal dignity as a way of reinforcing authority and control	*"I've seen people, like, managers calling people out publicly in front of a ward... almost wanted to embarrass them."*	275	
C36		Racial bias	unfair treatment or judgment of individuals based on their race, often rooted in stereotypes	***"There's a stereotype that the Black healthcare assistants are lazy... So, they will be more like, can you do that, and can you do that, and can you do***	276	

			and systemic inequalities.	***that? So that they will not sit down that much."***		
C37		Discriminated	Favouring those close to managers for opportunities.	***You tend to get groups that are very close to the managers... they get booked on it really quickly.***	277	
C38		"Exclusion of minority	Removing non-members of the dominant culture.	*They will just treat them badly and then they will eventually leave... creating a team of almost entirely the people who work and are like them. ...* ***The way you pronounce thing will be different from all people, but there are some among them, no matter how you say it, they wouldn't understand you […] And the way they will behave or squeeze their face, you know it will have an impact on you, it will be down on you […] And in most cases when you come um, across people from the minority, actually, you enjoy more because they all understand you."***	281	
C39		Language barrier, lacks mutual respect and acceptance"	A colleague refused to be led by someone due to their English.	*He was telling her in her face, 'your English is ridiculous. I don't want you to be my team leader.'*	278	
C40		Culturally unaware	African communicatio n styles are	*The voice is so strong. Comes across like it's a*	278	

			misread as aggression.	*fight... they can't look in your eyes... it looks like you're lying.*		
C41		Lacking Open communication	Staff are reluctant to report issues, fearing backlash.	***"We know that particularly BME staff in particular won't speak up. They are very reticent about speaking up about things that happened to them which is a concern […] because people feared the consequences for themselves, they fear being called a snitch"***	283	
C42		Superficial team dynamics	Unreal team dynamic	*"we know that particularly BME staff in particular won't speak up. They are very reticent about speaking up about things that happened to them which is a concern[…] because people feared the consequences for themselves, they fea being called a sitch"*	283	
	Studies	***Code***	***Description***	***Direct Quote***	***Page***	
C43	*Leifels & Zhang (2023)*	Socio-Communication differences	Communication breakdowns due to cultural or language differences.	*"The majority of stressors were perceived as differences in social behaviour, communication differences…"*	372	
C43		Differences in Opinion	Conflicting perspectives on tasks or decisions within teams.	*"The most frequent subcategory stressors, namely, misunderstandings*	372	

				, differences in opinion…"		
C44		Conflicts	Interpersonal tensions or disputes among team members.	*"...conflicts, mistrust, a lack of information sharing, discrimination, and social loafing."*	372	
C45		Mistrust	Poor team relations	*"...mistrust, a lack of information sharing, discrimination, and social loafing."*	372	
C46		Unequal of Information Sharing	Withholding or limited exchange of work-related knowledge.	*"...mistrust, a lack of information sharing, discrimination, and social loafing."*	372	
C47		Discrimination	Unequal treatment based on cultural or personal characteristics .	*"...mistrust, a lack of information sharing, discrimination, and social loafing."*	372	
C48		Demotivated	Reduced individual effort in group settings.	*"...mistrust, a lack of information sharing, discrimination, and social loafing."*	372	
C49		Team Cohesion	Sense of unity and belonging among team members.	*"The resources were categorized into social support and (team) cohesion."*	372	
	Study	***Codes***	***Descriptions***	***Direct Quotes***	***Pages***	
C50	*Hajro et al. (2017)*	Cultural conflict	The conflict or disagreement between the individual/minority group and the dominant norms on culturally diverse teams	*"It immediately came to a, well, I wouldn't say crash, but it resulted at least in a strong disagreement. … We just wanted to assure that each member's*	18	

				obligations within the team are duly noted by having everyone sign off his personal areas of responsibility. However, the Hungarians and Croats put their foot down because they were not used to something like that." (Team member, Austrian, GEC)		
C51		Emotional Misreading	Misinterpretation of emotional cues across cultures	*"You can awfully misinterpret people if you do not recognise... For the Croats, pride is of great value. Thus, criticising a Croat in the presence of all the others... No. That is simply not acceptable."*	18	
C52		Cultural unaware	Ignoring cultural differences under the guise of equality	*"Our boss from the U.S. was pretty straightforward... he was extremely direct and believed in saying exactly what one thought at all times. As a consequence we continued to drift apart."*	20	
C53		Harmony Over Clarity	Prioritising harmony over clarity and inefficiency	*"They preferred to withhold opinions to maintain harmony at work... sharing knowledge that was contradictory in an assertive manner could undermine that cooperative spirit."*	22	
C54		Cultural Sensitivity	Adapting communication to respect cultural norms	***"I tried to put in place incentives for speaking up, emphasising the***	23	

				'non-blame aspect' of our organisational culture."		
C55		Surface-Level Cooperation	Cooperation without deep integration of diverse perspectives	*"They remain very cooperative but also very reluctant... I think that there are still many areas where we could improve and learn more from each other."*	25	
C56		Encouraged open communication	Leadership fostering open expression of diverse views	*"Please raise your hand if you think something has gone wrong… No one will lose his head."*	26	
C57		Balanced Communication	Combining directness with cultural sensitivity	*"I would tell them what my expectations are... In one-on-one discussions I would then encourage them to speak up."*	27	
C58		Constructive Confrontation	Addressing issues directly but respectfully	*"We addressed this issue; we told him that we wanted this to be changed. And it did."*	28	
C59		Cultural Integration	Embedding cultural diversity into core work processes	*"Our Global Diversity and Inclusion Strategy is aimed at reflecting our markets and products through a diverse workforce... we take a holistic approach and embrace all aspects of diversity."*	29	
C60		Valued corporate communication style	contextually preferred style of communication in the AGEC	***"Straight talk is a competence, something that's valued here, a leadership competence.... It is an imperative***	20	

			organisational culture	***for action. Straight talk is a norm and an important aspect of AGEC's***		
C61		Direction Expectations	Preference of directions from heirachy than making decision	***"Romanians … want you to tell them what to do and how to do it. It requires being forthright about your wants and needs… But as I said, it is not my style to yell at someone. Balancing was indeed a big challenge. I would tell them what my expectations are, what they need to do and by when...."***	27	
C62		Resistance to cultural learning	Not open to learning others' culture	*"People in our team tend to think business is business and give little thought to different world views that can actually cause performance problems. It is because of this attitude that we face so many problems here, which has definitely impede good performance."*	20	
C63		Adapting from feedback,	Changing and learning from a situation	*"I would say that we have shown a high integration capability. We have definitively changed the way we communicate, we share feedback, we approach individuals, etc. So, there has been a big adjustment*	24	

				on our side. Definitively! We have been confronted with the Indonesian culture, we have had an intercultural experience, and we have learned to understand and to incorporate this new learning into the way we interact today.		
C64		Feeling excluded - exclusivity	Suggesting lack of inclusive communication	***"At the beginning, when this senior manager was new, there was a bad flow of information. And we did not like the way discussions were carried out. He asked for our opinions but made the decision all by himself."***	28	
C65		Empowerment	suggesting that the team were empowered to raise their concerns	***He asked for our opinions but made the decision all by himself. We addressed this issue; we told him that we wanted this to be changed. And it did."***	28	
	Studies	***Code***	***Description***	***Direct Quote***	***Page***	
C66	*Tenzer et al. (2021)*	Vocabulary Struggles	communication issue due to language difference	*"That's my problem with German: my vocabulary, my access to the right word is missing.. I know what I want to say... but I can't find the right verb or I can't find the adjective I need."*	5	
C67		Linguistic Ostracism	Feeling excluded due	*"The Japanese colleague... can't*	5	

			to limited language skills	*really contribute much to the conversation... I feel sorry... he doesn't really get it."*		
C68		Self-Silencing	Choosing not to speak due to language discomfort	*"He knows his stuff... However, he just does not speak or understand English, so he refuses to enter or join meetings."*	6	
C69		Pragmatic Misalignment	Misunderstanding indirect speech acts across cultures	*"Chinese often try to express their criticism indirectly... Germans... have to read between the lines."*	6	
C70		Prosodic Confusion	Misinterpreting tone, rhythm, or pauses in speech	*"Asian colleagues consciously allow for a pause... Europeans cannot deal with pauses at all."*	7	
C71		Irony Misinterpretation	Failing to detect sarcasm or humour due to intonation differences	*"If you say 'he is good at this' in a normal voice... If you use a different intonation... it sounds more negative."*	8	
C72		Agreement Illusions	Mistaking indirect or silent responses as agreement	***"If a German says 'Yes', this means that a contract is finished. If a Chinese says yes... it just means I am willing to negotiate."***	8	
C73		Task Confusion	Unclear task ownership due to language-based misunderstandings	*"Is this a real work order now? Or was it just a recommendation?.. How binding is a statement?"*	11	

C74		Delayed Disagreement	Disagreement surfacing too late due to indirect communication	***The Germans think that the Japanese agrees, because he isn't saying anything. Then after one week, the Japanese sends a mail to them saying 'I don't agree to this, to that'. Then they have lost one week! (DRIVE 1-10, Japanese)***	10	
C75		Misinterpretation error	Different interpretations of instructions leading to project issues	*"Three sentences spoken incorrectly can be like three sentences not spoken at all... the result will be non-acceptance of the assigned task."*	10	
	Studies	***Code***	***Description***	***Direct Quote***	***Page***	
C76	*Tingvold & Munkejord (2020)*	Miscommunication/comprehesion	refers to language related miscommunication and comprehension challenges in a multicultural team	*"Not everyone speaks good Norwegian when they start here. It can be a bit difficult for us ... Something as simple as saying what needs to be done and giving instructions ...And you ask if they've understood. 'Yes, yes', they say ... But then it often turns out that they haven't understood anything at all. I wonder if they're reluctant to ask again?"*	960	

C77		Rigid decision-making approach	Following care plans rigidly, showing reluctance to adapt to changing resident needs.	*"It's got to do with understanding what comes first. But many of those with a minority background who come here to work are very conscientious so if the schedule says 'Shower', that maybe means that they will carry out this task without thinking that it might be smart to do it another day. In other words, they do their job, that's for sure [the informant chuckles]."*	960	
C78		Autonomy Misunderstood	Independence or self-governance is misinterpreted, leading to unintended consequences.	*"I thought: Why don't they help them? ... But then I thought... they must feel they can manage things themselves."*	960	
C79		Task Preference	Some immigrant staff prefer visible, physical tasks over social engagement with residents.	*"I like to do things. I'm not someone who can sit in a sofa for a long time."*	961	
C80		Differing Priorities	Staff disagreements arise from differing views on task importance—cleaning vs. social care.	***"One person may feel that the other has wrong prior ities. While some people think it's important that the sterilization room is clean, others prioritize spending time chatting in the sofa, finding activities for the res idents …Yes, focusing on a***	961	

				good social environment."		
C81		Frequent Meetings	Regular meetings foster shared understanding and improve communication.	*"We reversed this and started up the meetings again … it's so important."*	962	
C82		Shared Language Learning	A supportive environment helps immigrant staff learn language and tasks.	*"They show me things and talk to me and then I started to learn it."*	963	
C83		Exclusivity	Poor communication and fewer meetings lead to distrust and exclusion.	*"Staff excluded each other instead of sharing knowledge and learning from each other."*	963	
	Studies	***Code***	***Description***	***Direct Quote***	***Page***	
C84	*Vigier & Spencer-Oatey (2017)*	Rule-setting	Team A created written rules to manage dysfunction	*"We managed […] to get together about nine of us […] to express […] what wasn't working out […] and then to try to draw up […] some rules of conduct"*	167	
C85		Rigid enforcement	Strict rule-following led to unnatural interactions	*"It wasn't natural […] between […] the anarchy at the beginning […] the extreme […] politeness and the extreme structure of the end"*	167	
C86		Language barrier	Less fluent speakers struggled to contribute	*"Language posed a problem for […] some […] [who] […] couldn't participate the*	169	

				way they would have liked to"		
C87		Code-switching tension	Switching to French caused frustration	*"When [they] […] started talking French […] Zachary-A […] got personally offended […] because he was really, really that frustrated"*	168	
C88		Flexible rules	Team B applied rules more flexibly and improved	*"We were disciplined. […] Joseph-B played a great role for that"*	167	
C89		Implicit norms	Team C used natural, intuitive rules	*"There was natural leadership without assigning roles […] this was a positive point"*	168	
C90		Language equity	Shared language challenges fostered inclusion	*"Everyone feels at ease to contribute. […] In the end, we succeed (laughs)"*	170	
C91		Faultline Intensification	Multiple aligned attributes intensified subgroup division	***"Team A's language-fluency faultline coupled with the alignment of other attributes may have strengthened the social identity categorizations"***	172	
	Studies	***Code***	***Description***	***Direct Quote***	***Page***	
C92	*Yousef (2024)*	Gigital communication gap	Cultural diversity in virtual teams was perceived as a risk to efficiency and communication.	*"We had two Chinese teammates, and it was hard for them to participate. In China, they don't use Facebook as we do here, so we tried WhatsApp, which was inefficient. They grew up there. They are used to different apps or ways of*	418	

				communication". (VT10)		
C93		Decision making challenges	The challenges in making decision to achieve of convergence in a multicultural team	*"I was a project leader in our team. I like that everyone had a good idea since basically all of us were from different countries, and we could understand cross-cultural challenges, so we could brainstorm together, but it was hard to choose one and stick to that. If we had stayed with our first choice, we could have finished the project a week before the deadline". (VT21)*	421	
C94		Intercultural learning experience	Active engagement, a practical learning experience of team members in a multicultural team	*"We hear a lot about cultural awareness and cultural intelligence, and I think these things can be understood if you spend alotof timewithpeople fromdifferentplace s. I want to work for a multinational company, and this setting is exactly what I will have, so I had the chance to try it myself". (FF59)*	421	

C95		Comprehension barrier	Comprehension barrier that arise in a multicultural team due to language differences	*"I was afraid that one of our international teammates didn't understand what we were doing. We speak Hungarian and English, so one of our international teammates, who is fluent in English, could work with us, but the other one was using a translator, which was not a problem, but she could not get the solution we found for the project. She was new in the city and at the University. It was a cross-cultural challenge for sure". (VT55*	421	
C96		Cultural curiosity	In face-to-face settings, cultural diversity was seen as a source of creativity and innovation.	*We basically had to talk and share our understandings. I am a student from China and having such a team project helped me to participate since my teammates were curious about everything related to my culture". (FF41)*	420	
C97		Communication channel	Students linked cultural background to communication habits and tool preferences.	*"They grew up there. They are used to different apps or ways of communication."*	418	
C98		Cultural Intelligence	Understanding cultural differences helped students	*"Now I understand how people with different cultural backgrounds*	420	

			collaborate better.	*work, and I can even use this in my term abroad next year."*		
C99		Cultural Adaptation	Teams adapted to dominant cultural norms in face-to-face settings.	***"It was interesting because we had our unique cultural heritage. However, somehow, we decided to work in a way that the local Hungarian culture works. It seemed logical that way. We had two Hungarians in our team, and the rest of us were from all over the world. Attending a Hungarian university made us use the Hungarian way of work as a standard. It was a wise solution". (FF51)***	423	
	Study	**Code**	**Description**	**Direct Quote**	**Page**	
C100	*Granow & Asbrock (2021)*	Openness to other cultures	Emphasising open-mindedness as a prerequisite for collaboration	*"I think it really depends on whether both sides have an open mind and respect the other side." – IP3*	53	
C101		Hiring for openness	Openness as a hiring criterion	*"That is very important, being open—like respectful, accepting all the different culture and this is like our value." – IP6*	53	
C102		Motivation to adapt	Willingness to go beyond comfort zone	*"It is a willingness […] to go out of one's way, out of the comfort zone in order to achieve this level of communication." – IP18*	53	

C103		Trust across cultures	Trust as a counter to automatic rejection of different views	*"Because when different opinions come to my view […] the very normal reaction is – what is different, that it is wrong […] so first open mind, listen and then trust." – IP6*	53	
C104		Delegating across cultures	Trusting local expertise	*"The Chinese colleagues on site are simply better connected with the local electricity company […] so it is important that the German colleagues trust that certain things will then be taken over by the Chinese colleagues." – IP13 (translated)*	53	
C105		Perspective taking	Empathy and understanding others' viewpoints	*"I think this empathy […] you really have to think the way also from their view." – IP4*	53	
C106		Cultural role awareness	Adapting behaviour to support cultural expectations	*"Let him be in the front and then we support him on the back. We never disagree in public, okay? And we show that we have harmony." – IP11*	53	
C107		Organisational friction	Tension between HQ and local teams due to cultural and structural differences	***"The more interfaces we have towards Germany, the more difficult it becomes. […] we have different levels of knowledge, we have different views of what it is to be achieved and what it is not." – IP5 (translated)***	54	
C108		Empowering leadership	Leadership style that	*"But if I'm leading a team, I make the*	55	

			adapts to intercultural needs	*whole team adopt to this intercultural." – IP6*		
C109		Agile mindset	Agility as a necessity in international work	*"Working in international context requires a lot of agility." – IP19*	55	
C110		Agile tools for diversity	Agile methods help manage complexity in diverse teams	*"New agile methods are very important. […] They are also based on diverse teams with their specific backgrounds." – IP19*	55	
C111		Shared purpose	Kick-off events build shared understanding and trust	***"At the beginning we need a clear event, a kick-off, where everybody come together to have the common understanding of the working methodology and the agreement to be very transparent." – IP19***	56	
C112		Retrospective reflection	Agile retrospectives enable real-time feedback and learning	*"They do a retrospective, what worked well, what didn't work well and what do we want to change […] they hear it in real time, they can discuss it and finally we take action." – IP18*	56	
C113		Collaboration as alignment	Emphasising joint decision-making in intercultural leadership	*"I will always say, we already talked about this, we already aligned this. So this is not only my decision, this is our decision." – IP6*	57	
C114		Shared purpose	Common goals unify culturally diverse teams	*"For success we have a common purpose. […] everybody shares*	57	

				that vision, and everybody could see how the future looks like." – IP11		
C115		Purpose before process	Agreement on goals precedes discussion on methods	*"If you have agreed on a common goal, then you can talk about the way. But first the goal has to be clear." – IP12 (translated)*	57	
C116		Information elaboration	Open discussion and help-seeking improve team outcomes	*"We found […] a place, where you could just put things on the table and not be criticized but have the chance to request help." – IP11*	58	
C117		Learning from diversity	Exposure to different approaches enhances team learning	*"You just get to know different approaches, different solutions and then work out […] with the team, okay, what's the right way next time." – IP14 (translated)*	58	
C118		More perspectives through effort	Diverse teams yield better results but require more effort	*"Even they relaxed, they have less opportunity to collect more opinions. To see the facts in a different direction." – IP6*	58	
C119		Drives innovation	Diverse teams foster creativity and innovation	*"That's what is fantastic about it, because it's where great ideas come out off. […] So much innovation, creativity and result orientation." – IP16 (translated)*	58	
	Study	***Codes***	***Description***	***Direct Quote***	***Page***	

C120	*Welsch et al. (2023)*	Openness as a success factor	Open-mindedness enables collaboration across cultures	*"It requires people to be open for everything and to be willing to meet people and connect with people." – Junior Software Engineer, Team Peter*	6	
C121		Subculture fosters agility	Team subculture supports agile adaptation	*"We just tailor Agile to our needs, which is in the end what I believe is being Agile." – Software Engineer, Team Peter*	6	
C122		Agile culture definition	Shared understanding of the agile definition means being effective with agile practices in a multicultural setting	*"An Agile Culture reflects to the behaviour of people working in an organization using agile practices based on the underlying values and principles defined in the agile manifesto and the guidelines of agile methods."*	7	
C123		Social bonding outside work	Informal meetings strengthen team cohesion	*"Team members expressed a positive relationship with their colleagues and an interest in meetings outside of work."*	7	
C124		Brings different views	Different backgrounds introduce new perspectives	*"Different cultures were found to bring new viewpoints and perspectives to the team."*	7	
C125		Agile culture needs time	Developing agile values requires patience	*"Creating a subculture needs time and patience from both the team members as well as their stakeholders and*	8	

				organization around them."		
C126		Team tenure improves performance	Older teams perform better due to established culture	*"As the age of a team increases, its performance capabilities also increase. This is attributed to the well-established subculture within a team."*	8	
C127		Workload blocks bonding	High workload prevents team-building activities	*"Not even a 15-minute coffee break, scheduled every two weeks, could be adhered to."*	8	
C128		Tailoring agile to culture	Agile practices should be adapted to team culture	*"Individualization of the Agile Manifesto to the needs and demands of the individual multicultural team."*	7	
C129		Long-term retention matters	Retaining employees helps sustain team culture	*"Organizations should prioritize long-term employee retention as a means to sustain the team in the long run."*	8	
C130		Scheduled social time helps	Regular informal interactions support integration	***"Scheduled coffee breaks for personal interaction should be implemented more frequently."***	8	
C131		Feedback needs structure	Guidelines help navigate cultural differences in feedback	*"A guideline or regulatory framework can be supportive in its formulation."*	8	
	Study	***Codes***	***Description***	***Direct Quote***	***Page***	
C132	*Eyiah et al., (2025)*	Cultural awareness builds trust	Understanding cultural differences improves teamwork	*"Cultural awareness is key in avoiding misunderstandings and building trust among team members,*	9	

				ultimately leading to better teamwork and productivity." – MC2		
C133		Sensitivity fosters inclusion	Empathy and respect enable inclusive leadership	*"Cultural sensitivity enables leaders to manage diverse teams with empathy and respect, fostering a positive and inclusive work environment." – MC3*	9	
C134		Backgrounds shape behaviour	Managers must understand team members' cultural roots	*"As a manager, you must understand each person's culture and background to relate to them and the group." – SPV3*	9	
C135		Language and beliefs differ	Language, religion, and beliefs create team differences	*"Considered differences in language, culture, challenges, safety culture, technical aspect, problem-solving, expertise and professionalism, educational level, and beliefs." – MC1*	10	
C136		Work hours reflect culture	Expatriates and locals have different work expectations	*"Ex-pats could work up to 10 or 12 h a day, while the locals have a contract that is 8 h a day." – SPV3*	10	
C137		Respect and engagement matter	Respectful engagement bridges cultural gaps	*"The real thing is being respectful and engaging." – SPV2*	10	
C138		Shyness hinders communication	Locals may hesitate to engage with expatriates	*"They become very shy and afraid to get the local people to engage." – SPV1*	10	
C139		Diverse views enrich discussion	Varied experiences lead to richer conversations	*"Work-related discussions often generate distinct perspectives from their varied*	10	

				experiences." – SPV3		
C140		Language barrier limits clarity	Misunderstandings arise from language differences	*"MC1 suggests that language differences lead to confusion and misinterpretation. We must be mindful of our language as perceptions require mutual consideration"*	11	
C141		Team talks build cohesion	Regular team discussions support collaboration	*"I usually give team instructions or work schedules. I understand Greek and Russian." – SC1*	11	
C142		Experience strengthens teams	Multicultural experience enhances problem-solving	*"Most team members possess multicultural project experience, which enriches the team with diverse cultures." – MC3*	11	
C143		Miscommunication causes tension	Poor communication leads to conflict	*"Miscommunication, collaborative styles, and tensions." – MC2*	11	
C144		Cultural upbringing affects tone	Words may offend depending on cultural norms	*"Certain words offend. Each system must be able to understand everyone's culture fully." – SPV3*	11	
C145		Communication is key	Clear communication is essential for team success	*"First, improve communication. This is crucial—I must ensure the team understands me." – MC1*	11	
C146		Listening builds understanding	Active listening helps resolve disputes	*"Listening. That shows your desire to understand my perspective." – SPV3*	11	
C147		Empowerment boosts morale	Giving responsibility increases engagement	*"Engaging everyone—empowering them to make a difference—by giving them good*	11	

				responsibility." – SPV1		
C148		Team unity reduces conflict	Strong relationships prevent minor disputes	*"You do not have to waste time settling small fights and disagreements between team members because they do not understand each other." – SPV3*	12	
C149		Language and hygiene challenges	Communication and hygiene are key challenges	*"Different mentalities and cultures, respect for colleagues, and hygiene issues." – MC2*	12	
C150		Cultural exposure is enriching	Working in diverse teams broadens perspectives	*"Discovering different cultures, different ways of thinking, and speaking other languages." – MC1*	12	
C151		Flexibility improves teamwork	Adapting to different norms enhances collaboration	*"Improved communication in the English language, flexibility, and diverse problem-solving skills." – SC2*	12	

Appendix 2

	Consolidated Codes			
Code No	**Label**	Original Code Names	**New Descriptions**	
H1	Cultural Understanding (6)	Practising Cultural awareness; Cultural awareness; Cultural Awareness; Cultural awareness builds trust	The degree of a team member or group's grasp, perception, and engagement with cultural differences, including both awarenes or lack of it	
H2	Learning from Differences (5)	Appreciating differences; Learning from differences; Learning from diversity; Cultural exposure is enriching	team members learning from cultural differences	

H3	Openness to Diversity (5)	Openness to differences; Openness to other cultures; Hiring for openness; Emphasising open-mindedness as a prerequisite for collaboration	team members openess to learn differences and work better with different cultures	
H4	Trust and Respect (3)	Trust across cultures; Delegating across cultures; Sensitivity fosters inclusion; Respect and engagement matter	Mentaining trust and respectful relationship with team members	
H5	Language and Communication Barriers (10)	Vocabulary Struggles; Linguistic Ostracism; Self-Silencing; Language barrier limits clarity; Team talks build cohesion	Importance of communication and the barriers to effective communication for a team outcomes	
H6	Conflict and Misalignment (7)	Struggling to align; Lacking shared understanding; Feeling misunderstood; Misalignment; Feeling misaligned; Conflicts	clash of ideas, culture, opinions, and style	
H7	Discrimination and Exclusion (5)	Feeling excluded; Feeling stigmatised; Racial bias; Discrimination; Minority exclusion; Discrimination	Treating certain team members unfairly or excluding them due to cultural differences	
H8	Team Cohesion and Unity (8)	Supporting team cohesion; Team Cohesion; Team talks build cohesion; Team unity reduces conflict	dynamic process of diverse groups come together. The degree of togetherness within the group	
H9	Agile and Adaptive Work Styles (6)	Assimilation, learning from the situation; Adapting to the situation; Adapting from feedback; Agile mindset; Agility as a necessity in international work; Agile methods help manage complexity in diverse teams	Flexibility, responsiveness, and adaptability of team members to differences in culture	
H10	Leadership and Empowerment (4)	Supportive leadership and autonomy; Empowering leadership; Empowerment boosts morale	Culturally aware leadership that enables all voices to be heard.	
H11	Shared Purpose and Goal Alignment (3)	Frequent Meetings; Kick-off for alignment; Shared purpose; Purpose before process	Collective commitment to common objectives across cultures.	

H12	Emotional Misunderstandings	Emotional Misreading, Prosodic Confusion, Irony Misinterpretation; Cultural upbringing affects tone	Misreading of emotions due to cultural variation in expression.	
H13	Power Distance and Inequity	Lacking shared cultural awareness, Feeling unheard, Lacking respect, Faultline strength	Unequal treatment or authority gaps influenced by cultural norms.	
H14	Explicit, Implicit Norms, Expectations	Retrospective reflection; Information elaboration; Agile retrospectives enable real-time feedback and learning	Cultural rules, expectations, and assumptions that shape team expectations.	
H15	work style	Rule-setting, Rigid enforcement, Flexible rules, Implicit norms	Cultural approaches to how tasks and roles are executed.	
H16	Power distance (1)			
H17	Social duty over engagement (1)	Prioritising social requirements over work commitment	Prioritising social requirements over work commitment	
H18	Familiy over work (1)	Cultural Misalignment; Cultural Unawareness; Cultural Integration	Prioritisation of familial obligations over work, shaped by culture.	
H19	Interpersonal relations (1)	Cultural Sensitivity; Sensitivity fosters inclusion; Backgrounds shape behaviour	Quality of personal connections influenced by cultural norms.	
H20	Absenteesim (1)	Cultural Diversity as Risk; Cultural Diversity as an Asset; Hiring for Openness	Frequent absence from work linked to cultural or social expectations.	
H21	Symbolic policy (1)	Perspective taking, Cultural role awareness, Empathy and understanding others' viewpoints	Policies that acknowledge diversity but lack effective enforcement.	
H22	Recognition (1)	Organisational friction: Tension between HQ and local teams due to cultural and structural differences	Recognition of individual or group contributions shaped by culture.	

H23	Demotivated (1)	Agile tools for diversity; Retrospective reflection; Kick-off events build shared understanding and trust; Emphasising joint decision-making in intercultural leadership	Loss of drive due to cultural conflicts or exclusion.	
H24	Prosodic confusion (1)	Motivated by cultural differences, Motivation to adapt, and Willingness to go beyond the comfort zone	Misinterpretation of tone, pitch, or rhythm in cross-cultural speech.	
H25	Agreement illusions (1)	Faultline strength; Cultural Diversity as Risk	False sense of consensus due to misunderstood cultural cues.	
H26	Delayed disagreement (1)	Misread the speaking style; Differences communication; Cultural upbringing affects tone	Postponed expression of dissent because of cultural norms.	
H27	Rigid-decision making (1)	Rigid decision-making approach: Autonomy Misunderstood; Task Preference; Differing Priorities	Inflexibility in processes due to lack of cultural consideration.	
H28	Task preference (1)	Superficial team dynamics; Social loafing; Surface-Level Cooperation	Cultural influence on preferred types of work tasks.	
H29	Differing priorities (1)	Language barrier; Code-switching tension; Language equity	Variation in goal importance based on cultural values.	
H30	Fautline intensification (1)	Encouraged open communication; Balanced Communication; Constructive Confrontation	Deepened divisions in diverse teams due to subgroup alignment.	
H31	Decision-making challenges (1)	Learning from diversity; Diversity drives innovation; Experience strengthens teams	Difficulties in reaching consensus due to cultural variation.	
H32	Cultural curiosity (1)	Cultural Diversity as an Asset; Diversity drives innovation; Cultural exposure is enriching	Active interest in learning about other cultures.	
H33	More perspective trough efforts (1)	Collaboration as alignment; Emphasising joint decision-making in intercultural leadership; Common goals unify culturally diverse teams	Broader views developed by engaging with diversity.	

H34	Drives innovation (1)	Purpose before process; Agreement on goals precedes discussion on methods	Cultural diversity contributes to creative outcomes.	
H35	Brings different views (1)	Communication is key; Listening builds understanding	Diverse backgrounds offer multiple angles on problems.	
H36	Team tenure improves performance (1)	Less committed.; Feeling discouraged; Not feeling fully engaged; Disillusionment with workplace conditions	Age and experience diversity linked to better outcomes.	
H37	Long-term retention matters (1)	Expectations, absenteeism impact engagement; Work hours reflect culture	Inclusive cultures support staff commitment and retention.	
H38	Scheduled social time helps (1)	Nurses appreciation; Public shaming	Structured interaction enhances cross-cultural bonding.	
H39	Sensitivity fosters inclusion (1)	Pragmatic Misalignment; Prosodic Confusion	Awareness of others' cultural needs strengthens inclusion.	
H40	Fear of escaltion (1)	Fear of escalation	Disagreement is often avoided unless cultural safety is established	

Appendix 3

Table 4.1: Summary of Findings: Themes, Subthemes, and the Number of Studies	
Themes	**Subthemes**
Theme 1 (M1): *Team Dynamics in Multicultural Settings Are Shaped by Interaction Patterns, Relational Behaviours, and Cultural Expectations (8 studies)* .	Subtheme 1.1: Cultural understanding, curiosity, and perspective-taking foster inclusive collaboration and team adaptation (6 studies - H1, H2, H32, H33). Subtheme 1.2: Openness to difference and intercultural learning enhance empathy and inclusive decision-making (5 studies - H3). Subtheme 1.3: Sensitivity to inclusion transforms misunderstanding into mutual understanding (1 study - H39).
Theme 2 (M2): *Communication Across Cultures Is Often Misaligned Due to Hidden Norms and Interpretive Barriers (10 studies)*	Subtheme 2.1: Cultural norms around directness, emotional expression and tone shaped perception and evaluation of communication (10 studies - H5) Subtheme 2.2: Seeming agreement conceals deeper disagreement, weakening cohesion and collaboration (1 study - H25). Subtheme 2.3: Without intentional cultural negotiation, teams struggle to manage ambiguity and implicit meanings (1 study - H12, H24, H26).

Theme 3 (M3): *Structural Power Dynamics Can Undermine Inclusion and Diminish Participation (6 studies)*	Subtheme 3.1: Hierarchical dynamics within culturally diverse teams prevented open dialogue and mutual problem-solving (1 studies - H13. H16). Subtheme 3.2: The absence of genuine recognition demotivates culturally diverse members and reinforces exclusion (5 studies - H7, H23). Subtheme 3.3: Diversity initiatives perceived as superficial do not dismantle structural inequities (2 studies - H21, H22).
Theme 4 (M4): *Team Cohesion and Shared Goals Strengthen Multicultural Performance Outcomes (9 studies)*	Subtheme 4.1: Trust, mutual respect, and team unity are foundational for cohesion and inclusion (8 studies - H8, H4). Subtheme 4.2: Structured social practices and inclusive retention strategies reinforce belonging and reduce turnover (1 studies - H37, H38). Subtheme 4.3: Shared purpose across cultural identities supports long-term collaboration and performance (3 studies - H11).
Theme 5 (M5): *Cultural Misfit and Subgrouping Fracture Team Integration and Performance (9 studies)*	Subtheme 5.1: Unacknowledged value differences and identity-based subgrouping fragment teams (7 studies - H6, H7, H30). Subtheme 5.2: Poorly structured diversity leads to conflict, dissatisfaction, and disengagement (1 study - H29). Subtheme 5.3: Repeated exclusion based on cultural traits leads to long-term disengagement (1 study - H7).
Theme 6 (M6): *Cultural Framing of Work Influences Participation, Authority, and Task Roles (4 studies)*	Subtheme 6.1: Cultural norms shape preferred work styles, decision-making pace, and hierarchy expectations (1 study - H15, H28). Subtheme 6.2: Work vs family obligations are sometimes misread as disengagement or unreliability (1 study - H17, H20). Category 6.3: Implicit norms undermine role clarity in multicultural teams (1 study - H14).
Theme 7 (M7): *Adaptive Leadership and Structural Inclusion Enable Diverse Teams to Thrive (7 studies)*	Subtheme 7.1: Inclusive leadership encourages diverse voices and empowers cultural engagement (4 studies - H10, H35) Subtheme 7.2: Agile work styles and team flexibility increase cultural responsiveness and innovation (6 studies - H9. H34,) Subtheme 7.3: Established team tenure and interpersonal respect reinforce adaptive team functioning (1 study - H19, H36))
Theme 8 (M8): *Decision-Making in Diverse Teams Is a Cultural Process that Requires Adaptation (2 studies)*	Category 8.1: Rigid decision-making processes conflict with collectivist and high-context norms (1 study - H27, H31). Theme 8.2: Disagreement is often avoided unless cultural safety is established (I study - H40).