

RESEARCH ON THE INFLUENCES OF CROSS-CULTURAL EXPERIENCE ON
LEADERSHIP IN THE CONTEXT OF CHINESE STATE-OWNED MNEs

Thesis Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Management

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Subject

This dissertation titled "Research on The Influences of Cross-Cultural Experience on Leadership in The Context of Chinese State-Owned MNEs" is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of a Doctorate of Management at University of Stirling.

The research explores the topic of cross-cultural experiences and its effect on leadership in Context of Chinese State-Owned MNEs. The study aims to contribute to the growing body of literature in the field of leading across cultures by providing insights drawn from both theoretical frameworks and empirical evidence gathered through qualitative research.

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Declaration

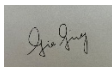
I declare that this thesis is founded on my own original research. Proper acknowledgment has been given through the citation of relevant sources whenever other individuals’ ideas have been utilized. Furthermore, I confirm that this thesis has not been previously or simultaneously submitted, either in its entirety or partially, for any other academic qualification at the University of Stirling or elsewhere. I take full responsibility for any inaccuracies and omissions found within this thesis.

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Abstract

From a global perspective, understanding the influence of cross-cultural experiences on leadership is crucial. It is the trend in managing across cultures because leadership refers to the self-reported leadership skills managers and employees identify and use to manage decision-making processes, especially in diverse workplace settings. This study's core objective is to explore the influence of cross-cultural experiences on leadership in the context of CMNEs. The author appropriated a qualitative descriptive research design to explore how the perceived effectiveness of interpersonal communication, perceived resource availability, and perceived intra-group similarity influence leadership improvement.

The analysis revealed that cross-cultural exposure functions not simply as a challenge, but as a developmental process—shaping leadership capabilities and driving transformation. Leaders in these enterprises are navigating institutional complexities, fostering ethical awareness, and working to create inclusive, value-oriented practices across diverse contexts. The research shows that change at the individual level tends to occur through reflection, especially at times of intercultural tension or failure. Leadership development programs must thus incorporate tools such as guided journaling, executive coaching, and formal peer feedback. Expanding future research to cover multiple industries—such as manufacturing, finance, technology, and energy—would strengthen the validity of the proposed “triple-layer” leadership model and enhance its relevance for a wider audience.

Keywords: Cross-Cultural Experiences, Chinese State-Owned Multinational Enterprises (CMNEs), Perceived Effectiveness, Interpersonal Communication, Perceived Resource Availability, Perceived Intra-Group Similarity, Leadership Improvement.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter provides the background to the study, highlighting significant aspects of cross-cultural experiences and leadership in the context of CMNEs. The chapter also explains the study problem statement and the gap that the study aims to fill. In this section, the study highlights the aims and objectives of the study and the research questions. Finally, this chapter's final segment describes the study's rationale and significance.

From different global perspectives, leadership is about enhancing the leadership abilities of leaders and team members of an organization.

Culture is one of the primary variables influencing the creation of various traits within the cross-cultural leadership setting, which varies from state to state. Culture, in particular, emphasizes characteristics that set one nation apart from another (Tobin, 2009). Zhang et al. (2023) indicate that cross-cultural experiences in cross-cultural corporations' context contribute to leadership by encouraging empathy, adaptation, and cross-cultural communication abilities. Leaders who value different viewpoints and experiences may successfully traverse complex organizational settings, fostering cooperation, innovation, and ethical decision-making (Fraser & Taylor, 2019). Apart from enhancing organizational success, these experiences help leaders foster inclusive leadership skills essential in today's international corporate environment. As a result, cross-cultural experiences impact a leadership style that enables leaders to bring diverse groups of people together, allowing them to demonstrate their expertise and particular abilities (Shah and Monahan, 2017).

Fraser and Taylor (2019) posit that an expatriate situation offers cross-cultural leaders more cultural diversity experience than local leaders. Since most people within the host country are typically natives, foreign leaders experience significant cross-cultural interactions. There has been a significant effect of Chinese state-owned multinational enterprises (CMNEs) on global markets, especially under the current era of globalization (Svetlicinii, 2020). These enterprises have constantly beefed-up worldwide partnership notably through projects like Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). CMNEs have therefore grown their global footprints by concentrating on quality infrastructure as well as business operations. According to Rottig and Torres-de-Oliveira (2018), their overseas assets now stand at an impressive 8 trillion yuan with over 8000 projects in more than 180 countries and regions. As such, this expansive international presence underscores the tremendous role played by CMNEs in global trade and investment.

Of note, integrating CMNEs into the global industrial chain is a strategic element in itself. These enterprises provide mutual economic gains and impetus to global economic development through win-win cooperation (Khilji, 2022). Their involvement in wide sectors—from energy to infrastructure—fosters innovation and technological advancement for both China and its global partners. This would, in turn, intertwine global markets and provide strength and stability to global economies (Fraser and Taylor, 2019). These efforts thus not only help to strengthen the economic influence of China for the CMNEs but also support a world economy that is integrated and cooperative.

1.2 Background of the Study

From a global perspective, understanding the influence of cross-cultural experiences on development is crucial. It is the trend in managing across cultures because leadership refers to the self-reported leadership skills managers and employees identify and use to manage decision-

making processes, especially in diverse workplace settings (Fraser & Taylor, 2019). While leadership is the systematic process of managing and directing a group of individuals in an organization, Wilson (2015) underscored that cross-cultural leadership involves engaging and leading a diverse cultural background workforce. Ahmad et al. (2023) supported that culture is also among the main factors affecting the emergence of different characteristics within the cross-cultural leadership context, which differs from state to state. Thus, cultural integration is crucial in managing across cultures.

1.2.1 The role of cross-cultural leadership in the context of globalization (cross-cultural experience)

Leadership has a few aspects that become crucial to the success of any organization, more so within the complex structures of cross-cultural enterprises. Setting a vision is about the most basic element of leadership. Visionary leaders are those who can explain the vision with clarity and inspiration, so as to set targets with a time reference, thereby motivating their followers toward the attainment of organizational goals. According to Khilji (2022), influential leaders envision the future by imagining exciting and ennobling possibilities. More precisely, in Chinese state-owned multinational enterprises, this shared vision binds diverse cultures of employees toward the long-term strategic directions of the company (Rottig and Torres de Oliveira, 2018). A well-articulated vision is essential for infusing a sense of purpose or direction that equips the firm with how to navigate through challenges in the global business environment.

Most business practices have been placing greater weight on the cross-cultural experiences of their leaders to enhance their performance outcomes. According to Jawas (2017), cross-cultural experiences take in an individual's or a leader's direct or indirect encounters with various elements of foreigners or foreign cultural backgrounds. Cultural factors are among the most significant

aspects affecting leadership and management practices at cross-cultural entities (Schlein et al., 2021). Therefore, cross-cultural enterprises should work diligently towards developing diverse and successful cross-cultural leadership teams that acknowledge and esteem cultural differences in the workplace.

Another primary critical dimension of effective leadership is communication skills. This means leaders ought to be able to communicate their vision and strategic goals clearly and persuasively. According to Connaughton (2023), communication in this field not only involves dissemination procedures for information flow but also the aspect of listening and engaging with the team members to enhance mutual understanding and collaboration. These leaders in CMNEs have to develop cross-cultural communication skills, including awareness and adaptation of various styles and preferences in communication. For example, leaders need to be sensitive to the high-context communication styles characteristic of most Asian cultures (Wu, 2019). This indirect communication relies on reading non-verbal cues in a situation. The transparency brought about by effective communication engenders trust and kicks in better organizational decision-making.

Alexandra (2023) posited that cross-cultural leaders use emotional and cultural intelligence to help them relate well with other organization members with understanding and empathy. The study established that the role of cross-cultural experiences in leadership includes increased visionary leadership. On the other hand, emergent leadership transpires when a member steps up as a leader within group interactions (Tuleja, 2021). Therefore, through experience with team diversity, cross-cultural leaders can develop this comprehension and guide team members to develop a similar understanding to ensure the organization benefits from the positive outcomes of team diversity.

Globally, cross-cultural experiences significantly impact leaders' communication and the moderating effects of their cultural backgrounds in diverse workplace settings. Fraser & Taylor

(2019) indicate that a successful leader in high-context cultures must blend a cross-cultural mindset with the universal principles of team buildings, goal settings, and leader personality. The studies indicate that this approach has an optimistic impact on organizations because the leaders become an essential part of the organizational processes. Cmielewski (2021) emphasized that with growing business shifts to new markets due to internationalization, cultural awareness and diversity in transnational establishments are relevant to business research and practice. According to Schlein et al. (2021), cross-cultural leaders and departmental managers in international businesses could benefit from cultural diversity to reach higher levels of personal and organizational performance by bringing together team members from low and high-context cultures.

There is a significant relationship between cross-cultural experiences, the vision, communication skills, team buildings, goal setting, and leader personality. Paesen et al. (2019) posited that cultural diversity offers beneficial differences in experience, perspectives, and knowledge that promote positive performance, especially for international firms whose operations provide employees with different experiences and backgrounds and equip them with country-specific knowledge for addressing cross-national issues. Similarly, (Ahmad et al. (2023) explain that as cross-cultural organizations increasingly embrace cultural diversity, corporate leaders need to demonstrate competent leadership skills underpinned by cultural intelligence to effectively address the unique needs of the cross-cultural labour force in these establishments.

Another critical aspect of leadership, particularly for multinational enterprises, is team building. According to Loon (2022) companies often have culturally diverse teams. Influential leaders understand how team building works and can build a competent team that depicts impressive performance since they know how to get the right mix. According to Tuckman's model 1965, group development undergoes forming, storming, norming, and performing critical in building effective

teams (Nanda et al., 2023). In CMNEs, leaders must progress through all these steps in a culturally diverse setting that influences team interaction and cohesiveness. Leaders skilled at building good teams can compose harmonious settings in which all the members would feel necessary for the ability to contribute particular inputs and differing perspectives. Such inclusiveness not only aids in increasing team performance but also in innovating and succeeding through putting together diverse talent in the team (Shah & Monahan, 2017). Thus, effective team building—one based on good communication and a compelling vision—lays the basis for successful leadership of any cultural enterprise.

Cross-cultural experiences pose distinct challenges and opportunities for individuals operating within cross-cultural enterprises. Compared to local enterprises, whether obtained through short-term engagements or long-term immersion into diversified cultural situations (Szunomár, 2020). Within the global business environment, dealing with suppliers and clients from multiple countries necessitates a thorough knowledge of different business practices, including communication styles, negotiation tactics, and ethical norms (Wang, 2021). In addition, leaders at cross-cultural enterprises face further complexity, hence the diversity of their teams in terms of culture. This brings out the importance of having great interpersonal skills coupled with cultural sensitivity to create cohesion and collaboration.

However, due to a lack of cultural awareness or sensitivity and other factors, cross-cultural experiences can become a source of problems for multinationals, as there may be cultural conflicts or misunderstandings. Therefore, it is essential not to underestimate the value of cross-cultural experiences, particularly when discussing leadership performance within MNEs (Tuleja, 2021). According to Lan (2024), cross-cultural leaders are more competent at navigating the complexities of international business settings, resolving conflicts, managing cross-cultural relationships, and

utilizing diversity to spur innovation and organizational success. Leaders who welcome and capitalize on cross-cultural experiences will be well-positioned to create inclusive, culturally sensitive work cultures that support cross-cultural enterprises thriving in an increasingly linked world as globalization continues to reshape the business landscape.

As the cultural backgrounds of the leaders moderate the effects of team nationality diversity in various workplace settings, one can expect that the impact on personal and team performance will be more favourable with foreign leaders on the host country rather than local leaders or those who have longer tenure with the team. In the same line, Engle and Schlaegel (2023) argue that cultural intelligence may serve as a substitute for the other by reducing the level of substitutability: as a result, the net effect of the cultural leadership conditions provides more pronounced effects among leaders with foreign experiences or short tenure with the diverse teams.

In this era of increased digitization and globalization, it is generally presumed that cross-cultural experiences underpinned by cultural intelligence foster leadership effectiveness. For instance, Tuleja (2021) posited that cultural intelligence represents a leader's capability to cross borders and thrive in multiple cultural backgrounds. The scholar established that corporate leaders with broader cross-cultural experiences were more effective in their leadership skills, an effect that is usually mediated by cultural awareness and communication competence. Nevertheless, little evidence has systematically verified this postulation. Founded on this premise, the current study developed theoretical and conceptual perspectives that articulate how and when cross-cultural experiences increase cross-cultural leaders' effectiveness. Thus, the study hypothesizes that cross-cultural leaders with broad cross-cultural experiences have increased leadership effectiveness.

Although cultural diversity also has some challenges, contemporary research in this field has recognized the need to consider the moderating effects of the leaders' cultural backgrounds in the

diversity–performance relationships. Lan (2024) supported the idea that corporate and team leadership are imperative. Various theoretical and contextual analyses put cultural diversity at the core of understanding cross-cultural experiences in managing across cultures. Drawing on these perspectives, it can be concluded that significant factors, including the leader’s cultural background and leader team tenure reflecting cross-cultural leaders’ experience with cultural diversity and awareness, positively moderate the association between team performance, cultural diversity, and leadership.

In today’s dynamic business world, a cross-cultural manager presents a distinctive set of leadership characteristics for successful negotiation across cultural landscapes, cross-cultural organizations, and a unified global audience. Leadership of the country, particularly for Chinese cross-cultural corporations, is a phenomenon that should be understood when globalization is being accelerated because national leaders are usually the driving force of globalization efforts (Wang, 2021). Empirical studies indicate that not only do successful and failed leadership cases of cross-cultural corporations give compulsory points of cross-cultural leadership influence on corporations’ success, but also how such companies can pull through in various situations.

Leadership is increasingly recognized as critical to driving organizational performance and competitiveness in the global economy. Leaders are important in defining company culture, encouraging innovation, and driving strategic goals (D’Iribarne et al., 2020). As a result, leaders and leadership roles within CMNEs are increasingly regarded as necessary in achieving international expansion and long-term success (Wu, 2019). Such a shift in perception has led to an increased appreciation of the role of leadership in ensuring that the business, as well as desire competitiveness in the present global market (Carminati, 2021).

Along the same line, existing literature suggests that underpinned by cultural intelligence, organizational cultures are molded by the leaders, which helps promote innovation and strategic movements. Therefore, the influence and significance of chief executives and leadership in transnational corporations are more valued as the tools that help them build efficient partnership expansion and sustainable development (Engle and Schlaegel, 2023). It is on this premise that the current study is dedicated to exploring the strategies used by leaders to negotiate the cross-cultural aspects of leadership and effectively lead diverse teams on the global stage.

1.2.2 Chinese State-owned Cross-cultural Enterprises (CMNEs)

Of the many factors, leadership is a very critical component for the success and sustainability of any organization, more so considering the complex dynamic environments of cross-cultural enterprises. Therefore, in the scenarios of Chinese state-owned multinational enterprises, leadership burdens further complicate the already diverse cultural, political, and economic elements that come into play at their nexus. Based on those intricacies, influential leaders in CMNEs have to sail through while ensuring continuity with domestic and international business objectives. However, Svetlicinii (2020) emphasized that this calls for a comprehensive cultural difference literacy, the ability to foster an inclusive workplace, and an ability to drive strategies that spread across varied cultural landscapes.

In China, Chinese State-owned Enterprises (CMNEs) substantially influence the overseas expansion of leading Chinese multinational corporations. Globalization heavily depends on multinational enterprises, which spur economic development and facilitate international trade and investment (Svetlicinii, 2020). According to Rottig and Torres de Oliveira (2018), the dominance of State-owned Enterprises in China's top 100 multinational companies is evident, with about 38 being state-owned entities by 2023. This considerable presence emphasizes State-owned

Enterprises' enormous role in the global market, particularly outbound direct investments from China and the rising impact of the Chinese economy (Wu, 2019). Specifically, the roles of CMNEs in Chinese economy can be discussed as follows.

Firstly, since CMNEs have gone global quickly, it constitutes an important force to enhance China's participate in globalization. They are becoming some of the most critical actors in world trade today (Svetlicinii, 2020). This trend exhibits China's strategic intent to penetrate international markets and reinforce its global economic position. As these State-owned Enterprises expand their operations abroad, they contribute to China's rapid growth and further strengthen its status as a global financial powerhouse (Rottig & Torres de Oliveira, 2018). Furthermore, China's growing involvement in global commerce shows how it is shaping international business networks and starting closer links with other countries (Wu, 2019).

Secondly, the cross-cultural experience of CMNEs sets inspiring examples to other multinational enterprises (Wang, 2021). These instruments were meant to act as prominent players, which are needed to readily cause innovation, job creation, and economic development both in inventing and beyond its borders. According to Rottig and Torres (2018), Chinese state-owned multinational enterprises could be in the driver's seat, which means that they could lead the future of business on an international level. Zhang et al. (2023) posited that their expanding influence and assets could make them a formidable economic power for the growing strategic role of China.

Thirdly, it is generally recognized that CMNEs has been significantly contributing to the economic development and prosperity of the Chinese society (Wu, 2019). These generated factors are set forth to yield much in terms of creativity, job creation, novelty, and growth of the domestic and worldwide economic sectors (Zhang et al., 2023). With the growing expansion of Chinese Multinational Enterprises in the international market, their operations on the international stage

CMNEs have to use their resources combined with their expertise to become the central role shapers of the global business landscape (Svetlicinii, 2020).

Fourthly, CMNEs in the ever-growing international market has been in a key position to achieve China's strategic aims on the world stage (Lan, 2024). Spurred by these economic agents, a trend of economic development and trade in the country will be highly expected. It will further enhance the country's position as a global economic superpower. As Chinese Multinational Enterprises grow and add forward-looking innovations, they become a solid foundation for China's economic growth trajectory and help assert its global presence internally and externally (Zhang et al., 2023).

Cross-cultural leadership in CMNEs gives an organization a coherent and efficient culture that can be able to integrate different views, practices, and orientations from its organization members. Leaders should be able to manage cultural nuances and solve possible conflicts that might arise from differing values, beliefs, and communication styles (Lan, 2024). This applies to the effects of cultural dimensions related to power distance, individualism versus collectivism, and uncertainty avoidance—everything outlined by Hofstede's theory of cultural dimensions. For instance, leaders have to blend the natural hierarchy of traditional Chinese business relations with more egalitarian traditions common in Western settings (Zhang et al., 2023). By so doing, they will have achieved what it takes to build trust, foster close collaboration, and drive performance across dispersed geographies.

1.2.3 The Importance of the Roles of Leaders and Leadership

Leadership has a critical effect on the course of organizations particularly within the direction of MNEs like the CMNEs. The key accountability of leaders is to provide overall guidance and define a general course of action for an organization (Crawford, 2023). It does not only focus on the specific conditions and capabilities of markets and organizations but also takes the perspective of

future developments (Benson, 2024). Leaders are strategic thinkers whose compounding capabilities are inclined towards providing ideas that are executable and relevant to the organization's objective. Walsh and Gleeson (2023) also mentioned that leaders who can create and communicate a vision gain better chances for mobilization of their workforce for other strategic goals. This visionary leadership is important in the current world of constantly changing and increasing competition as it is characterized by the operation of CMNEs.

Not only do organizational leaders have to set the vision, but they also need to develop and maintain a concerned and vibrant organizational culture. According to Crawford (2023), this offers an atmosphere of trust, self-managed work teams, and respect for fellow employees, regardless of their different cultural backgrounds. Bezio (2018) also explains that leaders, by their actions, decisions, and communication, are most influential in creating and even continuing to reinforce the organization's culture. Leaders in CMNEs have to be culturally smart and adept at managing cultural difference and bringing about inclusivity. This is to be able to build teams that bond effectively for common goals despite cultural differences. It is through the development of a positive organizational culture that leaders can encourage employee engagement, satisfaction, and productivity to contribute to the organizational drive towards success.

Finally, leaders drive innovation and organizational change. To survive in the rapidly moving business environment of today, an organization has to innovate and be responsive toward the market at high speed. Leaders set the leading pace by creating an organizational climate instigating creativity, experimentation, and responsible risk-taking (Walsh & Gleeson, 2023). They provide people with the proper resources, support, and autonomy to experiment and innovate. Moreover, leaders need to be able to act as agents of change who can credibly lead the process of change within their respective organizations (Boon, 2019). This involves handling resistance,

communicating the enormous benefits of initiatives, and managing the transition so that no damage is inflicted on the organization. Hughes (2023) believes, sound leadership is one of the essential ingredients for organizational change because it propels and sustains the momentum of the process. Thus, in CMNEs, the conditions of markets and business environments are constantly changing; therefore, the ability of a leader to build an organization that can innovate and change continuously will hold the key to long-term success.

1.2.4 Leadership as a Dynamic Concept

The reality is that cross-cultural experiences will offer so much to the influence of significant leadership changes, which is a dynamic and changing concept. These changes could be looked at in terms of a wide range of perspectives that reflect differences in leadership behaviors, attitudes, and approaches (Ahmad et al., 2023). For instance, people with cross-cultural experiences would have an increased ability to influence people through their varying perspectives and cultural insights to influence and inspire people (Rottig & Torres de Oliveira, 2018). Moreover, cross-cultural experiences can help to ensure quite a bit of transparency since leaders will understand that cross-cultural environments demand open communication and inclusiveness.

More cross-cultural experience pinpoints that the primary leadership attributes are integrity and accountability, allowing them to lead through a bundle of ethical dilemmas without wavering in holding ethics above their cultural comfort zones (Fraser & Taylor 2019). Ultimately, different experiences and perspectives gives the leaders a likely-element to act on decisions with confidence, cultural sensitivity and wise judgements. As such it is important to consider the short-term effects of cross-cultural experiences on current leadership, as well as the long-term effect on leadership styles development and change (Ahmad et al., 2023). As leaders increasingly commune over wider geographical spans, the more competent and adaptable they are in responding to cross-cultural

experiences, the better chance we will have of achieving inclusive leadership in practice and of promoting organizational success.

1.2.5 Research Gaps

Research indicates culture influences leadership conduct through established communication standards and decision-making approaches and power dynamics and team collaboration methods. The majority of research about leadership behaviour stems from Western environments which have different organizational frameworks and governance systems and leadership principles than Chinese CMNEs. Research about cross-cultural assignments shows their impact on leadership adaptability but scientists have not fully explained how leaders process cultural signals and control their behavior when working across different cultures situations (Alexandra, 2023). However, the research lacks analysis of China's special institutional environment which includes state control and Belt and Road initiatives and policy-driven economic direction.

The specific conditions of China's business environment affect how leaders handle team communication and trust development and collaboration with diverse cultural groups (Ahmad et al., 2023). The research lacks evidence about how Western leadership findings translate to Chinese multinational settings because different organizational and cultural factors might create new influence pathways. The research thus, requires investigation of Chinese CMNEs to determine if established leadership patterns from Western studies apply through their own organizational and cultural systems.

The literature review shows that culture expresses specific aspects that distinguish a nation from another. Current literature indicates that culture is communication; communication is culture because it plays a vital role in how individuals interact in various situations (Alexandra, 2023). Therefore, cross-cultural experiences significantly impact leaders' communication in diverse

workplace settings. However, little evidence shows how cross-cultural experiences influence their leadership in the context of CMNEs.

Further, non-researching will result in establishing a real impact of cross-cultural experience on leadership within the Chinese State-owned Multinational Enterprises. Moreover, the result cannot be applied to other studies, as unique factors exist, such as government influence, distinct cultural dynamics, and specific business strategies under the Belt and Road Initiative, which make them different from the CMNES (Svetlicinii, 2020). If not, then effective leadership by CMNEs may elude them and hurt global competitiveness and international cooperation (Wu, 2019). An understanding of this kind of dynamics is fundamental in developing leadership strategies to sail through and leverage the multicultural environments that drive the success of and contribution of CMNEs to the global economy.

There is a visible lack of knowledge in the scholarly world regarding how leaders and leadership in CMNEs are shaped by the cross-cultural experience (Svetlicinii, 2020). This deficit can be seen quickly by delving into the articles, journals, and other literature relevant to this topic. Although the literature on leadership in cross-cultural environments and cross-cultural management contains a great deal of research and findings, CMNEs are yet to provide consultations concerning the effect of cross-cultural experiences on leaders and leadership in CMNEs.

In addition, there is also limited evidence on cross-cultural experiences, cross-cultural expertise's impact, and internal mechanisms on leadership (including personal level, relationship level including leadership emergence, and leadership selection) (Ahmad et al., 2023). To fill these gaps in the literature, the study explores various aspects, including perceived resources availability, perceived power distance, perceived intra-group similarity and value internalization and problem-

solving strategies to correlate how these factors in managing a diverse workplace setting influence relationship levels, cross-cultural awareness, and cultural integration.

At present, there is a research gap regarding the overall understanding of how cross-culturalism influences the leadership of managers and executives in emerging economies where conditions are specific to the nature of CMEs. Although it is quite true that the work of some researchers overlaps this aspect of cross-culturalism and leadership, there is an evident lack when it comes to CMNEs that are directly empirically researched (Wu, 2019). Consequently, efforts are required for some evidence-based research, which will be devoted to the subtleties of cross-cultural experiences within CMNEs. Hence, conducting an empirical study becomes vital. CMNEs' current and former leaders' experiences are used as research objects, thus developing new theory bases and managerial practices suitable for the conditions of CMNEs.

1.3 Research Problem

The problem in this analysis only is a matter of leading a cross-cultural corporation's cross-cultural team. It is because the phenomenon's challenges involve the non-exposure of the lead and the led to cross-cultural settings (Mayer and Oosthuizen, 2021). This exposure results in much difficulty during interpersonal engagements among these two groups (Szunomár, 2020). As the study that investigated the lack of culture orientation leading to an obstacle in multination innovation noted, multiple reasons contributed to such a lack of knowledge. Similarly, if cultural knowledge is referred to in terms of values orientation, style of work, and work-life balance, the non-exposure may properly account for the problem (Rottig & Torres de Oliveira, 2018). In other words, individuals from various cultures may differ in their approaches to problem-solving, decision-making, and interpersonal communication, resulting in conflicts and inefficiencies within cross-cultural teams

Furthermore, the insufficiency of integrating cross-cultural experiences into leadership practices in cross-cultural enterprises can be another challenge. Without their leaders and team members' exposure to diverse cultural perspectives, navigating cultural differences becomes problematic while trying to bring out the strengths of the cross-cultural workforce (Eseryel et al., 2020). As cross-culturalism continues to be incorporated into leadership training at different levels in companies and enterprises, there remains a gap in the specific impact of cross-culturalism in improving leadership effectiveness (Torres and Augusto, 2018). The research on this gap is scarce which makes it harder for organizations to assess and harness the benefits of cross-cultural experience in creating effective leaders. This study has implications with respect to the relevance and importance of MNE leadership and teamwork insights related to cross-culture experience. There are a number of ways in which companies can address these challenges and increase innovation and productivity, not least by creating a more collaborative and open working environment — something critical for today's increasingly globalized corporate landscape.

Moreover, the absence of scientific proof on such a subject makes it difficult for organizations to take the measurements and assessments of their cross-cultural leadership endeavors. Therefore, the situation requires empirical investigations that would get into the details of the distinctive influence cross-cultural experiences have on leadership. Consequently, the knowledge provided will help to form effective organizational leadership strategies.

1.4 Aim of the study

This study's core objective is to explore the influence of cross-cultural experiences on leadership in the context of CMNEs. It examines the effect of cross-cultural experiences on cross-cultural leaders' aspects, including problem-solving, innovation, and self-regulation. It also discusses the

cultivation of leadership styles and relationships with others, which include interpersonal communication skills.

Specific Research Objectives

The specific objectives of the current study are:

1. To understand the content and critical aspects of the leaders' cross-cultural experience in CMNEs.
2. To explore the influences of cross-cultural experience on the leaders' leadership, including the critical aspects of individual, relational and collective leadership.
3. To configure recommendations for developing cross-cultural experience as a pillar of leadership schemes

1.5 The Research Questions

1. What do leaders perceive and experience in cross-culture contexts?
2. What impact will cross-cultural experiences have on leadership?
3. How cross-cultural experience affect leadership?

1.6 Chapter Summary

In conclusion, Chapter One provided the basic framework for this study by highlighting the rising importance of cross-cultural leadership in a globalised society, notably in the operations of Chinese multinational state-owned businesses. It defined leadership as a dynamic, developing construct affected by multicultural complexity and indicated particular research gaps that require more investigation. The chapter also addressed the research topic, purpose, objectives, and guiding questions that would guide the investigation. The next chapter provides a critical overview of

current literature, focussing on major theoretical and empirical contributions that enrich and contextualise the study's analytical approach.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Chapter Overview

The literature on the influences of cross-cultural experience on leadership is critically examined in this chapter, with special attention paid to understanding the content and critical aspects of the leaders' cross-cultural experience in CMNEs. These elements are closely interrelated because cross-cultural experiences shape how workers view the leaders' leadership skills, including the critical aspects of individual, relational and collective leadership (Torres and Augusto, 2018). The review incorporates insights from a variety of contexts, including recent empirical studies and well-established theoretical frameworks.

There are six major sections in this chapter. The basic concept of leadership is examined first, and then cross-cultural leadership experiences are covered. The impact of cross-cultural experience on leadership is examined in the following section. The focus then shifts to the mechanism by which cross-cultural experience influence leadership and learning effect of cross-cultural experiences on leadership. The chapter concludes by examining the theoretical frameworks relevant to this study and finally outlines the gaps in the body of knowledge, which provides justification for the current investigation.

2.2 The Concept of Leadership

Leadership is a basic concept in organizational research, and it means the ability to influence, guide, and stimulate individuals to achieve shared objectives. Over time, researchers have developed many leadership theories that offer diverse explanations regarding what makes a good leader. Classical studies and research, such as trait theory (Wilhelmus, 2020; Alexandra, 2023), suggest that some innate characteristics—intelligence, confidence, and emotional stability—are the keys to leadership success. Nonetheless, subsequent research, especially behavioural theories (Wu,

2019; Badger, 2020; Tan, 2022) focused on the fact that leadership effectiveness is a function of behaviours, not of inborn traits. These early approaches formed the foundation for more situational and dynamic leadership models prevalent today.

Since environmental, cultural, and interpersonal elements influence leadership effectiveness, leadership theory has evolved towards context-dependent and relational approaches. According to situational and contingency theories (Fiedler, 1967; Hersey & Blanchard, 1969), leaders must adjust their approaches to suit the needs of their teams and the demands of the circumstance. Modern approaches, including transformational leadership (Crawford, 2023), place more emphasis on inspiration, vision, and the capacity to inspire followers to go beyond self-interest. As a result, they are especially applicable in varied and international corporate settings. On the other hand, transactional leadership (Ahmad et al., 2023) emphasises incentives and exchanges that are organised. This approach may work well in hierarchical organisations, but it could not be adaptable enough for cross-cultural leadership situations.

Leadership is increasingly seen through a communal and cross-cultural perspective in today's linked society. Cross-cultural leadership emphasises how cultural variations influence leadership effectiveness and expectations (Thomas, 2022; Dilekli and Tezci, 2020). Furthermore, leadership roles can be disseminated among teams rather than concentrated in a single person, according to ideas like distributed leadership (Ibarrola, 2017) and shared leadership (Badger, 2020). These modern viewpoints highlight how crucial flexibility, teamwork, and cultural intelligence (CQ) are to effective global leadership. Addressing the difficulties of cross-cultural management requires a knowledge of leadership via a variety of theoretical frameworks as organisations traverse different cultural landscapes.

2.3 Cross-cultural Leadership Experiences

The term "cross-cultural experience" describes how people interact and are exposed to cultures other than their own. Such experience can be obtained in various ways: for instance, residing or working in a foreign country, interacting with different cultures, participating in international projects, or engaging in learning processes in a cross-cultural environment (Badger, 2020). In other words, cross-cultural leadership is leading and managing a diverse team with individuals from different cultural backgrounds. This forms a very significant skill in today's globalized business environment. Dilekli and Tezci (2020) described cross-cultural leadership as the ability of the leader to deal with and align different cultural norms and practices within a team. According to Ibarrola (2017), cross-cultural leadership experiences require that leaders continuously engage themselves in diverse cultural environments, impacting their leadership styles and effectiveness. As soon as leaders get accustomed to cross-cultural surroundings, the level of consciousness and understanding regarding different cultural norms, values, and practices arises. Thomas (2022) supported the idea that their exposure increases the likelihood of managing complex activities involving global business operations. Thus, leaders with extensive cross-cultural experience tend to be more culturally intelligent, which includes cognitive, motivational, and behavioural aspects necessary to manage intercultural relationships.

A case in point is that cross-cultural leaders are highly skilled in creating inclusive workplaces for all employees, irrespective of their ethnic affiliations, since they enhance innovation and teamwork among subordinates from different backgrounds (Badger, 2020). However, this study can be criticized for relying on self-reported measures rather than actual ones. In addition, there is a need for more longitudinal and mixed-method studies that would provide insights into how these cross-cultural experiences affect leadership over time.

Moreover, cross-cultural experiences' influence on leadership can be effectuated by the type and duration of the cross-cultural experience. International assignments in the form of traveling or working with global project teams can also be beneficial for creating awareness for long-term cultural shock periods. However, Forgeard (2021) argued that longer initiatives like expatriate assignments or multi-dimensional engagements with the international markets would likely leave longer and deeper impressions about leadership motivation. This is mainly because managers and leaders engaged in long-term cross-cultural assignments develop greater flexibility, understanding, and planning, all of which are necessary ingredients for managing operations in a globally competitive setting.

Long-term cross-cultural experiences assist leaders in a better position to be acquainted with a sound global business environment and improve their capacity to establish trust with stakeholders from different cultures (Tan, 2022). However, the literature reveals a discussion of the existing knowledge regarding some leadership experiences and how these experiences lead to processes that affect leadership practices (Badger, 2020). Thus, further research should aim to conduct detailed investigations on these factors by considering both the qualitative and quantitative dimensions of cross-cultural leadership.

Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory (2001) strongly emphasizes the need to comprehend cultural differences to manage and lead heterogeneous teams successfully. Power distance and individuality vs. collectivism are two critical cultural variables identified by Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory (Zhang et al., 2023). However, it has been criticized for perpetuating stereotypes and having a stagnant cultural perspective. Opponents of this theory contend that Hofstede's paradigm overlooks regional differences and oversimplifies the complexity of culture

(Thomas (2022)). Both studies highlight the vital necessity of cultural sensitivity and adaptation in leadership, especially in today's linked globe, notwithstanding these objections.

Globalization strongly increases the demand for leaders who manage cultural diversity effectively. Crawford (2023) stresses that the growth of MNEs has generated a demand for leaders who can deal with the intricacies of international markets as much as those with equally diverse workforces. Through in-depth interviews with global executives, Crawford (2023) identifies that high-performing leaders often possess high cultural intelligence that helps them bridge cultural gaps. However, the qualitative nature of this work might further lead to limited generalizability and the potential for researcher bias. In particular, the personal experiences that interviewed executives describe might not represent trends or challenges leaders face in other contexts or industries.

According to Badger (2020), cultural intelligence encompasses cognitive, motivational, and behavioural elements essential for effective global leadership. Their work combines organizational behaviour and psychology perspectives, offering a holistic view of cultural intelligence. Nonetheless, this all-encompassing approach can be challenging to implement in practice, which may limit its usefulness in regular leadership development programs. Thus, although theoretically sound, integrating various perspectives into a single framework may provide difficulties in operationalization and measurement in practical settings.

Traditional leadership theories based on Western contexts cannot apply to all cultures. Therefore, there is a need to develop theories based on the cultural aspects of different regions. Across the cross-cultural adaptation theories, adaptation in various backgrounds is conceived as a dynamic recounting of the anthropogenic tendency to scramble for an internal equilibrium in the face of habitually adverse ecological settings (Berry and Ramos, 2023). The theory maintains that even though unique in particular circumstances, every stranger in an unaccustomed background

embarks on creating and upholding relatively stable and reciprocal relations within the host setting. For instance, an individual from a low-context culture might create good relationships with co-workers to survive in a workplace setting with a high-context culture.

The central concept behind cross-cultural leadership and management is to adopt an inclusive management approach to the cultural practices of subsidiaries' states, with diverse races and cultures in the international businesses. In line with this model, Akhter et al. (2020) emphasized that adapting to new environments might take time. However, the transition pace may vary from one person to another. For instance, unlike those from high-context cultures, individuals from low-context cultures might experience significant life communication challenges in finding appropriate levels of context needs in all circumstances.

2.3.1 Hofstede's Six Dimensions of Culture

According to Chessum et al. (2022), Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory is a significant framework for managing across cultures and for multicultural communication. The theory highlights the effects of the social order's culture founded on the beliefs and values of its associates. The framework is built on a solid structure derived from factor analysis to identify how these social norms and principles or cultural practices relate to human behaviour in diverse groups. In his research, Hofstede identified six characteristic models to measure human behaviour in a multicultural society (Berry and Ramos, 2023).

Initially, the original model proposed four dimensions of culture along which cultural practices, beliefs, and social values could be examined (Wilhelmus, 2020). These dimensions included uncertainty avoidance and masculinity-femininity measure, which comprise task orientation against person orientation in the social order. Other important measures of cultural values include individualism-collectivism and the power distance dimension, representing the strength of social

hierarchy (Chessum et al., 2022). In his independent research in Hong Kong, Hofstede established another significant dimension of culture. According to Hofstede's six dimensions of culture, long-term orientation was introduced in the model to cover long-standing aspects of cultural values that had not been included in the original paradigm (Berry and Ramos, 2023). Furthermore, in 2010, the indulgence versus self-restraint measure was introduced as the sixth dimension of cultural values, beliefs, and behaviour in a diverse group.

In light of Hofstede's six dimensions of culture, the model underpins research tradition in cross-cultural psychology. According to Wang et al. (2021), Hofstede's work has been drawn upon by many consultants and scholars in various fields, especially communication, international relations, and cross-cultural business management.

2.3.2 External Environment Compliance: Complying with Local Regulations

Regulatory compliance is a key aspect of cross-cultural leadership in multinational corporations (MNEs). Adhering to regulatory compliance helps firms align with the host country's legal, economic, and societal systems. In alignment with Kostova and Zaheer (1999), institutional theory holds that organizations need to conform to formal and informal regulatory systems in order to gain legitimacy in the host country. In addition to legal compliance, regulatory compliance entails cultural adaptation to host country governance systems, labour laws, and business ethics. For instance, Chessum et al. (2022) illustrate that corporate governance in Western-based corporations emphasizes transparency and shareholder rights, yet regulatory systems in China emphasize state influence and long-term economic stability (Crawford, 2023). This creates a complex environment for Chinese state-owned multinational corporations (CMNEs), where leaders need to balance host country and home country policies.

Notwithstanding the need for conformity, managing contradictory laws across countries may be difficult. According to Walsh and Gleeson (2023), MNEs doing business in emerging economies face obstacles due to institutional voids, which are holes in corporate governance and regulatory compliance. For instance, CEOs of Chinese CMNEs growing into Africa and Southeast Asia must be adaptable because these regions frequently have disparities in labour standards, environmental regulations, and anti-corruption legislation. While some academics contend that rigorous adherence to host-country legislation might reduce risks (Benson, 2024), others counter that overly stringent compliance can stifle strategic flexibility and creativity. On the other hand, Hughes (2023) contend that in order to preserve a competitive edge, businesses frequently embrace symbolic compliance, which is the surface-level alignment with legislation.

The argument of compliance also touches upon ethics and social responsibility of business (CSR). For instance, Walsh and Gleeson (2023) assert that MNEs ought to combine local compliance with global best practice ethical compliance. Nevertheless, there is a school of thought that believes CSR is better when it is contextually framed than when it is enforced. For CMNEs, the challenge is how to observe international compliance standards and at the same time, honor local business practices (Crawford, 2023). Some scholars claim that organizational leaders with cross cultural regulatory intelligence, that is, the capacity to assimilate and respond to legal and ethical diverse frameworks, are able to manage compliance more effectively (Forgeard, 2021). Further studies ought to look into the role of cross-cultural leadership on regulatory decision making and the ways CMNEs manage the dichotomy of home country policies and host country legislations.

2.3.3 Cross-cultural communication

For leaders working in multinational enterprises (MNEs), effective cross-cultural communication is crucial, especially when working with diverse teams, developing trust, and interacting with the

local culture. Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory (1980) offers a starting point to understand how value, communication, and business practice differences—cultural distance—impede effective leadership. Leaders who do not manage these cultural gaps often experience misunderstandings, lack of team cohesion, and poor decision-making (Dilekli and Tezci, 2020). Local customs and communication styles enable leaders to build credibility and inclusivity, which is crucial in CMNEs (Chinese Multinational Enterprises) that operate across culturally diverse regions. More engaged leaders with host cultures have been shown to be more adaptable and display higher levels of cultural intelligence (CQ), and thus can expertly manage intricate interpersonal relationships (Raithel et al., 2021).

Even though language is an important part of trust-building for cross-cultural plasticity, it takes more than that; one exhibits understanding, dignified, and considerate behavior toward other cultures. Cochran (2021) points out that, in high context cultures like China and Japan, trust is acquired over a long duration with a single relationship, whereas for low context cultures, it is given more freely. Thus, leaders must adjust their communication style accordingly so that it harmonizes with the cultural standards of their stakeholders and teams. Furthermore, Raithel et al. (2021) add that leaders who include inclusive leadership behaviors such as valuing diversity and open communication develop psychologically safe spaces where team members work together in a collaborative manner. Future research should explore how CMNE leaders can craft their cross-cultural communication style to improve business and leadership performance.

From the review of existing literature, it is apparent that cross-cultural experiences affect people's communication skills and leadership development. Along this line, Mata et al. (2020) supported that through cross-cultural leadership experiences, leaders can combine leadership skills and acquaintance with sensitivity to other people's cultural values and beliefs, self-awareness, and

curiosity, which enhances their communication skills. Along with communication skills, leadership development, and cross-culture communication, Lüscher (2018) underscored that culture is communication while communication is culture. Therefore, cross-cultural experiences have significant impacts on the leaders' communication skills.

Communication skills are crucial in leadership because they enable leaders to take responsibility for their teams and convey clear messages unambiguously. According to Cotter and Reichard (2019), leaders with excellent leadership and communication skills can set the tone for their workplace settings, making it easier for teams from different cultural backgrounds to understand their work expectations. Along this line, Lu et al. (2022) emphasized that communication is essential for effective leadership in cross-cultural settings. The scholar holds that cross-cultural leaders must possess good communication skills. Cotter and Reichard (2019) supported that such skills are crucial in leadership development because they inspire leaders and empower diverse teams around them. In addition, recent studies indicate that cross-cultural leaders would hardly be understood by individuals from different cultural backgrounds without good communication skills. Therefore, effective communication is a critical skill every cross-cultural leader must possess for effective leadership.

Effective leadership is usually measured in terms of the time team members take to accomplish a given task shorn of any friction, and good communication skills play a significant role in reaching organizational goals. Gupta and Gregory (2017) state good communication skills are essential for effective cross-cultural leadership. It helps the leader to develop a bond with teams, bringing together members to the desired outcome by clearly defining responsibilities and organizational goals. Therefore, leaders develop strong bonds with team associates by clearly communicating

important information, responsibilities, and organizational goals with their teams without miscommunications and quarrels.

In addition, Rich (2017) posited that good communication skills build trust between the leaders and other people in the organization. According to Cochran (2021), trust in cross-cultural leadership binds a team together. Thus, leaders with effective communication skills certify that they can undertake different leadership activities to build and strengthen trust among their teams, which leads to efficiency in undertaking various tasks. Furthermore, through cross-cultural experiences, cross-cultural leaders can communicate every member's roles while avoiding team confusion. Thus, cross-cultural leaders build on communication skills to seek flexibility in the workplace, which fosters an optimistic work place setting that enables members to attain organizational goals without friction.

Culture and communication, which underpins cultural integration, are crucial in cross-cultural leadership because personal values, social beliefs, values, and cultural norms make up different cultures. Chen and Zhu (2020) supported that cross-cultural experiences significantly impact leadership ability. The scholar holds that leaders' cross-cultural experiences influence their collective-level capability and the underlying organizational management mechanisms, such as ethical decision-making processes in various workplace settings.

According to Boivin (2020), strong leaders adapt national cultural norms to the targeted cultures and lead the way while upholding a diversity and inclusion atmosphere for every individual in the workplace. Similarly, Lüscher (2018) emphasized that culture is communication; communication is culture because it plays a vital role in how individuals interact in various situations. Chen and Zhu (2020) supported that cross-cultural experiences significantly impact leaders' abilities in diverse workplace settings. This aspect enables cross-cultural leadership teams to recognize and

respect cultural differences through effective communication. Therefore, cross-cultural leaders who recognize cultural differences can set the most appropriate tone across various teams, enabling them to succeed.

Cross-cultural experiences also enable leaders to leverage teams' diverse backgrounds to develop innovative solutions and create an environment that encourages and celebrates different perspectives. Futaqi and Mashuri (2022) supported that cross-cultural experiences enhance leaders' abilities by strengthening their communication, conflict resolution, decision-making, and negotiation skills.

2.3.4 Value Internalization: Developing a Core Value for a Diverse Team

Having strong leaders with the ability to integrate different cultural practices needs a focused value internalization system that aids in establishing a cohesive set of core values. Acknowledging and accepting issues related to different cultures in organizational principles, ethics, and business customs is restrictive while attempting to building a multi-cultural organizational culture. Individuals internalize values and organizational objectives to an employee's personal goals and outcomes in their own life (Chen and Zhu, 2020). This process is particularly critical in Chinese state-owned multinational enterprises (CMNEs) where leaders have to deal with Confucian ascribed values of hierarchy and collectivism and international business practices, which meritocracy and innovation (Walsh and Gleeson, 2023). Even though Hofstede's (1980) cultural dimensions show that values are an essential part of national cultures, Benson (2024) argue that leaders on the globe can create common values through shared vision, communication, moral leadership, and team work.

Whether leaders should create a global organisational culture or adjust to local cultural norms is a major topic of discussion in the literature. Findings of Hughes (2023) support cultural

reconciliation, which involves leaders incorporating many cultural perspectives to create a hybrid organisational culture that takes into account other points of view. Effective executives, on the other hand, ought to support a robust, cohesive company brand that cuts across cultural divides, according to the Walsh and Gleeson's (2023) research. But in CMNEs, where cultural distance might cause resistance and misalignment, this strategy might not always work. According to studies, executives who enforce strict corporate standards without taking local customs into account frequently experience communication breakdowns and employee alienation (Forgeard, 2021). Conversely, leaders that involve staff members in the process of developing core values increase loyalty and trust, promoting an inclusive leadership style that improves team cohesiveness. Internalization of values is also a nudge for ethical decision making and leadership credibility. Effective leaders are those who are perceived as authentic and integrity-driven around their value systems, and research shows that such leaders are more capable of earning the trust and the respect of diverse teams (Alexandra, 2023). However, ethical dilemmas can emerge when organizational values are in contention with local customs and business practices. For instance, Szunomár (2020), draw attention to a phenomenon in which the ethical tissue of regions within the world, differs from global ethical norms, leading to challenges of CSR implementation. In order to do so, leaders would need to engage in cultural sensemaking (Mayer and Oosthuizen, 2021), interpreting and adjusting values in ways that align with local expectations and corporate objectives.

The intricate cultural factors present exceptional possibilities and difficulties for leadership in CMNEs. Integrating many cultural viewpoints into a unified corporate culture is a significant problem. Walsh and Gleeson (2023) assert that while staying in line with the broad objectives of the state and the enterprise, CMNE executives need to negotiate the complexities of leading culturally diverse teams. This entails balancing the demands and expectations of the global

stakeholders and the local workforce, which may be difficult in settings with different cultural norms and business practices (Benson, 2024). Hence, to create a distinctive leadership style that balances local and international business practices, CMNE leadership styles must frequently combine traditional Chinese values with contemporary management techniques.

Opportunities for leadership within CMNEs are leveraging diverse cultural experiences toward innovation and improvement of performance. Leaders who can effectively integrate cross-cultural perspectives are often better positioned to enhance their enterprise's global competitiveness (Crawford, 2023). For instance, leaders in CMNEs who can manage cultural diversity can create an inclusive situation characterized by collaboration that functions creatively under conditions of problem-solving and strategic decision-making (Hughes, 2023). This is of particular concern to industries with stiff competition globally where local adaptation or being sensitive to market conditions is critical to success.

In addition, building sustainable cross-cultural relationships and fostering leadership styles is critical for the long-term survival of CMNEs in global markets. It is not enough to manage existing cultural differences; building trust with international partners and stakeholders is essential to get closer to other cultures (Forgeard, 2021). The involvement of CMNE managers in compelling conversations about cultures allows the enterprise to become more popular and internationally effective (Benson, 2024). This proactive orientation of building relationships is necessary for overcoming cultural barriers and achieving strategic objectives amidst a global business environment. Consequently, in future research, it will be essential to investigate how leaders of emerging market multinational enterprises develop these relationships over time and their effects on the overall performance of corporate internationalization projects.

In summary, the value internalization process entails complex adjustments, which are often handled superficially or omitted altogether. As highlighted in the preceding analysis, there remains much room within the academic literature for additional research and analyses on how CMNEs address value internalization and their correlating internationalization strategies. If companies hope to manage cross-national diversity effectively, there is a need to promote participative leadership so that all employees feel valued. The role of values in facilitating integration, trust, and cohesion in ethnically heterogeneous environments cannot be overlooked.

2.4 The Impact of Cross-cultural experience on Leadership

There is an ongoing deliberation on whether culture-dependent practices or universal principles govern cross-cultural leadership. Carrington et al. (2021) suggested that these discussions have developed a relativist and a realist school of thought. Proponents of the realist approach suggest that because every leader performs comparable roles, the fundamental leadership processes should be alike, irrespective of the prevailing cultural differences. In particular, supporters of the realist school of thought have shown great interest in testing US-based leadership models and philosophies in other societies to establish whether such models can be replicated in different cultural contexts (Sagar, 2018). On the other hand, the relativist school of thought supports the idea of diverse cultural beliefs and values in leadership preferences and behaviours (Badger, 2020). Scholars from this school of thought postulate that cross-cultural leadership behaviours might not be collectively effective. They hold that the efficiency of such behaviours in diverse organizations closely accompanies the national cultures where cross-cultural leadership and management are enacted.

Bainbridge (2022) suggested that the logic for the relativist position is that because national civilizations differ in their cultural beliefs and values, diverse and inclusive entities may be

influenced significantly in their practices and corporate strategies by the national society's cultural practices. This position indicates that a leadership style linked to leadership effectiveness in a particular nation-state might not be equally effective in other national or cultural contexts. Along this school of thought, Ibarrola (2017) supported that workers' responses to a specific cross-cultural leadership behaviour might be firmly hooked on their cultural beliefs and values.

Many cross-cultural studies submit that leadership effectiveness in diverse workforces is a function of national cultural practices (Thomas, 2022). The scholar holds that leaders who are culturally aware of behaviours and conform to a particular national culture's values are more effective in cross-cultural leadership. For this reason, cross-cultural leaders and managers should recognize what institutes effective leadership in diverse cultural backgrounds.

Studies suggest that cultural factors such as values, norms, and beliefs can significantly influence leadership composition. For instance, Tan (2022) suggested that Western cultures are known to promote the concept of individualism, meaning they emphasize personal identity and independence. In contrast, Eastern cultures are predominantly collectivist, promoting unity and altruism (Thomas, 2022). Recent studies indicate that individualism or collectivism can influence how leaders interact with their followers and make decisions. For instance, individualist leaders stress the importance of promoting a competitive environment for their employees to thrive, while collectivist leaders believe collaboration is the key to employee development (Forgeard, 2021). It is also worth noting that shared norms and beliefs significantly influence corporate leadership and management practices since they determine how subordinates expect their leaders to behave and how a leader perceives and approaches his role.

Almost every leadership aspect is heavily influenced by culture. Beare (2019) states that cultural values, norms, ideals, and beliefs influence leadership goals, behaviour, and organizational

strategies. For instance, Western Culture significantly emphasizes individual capabilities and efforts as the basis for promotions. In addition, social issues like racism and other forms of discrimination may also affect business decisions like promotions in the West. In contrast, Eastern cultures in major economies like India and most African countries attribute professional advancement to externalities like family, marriage, corruption, and family (Tan, 2022). For this reason, organizations must appreciate culture's influence on leadership and make necessary provisions to establish an inclusive management theory and leadership structure that accommodates each employee's culture.

In addition, Beare (2019) suggested that native tribes in North America revere community elders. As such, Gehrke (2018) supported that an organization operating in this part of the world and employing native tribe elders must discard conventional leadership protocols or modify them to comprehensively accommodate the cultural aspect of respecting elders and enhancing modesty. Similarly, Shin (2021) emphasized the need for transformative leaders' commitment to emotional maturity and a genuine interest in others, which remains constant despite changing transactional opportunities, situations, and belief systems.

In his article, Beare (2019) quotes an assessment by Quinn in a 2000 research paper where the latter posits "normal assumptions of externally driven transaction and exchange identify the expectations and then transact the process. Internally driven people act according to conscience, even if the acts involve personal rights." Ultimately, inner stability facilitates natural responsiveness versus reactivity to the world's fast-changing business environment. In an individual capacity, Beare (2019) explains leadership development entails teaching mental clearing practices to help leaders experience mental clarity and peace. Such a mental state enables leaders to transcend beyond transactional and intellectual skills, giving them the wisdom to address

cultural and environmental differences affecting their organization. This wisdom addresses the polarity between making profits and delivering quality services in diverse organizations.

In an article titled “*The Effect of Culture on Leadership*” by The Ohio State University (2019), the author recounts an incident involving a friend complaining about her supervisor. According to the friend, the supervisor was significantly incompetent to lead the team despite her superior’s claim to be one with the team. Similarly, another friend made a similar complaint about her job, posting a photo depicting a gang of wolves and highlighting the last wolf with the caption, “The powerful always looks after his followers.” The author finds the scenario intriguing, claiming there is a significant likelihood that both friends would find satisfaction if they switched their bosses. The Ohio State University (2019) uses the scenario to help readers relate to the Implicit Leadership Theory (ILT). Based on this theory, every individual has their ideal type of leader. For instance, some people prefer dominant, performance-oriented, and influential leaders, while others prefer a low-profile, caring, and considerate leader who is open to opinions. Therefore, organizations need to appreciate that employees perceive similar behaviours from leaders differently due to diverse viewpoints on the characteristics of ideal leaders.

Based on this assessment, the article asks, “What causes these differences in how people feel about various types of lead.” While acknowledging multiple factors that cause this issue, The Ohio State University (2019) identifies culture as a significant factor. Different cultures promote distinct ways of perception, and psychological research suggests human beings are subconsciously influenced by culture. For instance, numerous studies suggest that Asians are more tolerant of contradictions when compared to Western cultures (The Ohio State University, 2019). Contrary to Americans, who would judge a specific argument in an article that features opposing views on capital punishment, the Chinese would find it challenging to pick a side since they would rate both

arguments equally. Based on these findings, it is apparent that culture influences people's perception of their experiences. The Ohio State University (2019) also explains that different from individualist Americans, the Japanese have a collectivist culture that makes them tend to collaborate even though not every party benefit equally.

Leadership significantly determines organizational success, allowing employee engagement, team cohesion, and general strategic performance. For decades, scholars have debated what attributes, behaviours, and contexts make effective leadership, with richly heterogeneous literature examining the concept from several standpoints (Tan, 2022). This review conceptualized that leadership effectiveness is operationalized at three intersecting dimensions: the individual, relational, and collective, each providing distinct but complementary insights into how leaders drive organizational outcomes.

2.4.1 Individual Leadership

The individual leadership perspective emphasises the personality traits, cognitive skills and behaviour of leaders, and is concerned with concepts like transformational and servant leadership (Berry and Ramos, 2023). Conversely, Crawford (2023) maintains that the relational perspective focuses on the process of interaction between a leader and followers and highlights communication, trust, and emotional intelligence as primary contributors to outcomes of leadership effectiveness. On the other hand, the collective approach focuses on the shared and dispersed leadership, or how teamwork and collaboration create effective leadership as Akhter et al. (2020) stipulated.

At the individual level, the traditional way of analysing leadership effectiveness is trait theory and behavioural theory, which is the most common. According to a trait theory, people have certain enduring characteristics or traits that separate them as leaders, and personality traits — like

conscientiousness, emotional stability or extraversion — can produce outcomes in leadership (Wilhelmus, 2020). Based on their meta-analysis derived from a few empirical studies, they showed that these traits predicted leadership emergence, as well as leadership effectiveness. In like manner, Alexandra (2023) postulated that analytic abilities, social skills, and problem-solving skills are equally important in defining leadership self-efficacy, proposing that there is a need for multi-faceted approaches to measuring the leadership potential of individuals.

Critics of trait theory, however, emphasize that it does not consider contextual and environmental aspects that determine leadership effectiveness. For example, Forgeard (2021) holds that built on behavioural theories, such as the ones developed by Blake and Mouton (1964), leadership style is not a matter of individual characteristics alone; it can be learned. Their study developed a managerial grid where effective leadership was defined as the combination of task-oriented and relationship-oriented behaviours. This is to the transformation leadership theory, which articulates a vision, motivates, and attends to individual needs, which are essential for leadership effectiveness (Wilhelmus, 2020). Despite these contributions, trait theory has faced criticism from behavioural theory for its overly simplistic approach to leadership that does not consider situational and cultural factors within the organization (Wu, 2019).

Recently, integrative models have emerged, acknowledging that the ongoing argument between traits-oriented and behaviour-oriented perspectives has led to a new aspect of leadership effectiveness: the interaction of personal attributes, learned behaviours, and the situation. Recent scholars promote systems thinking, along with Crawford (2023) and Akhter et al. (2020), who consider that the effectiveness of leaders depends on cultural and organizational settings. These findings are highly pertinent to cross-cultural leadership investigation since the effectiveness of individual leaders may depend upon global leadership abilities, cultural intelligence, and

adaptability to varied work contexts (Wilhelmus, 2020). In this regard, combining these views, this study seeks to analyse cross-cultural antecedents of leadership effectiveness for the individual level of analysis.

Transformational leadership was described by Bass in 1985 as the leadership style that emphasizes the leader's role of inspiring and motivating followers through vision, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. This leadership style has been widely studied for its positive impact on employee engagement, organizational commitment, and performance. In a later work, Wu (2019) further refined this model and explained how a transformational leader nurtures the innovation and adaptability of the organization in a fast-moving environment characterized by organizational intricacy. Most of their studies are quantitative, relying on survey methodologies and statistical analyses to determine how leadership functions effectively or across different industries. Although transformational leadership has been hailed as a way to effect organizational change, its applicability across cultural contexts remains highly debated. For instance, Szunomár (2020) found that the effectiveness of transformational leadership varied with cultural dimensions; hence, its impact is contingent on contextual factors such as power distance and individualism-collectivism.

The concept of transformational leadership led Alexandra (2023) to identify authentic leadership as an approach in which self-awareness, moral integrity, and relational transparency are emphasized. They also claim authenticity enhances the leader's credibility, builds trust, and ensures long-term organizational effectiveness. Empirical studies, such as those by Mayer and Oosthuizen (2021), have evidenced this assertion, where authentic leadership relates to increased job satisfaction and employee psychological well-being. However, critics have argued that the authentic leadership theory lacks clear operational definitions; hence, its measurement and

generalization to other settings are challenging (Eseryel et al., 2020). Moreover, with the emphasis on moral perspective and self-awareness, authenticity is questioned as either a stable trait or a context-dependent construct, further complicating its applicability in leadership development programs.

Notwithstanding their benefits, transformational and authentic leadership approaches have come under fire for placing too much emphasis on the leader's personal qualities at the expense of contextual and relationship factors. These models are criticised by Szunomár (2020) for having the potential to produce a "heroic leadership" bias, which overemphasises leader charisma while ignoring situational and structural factors that affect leadership effectiveness. According to recent studies, leadership effectiveness can be more context-dependent and flexible than conventional models indicate (Akunjee et al., 2022). To provide a more thorough knowledge of leadership effectiveness, academics support the combination of relational and collective leadership perspectives, as leadership increasingly occurs in cross-cultural and virtual contexts. By investigating how transformational and genuine leadership appear in cross-cultural leadership contexts, where relational and contextual elements are critical in determining leadership performance, this study seeks to advance these discussions.

Most research on leader behavioural impact focuses on measures of perceived leadership effectiveness combined with self-assessed personality or other pre-employment screening tests Eseryel et al. (2020). This enables the researchers to compare and generalize large respondent pools. These methods have helped determine leadership qualities, employee conduct, and the relationship between leadership actions and achievements. However, they often neglect most real-life issues concerning leadership, including the process through which decisions are made and the context within which leaders make them. Qualitative case studies, the contrary, while enlightening,

as pointed out by Lüscher (2018), map out leaders' developmental processes and examine antecedent events, self-stories, and contexts that underpin leadership effectiveness, thereby providing a contextually detailed picture.

2.4.2 Relational Leadership

According to Iswahyuni et al. (2021) and Masakowski (2017), leadership emerges from social interactions rather than as a personal trait, and therefore, leadership is inherently relational. This sets the compelling leadership story on a narrative that challenges the traditional leader-centric view by placing social processes above personal traits. The Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) theory supports this change by proving high-quality relationships between leaders and followers contribute to performance, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment (Chen and Zhu, 2020). Empirical studies demonstrate that leaders who cultivate strong relational ties with their subordinates create a more engaged and productive workforce (Mata et al., 2020). On the other side of the coin, some criticisms like Badger (2020) suggest that the philosophy encourages nepotism, which can undermine inclusivity and fairness in organizations.

Relational leadership views have already extended beyond LMX to include distributed and shared leadership. Bainbridge (2022) argues that leadership is the work of one person, but one person is only one of many moving parts of an organization. This idea is vital in volatile and knowledge-driven environments in which leadership is a by-product of teamwork and not formal authority. Mata et al. (2020) revealed that shared leadership begets creativity, fluidity, and resilience within the organization. Some researchers (Mata et al., 2020), however, question the extent to which shared leadership is applicable in hierarchical systems where power dynamics and established authority roles are still embedded.

In this respect, shifting attention from the individual to a d relational leadership have become closer in line with new organizational needs especially those of cross-cultural and multinational contexts, where leadership needs to be flexible and adaptable (Chen and Zhu, 2020). Greenleaf (1977) for example outlines a servant-leader model of leadership, which strengthens those around the leader, and inclusive leadership as proposed by Carmeli et al. (2010) — which have been shown to create trust and psychological safety, and thus build team cohesion and performance.

In recent years, however, some question how relational leadership models may have universal application in diverse cultural contexts, where the degree of cultural expectations and distance from power supersedes typologies of individual behaviour (Badger, 2020). However, while these relational leadership frameworks provide valuable insights, to be really effective, they need to be contextualised in terms of the provisions on which these frameworks are designed for smooth functionality across a vast spectrum of organisations.

Relational leadership offers a unique approach to leadership that focuses on social exchanges, and Blau (1964) provides the theoretical underpinning of relational leadership through social exchange theory, wherein reciprocal exchanges between leaders and their followers become the hallmark of effective relations. This concept narrows down to connections of mutual trust, obligation, and perceived fairness among parties, leading to commitment and performance in the organisation (Zhu, 2020). This perspective means that leaders who invest their time in establishing strong relationships based on trust with their teams are more likely to receive loyalty and discretionary effort from their followers. However, other academics contend that the theory oversimplifies workplace dynamics by assuming that exchanges are always rational and egalitarian, ignoring the impact of power disparities and organisational hierarchies (Raithel et al., 2021).

Building on the relational view of leadership, the followership theory can be discussed as a concept prescribing the actions of followers and positing that effective leadership always involves active followership (Dilekli and Tezci (2020). Following Wilhelmus's (2020) assertion that people act as followers most of the time, Cochran (2021) divides followers into different types: passive, indifferent, conforming, approving, active, and exemplary, as he stresses that followers are essential to organizational performance. Far from a direct leader-follower model, this approach advances the leader's control over followers by embracing follower age. Data from studies support this claim, asserting that proactive followers positively impact work team performance, creativity, and decisions (Raithel et al., 2021). But some voices claim that followership theory demands more empirical evidence and states that followers' behaviours are limited by organizational frameworks and leaders' working activities (Berry and Ramos, 2023).

Relational leadership theories are further made complex because of cultural influences. Along this line, Wilhelmus (2020) states that the role of followers closely corresponds to artistic and organizational values and expectations. Thus, leadership functioning depends significantly on this quality. For example, in high power-distance cultures (Hofstede, 2001), it would be challenging to encourage follower participation' thereby restricting the effects of participative leadership. On the other hand, expectations in a low power-distance culture differ since the employees expect an equal hierarchy, which is appropriate for relational leadership, such as servant or transformational leadership (Wu, 2019). Such differences call for culture-conscious leadership styles that consider followers' expectations based on cultural differences.

Despite the relational perspective of leadership's contribution, there are challenges. Critics say that it pays too much attention to interpersonal dynamics and less to the structural and institutional factors that shape whether leadership is effective, as Alexandra (2023) stated. Further, the extent

to which relational leadership can be sustainable in high-pressure, performance-driven environments remains open (Mayer and Oosthuizen, 2021). While the theories of social exchange and followership provide invaluable contributions to the literature on leadership effectiveness, further research is needed regarding how these theoretical frameworks interact with various organizational structures and cultural contexts in constantly changing workplace dynamics.

Investigations into relational leadership effectiveness often utilize qualitative methods such as longitudinal and ethnographic design to comprehend the changing relationship between leaders and followers (Chen and Zhu, 2020). These inquiry methods help understand leadership as a socially structured process, allowing it to advance for the advancement of leadership interactions with a more significant focus on dialogue, shared meanings, and trust building. Nevertheless, such studies can illuminate contextually but often invite criticism regarding generalizability and researcher bias (Zhu, 2020).

A heavier reliance on qualitative inquiry raises concerns about the objectivity and replicability of the research, which some scholars feel should be addressed with more mixed-methods research. This is not to say that the mixed methods approach offers a cure-all proposition, as critics claim relational leadership studies do not and should not have the same predictive powers as more traditional qualitative-based leadership research (Futaqi and Mashuri, 2022). This is because methodological approaches based on experiments and surveys provide predictive validity and causal explanations but ignore a lot of interpersonal intricacies existing in leadership relations. In contrast to relational leadership scholars who contend that decontextualized variables alone cannot adequately explain leadership, meta-analyses on leadership effectiveness strongly emphasize quantifiable characteristics and behaviours (Raithel et al., 2021). A fundamental epistemological

gap in leadership studies is brought to light by the continuous controversy between positivist and interpretive traditions.

Another challenge in relational leadership research is that the variables that add to leadership effectiveness are difficult to isolate. Most studies are bound to have methodological limitations because of organizational culture, industry norms, and other external economic factors that come into play and may be challenging to account for, as noted by Chen and Zhu (2020). For instance, a study investigating the influence of LMX on employee performance would find it challenging to account for broader workplace dynamics, including things like team cohesion and job design. The multilevel nature of the phenomenon called leadership requires more integrated approaches that combine individual, relational, and structural perspectives on leadership to reach an overall understanding.

Notwithstanding these methodological debates, relational leadership research has moved forward, embracing newer approaches such as social network analysis and computational modelling in pursuit of greater rigor and applicability (Raithel et al., 2021). As leadership is increasingly conducted in virtual and hybrid environments, future research should investigate how relational leadership is adapted to digital communication and virtual collaboration. A more complete and subtle understanding of effective leadership in contemporary organizations will be developed only by addressing these empirical challenges.

2.4.3 Collective Leadership

While organizational designs continue to evolve from functional, complex leadership performance is increasingly viewed as a collective endeavour instead of individual or clerical. Dilekli and Tezci (2020) defined collective leadership as leadership tasks that are not vested in a single leader or individual but in the performers, who are dispersed throughout the group. This model creates

partnership, creativity, and shared responsibility, especially within complex and fluid contexts. Recent scholarly studies show that shared leadership improves performance quality as more centralized leadership commonly does (Iswahyuni et al., 2021). Empirical research backs up the effectiveness of shared leadership with Szunomár (2020) discovering that teams with high degrees of shared leadership outperform those with traditional, centralised leadership models. However, scholars like Bainbridge (2022) have raised concerns about role ambiguity, responsibility diffusion, and potential conflicts in decision-making processes.

Raithel et al. (2021) take it further and propose that distributed leadership is not a practice kept within the authority constraints but, relatively, a concept that tells that leadership is not only practiced by the organization's top officials. In healthcare, especially in academics, distributed leadership is evident based on their qualitative case study methodologies, where organization expertise is fragmented. However, as for any concepts, authors like Lüscher (2018) emphasized that distributed leadership might be limited by organizational cultures that are not ready to decentralize and often characteristic of bureaucratic organizations.

A key debate in the literature centres on the extent to which collective leadership models can replace or supplement traditional leadership structures. While shared and distributed leadership frameworks emphasize collaboration, there is a growing belief among some scholars that it might not be fitting for every context. For example, Badger (2020) argues that strong, directive leadership remains vital in crises where decisions must be made swiftly and authoritative guidance is required. This raises critical questions about the contextual applicability of collective leadership and the conditions whereby it works the most. This move to collective leadership also aligns with the more significant trend in leadership theory, such as complexity leadership by Futaqi and Madhuri (2022), which emphasizes leadership's adaptive and emergent nature in contemporary organizations.

By combining insights from shared, distributed, and complex leadership theories, the researcher can develop a far more subtle approach to understanding leadership's effectiveness in contemporary fast-changing environments. This section aims to further the overall discussion by considering the connection between collective leadership models and the research objectives and providing a critical lens through which to assess leadership effectiveness within organizations.

In modern organizational research, team-based leadership is an important technique to enhance creativity, flexibility, and strength. According to Wilhelmus (2020), effective leadership at the team level allows the organization to tap into the different types of knowledge available, which improves problem-solving and decision-making. Their longitudinal research and case study shows that high-performing teams have shared leadership, a high degree of mutual accountability, and aligned collective goals. Likewise, Badger (2020) pointed out that the absence of any threat within a team encourages free and robust communication, which enables the sharing and development of ideas. While these studies illustrate the benefits of team leadership, they still underestimate the constraints of the division of decision-making. For instance, the absence of definite roles and power relationships can give rise to conflict.

In contrast, in their empirical study, Szunomár (2020) stresses the contextual contingency of collective leadership. Their survey, which analyses information accumulated in numerous industries, explains that team-based leadership is notably more effective in knowledge-occurrent industries – technologies, healthcare, and academics – where cognition is dispersed, and teamwork is crucial. On the other hand, traditional authoritarian leadership is predominant in mechanistic organizations owing to their rigid structure of operations, such as manufacturing and military institutions, where speedy decision-making is essential and achievement-oriented. This finding supports the study by Bainbridge (2022), which suggested that, though shared leadership improves

the effectiveness of a team in complex problem-solving contexts, the extent of impact reduces when the tasks are routine and standardized.

A fundamental argument in the literature is how team-based leadership can function effectively without formal hierarchies. According to Eseryel et al. (2020), empowering team members with decision-making authority increases motivation and engagement, resulting in higher performance. However, critics such as Raithel et al. (2021) warn that without a defined leadership structure, teams may face coordination issues and decision paralysis, especially in high-pressure situations. This raises fundamental questions regarding the optimal conditions for team-based leadership and how organizations might balance autonomy and organized oversight.

This section analyses the interplay of team leadership, decision-making, and organizational context. It provides input to the larger canvas of discourse related to leadership effectiveness. These conclusions have implications for understanding: team-based leadership superior in driving innovative and adaptive capability remains highly susceptible to the influences of both industry-wide and organizational cultural factors for its effectiveness, and that investigation into hybrid models through a mix of shared and hierarchical methods in leadership would be necessary to examine how the two approaches impact decision-making within a wide variety of organizations.

Teamwork system leadership has become popular in recent empirical studies to create dynamism, creativity, and organizational stability. Cochran (2021) states that the leadership factor boosts problem-solving and decision-making since it taps into diverse team expertise. Their longitudinal and case study research findings show a positive relationship between high-performance teams and leadership, accountability, and organizational purpose. Also, Iswahyuni et al. (2021) point out that psychological safety is imperative to encourage communication in a team and turn it into a proper knowledge-sharing environment for generating innovative ideas. However, whereas these

works establish the importance of team leadership findings, they partially consider the difficulties of having decentralized decision-making structures with role and authority disputes or conflicts.

Furthermore, Bainbridge (2022) makes an exception when discussing the limitations of collective leadership. Their analysis, which incorporates data across several industries, indicates that this leadership is more useful when applied in knowledge-rich environments like technology, health care, and academia, where expertise is broadly diffused and teamwork is key. On the contrary, other industries, such as manufacturing or military organizations with a strong operational focus, will always be dominated by traditional hierarchical leaders who operate within a defined command structure and make quick decisions. This is consistent with Chen and Zhu's (2020) findings, who note that teams working with shared leadership are more efficient in more complex environments. Still, tasks are less practical in more straightforward environments with repetitive and standardized tasks.

A crucial argument in the literature is whether or not team-based leadership is possible without hierarchy. Advocates of shared leadership, notably Futaqi and Madhuri (2022), assert that delegating decision-making power to the team enhances motivation and engagement, leading to improved performance. In contrast, Alexandra (2023) warns that teams may struggle with coordination and decision paralysis without a defined leadership structure, especially under pressure. This calls into question how organizations might balance autonomy and organized oversight and the circumstances in which team-based leadership works best.

This section contributes to the broader discourse on leadership effectiveness by investigating the interplay between team leadership, decision-making, and organizational context. Although team-based leadership has clear advantages in fostering innovation and adaptability, its success depends a great deal on industry-specific factors and organizational culture. Further research is thus needed

into hybrid models of leadership, which combine shared and hierarchical approaches to leadership in pursuit of optimized decision-making processes in diverse organizational settings.

2.5 The mechanism by which cross-cultural experience influence leadership

2.5.1 Learning Effect: Learning from Problem-Solving Experience

A key component of developing cross-cultural leadership skills is learning from problem-solving experiences, which improves a leader's capacity to handle challenging and unclear circumstances. Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory states that active participation, introspection, and adaptability in real-world situations are how leaders gain information and enhance their decision-making. Overcoming communication difficulties, settling disagreements, and making moral judgements under disparate cultural norms are all common components of problem-solving in cross-cultural contexts (Thomas, 2022). Trial-and-error learning helps leaders become more resilient and adaptable, which helps them hone their leadership philosophies and enhance teamwork (Tan, 2022). To maximise efficacy, some academics contend that organised leadership development programs must be added to experiential learning because it is insufficient on its own (Shin (2021)).

While some studies focus on the importance of learning by doing, others point out the importance of social learning in the context of developing a leader. Under Bandura's (1977) social learning theory, leaders learn passively as they engage with culturally different colleagues. Within multinational enterprises (MNEs), leaders who are actively involved in mentoring and cross-cultural training programs tend to develop cultural understanding, communication, and trust-building skills with diverse teams faster (Ahmad et al., 2023). At the same time, Rottig and Torres de Oliveira (2018) suggest that not all leaders learn from problem-solving activities, especially those without sufficient cultural intelligence (CQ) or the ability to change their leadership style to

fit a different culture. This means that in order to learn from cross cultural problem-solving, one demonstrates a certain degree of personal flexibility as well as the existence of supportive organizational structures.

A different issue to resolve refers to the question whether from a particular problem, there can be a learning outflow that is peripheral or whether it leads to a transformation that is fundamental over a considerable period of time. Some researchers like Fraser and Taylor (2019) observe that leaders get caught in single-loop learning, where only existing leadership moves in response to reasonable challenges are altered as opposed to eliminated. In the context of Chinese state-owned multinational enterprises (CMNEs), executives must reconcile home-country leadership traditions with host-country expectations, necessitating ongoing learning and adaptation. Future study should look into how CMNE leaders use problem-solving experiences to improve their long-term leadership skills and cross-cultural competency.

The cross-cultural experience has an impact that continues beyond the immediate benefits of increasing leadership effectiveness. Its long-term influences involve developing a more adaptive and inclusive leadership style that integrates diversity's cultural insight into strategic decision-making (Ahmad et al., 2023). In addition, leaders who constantly interact with cross-cultural environments show a gradual shift in management style from more rigid and homogenizing to appreciative and inclusive of various cultural perspectives. This kind of change in leadership style comes with an increased, effective organizational capability and leading styles for global markets. A 2022 study by Thomas revealed that leaders with more sustained cross-cultural experiences were better at creating an inclusive culture and harnessing diverse perspectives to fuel organizational innovation and growth. Thomas (2022) posited that an expatriate situation offers cross-cultural leaders more cultural diversity experience than local leaders.

2.5.2 Individual Difference (CQ)

Cross-cultural exposure influences leadership in various significant manners including cognitive flexibility, emotional intelligence, and behavioral adaptability. Cultural intelligence (CQ) theory asserts that leaders exposed to various cultural contexts develop higher levels of cognitive complexity and have the ability to process and synthesize multiple perspectives (Carrington et al., 2021). Leaders with high metacognitive CQ can anticipate cultural challenges, decode multiple perspectives, and modulate their leadership accordingly (Futaqi and Madhuri, 2022). This aligns with Kolb's (1984) theory of experiential learning in that practical exposure to different cultural contexts leads to leadership adaptability and the ability to make good judgments (Chen and Zhu, 2020). To effectively manage interpersonal connections in cross-cultural teams, leaders must also cultivate emotional intelligence, according to some academics, as cognitive flexibility alone is insufficient.

2.5.3 Contextual Effects

This emotional aspect of cross-cultural leadership is even more pronounced in cultures characterized as high-context (Badger, 2020), where leadership effectiveness is derived from strong relationship-building, trust and a keen sense of non-verbal communication. In fact, leaders who are exposed to diverse cultural settings tend to develop a higher level of empathy and emotional regulation during conflicts, which facilitates greater inclusivity (Wilhelmus, 2020). In contrast, Ting-Toomey's (1999) face-negotiation theory highlights how cultural expectations unfamiliar to the leaders increases the chance of miscommunication and trust-issues with corresponding decrease in its leadership effectiveness. This implies that having cross-cultural experiences does not necessarily lead to better leadership skills — leaders need to practice

reflective learning and interpersonal sensitivity to translate experiences into effective leadership practices.

Cross-cultural experiences influence leadership through an array of behavioural mechanisms such as adaptive leadership, ethical decision making, and crisis management. According to authors like Lüscher (2018), leaders acquire a form of adaptability known as situational adaptability being when they are set in ambiguous cultural contexts. In these contexts, leaders are required to change their leadership approach depending on the team's makeup and the cultures involved. Moreover, Berry and Ramos (2023) claim that international leaders tend to be more ethical and inclusive in their decision-making because other cultures with differing moral standards enable them to practice greater inclusiveness. In contrast, some scholars like Wilhelmus (2020) have pointed out that not all leaders are equally advantaged by the cross-culture process which is an assumption that some researchers make. He argues that without sufficient active reflection and organizational scaffolding, the positive aspects of intercultural interactions may not be realized. The impact of mentorship and leadership training as a form of cross-cultural experience structuring on the resulting effectiveness of in the particular direction of the behaviour is still to be determined.

2.6 Gaps in Literature

Despite the extensive study in cross-cultural leadership, how leaders navigate multiple and often complex cross-cultural contexts is poorly understood. Most theories of cross-cultural leadership are based on Western frames of reference and tend to neglect the unique dynamics of non-Western leadership contexts. Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory (1980) has been used to establish what the two share in light of differences in leadership styles between cultures on other bases. However, the kinds of frameworks applied are under challenge for being static and generalized, hence not very sensitive to constant changes in global interactions. For instance, cross-cultural leadership

research of Chinese SOEs has been limited, and most of the studies conducted so far, such as Gleeson (2023), primarily focused on Confucian principles of leadership but did not appropriately capture the impact forces of globalization on such an organization.

Describing the issues and approaches to managing cross-cultural teams is perhaps the most underrepresented area in the literature. Although Alexandra (2023) has noted the importance of cultural intelligence for effective leadership in cross-national contexts, little has been done to examine how leaders acquire CQ in practice. In addition, further clarification is needed on the relationship between cross-cultural competence and how it is combined with leadership skills. Although Akunjee et al. (2022) suggest that global leaders must have the ability to think and act flexibly, more research is needed on how leaders learn and develop these abilities over time. Most literature on cross-cultural team management has concentrated on barriers to communication and conflict management (Raithel et al., 2021), while the issue of cultural diversity as a leadership decision-making resource has received very little attention.

Another critical gap in the literature is cross-cultural communication in leadership. While Hall's high-context and low-context communication model provides a theoretical basis, the practical insights into how leaders adapt their style in diverse settings are scant. Most of the studies have focused on language barriers only (Bainbridge, 2022), while non-verbal communication, power distance, and decision-making styles also play a crucial role in the effectiveness of cross-cultural leadership. More specifically, even though the literature on expatriate leadership has acknowledged the impact of cross-cultural experience on leadership capability (Zhu, 2020), scant research is being done on how local leaders within multinational organizations adapt and internalize foreign practices of leadership.

Finally, the literature on leadership styles from a cross-cultural perspective is markedly deficient in the conceptualization of heterogeneous leadership models. Thus, the well-known typologies like transformational, transactional, and servant leadership based on Bass (1990) and Greenleaf (1977) do not include all the leadership types needed for cross-cultural adaptation. However, Carrington et al. (2021) argue that contingency models that afford culture a central place remain underdeveloped despite the cause-and-effect relationship between cultural contingencies and transformational leadership. Furthermore, following differences in contextual internationalization, there is a relative lack of research on how leaders can be credible while embracing competing cultural norms.

Addressing these gaps calls for a movement toward more interdisciplinary and context-specific research approaches; thus, ethnographic methods, longitudinal designs, and comparative case studies will be used in future research efforts that capture the richness of cross-cultural leadership. Moreover, organizational psychology, anthropology, and international business perspectives might be switches that will turn on broader and more complete views of how leaders navigate across diverse cultural landscapes.

2.7 The conceptual framework

Three main elements are the foundation of this study's conceptual framework: leadership as a dynamic notion, cross-cultural leadership, and cross-cultural experiences. These themes are all closely related to one another, as seen by the arrows showing how different leadership facets are influenced by cross-cultural encounters. The framework's foundation is the idea that cross-cultural experiences play a critical role in forming successful leadership in multinational enterprises.

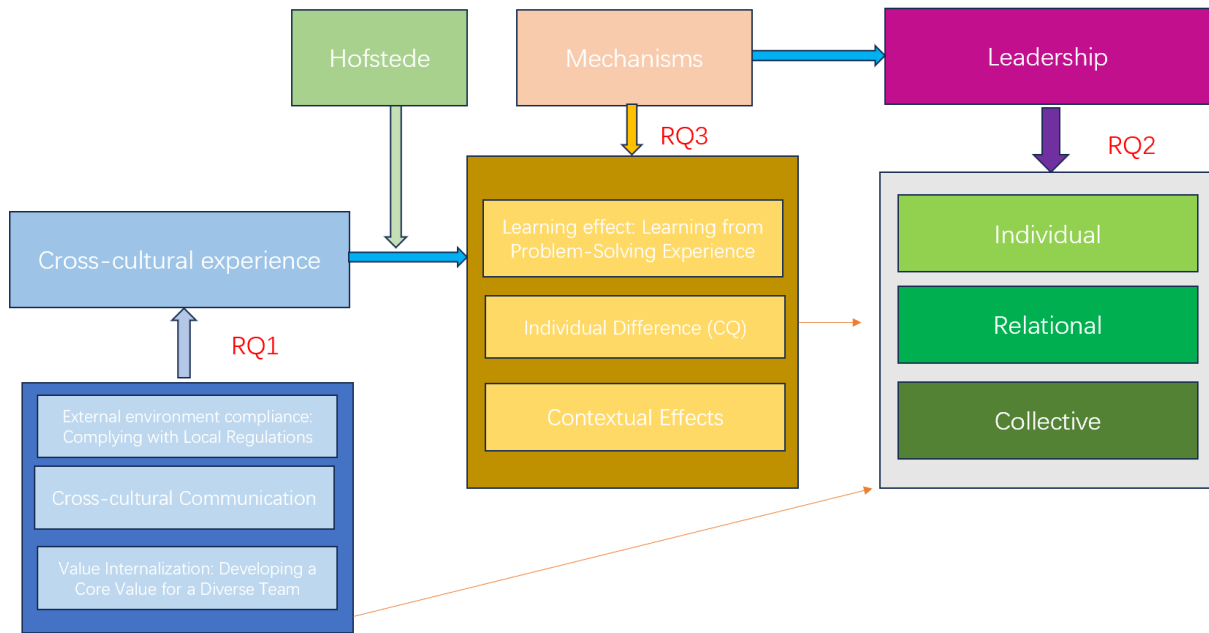


Figure 2.1. The Conceptual Framework of cross-cultural Experience

The conceptual underpinning of this study is centred on recognizing how leadership perception and leadership effectiveness interact and correlate to cross-cultural interactions. Cross-cultural interactions underlie leadership understanding and leadership perception, and through them, leaders interpret problems, make decisions, and interact with employees in diverse cultures (Cotter and Reichard, 2019). Cross-cultural interactions comprise exposure to diverse norms, modes of communication, and leadership expectations, and in response, alter a leader's capability to operate in cross-cultural contexts effectively. The impact is continuous—leaders who have diverse culture interactions constantly redefine their leadership style, fine-tuning their decisions, interpersonal, and moral considerations to fit global business contexts (Carrington et al., 2021). The ongoing process enhances their capability to manage global employees, trust, and advance inclusivity, crucial determinants of leadership in CMNEs.

The framework further demonstrates that leadership perception acts as a connection between cross-cultural experience and leadership success. Leaders develop their perception of leadership through their assessment of resources they access and the ways they work with others and handle power distances as well as value creation processes. Leaders who possess high cultural intelligence according to Masakowski (2017) display better capabilities to handle cultural complexities so they solve problems creatively and handle diverse teams more effectively. Cross-cultural leadership experiences enable ethical decision-making because they present leaders to various moral perspectives which helps them build inclusive leadership approaches that adapt to diverse cultures (Lüscher, 2018). The experiences shape leaders' strategic approaches and strengthen their capacity to manage global compliance rules together with organizational functions and cultural communication practices which prove vital in CMNE success.

The model also emphasises how cross-cultural experiences affect leadership effectiveness and styles over the long run. Leaders develop their individual, interpersonal, and group leadership skills through a process of ongoing learning and adaptation. Being exposed to diverse cultural contexts improves self-control and flexibility, which aids leaders in creating inclusive leadership models that meet the demands of both domestic and international organisations (Carrington et al., 2021). Additionally, because leaders with global experience are better suited for leadership positions in international corporations, cross-cultural encounters aid in career growth as is emphasized by Bainbridge (2022). By incorporating these components into the literature evaluation, this study strengthens the connections mentioned in the conceptual framework and provides a thorough and theoretically based understanding of how cross-cultural leadership evolves.

2.8 Chapter Summary

In conclusion, the main themes that have emerged from CMNE leaders' experiences with cross-cultural leadership have been examined in this chapter, with an emphasis on the transforming implications on individual, relational, and collective leadership practices. These empirical findings provide a sophisticated knowledge of the construction and performance of global leadership in many circumstances.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter outlines the methodological model, which is utilized to analyze the role played by cross-cultural experiences in enhancing leadership in cross-multinational enterprises. First, it states the philosophy of research to be followed in the study by highlighting that an interpretivist position is most fortunate to investigate subjective meanings of the leaders as well as experiences mediated by cultural factors. The chapter then explains the inductive research strategy used. It then proceeds to describe the qualitative descriptive research design in terms of the sampling strategy, selection criteria of participants and reasons as to why semi-structured interviews are the main data-collection tool.

The chapter proceeds by providing a detailed discussion of the thematic analysis processes that were used to analyze the interview data, to explain how the thematic analysis generated, refined, and interpreted on the data. Lastly, the chapter contains the ethical considerations on which the investigation proceeded and gives credit to the limitations of the methodology used before finally drawing a conclusion which ties the entire research objective to the subsequent methodological choices.

3.2 Research Philosophy

Interpretivism is a branch of research philosophy that studies the meaning of human actions and experiences with a greater focus on the subjective aspects of that meaning. Kruger (2019) holds that its center is the explanation of how individuals view the social world, which is to acknowledge that reality is constructed through social interactions and experiences. This philosophical stance is underpinned by four core elements: the nature of reality together with ontology, the nature of

knowledge, epistemology representing the values of a researcher, axiology, and methodology, which signifies the manner of doing the research (Scauso, 2020).

Ontological concerns within interpretivism state that what is called 'reality' exists but that this is both constructed and conformed to by social actors. According to Scauso (2020), it denies the existence of a universal reality and insists that reality is a relative concept created by people's internal and external forces. On the other hand, Interpretivism, founded on epistemology, supports that state of mind which stresses that knowledge is reached from what interacts with its purpose, determination, and subjectivity, that is, the people. This is the concern of the "how" and "why" in the actions of human beings" as opposed to just looking at and counting them (Mustofa, 2024). These methodologies oppose positivism, which seeks universal law by mere observation and measurement.

Another essential characteristic of the interpretive paradigm is axiology, relating to the role of values in research. This paradigm holds that the researcher's values and those of the studied subjects are to form an integral part of the research (Kruger, 2019). Interpretive researchers are, therefore, conversant with how they influence the background against which the research is taking place and strive toward a reflexive attitude throughout the investigation process. Mustofa (2024) supported that this approach allows a more enriching and detailed understanding of the subject under scrutiny as one embrace complexity and diversity in human experiences. In light of methodology and from a general perspective, Interpretivism tends to rely on works of qualitative approaches in interviews, ethnography, and case studies. Skoczeń (2022) posited that these approaches allow a researcher to collect very detailed information and context-specific data, which are pretty helpful in exploring the complexities of human behaviour and any social phenomena.

More common approaches used within an interpretive research study are theory-based and phenomenological approaches, whereby theories can be drawn based on what participants themselves have shared. Mustofa (2024) holds that this method provides the means to explore in depth the meanings and interpretations attributed to experiences, which would best apply to studies related to complex social situations, such as cross-cultural interactions.

3.2.1 Why Interpretivism?

Interpretivism was chosen as the research theory for this study because it consistently investigates and interprets the varied cross-cultural experiences of leaders in CMNEs. The leadership in cross-cultural setting becomes a complex and behaviour subject of experience which varies from person to person and culture to culture itself (Sachdeva, 2020). Through the lenses of a range of cultural antecedents Interpretivism allows researchers to capture these interpretations and grasp the deeper secondary meanings behind leadership behaviours and strategies (Scauso, 2020).

Through an interpretive methodology, the research can explore leaders' distinct and context-specific experiences, offering valuable perspectives on how they manoeuvre and modify their leadership approaches within varied cultural settings. Therefore, Interpretivism allows for a rich examination of cross-cultural leadership by focusing on leaders' perceptions in this study. Unstructured interviews are used to investigate the research, which provides the study with insights into leadership processes and numerous cultural environments based on the leaders' personal experiences and acceptance of the challenges. This approach is constructive in explaining why leadership is constantly changing in CMNEs and how these leaders must change strategies to address cultures. Using the descriptions of these leaders, the research examines patterns and motifs showing cross-cultural relations' imprint on their leadership. This adds to the literature on cross-

cultural leadership and provides relevant information about leaders' experiences in global organizations.

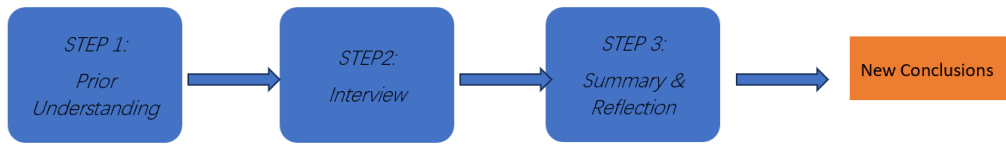
3.3 Research Approach: Inductive Approach

The inductive approach is a research method where theories and models are derived from the data (patterns, themes, and categories) gathered, and analyzed during the research process. In inductive research theoretical propositions are developed iteratively and grounded in data that is to say, generated from evidence that has been directly observed or experienced (Tong & Zuo, 2018). The inductive approach on the other hand, begins with a theory of hypothesis and looks for evidence to support it (Gilgun, 2019). Inductive researchers do not come up with preconceived notion or theories to govern their studies instead they develop their findings as they emerge as an outcome of the researcher interaction with the raw data. This method allows researchers to generate new theoretical statements emerged through what participants discuss or naturalistic observations of what happen within the studied setting of complex character of interest which were not previously theorized.

Cross-sectional qualitative data collected in this research was best analyzed using the inductive approach because no available literature systematically theorizes the changes in leadership behaviours resulting from cross-cultural assignments in CMNEs. Cross-cultural leadership is a dynamic context, and there is a need to take a dynamic perspective to understand how leaders combine strategies in different cultural contexts. The inductive method enables the delicateness in developing these phenomena since it creates fresh theories from scratch by drawing on leaders' experiences (Wolf, 2019). This is important, especially in leadership settings across different cultures where details of one's experience might differ depending on the details of the culture and organizational framework within which they serve.

The inductive approach was instrumental in uncovering the patterns and dynamics that actual theories might not foresee. For instance, in the leadership process, qualitative factors may come into play in cross-cultural situations, such as colours or signals that may affect leadership behaviors, yet are not built into most leadership theories. Consequently, using inductive reasoning, this study enabled the researcher to pinpoint these emergent patterns and create a theoretical foundation that captured the diffusion features of cross-cultural leadership. This approach also enabled legitimacy to be granted to the multiplicity of views because it depends on the participants' narratives and explanations of events for clues for generating fresh theoretical concepts.

This inductive nature of the research followed a number of key steps in the course of the study. The research actually started with prior understanding, where the researcher approached cross-cultural leadership devoid of any fixed theories or assumptions, allowing the data to shape the findings. These theoretical foundations were developed in an iterative fashion, where data from interviews were used in developing new ideas and themes rather than trying to fit data into existing theory. This iterative focus meant that, as more interviews were conducted and analyzed, emergent themes could be refined by the researcher in a continuous cycle. In this way, he was able to build a framework that reflected the actual cross-cultural experience of the participants. This enabled the theoretical framework to stay open to unique contributions from participants in the elaboration of a model based on the leadership practices observed in real-life natural environments of diverse cultural contexts.



The second step entailed interviews with leaders in CMNEs, where participants shared personal experiences in navigating leadership challenges in diverse cultural environments. Each interview was non-directive, allowing detailed, qualitative information to emerge. Because each interview was conducted in a non-directive manner, participants were free to discuss and freely express complex opinions about cultural exchanges and how they affect leadership. Important viewpoints were able to surface because to this open structure, especially regarding how leaders decipher and adjust to cultural cues, communication preferences, and team dynamics in various contexts.

Finally, once data had been collected, a thorough summarizing and reflection process began, in which the researcher studied the narratives of the participants to outline patterns that would lead to new conclusions (see the figure below). It focused on specific impacts of cross-cultural experiences on leadership, leadership practices and leadership styles. This step was necessary for the generation of new theoretical insights, grounded in the real-life experiences of cross-cultural leadership. From reflecting on the data, new conclusions were obtained that contributed to the understanding of the influence of cross-cultural dynamics in leadership behaviour.

Step 1 involved reorganizing existing understanding;

Step 2 focused on data collecting through interviews, allowing participants to share insights; and

Step 3 employed an inductive technique to produce new understanding, building hypotheses based on the evidence acquired.

3.4 Research Design: Data Collection and Analysis

3.4.1 Research Design

The current study explores the influence of cross-cultural experiences on leadership development. In light of how data was collected for analysis, the author appropriated a qualitative descriptive research design to explore how the perceived effectiveness of interpersonal communication, perceived resource availability, and perceived intra-group similarity influence leadership improvement. This approach focused on interviews and thematic analysis which enabled the researcher to accurately assess the implications of cross-cultural experience leadership improvement. The interview method in qualitative research involved interviewing executives with cross-cultural experience and conducting thematic analysis on the interview content.

3.4.2 Sampling Method

In this study, purposive sampling was appropriate as it ensured the respondents selected were the most appropriate for the research question. In this case, all of them would provide helpful information rich in content. Sampling refers to the non-probability sampling method, which involves selecting participants for the study according to the study's goals (Palinkas et al., 2015). In this case, the research targeted leaders in CMNEs, and these were only selected in cross-culturally intensive leadership posts. Using a purposive sampling strategy, the investigator gathered relevant information on specific leaders who navigated through intercultural team management and provided helpful information on the concepts sought in cross-cultural leadership. To achieve this, the study ensured that the participants selected in the sample have adequate cross-cultural experience. This helped ensure a results-oriented sample in addition to the representativeness of the sample in the population of interest. Such a selective targeting procedure

helped to strengthen the reliability and relevance of the results, which enabled the investigation of the chosen subject matter.

Purposive sampling was used to recruit research participants, with an emphasis on cross-culturally intense leadership roles held by CMNE leaders. Those with a lot of expertise leading teams in many cultural contexts met one of the selection criteria. To guarantee that they could offer insightful commentary on cross-cultural leadership dynamics, the leaders selected had to have exhibited a high level of engagement with intercultural team management. By carefully choosing the sample, it was made sure to be representative and pertinent to the demographic of interest. The study improved the validity and applicability of its conclusions by limiting the sample to people with significant cross-cultural leadership experience, ensuring that the knowledge acquired was closely in line with the study's goals.

Sample selection conditions included leaders in state-owned multinational enterprises who are exceedingly responsible for a large role in managing cross-cultural projects or initiatives. Only participants performing in director or higher management levels, with wide spans of control, and having substantial leadership experience were evaluated. This way, one could guarantee that the insights will be derived from leaders who have spent deep, practically experienced knowledge of the dynamics of cross-cultural leadership.

The necessity of this sampling technique was relatively unambiguous because the research objective was to explore the precisely constructed unique positions of leaders of CMNEs. This technique was also appropriate because purposive sampling has consistently been recognized as one of the sampling techniques that generates contextually rich data, which is important in cross-cultural research such as this one (Mercurio, 2003). Since the study aimed to have a representative

sample that showed that cross-border experience was sufficient, the researcher ensured that all participants had cross-border experiences.

This purposive sampling thus resulted in 16 such leaders from the CMNEs that met the above criteria. Individual participants were either the Chief Executive Officer, Managing Director, or Regional Manager who had senior leadership and direct responsibility for managing cross-cultural teams. Participants in this study were selected to include those individuals with substantial experience in regard to overcoming intercultural difficulties within the context of a multinational enterprise framework. To ensure anonymity, each participant was assigned an interview code, such as Interviewee01, Interviewee02. These coding are used in later stages of analysis, wherein leadership strategies and behaviours are cross-compared across cultures with the assurance of confidentiality of participant responses. A complete summary of all interviews, including coded identification and important role characteristics, is provided in Appendix 6: Interviewee 2024–2025 Details.

Because semi-structured interviews offer the flexibility required to delve deeply into participants' narratives and experiences, they were selected as the primary data-gathering technique. This approach also sat in the direction of organized inquiry and their freedom to interpret, thereby allowing a more nuanced sense of how participants developed their leadership styles through cross-cultural experiences (Gibb 2019). Karatsareas (2022) also argued that semi-structured interviews permit us to explore themes and insights that were not anticipated, but at the same time observe a path with predetermined questions. This strategy was useful for capturing nuanced, situation-specific processes like, for example, leadership in cross-cultural settings. This gave both participants an opportunity to talk, in their own words, producing a more complete set of information than if they had been simply reading forced-choice surveys.

3.4.3 Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews were used to balance structured questionnaires with the in-depth study of the participants' experiences. In this approach, the accent falls not on quantitative aspects but rather on capturing quality data, whereby interviewees describe their unique experiences of crossing cultures and how such experiences have nuancedly shaped their leadership styles. Unlike fully structured interviews, semi-structured interviews provided room for changes in questions according to the participants' responses, allowing for a natural flow of conversation to take over.

Moreover, the semi-structured interview allowed the researcher to delve deeper into specific themes as they emerged, which helped gain an in-depth understanding of the subject matter. This method is proper in qualitative research to explain experiences and complex phenomena, such as leadership in diverse cultural contexts. Semi-structured interviews complement other data collection methods by allowing the researcher to investigate exciting topics in greater detail, adding depth to what might otherwise be superficially understood (Quarta, 2019). Thus, semi-structured interviews were used because depths of insight that deliver data disclosing patterns and themes may be overlooked using some methods.

Based on the researcher's continuum of the leadership experience, the interview design was structured into three parts in the setting of a broad interview guide. The first part dealt with reacting to cross-cultural experience, seeking to find out the ways through which the participants met various cultural contexts in their leadership positions. The second part focused more about the short-term effects about these experiences; how issues like language and cultural differences influenced their leadership and how their team dealt with it. In the end, the third part looked at the residual effects on their leadership as they were able to determine the changes to their behavior in team management, communication, and decision-making process after successive cross-cultural

activities. This structured design was helpful in developing a nuanced understanding of emergency and continuous leadership behaviour change from cultural diversity aspects.

3.4.3.1 The interview process

For this research, interviews with selected CMNE leaders were arranged for about 1-1.5 hours. Moderating the time of the interview ensures that the meeting is long enough to help people relate their experiences in leadership but not so long as to make people tired, which can help by altering the quality of the responses. Hoda (2024) suggested that when the interviews occur at a convenient time for the participants, their narratives are appropriate to the extent that they enable the applicants to provide comprehensive coverage of how they handled the complexities of cross-cultural leadership. On the same note, creating a simple and conducive environment was important, as it was needed to enhance the participants' responsiveness to the subject matter.

The sample consisted 16 participants, which is enough for qualitative studies that seek to explore in-depth complex issues. This sample size was selected based on the importance of avoiding overwhelming the respondents with the data they would provide for each perspective targeted to ensure that every aspect is included. The small purposive sample size enabled the researcher to conduct an in-depth, focused interview with each of the families and understand the different cultures and changes that the various family leaders have experienced and the management styles they have employed. Gilgun (2019) notes that this approach makes it possible to establish an elaborate understanding of the research themes and patterns because the research questions are well-defined and explored.

During the interviews, the participants were encouraged to reflect on their experiences and provide examples of both leadership in diverse cultural environments, as well as in homogenous settings. Semi-structured interview techniques allowed for these inductive themes to arise from the

leadership practices and were flexible enough that if a probing question needed reframing or reordering to ensure an in-depth view of the theme was gathered. This method also satisfies the iterative tendencies when seeking qualitative data, as the most common form of participant observation requires a fluid and adaptive approach to data collection in order to expand on the depth of your participants experiences (Quarta, 2019). The qualitative interviews allowed rich empirical findings to emerge on cross-cultural leadership in CMNEs based on their life stories.

The following table shows how each question relates to the framework and research questions.

Table 3.1 Interview guide

Focuses	Questions	Probs	Research question
Cross-cultural experience	1. Please briefly describe your role and responsibilities within your organization. 2. How many years of experience do you have in a leadership position? 3. What is the scope of your leadership in terms of team size and geographic regions covered? 4. Can you share some of your most significant cross-cultural experiences in your career?		1 , 2 and 3

	5. How did these cross-cultural experiences come about (e.g., international assignments, working with diverse teams, etc.)? 6. What specific skills or knowledge did you gain from these cross-cultural experiences? 7. Why do you think these cross-cultural experiences have improved your leadership? 8. What challenges have you faced when leading multicultural teams? 9. How do you ensure effective communication and collaboration within your multicultural team? 10. Can you provide examples of how cultural diversity has positively impacted your team's performance?	Probe: If so, in what ways? Probe: How did you address them?	
Impacts on leading a cross-cultural team	1. Do you believe that cross-cultural experiences have helped improve your leadership skills? 2. Can you identify specific aspects of your leadership that have been		1 and 2

	influenced by your cross-cultural experiences (e.g., decision-making, communication, team management)? 3. Why do you think these cross-cultural experiences have improved your leadership?	Probe: What is the mechanism behind this improvement? Probe: What is the mechanism behind this improvement?	
Impacts on leadership style shift	1. How have your cross-cultural experiences shaped your personal leadership philosophy? 2. Have your leadership styles or approaches changed over time due to your cross-cultural experiences? 3. What advice would you give to aspiring leaders in multinational environments? 4. How do you foresee the role of multicultural leadership evolving in the next five to ten years?	Probe: If so, how?	1, 2 and 3

	5. Do you believe that the benefits of cross-cultural experiences are immediate, or do they manifest over a longer period? 6. Are there any other aspects of leadership influenced by cross-cultural experiences that we still need to cover? 7. What are the fundamental mechanisms through which cross-cultural experiences enhance leadership effectiveness?	Probe: Can you provide examples?	
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3.4.4 Data Analysis

Data analysis forms the most critical part of a research project because the process summarizes the collected information for education, development, planning, or further research. According to Ismail et al. (2019), data analysis is crucial in research because it involves interpreting and understanding the information gathered through logical or analytical reasoning to determine the acquired information's trends, relationships, or patterns.

In light of the current study, partakers' beliefs, thoughts, and perceptions obtained from semi-structured consultations were scrutinized through thematic analysis to determine the trends, relationships, and patterns around the influence of cross-cultural experiences on leadership development. In particular, data collected from the study and recorded in the interview transcripts was organized into particular themes and sub-themes to highlight the impact of cross-cultural leadership experience and how interaction with various factors such as personal values, social norms, and cultural values can influence leadership development in diverse workplace settings. At first, researchers soak in the data, using open coding in order to notice the topics and the themes. These ideas evolved into the concentrated coding where the dependence and correlation of the features were found.

The thematic analysis approach was sufficiently flexible that these themes were continually refined as new knowledge was acquired with each subsequent interview. For instance, as demonstrated below, the more complex code "Cultural Adaptability in Leadership" evolved from the less complex one of "adapting leadership styles" as the reported analysis progressed. This included how leaders adapt their decision-making processes, communication style, and leadership approach when working in a different culture. A related major category, "communication challenges," refers to the difficulties that leaders encounter in speaking across cultures and languages.

Throughout the process, precise dimensions of leadership, such as "cross-cultural decision-making" and "adapting to cultural differences during conflict," were targeted. In this manner, the researcher developed a more complex theoretical model, which was more in sync with the data. In the concluding part of the analysis, the procedures for applying codes changed, beginning with open coding, followed by focused and selective coding. This transition facilitated the researcher to narrow down to the most prominent categories and expand them into core themes. As an example, the theme of 'Cultural Adaptability' evolved into one of the primary theoretical frameworks with sub-themes in 'leadership styles,' 'culturally diverse teams', and 'cross-cultural communication.' These subthemes were critical for understanding how an individual's leadership practices and strategies evolved from numerous cross-culture encounters.

The last step in the thematic analysis process involved purposeful integration, in which the researcher linked the emergent themes to a logical theoretical structure. This structure explained how cross-cultural environments impacted leadership development within CMNEs. The linkages between concepts such as adaptability, communication, and team functioning were explored within the structure of this model to gain further insight into how these different elements relate to one another. Using the thematic analysis approach, the researcher ensured that this theoretically integrative model was firmly rooted in participant data, allowing for deep insights into cross-cultural leadership.

The rationale for using thematic analysis in the current study is that unlike content and narrative analysis, thematic analysis enables the researcher to identify the patterns (important themes) in the obtained data. According to Avendaño (2022), the primary goal of thematic analysis is to identify the themes and use them to address the research problem by interpreting and making sense of collected information.

In particular, thematic analysis was suitable for the researcher to attain more reliable outcomes regarding the influence of cross-cultural experiences on leadership development. Importantly, the thematic analysis approach was appropriated for the current study over the content and narrative analysis because the technique enables the researcher to have an in-depth understanding of a particular aspect of the issue and how various features of the study might be linked. Therefore, unlike content or narrative analysis, the approach is much more than summarizing obtained data.

In descriptive research, the most common advantage of employing thematic analysis is that the method offers a more accessible form of data scrutiny. Avendaño (2022) emphasized that thematic analysis is a good approach to descriptive research, especially where the researcher explores a topic or something about people's experiences, familiarity, views, values, or opinions from qualitative data. Therefore, the approach was appropriate for scrutiny of data collected for this study following its distinctive features accompanying its ability to help the investigator account for a more inclusive breakdown of collected information about the topic.

Another advantage of employing thematic analysis in descriptive research is the approach permits the scholar to obtain more reliable information about the topic under the study because, unlike content analysis, thematic analysis does not necessitate more advanced data analysis skills. In addition, current studies point to thematic analysis as a powerful data analysis tool that can be used to identify patterns in the data, identify relationships between the data and other variable quantities, and provide reliable insights into the data collected.

3.5 Data Presentation

In the final stage, the information gained through thematic analysis was presented descriptively, highlighting the trends, relationships, and patterns around the influence of cross-cultural experiences on leadership development. The results showed how interaction with various factors,

such as personal values, social norms, and cultural values, can influence leadership development in diverse workplace settings. In particular, the key outcomes of various interactions between variables, including leadership ability, personal and professional development, increased relationship levels, cross-cultural awareness, and cultural integration, were presented through descriptive approaches.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were at the centre of all phases of research in order to comply universally ethical norms and prevent harm (rights, safety and dignity) to people involved. To maintain ethics, the first step was to attain informed consents from all participants. According to Saunders et al. Consent: According to Khwaja et al., (2019), Subjects should get informed consent by describing the goals of this research, how they will be included in the study, what are some potential negative and positive aspects of joining. Participation proforma with objectives accompanied by an information paper was given to the participants before interview. Those who agreed to participate signed consent forms indicating that they would experience no negative consequences if they subsequently chose not to enroll. By doing so, the practice respected and lived the principle of transparency and occurrence of each candidate.

Concerns of anonymity and confidentiality were predominant concerns during the research. The data was stripped of personal identifiers such as names and individual organizations to attain anonymity during the research. This was especially crucial in light of possible discussions on leadership issues in cross-cultural multinational enterprises CMNEs, which could lead to revealing sensitive and professional information that could be harmful to the participants. In addition to words or in oral and written forms, pseudonyms were used to enhance confidentiality because access to raw data was solely restricted to the researcher. It was also made clear to the participants

that the only use of their data was for academic purposes, and if there were a need to give out information to other parties, further consent would be obtained from them.

On top of assuring the anonymity of the participants, proper data protection strategies were adopted to prevent unauthorized access and loss of all the information collected. Pictures of the collected files, including interviews and recordings or transcription, were encrypted and protected using passwords. Science mock-up copies, enciphered on external storage cards, were kept to eliminate loss or leakage of files. Data retention policies were made explicit to participants, and they were informed of how long their data would be retained and when it would be securely destroyed after the completion of the project. These requirements are mandated by the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), which is especially applicable in Europe but also necessary for maintaining privacy and data security for all participants in research studies.

Also, it was ensured that the research was guided by the principle of non-maleficence such that participants were not harmed in any manner, i.e., psychologically, emotionally, or harming their reputation. The semi-structured questions were drafted in a manner that was respectful and did not intrude into personal or sensitive aspects of the individual. If one realized that participants were uncomfortable during the interview, they would be informed to discontinue participation immediately or refrain from answering a specific question(s). This principle was considered as part of ethical principles, namely the principle of care and the principle of responsibility, where the well-being of participants becomes more important than what was to be published.

3.7 Limitations of the Study

The main drawback of this study is overdependence on the interviewees' goodwill during semi-structured interviews. This limitation might have had a substantial impact on the outcome.

Additionally, the process is time-consuming, and some candidates might have misinterpreted some questions. Thus, some interviewees might not have given appropriate responses to the questions. In addition, a lack of coherence might have occurred during the data analysis phase, especially when developing themes and sub-themes. Another significant limitation of this study is that the interpretations might have been limited to the author's understanding because knowledge and personal experience tend to influence observations and presumptions. Therefore, because the thematic analysis is usually phrase-based, some meanings and interpretations of the participants' beliefs, views, and perceptions might have been captured incorrectly.

It is worth noting several problems may arise from the proposed research project. First, it is possible that the findings could be misinterpreted or overgeneralized such that it contributes to negative implications. Similarly, the research can be used to develop a false sense of security that cross-culturalism is the only way to create effective leaders, leading to a lack of focus on other critical aspects of leadership development. Nevertheless, the project's implications are far-reaching for leadership development. The research project could offer organizations the necessary insight to develop competent and successful teams if successfully executed. The research could also provide insight into how leaders can use their cross-cultural experience to enhance their skills, which is ideal for multinational entities.

3.8 Chapter Summary

Cross-cultural experiences have significant impacts on leaders' communication in diverse workplace settings. Nevertheless, there is little evidence to show the influence of cross-cultural experiences on leadership development. In light of the research methodology, this study adopts a qualitative research approach to fill this gap by exploring how the perceived effectiveness of

interpersonal communication, perceived resource availability, and perceived intra-group similarity influence leadership improvement.

In this study, the philosophical model is built on epistemological interpretivism to explore the impact of cross-cultural leadership experience and how interaction with various factors such as personal values, social norms, and cultural values can influence leadership development in diverse workplace settings. The key outcomes of various interactions between variables include leadership ability, personal and professional development, increased relationship levels, cross-cultural awareness, and cultural integration. In light of how data was collected for analysis, the author appropriated a qualitative descriptive research design to explore how the perceived effectiveness of interpersonal communication, perceived resource availability, and perceived intra-group similarity influence leadership improvement. This approach enabled the researcher to accurately assess the implications of cross-cultural experience leadership improvement.

The target for this study includes key management executives, corporate leaders, and expatriates with cross-cultural experiences in various multinational corporations. The inclusion criteria of the applicants involved in the current study comprised organizational leaders, executives, and supervisors 38 to 65 years with extensive experience in cross-cultural leadership experience, leadership ability, personal and professional development, and leading across cultures. This study included thirty applicants, including key management executives, corporate leaders, and expatriates with cross-cultural experiences in various multinational corporations. These interviewees were selected through purposive sampling to offer their ideas and insights vis-à-vis the impact of cross-cultural leadership experience and how interaction with various factors such as personal values, social norms, and cultural values can influence leadership development in diverse workplace settings. The current study used interviews as the most suitable data collection

instrument. Guetterman (2020) underscored that primary data gathered through these approaches (interviews) can be easily analysed to refute or support a research hypothesis before concluding vis-à-vis the subject matter of the study. The researcher appropriated semi-structured interviews in this study because of their descriptive nature.

In the current study, partakers' beliefs, thoughts, and perceptions obtained from semi-structured consultations were scrutinized through thematic analysis to determine the trends, relationships, and patterns around the influence of cross-cultural experiences on leadership development. In particular, data collected from the study and recorded in the interview transcripts was organized into themes and sub-themes. In the final stage, the information gained through thematic analysis was presented descriptively, highlighting the trends, relationships, and patterns around the influence of cross-cultural experiences on leadership development.

In line with the University's precondition of adhering to academic and research integrity, which requires the researcher to cautiously and critically examine their research work to avoid negligence and obvious errors, the scholar followed these ethical considerations by observing research objectivity. In this study, the researcher also avoided biases in experimental methods, data analysis, interpretation, and choosing collaborators.

The chapter is based on the methodological choices that were expressed in Chapter 3 and presents the findings that were obtained in the course of the thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews. The identified emergent themes and sub-themes based on the stories of the interviewees illustrate the effects of cross-cultural experiences on the leadership behaviours, communication practices and professional growth in CMNEs. As a result, Chapter 4 carries out a move towards the description of the methodological implementation to reveal the substantive findings of the study

on the real experiences of leaders in the world. These results represent the data ground of the succession that follows the discussion and explanation below in Chapter 5.

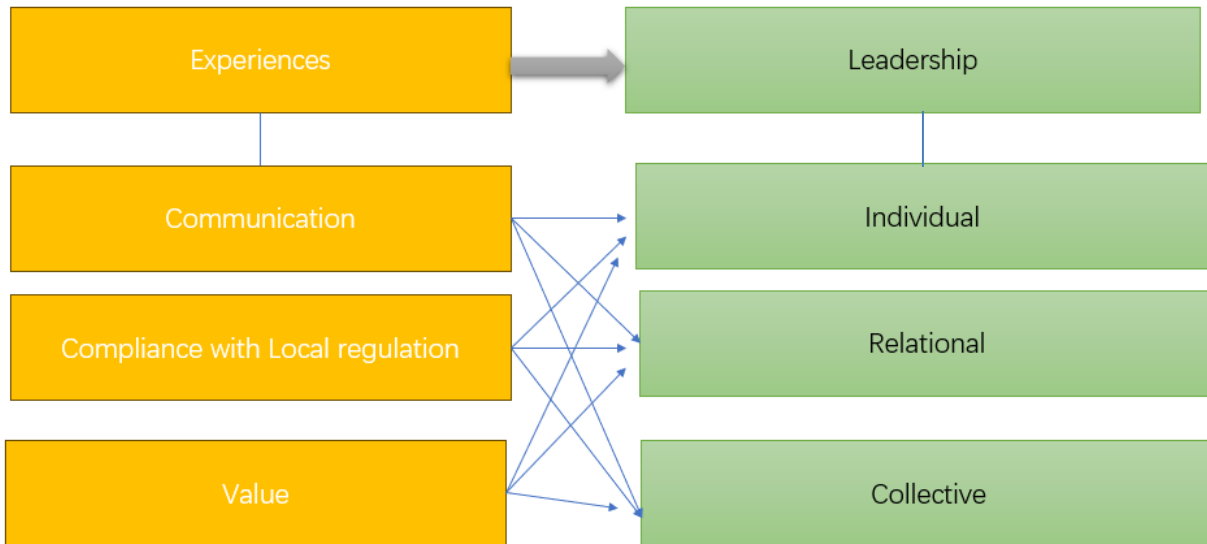
Chapter 4: Results and Findings

4.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter provides the results and findings of the study, highlighting significant aspects of corporate leaders and cross-cultural experiences and their impact on leadership and leadership effectiveness. The chapter offers thematic data analysis from interview data with prominent leaders in Chinese State-Owned Multinational Enterprises (CMNEs). The findings from the empirical data and the interpretation of those findings using the conceptual framework on the impact of cross-cultural experiences on leadership are the two main components of this chapter.

Senior executives working for Chinese State-Owned Multinational Enterprises (CMNEs) were interviewed in-depth for the empirical findings. For cross-cultural experiences, the three major factors, including communication, compliance with local regulations, and values, were identified by the research as influencing leadership experiences in cross-cultural settings. Furthermore, perceived resource availability, perceived power distance, perceived intra-group similarity and problem-solving strategies were identified as key mediators or mechanisms influencing leadership in various cross-cultural settings. The interview excerpts provide evidence for the intricacies, adversity, and improvement related to cross-cultural experience in the leadership style of CMNEs

In section 4.2 the findings are explored and discussed including each theme (2nd order) and its sub-themes (1st order). Based on the conceptual framework for understanding cross-cultural leadership, the data is presented across six analytical mechanisms and synthesized into three interpretive leadership themes: Individual, Relational, and Collective Leadership as shown in the model below.



The results are combined into three broad leadership dimensions (Individual, Relational, and Collective Leadership) in Section 4.3 as illustrated in Table 1. Each of these dimensions is influenced by certain processes and results. Collectively, these results demonstrate how cross-cultural experiences impact the development of leadership behaviours, tactics, and identity in CMNEs.

Themes	Sub- themes	Examples
Individual leadership	Compliance with local regulation supports innovation.	-Regulatory frameworks, understood and implemented well, can support innovation and employee involvement rather than stifling them. (Empirical 2). -By considering compliance as an enabler rather than a constraint, CMNE leaders demonstrated regulatory literacy that enabled sustainable growth and countered the liability of foreignness (Empirical 2).

		-Instead of accepting host-country regulation as fixed forms of bureaucratic impediments, leaders re-framed compliance as a two-dimensional tool (a) as a strategic precondition of market legitimacy; and (b) as a generator of organisational innovation (Empirical 2).
	Problem-solving capabilities	Solving problems successfully in cross-cultural contexts is not just cognitive but also deeply embodied, influenced by regular interpersonal encounters, subtle clues, and the capacity to maintain an open mind to alternative methods of thinking and doing tasks (Empirical 4). “... After several revisions, they gradually understood this thinking model and learned how to apply it after adaptation and integration. The level of the summary report has significantly improved, and the team also agrees with it" (Empirical 4).
	Self-regulations capabilities	Actions/Events/Experience are significant crucibles for learning and developing leadership as they necessitate top management to encounter unknown local cultural, legal, and organizational norms (Empirical 1).

		Cross-cultural experiences promoted strategic flexibility and greater sensitivity to institutional and cultural diversity (Empirical 1). -How they were required to adjust their leadership approaches, decision-making practices, and communication styles when working overseas (Empirical 1).
Relational leadership	Value Internalisation	-Value internalisation had a positive impact on the entire community (Empirical 3). -Leaders preferred working with a culture that emphasised fairness, openness and caring for every employee. Benefits and goals that were well-organised and described were essential in what was required (Empirical 3). “....the most crucial thing here is to establish a set of leading by example, fair and transparent systems to incentivize, assess and evaluate the business below...”(Empirical 3).
	Enhanced leadership perception and understanding	The study outcome showed that the exposure to different cultures made CMNE leaders reevaluate their

		thoughts on leadership and the way they lead (Empirical 5). -Foreigners are most averse to preaching and output, so when communicating, seek common values first and integrate management goals into value exchange” (Empirical 5).
Collective leadership	Enhanced Intra/Inter-Group Collaboration	-Collaboration in cross-cultural settings was shaped particularly by variations in expectations about hierarchy, authority, and participation (Empirical 6). -For leaders, good collaboration necessitates recalibration of their leadership style as well as their projection of authority to suit local cultural conventions. (Empirical 6). -“In communication, it is important to downplay the identity of state-owned enterprises as much as possible, avoid mentioning the significant significance of merger and acquisition strategies for the national economy and people's livelihood, and maintain a distance from public perception... The acquisition was very successful”(Empirical 6).

4.2 Empirical Findings

This section investigates the ways by which cross-cultural experiences impact leadership in Chinese state-owned multinational enterprises (CMNEs). As these businesses operate in more complicated and culturally varied global contexts, executives must traverse a number of institutional, communication, and interpersonal hurdles. Drawing on rich participant accounts, this research is organised into various analytical categories that represent the lived realities of cross-cultural engagement. These include important acts and events, adaptation to external regulatory frameworks, internalisation of common values, cross-cultural communication, and collaborative problem-solving techniques. Through these methods, the data demonstrates how leadership styles change, extend, and become more contextually sensitive. The findings given here serve as an empirical foundation for the wider leadership concepts discussed in the next section.

4.2.1 Sub-themes/1st Order Themes

Empirical Finding 1: Self-regulations capabilities

The empirical data showed that cross-cultural encounters improved leaders' self-regulation abilities by encouraging strategic flexibility and emotional restraint. From the interviews, leaders who were exposed to a variety of institutional and cultural environments had to control personal biases, change their behaviour, and make judgements with heightened context sensitivity. This permitted more measured, culturally appropriate answers in high-stakes situations. Such events become crucibles for learning and developing leadership as they necessitate top management to encounter unknown local cultural, legal, and organizational norms. For instance, a number of participants explained how they were required to adjust their leadership approaches, decision-making practices, and communication styles when working overseas. One classic case concerned an acquisition success involving a European company, whereby the top manager needed to

reformulate performance appraisal mechanisms to meet tougher labour laws and well-established local norms in work culture.

Interviewee 5: “Accurately convey the requirements of the domestic parent company in a way that local employees can understand Domestic mode: frequent meetings require quick and comprehensive requirements... In the management of foreign companies, we cannot completely copy the domestic mode, otherwise it is easy for foreign employees to not understand and create friction. Clear expression of important information, timeline, and goals to be achieved, and completion of tasks within a limited time frame”. These learning experiences promoted strategic flexibility and greater sensitivity to institutional and cultural diversity. According to one executive (Interviewee 1), “During the merger and acquisition process, the Dutch have a strong sense of rules and regulations, benchmarking against Chinese companies. ... even if the management team sees a lot of room for improvement in production efficiency, it is impossible to achieve the goal with Chinese standards and incentive mechanisms... local labour laws must be followed...” This observation illustrates the need to move away from a Chinese leadership philosophy based on efficiency and tradition and toward a more compliant and stakeholder-sensitive leadership style. The capacity to real-time adjust—quite often under pressure—illustrates how cross-cultural adversity functions as catalysts for profound experiential learning and long-term leadership change. Empirical evidence shown that cross-cultural interactions enhanced leaders' capacity for self-regulation by promoting emotional control and strategic adaptability. According to the interviews, leaders who experienced a range of institutional and cultural contexts had to modify their conduct, limit their own prejudices, and make decisions with greater context sensitivity. In high-stakes scenarios, this allowed for more measured, culturally relevant reactions. Such events force senior

management to interact with foreign organisational, legal, and cultural conventions, making them testing grounds for learning and leadership growth.

One of the drivers that led to the emergence of self-regulation involved the feeling of dissonance between the customary Chinese leadership procedures and host-country anticipations. The participants explained how their instinctive or automatic behaviours in the domestic environment, which included directive communication style, quick decision-making, and working under high pressure or assertiveness, were mostly taken as assertive or even culturally unacceptable abroad. To this end, leaders have had to adjust both the technicalities of their management styles as well as their emotional reactions especially where misunderstanding or institutional opposition exists.

One executive, for instance, considered the difficulties in moving the culture of frequent, intensive meetings that prevails in China into a Western organisational setting. He remarked that recreating this home environment without modification usually led to disorientation and person-to-person tension among overseas employees (Interviewee 4). In response to this, the leaders needed to use more clear and organized methods of communication and be explicit about goals, time frames and expectations. This was one part of a larger change in emotionally intelligent leadership behaviours which were supported by empathy and increased awareness of cultural sensitivities. This kind of move explains why self-regulation in cross-cultural leadership goes beyond the control of behaviours, but entails a more complex process of emotional and cognitive adjustment to various workplace expectations.

This demonstrates how host nation legal frameworks serve as external institutions that limit and mould internal leadership discipline. Effective leaders reflected and strategically recalibrated rather than resisted these frameworks, exemplifying Argyris and Schön's (1978) idea of "double-loop learning," in which underlying ideas and behaviours are both challenged and reformed. As

a result, self-regulation is both reactive and developmental; it shows how a leader may improve their motivating style, ethical reasoning, and cross-cultural efficacy. In CMNEs that operate across several institutional contexts, this dynamic change is essential to long-term leadership success.

Empirical Finding 2: Compliance with local regulation supports innovation.

The results showed that CMNE leaders typically encountered regulatory and institutional settings in stark contrast to China's, and they needed a strategic yet flexible compliance response. Rather than seeing external regulations as strictly bureaucratic barriers, leaders imagined compliance as a double tool—both a strategic requirement for market access and a moral imperative for legitimacy creation. In countries like Brazil, compliance with society and labour law demanded something more than rule compliance. One of the leaders emphasized aligning incentives with cultural forces: “Once the mechanism is established, Brazilians will complete tasks flexibly and creatively according to policies...” (Interviewee 1). This remark shows how regulatory frameworks, understood and implemented well, can support innovation and employee involvement rather than stifling them.

One respondent further commented, “Brazil is another situation. ...if there are loopholes in the management system, Brazilians will study them and are also very sensitive to incentive mechanisms... (Interviewee 1). For Chinese management teams, it is very important to timely fill management loopholes, establish assessment and evaluation systems, including incentive mechanisms for evaluation.” This observation reflects an active stance towards coping with regulatory uncertainty. Instead of fighting strange systems, managers created adaptive internal systems to comply with host country requirements. In addition to reducing operations risk, this enhanced credibility and trust with local stakeholders. By considering compliance as an enabler

rather than a constraint, CMNE leaders demonstrated regulatory literacy that enabled sustainable growth and countered the liability of foreignness.

The findings revealed that CMNE leaders were generally faced with regulatory and institutional environments that were polar opposite to that in China, and they had to have a strategic, but adaptable response to compliance. Instead of accepting host-country regulation as fixed forms of bureaucratic impediments, leaders re-framed compliance as a two-dimensional tool (a) as a strategic precondition of market legitimacy; and (b) as a generator of organisational innovation. Such reframe was especially manifested in such settings as Brazil, where the regulatory norms were embedded in terms of social expectations, labour protection, and informal accountability frameworks.

One of the leaders answered that after incentive mechanisms had been adjusted to local preferences, Brazilian staff turned out to be more autonomous and creative in the field of policy (Interviewee 2). This is to imply that effectively integrated compliance systems not only provided a guarantee of legal compliance but also opened the doors to employee involvement, organisational learning, and flexibility of procedures. In this regard, compliance did not mean passive obedience to rules, but an active leadership skill that relied on the institutional literacy practice and cultural adjustment. Participants talked about developing internal systems that were both compliant and culturally appropriate, such as updated performance metrics and assessment frameworks. One responder emphasised a proactive and preventative strategy by highlighting the significance of promptly identifying and fixing regulatory "loopholes" (Interviewee 1). External constraints were internalised as design challenges rather than operational dangers, indicating a deeper leadership transition.

CMNE leaders showed their capacity to reduce the risk of being foreign, win over stakeholders, and support long-term market integration by using compliance as a type of contextual intelligence. Such acts demonstrate a deep comprehension of the institutional dynamics of the host nation and demonstrate how, when read strategically, compliance may spur innovation and legitimacy.

Empirical Finding 3: Enhanced value internalisation

The results indicated that it was necessary for CMNE leaders to create shared values in order to manage teams from various cultures around the world. Leaders preferred working with a culture that emphasised fairness, openness and caring for every employee. Benefits and goals that were well-organised and described were essential in what was required. According to Interviewee 1, “...the most crucial thing here is to establish a set of leading by example, fair and transparent systems to incentivize, assess and evaluate the business below...” This observation stresses that leadership should be strong and honest to help team members absorb and value their firm’s principles.

In addition, value internalisation had a positive impact on the entire community. In this example, the Chinese investment led to the county investing in its infrastructure and making more opportunities for young people: “.... because we entered, we also built a lot of fixed assets locally, added a lot of job opportunities, and created better development space for young people” (Interviewee 1). This situation points out that enacting goals important to the local community encouraged unity among employees and the company. As managers tied the company’s vision to local initiatives, workers became more involved and committed to the business. As a result of their strong alignment, the values were present in both workplace culture and in the company’s relationships with the community, helping to unite people of various cultures.

The results suggested CMNE leadership understood the importance of shared value structures in managing multicultural teams within differing national contexts. This was more than just issuing corporate slogans or codes of ethics; it was about creating a value ecosystem where fairness, inclusiveness, and transparency were not only practiced but deeply rooted in daily operations. Interviewed leaders emphasized that clearly defined incentives, performance metrics, and ethical frameworks were essential in promoting cohesion and coherence across diverse employee cultures. As one interviewee (Interviewee 1). put it, “the most crucial thing here is to establish a set of leading by example, fair and transparent systems to incentivize, assess and evaluate the business below.” This reflects the strong conviction that real leadership requires actual alignment with set policies for effective internalization to occur.

The process of internalizing shared values was functional and transformative. Leaders actively aligned company goals with community development objectives, enabling the firm to operate as a legitimate social actor instead of a perceived foreign entity. “Because we entered, we also built a lot of fixed assets locally... and created better development space for young people” (Interviewee 1). This deliberate social investment helps to align business ideals with local expectations, bolstering both internal commitment and outward credibility.

Additionally, value internalisation promoted a cohesive corporate identity and reduced intergroup distance by acting as a cultural bridge. Leaders created commitment via cooperation rather than compliance by co-constructing values with stakeholders rather than enforcing them from the top down. By doing this, CMNEs were able to foster emotional connection and enduring loyalty, both of which were critical for negotiating the challenges of managing a cross-cultural business. This research shows that internalising values is not only morally required, but also a tactical tool for maintaining a high-performing international team.

Empirical Finding 4: Enhanced problem-solving capabilities

From the results, CMNE leaders frequently stressed that working in different settings led to innovative and frequently revolutionary approaches to problem-solving. They used reflective practice and adaptive thinking in the face of cultural conflict, unclear norms, and knowledge gaps. The results showed that these problems required more than just technological fixes; they also called for context-sensitive judgement and emotional intelligence. “Even though language is an important part of trust-building for cross-cultural plasticity, it takes more than that; one exhibits understanding, dignified, and considerate behaviour toward other cultures” Interviewee 7 said. This demonstrates how solving problems successfully in cross-cultural contexts is not just cognitive but also deeply embodied, influenced by regular interpersonal encounters, subtle clues, and the capacity to maintain an open mind to alternative methods of thinking and doing tasks.

Another leader described how his team learned to internalize new models of thinking over time through repeated documentation and revision: “... After several revisions, they gradually understood this thinking model and learned how to apply it after adaptation and integration. The level of the summary report has significantly improved, and the team also agrees with it” (Interviewee 6). This cyclical process is reminiscent of experiential learning in action, wherein solutions aren't prescriptive but worked out collaboratively over time. It is suggesting that global leadership requires more than procedural skill; it involves learning on the job, experimenting, and adapting in situ. Problem-solving, from this perspective, is a learning process of adaptive cultural exchange and meaning-making, producing innovation and resilience across different contexts.

The results showed that for CMNE leaders, solving problems in intricate and novel settings went well beyond providing a technical solution. It involved interpreting a culture, a society, and making strategic moves. Leaders learned the hard way that everything depended on unlocking the local

values, behaviours, and expectations. One leader working in Brazil noted: if there are loopholes in the management system, Brazilians will study them and are also very sensitive to incentive mechanisms... (Interviewee 1). For Chinese management teams, it is very important to timely fill management loopholes, establish assessment and evaluation systems, including incentive mechanisms for evaluation.” Such a realization shows the extent to which relational problem-solving goes in cross-cultural contexts requires context-specific solutions instead of blanket approaches.

The constructivist perspective on problem solving emphasizes that effective problem solving is a social dialogue and entails problem solving through discussions, blending cultures, and through trial and error. Leaders did not only have to decipher certain clues, but also listening and work closely with the locals to build systems and responses that would not be removed from the context of culture where they were brought. Such did foster innovation, but through not imposing top-down solutions, but through planning bottom up and following local guidance. Thus, problem solving became a collective responsibility that rose beyond business and defend organizational resilience and identify new leadership. Cross-cultural problem-solving was therefore used not just to solve problems, but also as a method for leadership development and organisational learning.

The results indicated that CMNE leaders had acquired superior problem-solving skills due to prolonged exposure to new cultural, legislative, and operational conditions. The conventional methods of problem solving were found wanting in such settings. The leaders were forced to move beyond their dependence on set procedures and technical solutions to context-specific, reflective, and collaborative practices. Instead of viewing problems as essentially technical challenges in isolated situations, they started regarding them as culturally situated predicaments that called on emotional intelligence as well as interpretive judgement.

One of the participants explained, "Though language is an important aspect of cross-cultural plasticity trust-building, it takes more than that; one shows understanding, dignified, and courteous conduct towards other cultures" (Interviewee 7). This observation makes the argument that problem-solving in cross-cultural situations continues to be cognitive as well as embodied while one bargains on the ability to read finely-grained cues, respond empathetically, and co-create meaning alongside others. Solutions, more so than being a product of imposing systems, emerged through repeated engagement and learning-by-doing.

An additional leader detailed how ongoing documentation and feedback cycles helped team members internalise new ways of thinking: "Having made several drafts, they began to grasp this model of thinking step by step and learned to apply it..." (Interviewee 6). This repetitive, cyclical process is typical of Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory, whereby knowledge is constructed through reflection, accommodation, and application in the moment.

One of the Brazilian managers expressed, "If there are loopholes... Brazilians will study them... For Chinese management teams, it is necessary to fill management loopholes, set up assessment and evaluation systems" (Interviewee 1). That indicates the shift from reactive leadership to anticipatory leadership, in which local behaviour turned into the first priority area for contemplating and designing adaptive systems.

These observations are in line with the constructivist thoughts, which consider problem-solving as a dialogic process based on the cultural interpretation and social interaction. Leaders did not simply implement solutions, but they also created them together with the local stakeholders. Problem-solving became a strategic process of organisational learning, innovation, and the formation of leadership identity through trial and error; cultural negotiation; and responsive planning. To this end, the journey of overcoming issues in varying contexts emerged as one of the primary avenues

towards the development of resilience, trust, and an earthy leadership style that can circumvent the complexity of the global environment.

Empirical Finding 5: Enhanced leadership perception and understanding

The study outcome showed that the exposure to different cultures made CMNE leaders reevaluate their thoughts on leadership and the way they lead. It was apparent that hierarchical and directive authority was replaced by a new approach that depended on learning about different cultures and understanding emotions and relationships. One interviewee said, “.... foreigners are most averse to preaching and output, so when communicating, seek common values first and integrate management goals into value exchange” (Interviewee 4). This means that to be effective in global affairs, countries should focus on teamwork instead of giving orders.

From the analysis, exploring new approaches to leadership demanded that people look at themselves and adjust to changes. They took time to consider how their actions were viewed by those from other countries and in other organisations. The results showed that when leaders noticed and addressed these perceptions, they reorganised their leadership to focus on respecting all, including others and aligning on values. In particular, the change required managers to adjust their actions regularly and to introduce new ways of leading. Therefore, leaders gained trust and were viewed as having a moral authority appreciated by people everywhere. Consequently, these new ideas helped develop a leadership style that worked well and was moral and appropriate for the situation.

According to the study, CMNE leaders were forced to reevaluate their conception of leadership after years of exposure to a variety of cultural contexts. Many leaders have historically approached international positions with a directive, hierarchical attitude that was influenced by home conventions. Working across cultural boundaries, however, challenged these presumptions and

necessitated a greater comprehension of emotional signals, relationship dynamics, and cultural value systems. According to one leader, "When communicating, look for common values first and integrate management goals into value exchange, as foreigners are most averse to preaching and output" (Interviewee 4). This feeling is part of a larger movement in leadership from command and control to mutual value alignment and cultural facilitation. It emphasises the necessity of interacting with others by moral credibility, empathy, and consensus, particularly in situations where power must be gained rather than assumed.

Further, this change was not just behavioural but very insightful. Leaders talked about an increased sensitivity to the ways their actions were received by their international colleagues and the effect those perceptions had on their effectiveness. They were forced to deal with unknown requirements of power distance, feedback culture and interpersonal respect. In the process, the inclusive and adaptive leadership styles were embraced by many. This involved a continuous reflexivity, in which leaders were able to reflection on their motivations and communication approaches, as well as positioning of relationships. This quality of being able to see oneself as others see him made possible a more culturally sensitive and morally reverberant kind of leadership. Leaders were expected to be trustworthy, fair, and humble instead of trying to inspire people with their power, and legitimacy was supported by ethical behaviour.

Such changing understanding of leadership eventually resulted in the construction of more context-sensitive leadership identity. Leaders were turned into interpreters of cultures- interpreting expectations, mediation of meaning and constructing bridges of difference. What they got was a leadership concept that placed moral authority, respect and emotional intelligence above status and hierarchy. Not only was this new model of leadership more effective in an international

environment, but it was also more sustainable because it created trust, cohesion, and long-term relational capital in the multicultural teams and the host societies.

Empirical Finding 6: Enhanced Intra/Inter-Group Collaboration

Collaboration in cross-cultural settings was shaped particularly by variations in expectations about hierarchy, authority, and participation. CMNE leaders discovered that good collaboration necessitated recalibration of their leadership style as well as their projection of authority to suit local cultural conventions. In an exemplary case of an M&A transaction, according to a leader, “In communication, it is important to downplay the identity of state-owned enterprises as much as possible, avoid mentioning the significant significance of merger and acquisition strategies for the national economy and people's livelihood, and maintain a distance from public perception... The acquisition was very successful” (Interviewee 8). This deliberate branding initiative served to reduce symbolic power distance so that the leader appeared to be easy to approach and engaged in dialogue. By softening hierarchical cues, leaders were able to produce more inclusive and participative settings that further enhanced smooth cooperation and trust-building among teams.

Aside from formal structures, leaders highlighted informal and culturally rooted practices as a must to foster deeper collaborative connections. Involvement in community activities, local celebrations, and team-building exercises facilitated leaders to establish rapport and express sensitivity towards their people's culture. These activities fostered people's psychological safety and made them feel valued and comprehended. Thus, collaboration transcended mere coordination at a task level to encompass emotional and relationship commitment. Such a twofold approach—mixing strategic adoption of authority with informal and people-focused interaction—enabled leaders to establish settings in which cross-cultural collaboration could become both real and effective.

The results showed that collaboration in cross-cultural settings was not only shaped by the formal organizational structure, but also by cultural notions regarding hierarchy, power distance, and leadership access. The CMNE leaders understood that effective intra- and inter-group collaboration necessitated a recalibration of leadership display in both intra- and inter-group dynamics, especially in places where top-down leadership might be met with skepticism or hostility. As an example, one of the leaders participating in a merger commented on the importance of branding the company as a merger and avoiding the dominant portrayal of the enterprise as a state-owned Chinese firm, understanding that expressions of national or institutional authority might invoke suspicion or distance. This decision illustrates an understanding of symbolic leadership, where a leader's representation is equally important to their actions.

By reducing state owned enterprise portrayals, the leader created the conditions for employees to experience autonomy and inclusiveness, which invited participation and dialogue, thus fostering the conditions for constructive collaboration. Such modifications illustrate a culturally intelligent leadership style where perception management is crucial for legitimacy and engagement that goes beyond mere compliance.

Additionally, leaders' readiness to participate in casual, relationally orientated activities based on regional cultural norms improved teamwork. Several interviewees regarded taking part in neighbourhood festivities, going to social gatherings, or lending assistance to neighbourhood projects as sincere attempts to demonstrate cultural humility and respect rather than as public relations gimmicks. Employee psychological safety was created by these measures, enabling them to exchange comments, voice ideas, and emotionally commit to shared objectives. Trust-based collaboration that transcended departmental, national, and cultural borders was achieved through the combination of emotionally intelligent engagement and adaptive authority framing, which

helped go beyond transactional coordination. By combining cultural immersion in casual contexts with deliberate restraint in formal leadership projection, CMNE leaders fostered a cooperative atmosphere based on respect for one another, common objectives, and enduring human ties.

4.2.2 Themes/2nd Order Themes

The leadership aspects and theme results presented in Section 4.2.1 are expanded upon in the analysis that follows. Individual, Relational, and Collective Leadership are the second-order interpretative leadership themes that are presented in this section's data analysis method, which progresses from first-order processes. The analysis examines how cross-cultural experiences serve as both facilitators and barriers in the development of leadership practices inside CMNEs, based on empirical data from the interviews. These results show how processes including cultural communication, value internalisation, and regulatory compliance affect individual development, interpersonal trust, and group identity. They are interpreted via the conceptual lens of cross-cultural leadership. In the end, the processes of cross-cultural experience are combined to create a model that depicts the dynamic interaction of organisational adaptability, leadership development, and cultural immersion in a global setting.

In response to complicated cross-cultural experiences, executives in Chinese State-Owned Multinational Enterprises (CMNEs) created adaptive techniques, as the previous investigation shown. Three broad leadership outcomes—individual leadership, relational leadership, and collective leadership—are shown by synthesising the six analytical mechanisms. These characteristics signify a conceptual change away from leadership as a transactional or hierarchical role and towards a more inclusive, reflexive, and context-sensitive procedure. Personal development, identity transformation, and reflection are all reflected in individual leadership. Relational leadership encompasses the growth of empathy, communication, and interpersonal trust.

Collective leadership emphasises group coherence, cultural integration, and common behaviours. When taken as a whole, these themes offer a framework for comprehending how exposure to different cultures alters leaders' actions as well as their thoughts, relationships, and decision-making processes in organisational environments that are internationally integrated.

Theme 1: Focusing on cross-cultural experiences enhances Individual leadership as a continuous process of self-making

Individual leadership involves changes within a leader, brought about by cultural exchange such as improving self-awareness, being adaptable and responsible toward others. The results showed that when leading in CMNEs, individuals experience personal changes as they gather cross-cultural experience. It means learning the required skills, along with developing humility, flexibility, acting ethically and being emotionally intelligent. From the analysis, it is common to develop these qualities when faced with difficulties, cultural clashes and when we use time for reflection. Someone from the industry stated that experiences in Europe often show that matters such as labour laws can lead to unexpected changes in plans: “.... even if the management team sees a lot of room for improvement in production efficiency, it is impossible to achieve the goal with Chinese standards and incentive mechanisms... local labour laws must be followed...” (Interviewee 1). As a result, leaders started to see their role as one of involvement with others and honour for the community's values.

The results showed that leaders becoming aware of their emotions and how they affect them plays a big role in developing leadership skills. When open directions were not considered standard, leaders realised that building trust and searching for common values made them influential. A participant said, “...foreigners are most averse to preaching and output, so when communicating, seek common values first and integrate management goals into value exchange” (Interviewee 4).

It suggests that people are learning to lead by respecting and empathising with others. They participants started cross-cultural experiences the primary source of ethical leadership.

In addition, cross-cultural experience deepened leaders' senses of moral obligation and internal motivation. Faced with high-stakes decisions and public exposure, leaders became increasingly attuned to their reputational and moral responsibilities. As one informant noted, "...we invested 1 billion US dollars in this project, and for our investment team, if this transaction is not done well, it will have a great impact on my lifelong reputation and the credibility of the industry ..." (Interviewee 1). These remarks illustrate how global assignments precipitate not only strategic adaptation but profound personal growth. Leaders change from figures of authority to cosmopolitan-oriented individuals who are introspective, responsible, and resolute to bring actions into congruence with cultural setting and personal values. Lastly, leadership in CMNEs is a continuous process of self-making, mediated by life experience and moral commitment.

Individual leadership, as the research demonstrates, is not a static attribute but an ever-changing and active process of self-creation evolving through cross-cultural engagement. For Chinese State-Owned Multinational Enterprises (CMNE) leaders, operating in foreign institutional and cultural environments was an alchemical crucible for individual transformation. Exposure to diverse social norms, legal frameworks, and relationship expectations resulted in challenging assumptions and developing higher emotional intelligence, moral awareness, and flexibility among the leaders. As the one respondent here noted in describing European regulatory regimes, "even if the management team has the feeling that there is lots of room for improvement... local labour legislations must be obeyed" (Interviewee 3). That's a snapshot of how leaders shift from instrumental efficiency to an ethical and participatory orientation—to learn to adapt not only for results but also for legitimacy

and relational trust. These interactions with difference invited reflection, humility, and a more expansive imagination of leadership premised on responsiveness to local values.

Further, the reflection indicates that personal leadership growth is highly associated with emotional self-awareness and moral reasoning. Leaders shared the experiences when standard directive leadership styles failed to work, and they had to focus on empathy, listening, and alignment of values. As one executive observed, the foreigners hate preaching the most “... find common values agreed” (Interviewee 6). These lessons serve to show that cross-cultural encounter is like a looking-glass, in that it reflects back the boundary of their own cultural presupposition, and prompts more profound personal congruence between conduct and value. Leaders started to measure success not only by the results of the performed activities, but the way they interact with other people in a more ethical and human way. This indicates a larger shift in which global leadership may be summarized as an exercise in moral authorship- in continuously trying to bring inner character and outer behaviour into alignment. Cross-cultural experiences therefore served as a context and a moral guide in development as well as in ensuring that the leaders that emerge are not only globally competent but internally integrated and in the process of self-evolution.

Theme 2: Focusing on cross-cultural experiences enhances relational leadership

Being a relational leader means building trust, making sure people are understood and helping clear up communication issues. Relational leadership within CMNEs is built upon building trust, mutual respect, and understanding of differences through contextually aware and emotionally intelligent interaction. Leadership moves attention from formal authority to connection with people and highlights empathy, listening, and flexibility as foundational skills. A very convincing case came from an acquisition success story, with a CEO reporting: “... acquisition of Tully Sugar Industry used interpersonal communication methods to narrow the spatial and psychological

distance, sent its own employees to participate in activities suitable for interaction and communication with the local public, approached and convinced shareholders, reversed their resistance to the acquisition, and ultimately achieved success..." (Interviewee 8). This indicates that the success of that initiative wasn't just strategic; it rested upon the ability of the leader to span cultural and psychological distance through genuine human engagement and symbolic respect.

Leaders learned that traditional top-down leadership typically failed in cross-cultural environments. Instead, relational leadership required co-creation, patience, and learning from one another. One of the members described how they led a team in Hong Kong: "...my Hong Kong colleagues wrote a summary of several thousand words, mostly in the form of a journal. Following the Chinese approach, I asked them to refine their work and personally made changes for them. They also thought it was good, but they didn't know how to do it... After several revisions, they gradually understood this thinking model and learned how to apply it after adaptation and integration. The level of the summary report has significantly improved, and the team also agrees with it" (Interviewee 6). Rather than mandating, the leader adopted a collaborative and supportive style, using conversation and mutual adjustment to bring about the internalization of new processes by the team. This answer reduced tension and generated more buy-in, which showed that relational leadership is not so much about exerting control as it is about generating alignment through shared understanding and trust.

Furthermore, leaders take action to lessen perceived power gap after realising the symbolic aspect of leadership. "... in communication, it is important to downplay the identity of state-owned enterprises as much as possible, avoid mentioning the significant significance of merger and acquisition strategies for the national economy and people's livelihood, and maintain a distance from public perception..." Interviewee 8 said. This intentional easing of hierarchical cues

empowered local stakeholders and created room for more inclusive conversation. By adopting relational leadership, CMNE leaders established settings where psychological safety, reciprocity, and respect allowed for improved teamwork, higher morale, and cross-culturally flexible decision-making.

Cross-cultural experiences that pushed leaders to go beyond hierarchical authority and cultivate deeper interpersonal abilities were shown to have a significant impact on relational leadership inside CMNEs. Mutual adaptation, trust-building, and sympathetic communication were seen as strategic imperatives in negotiating culturally varied situations rather than soft skills. Leaders realised that legitimacy and collaboration were frequently based on relational capital. This notion was well demonstrated by the success of the Tully Sugar purchase, which showed that polite communication, symbolic gestures, and human engagement were more successful than top-down orders. In these situations, leaders served as cultural bridge builders, overcoming ideological and emotional divides to jointly develop common meanings and objectives. This signifies a shift from transactional leadership paradigms to ones based on emotional resonance and relational honesty.

In addition, cross cultural issues displayed the fact that effective leadership is much about leading with and less about leading over. The leaders often recounted instances where unfamiliar communication cultures necessitated them to forego their stiff expectations, and instead, be ready to learn from each other. The reflected instance of leading an iterative writing process with a team based in Hong Kong illustrated the way relational leadership can be carried out by mentoring, discussion, and mutual respect. Similarly, the symbolic depreciation of state-owned identity manifested the manner in which leaders exercised symbolic humility to build inclusive settings. This is because such efforts enabled them to break down the perception and status barriers, thus

creating a sense of psychological safety and mutual ownership. Finally, cross-cultural encounters led CMNE leaders to re-imagine leadership not as a commanding presence, but as a socially-co created process based in trust, respect and flexible human interaction across difference.

Theme 3: Focusing on cross-cultural experiences enhances collective leadership

To achieve Collective Leadership, one needs to develop practises, values and decision-making plans that many share and apply globally. Collective leadership in CMNEs promotes shared accountability, dispersed power, and co-creation of values among diverse teams. For dealing with complex global contexts, this kind of leadership became indispensable to maintain cohesion and flexibility. Leaders transcended personal command and developed structures and cultures that induced participation and engagement. As stated in one leader's words, "...the most crucial thing here is to establish a set of leading by example, fair and transparent systems to incentivize, assess and evaluate the business below..." (Interviewee 1). Such systems served as moral and procedural norms cutting through cultural divides and allowed teams to take decisions based on fairness, trustworthiness, and shared purpose.

One of the key features of collective leadership was the conscious construction of collective identity. Leadership facilitated cultural incorporation not by imposition but through narrative and symbolic framing. One of the actors described, "... when managing Czech enterprises, we also integrate our national culture into it, making Czech employees identify with our culture and facilitating work..." (Interviewee 5). Such co-construction of hybrid identity provided room for a sense of common belonging, facilitating emotional stake and collaboration across countries. Leadership, in this sense, served as a process of community building and value-based alignment guidance.

Collective leadership was even extended to global responsibilities. Speaking to the greater environmental and social needs, the results found that COFCO International has created a new sustainable development approach. A paradigm for evolving toward vision-based, future-oriented leadership, here collective responsibility extends beyond internal stakeholders to global systems. By applying sustainability targets into strategic organization, leaders practiced an advanced form of collective leadership—one based on inclusivity, long-term vision, and moral stewardship.

The phenomenon of collective leadership in CMNEs became an important strategic orientation, especially in dealing with complexity and creating coherence in different settings of operation. Collective leadership contrasts with the traditional models that are based on centralised power, as it spreads influence and encourages horizontal responsibility and developing a common vision within the cultural boundaries. Cross-cultural experiences led leaders to recognise that it is no longer sufficient to rely on their personal charisma or power of control but instead they must introduce fairness, involvement and ethical congruence into organisational systems. One participant highlights this change in a nutshell: “The most important in this regard is to develop a series of leading by example, fair and transparent systems... (Interviewee 9). Those systems have turned into normative anchors of decision-making and have led to behavioural consistency and team cohesion, despite geographical and cultural distances. This kind of procedural fairness assisted in eliminating uncertainty, strengthened trust and provided employees with a well-defined system through which they could discern leadership intent and take independent actions.

In addition to operational systems, joint leadership in CMNEs also implied co-creation of identity and common meaning. Leaders used a narrative style to integrate local cultures to the overall organisational culture. One of the leaders explained the process of implanting the Chinese values in the Czech operations to create the sense of mutual identification not by force but by symbolic

acknowledgement: One leader explained the process of implanting the Chinese values in the Czech operations to create the sense of mutual identification not by force but by symbolic acknowledgement: This fusion of identities was turned into a cultural cement that supported cooperation and common ownership. Further, collective leadership was also applied to global stewardship, which was the case in COFCO sustainability strategy. In creating value by reconciling the corporate with the environmental and social ambitions, leaders showed a vision-driven leadership culture, one aimed not just out of organisational prosperity, but out of inclusive, responsible and future-oriented governance. The practices are an advanced form of collective leadership, in which co-creation of value, responsiveness to stakeholders, and ethical vision are central to global enterprise.

4.3 Chapter Summary

This chapter explored the thematic findings and interpretive analysis of cross-cultural leadership experiences within Chinese State-Owned Multinational Enterprises (CMNEs), organizing the discussion around individual, relational, and collective leadership dimensions. The analysis revealed that cross-cultural exposure functions not simply as a challenge, but as a developmental process—shaping leadership capabilities and driving transformation. Leaders in these enterprises are navigating institutional complexities, fostering ethical awareness, and working to create inclusive, value-oriented practices across diverse contexts.

Looking ahead, the next chapter will engage critically with these findings. It will connect them to existing literature and theoretical frameworks, while also considering the broader implications for leadership development, cross-cultural management, and organizational change in global enterprises.

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1. Introduction

With an emphasis on the growth of individual, relational, and collective leadership skills, this study aimed to investigate how leadership within Chinese State-Owned Multinational Enterprises (CMNEs) is impacted by cross-cultural experiences. CMNEs encounter particular difficulties negotiating various institutional, regulatory, and cultural contexts in an economy that is becoming more and more globalized. The main goal of this study was to find out how leaders' problem-solving skills, innovative practices, self-regulation, interpersonal skills, and changing leadership styles are influenced by their exposure to and involvement in other countries. Understanding the essential elements of cross-cultural experiences, analysing their influence on leadership behaviours and traits, evaluating the long-term development of leadership styles, and offering practical suggestions for incorporating cross-cultural experience into leadership development plans were the specific goals. The main study topics focused on the nature of cross-cultural experiences in CMNEs, their impact on leadership from the leaders' perspective, and how such experiences affect leadership approaches over time.

The aim of the chapter is to critically apply the empirical data presented in Chapter 4 to the background of existing literature and theoretical frameworks for cross-cultural and global leadership. It aims to bridge the gap between data conceptualized and observed by addressing how CMNE leaders' everyday experiences influence leadership identities and strategies in various cultural contexts. This debate seeks not only to illuminate how cross-cultural experience influences leadership but also to show how mechanisms in this way undermine or enable dominant theory such as cultural intelligence, experiential learning, relational leadership, and distributed leadership.

By such an analysis, the chapter facilitates a better theoretical and practical understanding of leadership transformation in the context of international state-owned enterprises.

To structure this discussion, the chapter is divided into several thematic sections. First, the findings are introduced against the backdrop of the three overarching dimensions of leadership that were found in the empirical data: individual leadership, relational leadership, and collective leadership. Each theme is discussed through critical discussion with relevant literature and theory. Cross-thematic synthesis then makes linkages between these areas of leadership. The chapter thereafter gives an overview of the theoretical implications of the research findings, followed by practical implications for CMNE leadership development. It concludes with a consideration of the study limitations prior to concluding with a summary that provides the stage for Chapter 6.

5.2. Interpretation of Key Findings by Thematic Axis

5.2.1. Individual Leadership

It was found in Chapter 4 that being part of a diverse team often brings about significant changes in Chinese State-Owned Multinational Enterprises (CMNEs). First, the process was explained not only as becoming more skilled professionally, but as a nonstop process of self-improvement influenced by situations in different countries and their uncertainties. In this process, self-regulation, finding innovation in obeying laws, and changing one's moral views were found to be highly significant. Secondly, it is apparent from these findings that leadership can change and develop, appearing at the right moment and being personal, most especially when different cultures interact around the world. To deal with the institutional and cultural challenges as well as the expectations of multiple stakeholders, CMNE leaders were required to examine themselves and change their behaviours, transforming who they were as leaders.

The experience of working in other cultures encouraged leaders to pay close attention to their emotions and develop ways to handle them correctly in various cross-cultural settings. This follows the ideas from emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1995), stating that being self-aware, able to manage oneself, mindful of others, and managing relationships is a key trait for effective leadership. Trying to control emotions made up only a part of self-regulation for CMNE leaders; they also had to adjust the way they felt and acted according to what they encountered in new locations. This shows how having to relate to foreign traditions made leaders switch their typical behaviour to ones fitting the culture. A leader's statement, "despite the management team spotting many ways to boost efficiency, it will still be hard to reach the goal as Chinese standards don't match local laws" shows how important it is for companies to change their ethnocentric approaches and adapt to the policies of the host nation.

This strategic behavioural adaptation is consistent with Kolb's experiential learning theory (1984), which describes learning as a cyclical process that includes real experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. Cross-cultural interactions served as "crucibles" for CMNE leaders, forcing them to face dissonance, rethink current beliefs, and iteratively try new behaviours until they discovered culturally suitable and successful solutions (Walsh and Gleeson, 2023). These challenging moments—whether it was regulatory compliance in Europe, navigating hierarchy in Brazil, or dealing with uncertainty in Southeast Asia—were transforming learning experiences rather than management roles. Leaders employed reflection to gain insight, establish new mental models, and modify their actions in future contexts, resulting in a repertory of cross-contextual leadership methods.

In addition, analysis of the data found that being exposed to different cultures is crucial for promoting ethical and moral changes, expanding the ideas in the field of transformational

leadership as Benson (2024), suggested. In transformational leadership theory (Chen and Zhu, 2020), leaders build skills in their team through role modelling, inspiring them, and clearly explaining the company's moral values. Still, in the study described here, it is the leaders who undergo a transformation after experiencing other cultures. Being responsible for businesses on a global scale made leaders more aware of what is right and wrong. One participant noted: "...if everything goes wrong with this transaction, my reputation will be severely affected and the industry's credibility will drop". It means that taking responsibility for moral issues in international settings became personally important for me, instead of only something I needed to follow. Being part of another culture raised cross-cultural leaders' tech and interpersonal abilities plus made me aware of my ethical and social responsibilities.

These findings point to the Cultural Intelligence (CQ) concept created by Earley and Ang (2003), which involves specific abilities for successful functioning in various cultures. Along this line, those leading in CMNE showed good metacognitive and motivational CQ by still caring about others' feelings and always observing their backgrounds. As an instance, instead of opposing rules from other nations, leaders worked with these regulations to create new things and increase their local legitimacy, revealing strong behavioural CQ. The result that copying foreign methods led to new ideas (Lüscher, 2018) goes against the usual approach in China, which is for leaders to hold most of the power and standardize things. From these observations, it can be concluded that reinterpreting pressure from outside as an opportunity instead of a difficulty is important for both cultural intelligence and being ready as a global leader.

Cross-cultural experience, as seen in the study, also reshaped the way leaders identified with others, contributing to a shift from authority- to empathy-based leadership. As one participant noted, "foreigners are most averse to preaching and output, so when communicating, seek common values

first." This movement from directive to meaning-seeking and culturally resonant leadership indicates that identity reconstruction is at the center of cross-cultural leadership. It echoes Ibarra's (1999) provisional selves' theory, whereby leaders in new contexts try out new behaviours and adjust identity through feedback and cultural interaction (Futaqi and Mashuri, 2022). As the Chinese managers moved away from nationalistic leadership paradigms and embraced pluralistic worldviews, they became cosmopolitan-oriented leaders—leaders who can handle value pluralism with integrity and authenticity.

Furthermore, the evidence suggests that individual-level leadership development in CMNEs cannot be understood without recourse to high-context vs low-context cultural differences (Forgeard, 2021). The majority of the challenges that CMNE leaders faced stemmed from differences in communication norms, power distance, and interpersonal relationship expectations. Indirectness, symbolism, and emotional subtlety were paramount in high-context cultures such as Brazil or Southeast Asia. Leaders who previously relied on command by direct decree and hierarchical role-taking had to learn new codes of communication, patience, and subtle trust-building strategies. Along the way, they shed rigid hierarchical assumptions and learned leadership practices that honoured humility, dialogue, and bilateral understanding, accumulating relational capital.

In sum, the leadership personal change demonstrated in CMNE leaders was neither trivial nor accidental. It was grounded deeply in lived cross-cultural experience, requiring not just skill acquisition, but identity remaking. Leaders did not merely alter their behaviours but envisioned who they were as leaders—emotionally intelligent, morally grounded, and strategically flexible. This turn represents a useful addition to the literature, for it suggests that cross-cultural experience in CMNEs is not just a variable influencing leadership results; it is the very condition under which

leadership is established and re-established. Leadership is not a stable trait or position here but a reflexive, iterative, and context-situated process of becoming—what this study theorizes as "leadership as self-making."

The study contributes to a new view of global leadership creation by combining the findings with emotional intelligence, cultural intelligence, transformational leadership, and experiential learning. It suggests that leadership change in CMNEs must be viewed as a developmental arc that is influenced by humility, context learning, emotional insight, and moral development rather than just strategic directives in highly regulated, culturally varied, and politically sensitive situations. As a result, cross-cultural experience becomes both a contextual element and a defining crucible for global leadership.

5.2.2. Relational Leadership

It is clear from Chapter 4 that relational leadership plays a key role in how CMNEs have changed their leadership over the years. First, with relational leadership, leadership perception, value internalisation, trust, mutual respect, and cultural consideration are more important than in other types of leadership. Secondly, since leaders in CMNEs experience a wide variety of social and business environments, this kind of leadership is absolutely necessary. It was also found in the empirical evidence that there are three main characteristics of relational leadership: understanding the importance of values, appreciating those in charge, and feeling empathy and trust towards others. Overall, these points reveal how dealing with people from all over the world makes CMNE leaders reconsider their leadership style and start working more as a team.

Value internalization became a central process by which CMNE leaders could align leadership ambitions with host environment moral and cultural requirements. The leaders realized that in an attempt to convince and inspire multinational teams, they could not rely on performance targets or

operational compliance mechanisms; instead, they had to internalize and extend values common to local employees and local communities. This approach illustrates the precepts of Relational Leadership Theory (Crawford, 2023), which asserts leadership as a socially constructed process resulting from human interaction rather than one's own authority. The Tully Sugar Industry takeover case is most insightful. As described, the leader bridged "psychological distance" by face-to-face engagement with local publics, integrating employees into culturally significant events, and showing symbolic respect for local traditions. This made possible not only strategic success, but also heightened sense of value congruence, trust, and legitimacy — results rarely achieved through unilateral or transactional methods.

Relational leadership, as evidenced in the findings, also involved a fundamental redefinition of the perception of leadership. Leaders came to recognize increasingly that their traditional, directive style of leadership, rooted deeply in Chinese bureaucratic and hierarchical norms, was often ineffective or at times even counterproductive in cross-cultural contexts. One executive's experience in Hong Kong, where recursive cooperation supported a local team in embedding new cognitive models, is an excellent illustration of this shift. Instead of imposing conformity, the leader had chosen co-creation, patience, and learning as change methods. This aligns with the definition of leadership humility by Wilhelmus (2020) as being able to admit one's limitations, appreciate other people's strengths, and grow together. In global environments, where the norms of culture and communication widely differ, humility in this manner becomes an asset of strategy, enabling leaders to adjust and lead with others, rather than over others.

Hofstede's cultural dimensions—in particular, power distance and individuality vs collectivism—can also be used to understand this shift. High power distance, centralized authority, and a custom of respect to hierarchy are characteristics of Chinese leadership culture. Employees, however,

anticipate more autonomy, flat communication, and participative leadership in low power distance cultures, such as those seen in Australia, the Netherlands, or even certain countries in Southeast Asia. By purposefully reducing their allusions to state ownership, avoiding overt displays of institutional power, and softening their leadership presence, CMNE officials were able to successfully manage these changes. Building ties through neutral, humanizing channels is more important than "downplaying the identity of state-owned enterprises," according to one CEO.

Additionally, the research points out that interpersonal trust and empathy help greatly in guiding leaders around the world. It became obvious to CMNE leaders that being in charge matters less and creating connections matters more for success in international businesses. Being able to read and understand the feelings and emotions of others from different backgrounds was proven to matter a lot in handling multicultural teams and stakeholders. This agrees with leadership theories that promote using feedback and including it in their ongoing talks with others (Wilhelmus, 2020). These effective leaders chose to develop spaces for dialogue where all types of cultures could be considered, valued, and integrated into the leadership approach.

These elements do not go against the beliefs of Chinese leaders, but instead consider them in their own context. Core values of diligence, long-term thinking, and collectivism were kept by leaders, but they expressed them in a manner that was relevant for people in the host environment. Thus, they combined global and local approaches to leadership, coming up with new ways of leading (Hughes, 2023). Because of their interaction, cultural understanding, and awareness, the leadership identities under discussion were able to change and grow over time. Instead of only carrying out tasks, leaders in this context practiced forming a sense of community and shared understanding with others.

From a theoretical standpoint, the study makes a significant addition to Relational Leadership Theory by illustrating how cross-cultural circumstances accentuate the need for dialogic leadership and push the limitations of traditional top-down approaches, particularly in state-owned firms. It implies that leadership performance in global CMNEs is less about imposing strategic direction and more on negotiating common meaning. This builds on the previous research, which frequently focusses on relational leadership in Western or entrepreneurial contexts (Crawford, 2023), by including actual findings from huge, bureaucratically organized organizations functioning in culturally diverse situations.

The results also dispute the previously dominant perception that Chinese SOEs (state-owned enterprises) are inflexible and driven by a strict hierarchy. While bureaucratic power and political legitimacy continue to be important for domestic activities, cross-cultural assignments seem to provoke a deeper awakening of relational leadership. Internationally successful CMNE leaders were those who went beyond the boundaries of formalistic frameworks and cultural empathized through influence. They crafted, rather than controlled, environments of co-presence and shared ownership where dialogue, recognition, emotion, and resonance became primary leadership instruments. This highlights the empirical contribution of the study: that within state-owned, globally operating firms, relational leadership is not only possible but essential, and it entails systematically transforming the understanding and exercise of power, communication, and authority.

From a practical perspective, these outcomes imply that leadership development in CMNEs should go beyond technical skills and strategic focus. In fact, they require new training focused on cultural humility, dialogic engagement, emotional intelligence, and global leadership strategies to meet the demands of global leadership. HR systems should also promote co-leadership models, which will

help the local staff work together with the expatriate leader, yielding mutual adaptation and value co-creation. Such systems would also solidify relational leadership practices throughout levels within the organization, fostering broader, more inclusive and flexible leadership cultures.

In summary, the results confirm that relational leadership in CMNEs is a natural outcome of cross-cultural interaction and an effective means for multinational operations. By internalizing shared cultural values, reconceptualizing leadership authority (Walsh and Gleeson, 2023), and building trust-based relationships, CMNE leaders repositioned their leadership identities from authoritative enforcers of the hierarchy to culturally responsive facilitators. This transition indicates not just a strategic change, but also a moral and emotional reorientation based on empathy, humility, and mutual awareness. Relational leadership therefore emerges as both a reaction to cross-cultural complexity and a strategic advantage for long-term global leadership.

5.2.2. Collective Leadership

The data in Chapter 4 demonstrates that collective leadership has emerged as a typical response to the complexity, uncertainty, and diversity Chinese State-Owned Multinational Enterprises (CMNEs) face in the outside world. Unlike traditional command-and-control leadership found in Chinese bureaucratic frameworks, collective leadership promotes shared responsibility, distributed power, and co-evolved values among multiculturally diverse groups which points to strong value for inter/intra group collaboration. In an economy of global interdependence with sociopolitical concern, CMNEs have found that community-based leadership, shared purpose, and sustained moral legitimacy not only generate stability but competitive edge. This part discusses how cross-cultural exposure has spurred CMNEs to adopt collective leadership via focus on inter-group collaboration, collective identity and moral framing, and shared responsibility towards sustainability objectives.

At the core of collective leadership is inter-group collaboration — the ability to enable different actors to work together across cultural and organizational boundaries. The evidence indicated that cross-cultural leadership required more than coordination; it required the intentional building of shared norms and participatory processes. Leaders generated processes that were inclusive, equitable, and context-sensitive, thereby enabling collaboration beyond hierarchy. For instance, an executive emphasized the importance of creating "fair and transparent systems to incentivize, assess and evaluate the business" since these frameworks created psychological security and trust for culturally diverse employees. This is in agreement with concepts in distributed leadership theory (Walsh and Gleeson, 2023), which contends that leadership does not belong to one actor but is exercised collectively by individuals, systems, and practices. Distributed leadership is most relevant in CMNEs, where functional interdependence among subsidiaries operating in various regions necessitates a collective, rather than lone, leadership response.

Besides encouraging teamwork, CMNE leaders participated in building shared identity and symbolic integration over the borders. The management of Czech enterprises, for example, where leaders “integrated the Chinese culture” so subordinate staff could work under the appreciation of the organizational culture, shows the application of symbolic integration to culturally construct belonging. This is in accordance with Institutional Logics Theory (Mata et al., 2020), which states that an organization operates within several logics — market, state, community, and profession — that determine the actions of the constituents. In global CMNEs, the leaders need to manage competing cultural logics at the same time. The incorporation of Chinese culture into Czech subsidiaries, together with local attitudinal compliance, demonstrates hybrid institutional logic, combining global business rationality and local cultural scripts. Such hybridization is

advantageous for the defending and developing of collective identity and collective identity and legitimacy in the context of multifarious institutional settings.

In addition, people adopt this identity naturally, not because of strict rules but through storytelling and cultural examples provided by everyone. It was found that leaders focused on creating meaning with the communities instead of imposing national ideologies from above. Another concept that shows the same viewpoint is Stewardship Theory (Lu et al., 2022), which indicates that leaders should see themselves as stewards and naturally put the best interests of the organization and its stakeholders above everything else. In the study, leaders from the Community Mennonite Network embraced stewardship by becoming involved in local stories, highlighting what the communities required, and earning people's trust. Since they took care of shared values instead of ruling policies, they increased social harmony and versatility within their international companies.

One of the most important points is that collective leaders now tend to focus on sustainability and long-lasting principles as key aspects of their leadership. How COFCO International adopted a sustainable approach to leading its operations is a good example of the transformation in corporate influence that CMNEs have gone through. Assessing leaders used to focus only on how they did today, but now more attention is given to how they follow social, environmental, and ethical standards. This is a move from instrumental leadership to one based on vision and morals that takes into account everyone and looks ahead. Such trends indicate that due to global pressure, multinational firms are being asked to act responsibly and help protect and improve society, in addition to following the rules (Cotter and Reichard, 2019).

The cross-cultural transformations this case discusses above appear to have greatly influenced CMNEs leaders' ethics and strategies. Upon confronting new regulatory frameworks, societal stakeholder demands, and cultural contexts, CMNE leaders sought further contextualized 'success'

paradigms. They started perceiving and practicing leadership transcending its operational control nature to a relational and morally situated one bound to a community global in scope. With respect to leadership, this meant integrating sustainability, which enabled CMNEs to gradually transform into global moral agents — an alteration that elevates their soft power, strengthens diplomatic prominence, and meets emerging benchmarks of corporate social citizenship.

This transformation to shared leadership was, nevertheless, premeditated. Ultimately, it resulted from intentional system design innovations that fostered shared responsibility and alignment based on values. Empowering evaluative fairness policies, bounded inclusive communication, and team-based conflict resolution were critical. Leaders were not simply individual decision-makers, but rather guided participatory approaches. To a greater extent, they diminished reliance on personal charm or authority and instead shifted control to organizational culture and daily practices, a form of successful distributed leadership. Furthermore, CMNEs were able to go past strict centralization without sacrificing strategic coherence by allowing teams to engage in decision-making processes grounded in common moral values and performance objectives.

As a result, the above stated actions increased resilience among people coming from different cultures. When there are continuous changes in regulations, the economy, and culture, leaders in CMNEs work together to enable the companies to adapt and be accepted locally. Firms with teams that have common principles and independence can deal more effectively with new issues. That's why working as a team creates a strategy for the institution to change, survive culture shock, and continue its growth in the future.

Theoretically, the study puts cross-cultural experience at the heart of distributing and facilitating leadership roles in teams. Though many before thought of distributed leadership as a new strategy, this study shows that companies require it because of the new contexts they face globally. Similarly,

even though stewardship theory (Gupta and Gregory, 2017) is mostly about trust and a person's own intrinsic drive, the results uncover that by emphasizing moral values, leaders can uphold these motives all over the world, making stewardship into a universal concept.

In practice, CMNEs ought to establish collaborative leadership through policies for cultural integration, performance systems, and training. Collaborative skills including cultural translation, symbolic framing, systems thinking, and environmental awareness should be given top priority in leadership development. CMNEs should also embrace hybrid organizational identities, which let subsidiaries align with core strategic ambitions while preserving local values. Contextual flexibility is made possible while organizational coherence is strengthened by this balancing.

In conclusion, the study shows that cross-cultural teamwork plays a key role in CMNEs' ability to handle challenging situations, hold their organization together, and continue their work for years. Multilateralism shows up as people from different countries teaming up, creating a sense of belonging, and making sustainability commitments. Instead of relying on old leadership standards, this model gives people in different groups authority so they can support each other while staying committed to the same principles. Managing multi-national corporations through collective leadership means changing how roles, decisions, and missions are handled everywhere.

5.3 Cross-Thematic Synthesis

The preceding sections on individual, relational, and collective leadership demonstrated diverse yet interrelated levels of leadership change inside Chinese state-owned multinational enterprises. According to a comprehensive analysis, these aspects work together to create a dynamic and cohesive leadership environment that is influenced by continuous cross-cultural encounters. The understanding that cross-cultural exposure is a creative force that propels identity reconstruction,

interpersonal attunement, and organizational growth rather than merely a contextual element impacting leadership is at the core of this ecosystem.

Self-regulation, strategic adaptability, and moral self-reflection provide the foundation for individual leadership change. As demonstrated in the study, a cross-cultural experience is that which transforms leaders to possess emotional intelligence, reflexivity, and contextual judgment. Yet this is only made real when enacted relationally as Hughes (2023) suggested. This relational arena brings personal awareness into interpersonal arenas characterized by empathy, cultural humility, and communicative flexibility that mutually build trust and understanding between parties. In line with Crawford (2023), these relationship competencies, in turn, provide the social bonding necessary for the development of collective leadership, which is characterized by mutual accountability, cultural fusion, and coherence toward superordinate goals such as sustainability and legitimacy.

This interactive framework reflects complexity theory's concern with non-linear interdependencies (Mayer and Oosthuizen, 2021). In sophisticated global situations, leadership arises from recursive interactions among agents (leaders), relationships (social networks), and systems (organizations situated in global cultures). For CMNEs, this change from top-down to distributed and morally rooted leadership takes place through cumulative experiential learning at these levels. Self-awareness triggers relational interaction, which in turn extends to institutional frameworks that facilitate collective choice and identity. This chain reaction is a "triple-layered" framework for global leadership—where change comes from recursive feedback loops between the self, the social, and the system.

Besides, this result corresponds to the conceptual framework mentioned earlier, since the findings confirm that working across cultures helps link leadership actions to success abroad. It has been

confirmed and expanded by data that the framework's main aspects were initially meant for: communication, value alignment, following rules, and cooperative effort. It can thus, be clearly seen that being part of various cultures encourages leaders to adopt new perspectives, feelings, and mindsets. It works at the same time to shape people's growth, let them see their role in relationships, and help develop systems within the group.

This approach adds to literature by proposing a unified way that goes beyond the prior models. Comparing Transformational Leadership Theory, which only looks at leader–follower exchanges, and Cultural Intelligence Theory, which focuses on a single person's competencies, the approach from this study highlights how leadership develops at the same time in various interrelated contexts. Sometimes Relational Leadership Theory (Shin, 2021) is enhanced when placed in the context of different cultural values that must be dealt with at the same time.

Finally, cross-thematic synthesis indicates that leadership in CMNEs is an emerging ecosystem influenced by lived cross-cultural experience, rather than a linear skill set that can be taught. The suggested triple-layered model—individual, relational, and collective—provides a more comprehensive and dynamic view of how global leadership develops, adapts, and matures. Recognizing and engaging in this evolutionary ecology will be critical to CMNEs' strategic, ethical, and cultural resilience on a global scale.

5.4. Theoretical Implications

This study offers important theoretical contributions to leadership across cultures. It pokes at some of the big ideas in leadership theory and sends them off in new directions. By expanding and reinterpreting a number of well-known leadership theories through the prism of cross-cultural experience inside Chinese State-Owned Multinational Enterprises (CMNEs), the study's findings provide significant theoretical contributions. These include theories that address Relational and

Distributed Leadership (Spillane, 2006), Experiential Learning Theory (Kolb, 1984), and Cultural Intelligence Theory (Earley & Ang, 2003). Furthermore, by questioning traditional, top-down bureaucratic presumptions about leadership in state-owned contexts and providing a fresh, dynamic model of leadership creation informed by global experience, this study adds to the developing body of literature on Chinese leadership.

It first shows that CQ is essential to be a good global leader and then goes further by proving that this capacity involves more than traits or habits an individual gains. In turn, it was discovered that being in various cultural situations for an extended time helps people gain cultural intelligence unconsciously. People in CMNEs usually developed their CQ while dealing with difficult and unfamiliar cultural situations. In this respect, the game follows Kolb's theory (Hughes, 2023) by having participants experience and resolve problems like conflicts with regulations, issues talking with others, and ethical questions. Significantly, having cultural intelligence in this case improved as leaders experienced new situations, reflected on them, adjusted their actions, and shifted emotionally, showing that going through these experiences is a way to enhance cultural intelligence in leading globally.

The study also adds to Relational and Distributed Leadership theories by testing them among groups in different cultures and institutions that are rarely studied in Western studies. Relational leadership is based on face-to-face relationships, but this study proves that having relational abilities is necessary in cross-cultural settings where respect for traditional leaders is lacking. Leaders in CMNE had to give up giving orders and use influence to build trust, make everyone feel safe, and join with local teams to establish values. As a result, this change made it obvious that leading in decentralized settings required input from many people, especially with regulations and cultural differences across the world. It is evident from the research that leadership is a

cooperative and structured process that arises from people's commitment to the same ideas, teamwork, and holding each other responsible in various cultures.

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, the study opposes typical views about China's chief leaders and SOE leaders, who are commonly seen as rigid, bossy, and isolated from other cultures. It is clear from the findings that taking part in different cultural contexts leads leaders to improve their character, emotional responses, and understanding of the world as a whole. Changing from authority-based leadership to models that emphasize empathy and participation has an important impact on leadership in SOEs. Instead of following standard procedures, global assignments made people think deeply, act ethically, and rethink their company's strategy for the future. This opposes the belief that SOEs do not accept change by showing that CMNEs are flexible enough to adopt worldwide norms without giving up their own identity.

In conclusion, this study's theoretical implications stem from its capacity to reframe leadership ideas in a cross-cultural, real-world SOE setting. This research offers a hybrid theoretical model of leadership development that is emergent, multi-layered, and contextually based in the reality of global business by combining cultural intelligence, experiential learning, and dispersed leadership under a unified analytical framework. This enhances scholarly discussions and offers a more genuine perspective on leadership in China's state-owned businesses, which are increasingly expanding internationally.

5.5. Practical Implications

The empirical results of this study present several crucial practical implications for CMNEs wishing to cultivate worldwide competent leadership. With emerging cross-cultural experiences considered transformative mechanisms in shaping leadership identity and effectiveness, CMNEs

should move away from ad hoc international exposure towards structured and strategic integration of cross-cultural learning within leadership development schemes.

Second, CMNE leadership development has to incorporate training modules focusing on self-regulation, empathy, and collaboration skills. These training modules will have to go beyond compliance or technical training to motivate emotional intelligence, intercultural communication, and values-reflection. Based on the theory of experiential learning, programs have to include simulations, decision-making through scenarios, and reflective guiding to enable leaders to internalize from cultural dilemmas. These tools will prepare leaders to navigate the ethical ambiguity, emotional complexity, and communicative diversity they will encounter in global environments.

In the third place, the findings point out that cross-cultural competence should be considered a main factor when deciding who will be promoted and prepared for leadership in CMNEs. Isolated assignments abroad should be treated not only as regular jobs but also as developing centers for those who will become the future leaders of the company. As a result, managers in CMNEs should put ways in place to track and assess the development of leadership during foreign assignments, so that insights learned overseas are used in the organization and in leadership processes at home.

It is also important to strengthen expatriate strategies so that both parties gain knowledge. Instead of only making expatriates influence headquarters' policies, CMNEs ought to support situations where Chinese employees guide managers on the expectations and culture of stakeholders. Adopting this way of schooling helps people learn more easily and fit into the culture quickly. Looking at 360-degree reviews, working with intercultural coaches, and learning in peer circles will assist leaders in becoming better leaders and applying relational leadership practices in a wide range of situations.

To effectively enhance leadership development through cross-cultural experiences, Chinese multinationals should adopt practical strategies tailored to their contexts. Boivin (2020) stipulates that for this to be achieved, multinationals need to foster an organizational culture that appreciates diversity and inclusion of all employees, as would be the case. This can be attained by implementing policies to raise cultural awareness and sensitivity among all employees. For example, including diversity and inclusion goals in the company mission and bonus performance metrics can further solidify these values (Lüscher, 2018). This would be further bolstered by CMNEs placing a high premium on hiring and developing leaders with high cultural intelligence and cross-cultural competencies. This can be achieved through targeted recruitment drives and induction programs that strongly emphasize the importance of cross-cultural skills (Zhu, 2020).

Another hands-on approach for CMNEs is to provide international assignments and cross-cultural training for their leaders. Boivin (2020) argues that knowing different cultural contexts will help the leader manage diversified organizational teams, which would be significantly enhanced by senior leadership work experience across borders. In particular, the international assignment may expose the leader at close range to different cultural practices and business environments, which would develop a deeper appreciation of these nuances in culture (Lüscher, 2018). Furthermore, CMNEs must have mentorship programs that match seasoned and rising leaders, offering precepting for successfully treading cross-cultural shores. These mentorship relationships can help to develop people with leadership potential into culturally competent leaders within the organization.

Firm policy and training initiatives are necessary to assist CMNEs in developing cross-cultural leadership. The significance of creating all-encompassing training programs that cover the behavioural, emotional, and cognitive facets of cross-cultural competency is emphasized by

Bainbridge (2022). Interactive seminars, role-plays, and case studies should all be a part of these programs so leaders may hone their intercultural competency. In addition, training must be ongoing and flexible to accommodate the dynamic character of international corporate contexts (Lüscher, 2018). Ensuring that training materials are updated regularly to incorporate new cultural trends and difficulties will help leaders stay prepared to manage the complexities of diverse teams.

Besides training programs, CMNEs should define policies that support cultural and practical interconnections. For instance, making a diversity management policy across cultural work teams or groups whereby the workers in a project team come from different cultural backgrounds can promote the integration of employees' diverse views (Raithel et al., 2021). Other policies relating to attendance at international conferences, seminars, and membership in professional networks can also offer the leaders a chance to increase their cultural capital (Svetlicinii, 2020). Furthermore, there is strong advice for implementing flexible work arrangements that will respect cultural differences encountered in the culture mix encountered in CMNEs.

Execution of such strategies and policies, as stated above, requires that an organization be genuinely invested in the development of cross-cultural leadership. According to Lüscher (2018), top management must clearly express and demonstrate its commitment to cross-cultural competence and cultural intelligence through visible support for diversity efforts, frequent communication about the importance of cross-cultural skills, and senior leaders' active involvement in cross-cultural training programs. Boivin (2020) supports the idea that top management can encourage other employees to embrace and nurture cross-cultural competence by acting as role models.

Moreover, the cross-cultural leadership development initiative has to be well-resourced by CMNEs. This includes high-quality training materials, experienced trainers and consultants,

sufficient time, and a budget that would enable leaders to go on international assignments and engage with cross-cultural training programs (Khilji, 2022). Proper resourcing of such activities shows that the organization is serious about developing culturally competent leaders and can emphasize that cross-cultural ability is a precondition for organizational success.

Furthermore, CMNEs should put in place structures for assessing the outcomes and achievements of cross-cultural leadership development programs spearheaded by the implementing authorities. This includes outlining goals and targets related to cross-cultural training and cultural intelligence for employees (Futaqi and Mashuri, 2022). Thus, with some additional feedback forms and constant evaluation of the success of the training, it may be feasible to strengthen the meeting of the training aims and objectives. Also, following participants over time to analyze the effects of cross-cultural experience on leadership performance can help develop and improve the interventions (Carrington et al., 2021).

It is also necessary to improve the process of fostering leadership skills within the context of cross-cultural exposure, as a result of which CMNEs face different challenges connected to the globalization of the environment. CMNEs can effectively socialize cultural competence by providing practical strategies, efficient policies, and widespread training programs that produce culturally apprehensive leaders to help run cross-cultural organizations (Svetlicinii, 2020). Thus, one must mention organizational commitment, sufficient financial investments, and intelligent measurement and recognition systems as major prerequisites for these initiatives. In this way, the CMNEs can develop a proper framework of cross-cultural leadership and guarantee their further effective functioning in the worldwide markets.

Last but not least, CMNEs ought to make cross-cultural leadership development a strategic priority that is in line with long-term objectives like stakeholder trust, global legitimacy, and sustainable

growth. CMNEs can turn internationalization from a logistical necessity into a platform for moral, flexible, and resilient leadership—able to handle the strategic and moral complexities of a globalized world—by integrating relational and collective leadership practices into the very fabric of their organizational culture.

5.6. Limitations

Even though this study provides useful information about leadership in CMNEs as a result of cross-cultural exposure, we should admit that it has shortcomings. Since there are only a small number of people in the study, the perspectives included are narrow. Since the research is based on deep interviews with a chosen group of senior executives, it was set up this way to offer a thorough understanding. However, this way of researching prevents us from applying the findings evenly to other people. The detailed information from elite interviews improves on the previous examples, but still, better results may be achieved by using bigger samples and mixing different study methods in the future.

Next, the study only studies state-owned enterprises (SOEs) and leaves out any leaders from private multinational enterprises (MNEs). Consequently, it is hard to generalize results, for example, about how the way a company is organized and controlled affects the development of cross-culturally effective leaders. Many SOEs are managed closely by the government and plan their actions over a long period, so this may lead to leadership behaviour that differs a lot from similar roles in private firms. For this reason, the outcomes are sound for CMNEs, though they may not fit completely with leadership development in Chinese private-sector MNEs or multinationals from different backgrounds.

Lastly, the interview-based data gathering method has an inherent risk of response bias. There could have been a propensity to present events in a more positive or strategic perspective due to

the participants' seniority and organizational commitment, especially when it came to delicate subjects like leadership failure or adaptability. Furthermore, the data mostly represents viewpoints from one industrial cluster, which may further reduce the contextual diversity of the results. In order to reduce bias and strengthen empirical robustness, future research might benefit from triangulating data from additional sources, such as team feedback, performance reports, or cultural audit tools, even if steps were made to maintain openness and anonymity during the interview process.

5.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter thoroughly discussed how the study's empirical results relate to already existing theories and looked into the main research aim, which was to study cross-cultural influences on leadership in CMNEs. The chapter proved how being involved in various cultures encourages individuals to shift their behaviours and go further by transforming their identity, changing their values, and adjusting their leadership strategies.

During the discussion, it was revealed that Individual Leadership matures by practicing self-control, becoming emotionally aware, and acting responsibly, because of exposure to unfamiliar institutions and cultures. These findings addressed the first two questions about the experiences and effects of working internationally from the leaders' opinion. The authors noted that showing cultural care, keeping values similar, and building confidence between individuals made it possible to reduce the "boss-subordinate" culture and create environments where people cooperate. Because of the complex ethics involved in running global operations, leaders adopted Collective Leadership, by making everyone accountable, embracing new ways for the organization to identify itself, and making sustainability a guiding principle. It pointed out that the evolution of leadership and cross-cultural leadership experiences are important aspects for building leadership strategies.

The chapter demonstrated how relational competence is fueled by individual change and then scaled up to facilitate institutional adaptation and collective coherence by combining the findings into a triple-layered leadership model. Cross-cultural experience was reframed as a dynamic leadership ecosystem rather than a contextual obstacle, changing not just how leaders act but also how they see themselves, interact with others, and manage organizations in a globalized world. While practical observations highlighted the need for integrative leadership training and HR changes in CMNEs, theoretical implications expanded on existing theories of relational leadership, experiential learning, and cultural intelligence.

The most important results from the study will be combined into a set of concise and useful conclusions in Chapter 6, which is now set up by this synthesis. The following chapter will offer suggestions for leadership development both inside and outside of CMNEs, building on the theoretical and practical insights covered. Lastly, it will list possible avenues for further research, providing strategies to build on the findings of the current study and overcome its noted shortcomings.

Chapter 6: Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter concludes the research by synthesising and analysing the important findings in light of the overall research topics. It focusses on how individual, relational, and collective leadership capacities develop via cross-cultural experiences in Chinese multinational businesses (CMNEs). The study's primary research questions—how CMNE leaders acquire and apply global leadership competencies, how cultural contexts shape leadership across cultures, and how relational dynamics and collective identity influence performance—have been thoroughly addressed using empirical evidence and critical interpretation. The findings indicate that cross-cultural interaction inspires a shift from traditional hierarchical leadership to more responsive, participative, and values-driven forms of leadership. This evolution took shape in the form of leaders having more self-awareness, awareness of their emotions, trust-building practices, and ability to create shared vision and moral legitimacy across diverse cultures.

The chapter opens with a clear explanation of how the study slots into ongoing talks about global leadership, stressing that most researchers still ignore the world of Chinese multinationals. By weaving together ideas from Relational Leadership Theory, Distributed Leadership, Hofstede's cultural dimensions, and Stewardship Theory, it lays out a three-layer formation process—individual choices, day-to-day interactions, and shared action—that is easier to grasp than the usual checklist of traits. That fresh map moves well beyond the top-down bureaucracy we usually link to state-owned firms. The chapter then walks through what the findings mean for theory, practice, and policy, gives clear tips for managers, officials, and teachers, admits where the study could have gone deeper, and finally pauses to reflect on the entire research journey and what it says for developing leadership in a multipolar world.

6.2 Summary of Key Findings

For the RQ1: What do leaders perceive and experience in cross-cultural contexts? For cross-cultural experiences, the three major factors, including communication, compliance with local regulations, and values, were identified by the research as influencing leadership experiences in cross-cultural settings. The results demonstrate that CMNE leaders view cross-cultural settings as places of both disruption and transformation, where deeply rooted presumptions are challenged by unfamiliar norms, expectations, and limits. Participants frequently said that they were compelled to reconsider how they lead, communicate, and make decisions as a result of their interactions with foreign regulatory systems, communication methods, and workplace norms. Leaders generally saw these challenges as developing rather than obstructive, despite the fact that they caused emotional strain, confusion, and cognitive dissonance.

After handling culturally foreign situations, many claimed increased self-awareness, humility, and moral responsibility. In order to overcome the gaps between Chinese leadership traditions and host-country expectations, they also learned to prioritize relationship-building, symbolic respect, and adaptable communication. In general, leaders saw cross-cultural contexts not just as operational environments but also as potent developmental arenas that altered their perceptions of authority, interpersonal dynamics, and ethical responsibility. These perceptions laid the groundwork for later changes in individual, relational, and group leadership.

From the perspective of individual leadership, the findings indicate that navigating unfamiliar cultural environments acts as a powerful catalyst for self-transformation. Leaders reported grappling with moments of cognitive dissonance and ambiguity, which prompted deep reflection and adaptation. This process resulted in greater humility, heightened emotional self-awareness, and a more nuanced capacity for empathy. Rather than simply reinforcing traditional leadership

models, these experiences highlighted the importance of discomfort and uncertainty in driving meaningful development—a perspective consistent with Kolb’s experiential learning framework and the concept of cultural intelligence articulated by Tuleja (2021).

Crucially, participants learned to self-regulate, challenge ethnocentric assumptions, and adopt more flexible leadership. This represents a marked departure from the rigid, hierarchical norms typically associated with Chinese state-owned enterprises. The experience of working in other cultures encouraged leaders to pay close attention to their emotions and develop ways to handle them correctly in various cross-cultural settings. This follows the ideas from emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1995), stating that being self-aware, able to manage oneself, mindful of others, and managing relationships is a key trait for effective leadership.

Trying to control emotions made up only a part of self-regulation for CMNE leaders; they also had to adjust the way they felt and acted according to what they encountered in new locations. This shows how having to relate to foreign traditions made leaders switch their typical behaviour to ones fitting the culture. A leader’s statement, “despite the management team spotting many ways to boost efficiency, it will still be hard to reach the goal as Chinese standards don’t match local laws” shows how important it is for companies to change their ethnocentric approaches and adapt to the policies of the host nation. Overall, the study suggests that cross-cultural exposure is not just beneficial but essential for cultivating adaptive, globally minded leadership within Chinese multinationals.

For the RQ2: What impact do cross-cultural experiences have on leadership from the leaders’ perspective? Cross-cultural experiences have proved to have significant impact on individual, relational, and collective leadership. Cross-cultural experiences serve as both facilitators and barriers in the development of leadership practices inside CMNEs, based on empirical data from

the interviews. These results show how processes including cultural communication, value internalisation, and regulatory compliance affect individual development, interpersonal trust, and group identity.

At individual level, the leaders of CMNE regard cross-cultural experience as a powerful force that remodels their way of leading, communicating and interacting with others. The unfamiliar cultural norms have confronted the Chinese traditional beliefs based on the hierarchies and made the leaders change to a more adaptable, relational and people-oriented way. The leaders have turned out to be more attentive to building trust, symbolic respect and solving problems collaboratively as they have recognised that authority cannot be enough in the global environment. It has shown that cross-cultural experience not only changes the leaders' behaviours but fundamentally changes how they understand their role and influence.

On the other hand, relational leadership has emerged as an essential component of cross-cultural competency. Intercultural interaction facilitated the development of essential relationship abilities such as trust, communication flexibility, and empathy. Leaders displayed a greater ability to overcome psychological and cultural gaps by utilising emotional intelligence and symbolic respect. This verifies and broadens relational leadership theory (Uhl-Bien, 2006), especially in the setting of CMNEs, where power distance and collectivist norms need sophisticated interpersonal methods. The emphasis on listening, nonverbal sensitivity, and collaborative adaptation indicates a transition away from transactional authority and towards human-centred leadership. It was found in the empirical evidence that there are three main characteristics of relational leadership: understanding the importance of values, appreciating those in charge, and feeling empathy and trust towards others. Overall, these points reveal how dealing with people from all over the world makes CMNE leaders reconsider their leadership style and start working more as a team.

Collective leadership, as evidenced in the findings, also involved a fundamental redefinition of the perception of leadership. Leaders came to recognize increasingly that their traditional, directive style of leadership, rooted deeply in Chinese bureaucratic and hierarchical norms, was often ineffective or at times even counterproductive in cross-cultural contexts. One executive's experience in Hong Kong, where recursive cooperation supported a local team in embedding new cognitive models, is an excellent illustration of this shift. Instead of imposing conformity, the leader had chosen co-creation, patience, and learning as change methods. This aligns with the definition of leadership humility by Wilhelms (2020) as being able to admit one's limitations, appreciate other people's strengths, and grow together. In global environments, where the norms of culture and communication widely differ, humility in this manner becomes an asset of strategy, enabling leaders to adjust and lead with others, rather than over others.

For the RQ3: How cross-cultural experience affect leadership? Perceived resource availability, perceived power distance, perceived intra-group similarity and problem-solving strategies were identified as key mechanisms influencing leadership in various cross-cultural settings. In particular, cross-cultural work scenarios and exposure to and involvement in other countries had significant impact on leaders' problem-solving skills, innovative practices, self-regulation, interpersonal skills, and changing leadership styles.

These findings reveal that leadership transformation in CMNEs is not the result of mere cross-cultural exposure but the consequence of a set of three interconnected mechanisms that explain how and why leaders change. First, through the "learning effect", leaders learned by solving real problems in unfamiliar contexts. One participant described cross-cultural work as "a process of trying, failing, learning, trying again" - an experience that closely mirrors Kolb's theory of experiential learning. When CMNE leaders encountered situations where ambiguity was high,

miscommunication was frequent and norms were inconsistent, they were forced to test new behaviours, question assumptions and recalibrate decisions. This created moments of friction that encouraged emotional regulation, ethical mindfulness, moral reasoning and situational sensibility. Leaders repeatedly emphasised that the challenging (not the comfortable) nature of foreign environments sparked development. Learning from cross-cultural problem-solving is, therefore, a mechanism that catalyzes a transition from established scripts to more flexible and self-aware ways of leading.

Individual differences, namely Cultural Intelligence (CQ), are the second factor that affects how well leaders understand, assimilate, and implement cross-cultural learning. Leaders with high metacognitive and motivational CQ scores (those who were inquisitive, introspective, and socially conscious) were more likely to cultivate interpersonal trust, empathy, and culturally sensitive communication techniques. For others, poor CQ hindered behavioural change and slowed the learning period.

The third mechanism is contextual effects: host-country cultural norms, institutional expectations and organizational structures. Leaders changed their relational or collective leadership depending on whether they were operating in high-context cultures, low-context cultures or heavily regulated environments. These environmental requirements determined how much and what kind of accommodation was necessary. Together, the foregoing three mechanisms, the learning effect, CQ and contextual conditions, provide a straightforward explanation of how cross-cultural experience changes leadership, thereby addressing RQ3 directly.

6.3 Contributions to Knowledge and Theory

The theoretical and conceptual contributions of this research are primarily threefold. Firstly, the current study explores the influence of cross-cultural experiences on leadership. It

comprehensively analyses the relationship between leadership and cross-cultural experiences against globalization. This study examines the connection between corporate leadership and cross-cultural experiences in the global context. In particular, the study expands the scope of cross-cultural leadership and cross-cultural experiences into various organizational management settings. In addition, the study introduces the concept of cross-cultural experiences into research in leading across cultures. It explores the impact of cross-cultural experiences on leadership ability, communication skills, and leadership, providing new insights into leadership and communication research. Furthermore, the current study provides new insights and implications for cross-cultural leadership management and global talent nurturing practices. Thus, the study adds knowledge to specific areas around cross-cultural leadership experience and leadership ability.

The research makes a theoretical contribution by examining and elucidating how cross-cultural experiences impact leadership over the short and long terms. Through an exploration of the complex relationships between cross-cultural experiences and leadership, the research advances our theoretical knowledge of how exposure to different cultures influences the behaviours and efficacy of leaders. Furthermore, by offering suggestions for CMNEs to improve their leadership programs, the research makes a valuable addition to practice. These suggestions, supported by empirical data, provide useful information to CMNEs looking to use intercultural experiences to foster effective leadership inside their firms.

This study contributes significantly to the growing body of work on global leadership, cross-cultural management, and internationalization of Chinese state-owned multinational enterprises (CMNEs). A significant theoretical contribution of this study is the development of the "Triple-Layer" Leadership Model, which theoretically conceptualizes leadership as an interactive and recursive process operating at three interconnected levels: individual, relational, and collective.

While in the classical model the development of leadership is a sequential build-up of competence, this paradigm presents it as an ecosystem where self-awareness, emotional intelligence, and ethical sensitivity give rise to relational competencies such as empathy, trust, and communication. These relationship skills, through a feedforward loop, facilitate collective leadership drawing upon shared values, hybrid identities, and distributed accountability. This model understands the mobile and context-dependent nature of global organization leadership and provides a more integrated alternative to hard, trait-based models one might find in traditional leadership theory.

Another main contribution is reconceptualizing cultural intelligence (CQ) as not something to be tested as a static ability or trait, but as a developmental learning process. Literature puts CQ in a position where it's something that leaders will possess in differing degrees; this study unveils, however, that cultural intelligence is built upon experiential learning, self-awareness, and emotionally charged intercultural interactions. Drawing on Kolb's experiential theory of learning, the research shows that leaders build CQ by navigating through discomfort, conquering communication obstacles, and modifying leadership behaviour in response to variations in norms. Rather than simply learning "about" other cultures, leaders experienced a close-inward looking—developing cross-cultural reflexivity, cultural humility, and a broader global mindset. This repatterning asks us to shift away from passive training paradigms towards active, hands-on development approaches.

The study also calls into question common beliefs about leadership in Chinese state-owned enterprises, which are frequently viewed as bureaucratic, centralised, and resistant to cultural adaptation. The findings show that foreign experience may cause significant changes in leadership style, promoting adaptation, participative decision-making, and moral accountability. Rather of replicating strict hierarchies abroad, several CMNE leaders displayed reflexivity and ethical

involvement, changing old power relations to create cooperation and legitimacy in foreign settings. These findings not only contradict the conventional narrative around Chinese state-owned enterprises, but also indicate that state ownership does not always prohibit dynamic leadership growth in foreign settings.

This research essentially advances established theories of relational and collective leadership by examining them within the unique environment of Chinese multinational enterprises—a context people haven't really paid enough attention to. While most of these frameworks have been heavily dissected in Western settings, the current study actually shows that principles like shared leadership, cultural empathy, and symbolic integration are just as relevant in Chinese firms operating on a global stage. The findings make it pretty evident: Chinese leaders are placing greater value on interpersonal trust, collaborative leadership, and the creation of hybrid organizational identities. This doesn't just confirm the usefulness of these models outside the West; it genuinely adds depth to the theoretical discussion. In short, the universality of human-centred, morally-grounded leadership becomes hard to ignore, especially as globalization continues to blur old boundaries.

6.4 Recommendations and Policy Implications

The research offers practical takeaways for improving leadership training in Chinese multinationals and other companies working across borders. First, programs should shift from sitting in classrooms to hands-on, cross-cultural experiences that challenge people in real time. Adding immersion trips, exchange projects, and regular reflection helps rising leaders build emotional smarts, steady self-control, and sharper people skills. This matter more in CMNEs because new bosses often grow up inside rigid chains that hinder quick adjustments overseas.

Blending cultural openness with solid know-how readies them to act ethically and flexibly when global situations twist.

According to the research, there is a need to reconsider the methods used to find and develop global leadership potential in the areas of human resources and succession planning. More intentional use of overseas assignments, such as reverse mentoring programs in which local staff members train foreign executives, should be promoted by CMNEs. In addition to encouraging mutual respect and learning, these techniques flatten organisational hierarchies and promote cultural understanding. Furthermore, in order to evaluate moral responsibility, collaborative skills, and cross-cultural adaptation, succession planning frameworks need to incorporate criteria that go beyond performance metrics. CMNEs will be able to create leadership teams that represent organisational ideals and global sensitivities by promoting people based on their relational and cultural intelligence.

The study ultimately emphasizes that fostering truly inclusive organizational cultures requires intentional and sustained policy initiatives. It's not enough for CMNEs to merely gesture toward diversity; they must implement robust feedback systems and communication channels that genuinely encourage open dialogue and ensure psychological safety. Leadership should go beyond symbolic participation in local customs—adapting internal communication practices to suit cultural contexts signals meaningful respect and engagement.

Additionally, there is a clear role for policy-makers and industry bodies. By offering targeted incentives, they can drive the adoption of sustainable, human-centred leadership models within global enterprises. This approach not only bolsters the development of effective leadership but also enhances organizational legitimacy and operational success in international environments.

Based on the key findings of this study, a few strategic recommendations are offered to promote leadership development and firm performance in Chinese multinational corporations (CMNEs). First, CMNEs should include experiential learning modules in training programs. Intercultural simulation exercises emulating real-world intercultural realities can enable leaders to have a real-world encounter with addressing cultural tensions, ethical dilemmas, and relational complexity. Unlike theoretical training, experiential learning enhances emotional resiliency and adaptive reasoning through experiencing ambiguity and cultural dissonance—an essential prerequisite to developing global leadership capability.

Second, institutions need to actively encourage empathy and reflection as core components of leadership development. The research shows that change at the individual level tends to occur through reflection, especially at times of intercultural tension or failure. Leadership development programs must thus incorporate tools such as guided journaling, executive coaching, and formal peer feedback. These can improve leaders' emotional intelligence and reflexive capacity, leading them to review implicit assumptions and handle diverse teams more ethically and sensitively.

A third recommendation centres on the intentional development of hybrid identity strategies to support cultural integration and symbolic coherence. Instead of relying on superficial gestures, effective leaders purposefully blend foundational values from their home context with the expectations of the host culture. They achieve this through meaningful storytelling, shared rituals, and authentic symbolic actions. For Chinese multinational enterprises (CMNEs), this means investing in narratives that resonate across cultures, hosting events that genuinely combine elements from both Chinese heritage and local customs, and ensuring leadership consistently communicates this blended identity. Such efforts do more than foster a sense of belonging—they reinforce organizational cohesion and build legitimacy in diverse markets.

The study further recommends that there is a clear imperative to embed collective leadership practices within the organizational framework. Rather than perpetuating hierarchical, individual-focused models, the research underscores the effectiveness of co-leadership structures and systems of shared accountability. In particular, CMNEs should formalize collaborative roles across divisions, establish shared performance metrics, and recognize group achievements over individual accolades. This approach cultivates a culture of mutual responsibility and inclusivity—essentials for organizational resilience in a rapidly changing global environment.

Lastly, CMNEs ought to update their promotion standards and HR metrics to reflect the reality of global leadership. The relational and cultural competences necessary for effective leadership in global environments are not captured by traditional performance assessments that place an emphasis on production or tenure. Qualitative tests of empathy, flexibility, and cross-cultural communication should be incorporated into HR departments' evaluation processes. CMNEs may more successfully create a leadership pipeline that is not just technically proficient but also internationally aware and ethically based by identifying and rewarding these skills.

6.5 Limitations and Future Research

This study undoubtedly offers valuable insights into cross-cultural leadership within Chinese state-owned multinational enterprises (CMNEs). Still, it's important to recognize several clear limitations. To begin with, the sample size was quite limited, focusing on a small, purposively selected group of senior managers. While this approach yielded rich, in-depth qualitative data, it naturally restricts the generalizability of the findings. Drawing wide-ranging conclusions from such a narrow base is inherently problematic.

Furthermore, the exclusive concentration on state-owned CMNEs narrows the applicability of the results. Leadership behaviours and cross-cultural adaptations can differ markedly between state-

owned enterprises, privately-owned Chinese firms, and Western multinationals. Broader comparative research—including a range of organizational forms—would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how global leadership evolves across different contexts.

Response bias is another potential issue, particularly in hierarchical organizations where participants may feel pressure to present themselves in a favourable light. This can affect the authenticity of the data collected. Future research would benefit from supplementing interviews with additional methods such as direct observations, 360-degree feedback, or employee surveys in order to triangulate perspectives and minimize bias.

Finally, if the study was confined to a single industry, its findings might reflect sector-specific leadership dynamics rather than broader trends. Expanding future research to cover multiple industries—such as manufacturing, finance, technology, and energy—would strengthen the validity of the proposed “triple-layer” leadership model and enhance its relevance for a wider audience.

In sum, while the study makes meaningful contributions, its insights should be interpreted with an awareness of these limitations, and further research is necessary to develop a more robust and universally applicable understanding of cross-cultural leadership in multinational enterprises.

6.6 Reflective Synthesis and Broader Significance

This research journey has traversed conceptual, empirical, and personal terrain. It has navigated, via intense engagement with global leadership literature and rich first-hand narratives of CMNE leaders, the complex dance of culture, identity, and leadership development. The change observed—towards distributed, relational, and values-based leadership from hierarchical power—is a revolutionary turn in practice as much as in approach. For Chinese multinational companies in increasingly pluralized and volatile world economies, this reconfiguration signifies more than

adaptive change; it constitutes a rewriting of leadership as a morally sensitive and culturally reflexive practice. Participants' accounts verify that leadership transformation is enacted, negotiated, and created through experience, discomfort, and engagement with difference.

Beyond its particular organisational setting, the research highlights the need to rethink leadership in a society characterised by cultural complexity, global interconnectedness, and systemic unpredictability. The ability of CMNEs to lead with compassion, inclusivity, and ethical responsibility will be crucial to their global credibility as their geopolitical and economic power continues to increase. The "triple-layer" leadership model put out here provides a paradigm that is both culturally grounded and internationally relevant, bridging theory and practice while encouraging further research and institutional change. In the end, this study confirms that co-creation, shared purpose, and enduring moral commitment are more important components of effective leadership in the twenty-first century than command and control.

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Appendices

Appendix1: Ethical Approval Letter



University of Stirling
Cottrell 3B1
Stirling
FK9 4LA

23/09/2024

Dear Jie Jing

Ethics Application Form : Research On The Influences Of Cross-Cultural Experience On Leadership In The Context Of Chinese State-Owned Multinational Enterprises (MNEs)

Ethics Reference Number: GUEP_2024_14744_14633

Thank you for your submission of the above ethics application.

The ethical approaches of this project have been approved and you can now proceed with your project.

Please note that should any of your proposal change, a further change request submission will be necessary.

If you have any further queries, please do not hesitate to contact the Panel by email to ethics@stir.ac.uk

Yours sincerely,

General University Ethics Panel

Research Ethics in Practice training is available online:

[Staff & Postgraduate Research Students](#)

[Undergraduate & Postgraduate Taught Students](#)

Appendix 2: Participant Information

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Participant Information Sheet

1. Research Project Title:

Research On the Influences Of Cross-Cultural Experience On Leadership In The Context Of Chinese State-Owned Multinational Enterprises (MNEs).

2. Background, aims of project

I would like to invite you to take part in this research study. Before you decide whether or not you wish to participate in this study, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve.

This study's core objective is to explore the influence of cross-cultural experiences on leadership in the context of CMNEs. It examines the effect of cross-cultural experiences on cross-cultural leaders' performance in various aspects, including problem-solving, innovation, and self-regulation. It also discusses the cultivation of leadership styles and relationships with others, which include collaboration, interpersonal communication, and ethical decision-making processes.

3. Why have I been invited to take part?

You have been invited to this study because I believe your experience in this field can make a meaningful contribution to this study.

4. Do I have to take part?

Your participation in this research is voluntary. If you do decide to take part, you can withdraw your participation at any time without needing to explain and without penalty by advising the researcher of this decision. If you withdraw, we will not collect any more data from you. However, any data collected up until the point that you withdraw will be kept and used in the data analysis.

5. What will happen if I take part?

You will need to complete an interview session. The session shall take approximately 50 minutes and there will be no follow up visits.

6. Are there any potential risks in taking part?

There are no foreseeable risks for partaking this research. No private information regarding the participants or associated organizations shall be identified in the publication or other dissemination of this work unless permission is expressly granted.

7. Are there any benefits in taking part?

There will be no direct benefit to you from taking part. However, your contribution to this study shall provide researchers with information on the influence of corporate leaders and multicultural experiences on their leadership development.



8. What happens to the data I provide?←

I am carrying out this study as part of my personal studies towards the completion of my degree. Confidential information will be stored anonymously and securely destroyed after the study has been used.←

9. Will the research be published?←

The findings of this research shall be published in various ways, including presentations, reports, and articles. No private information regarding the participants or associated organizations shall be identified in the publication or other dissemination of this work unless permission is expressively granted. Your words might be visible in the published works, but they will not be attributed to you. The findings of this study will be read by academics and other people interested in this field.←

10. Who has reviewed this research project?←

The ethical approaches of this project have been approved via The University of Stirling [General University Ethics Panel].←

11. Who do I contact if I have concerns about this study or I wish to complain?←

If you would like further information about the study, please contact the Primary Investigator Jie Jing (jjj2@stir.ac.uk) or project supervisor Peter Flett (p.d.flett@stir.ac.uk). If you have any complaints about the study, please address these to the Professor Robert Webb, University of Stirling Management School. EMAIL ADDRESS is <r.m.webb@stir.ac.uk>←

You will be given a copy of this information sheet to keep.←

←

Thank you for your participation.←

Appendix 3: Pre-study questionnaire

Interview Protocol

Interview location _____ Date _____ Starting Time _____
Number of persons attending the interview _____
Number of researchers conducting the interview _____

Hello, my name is***, and I will facilitate this semi-structured interview for about 50 minutes. This study's core objective is to explore the influence of cross-cultural experiences on leadership in the context of CMNEs. It examines the effect of cross-cultural experiences on cross-cultural leaders' aspects, including problem-solving, innovation, and self-regulation. It also discusses cultivating leadership styles and relationships with others, including interpersonal communication skills.

This session shall take approximately 50 minutes, and I will follow an interview protocol.

Did you bring a copy of your consent letter? If not, I have some with me here. You can fill before we start. Do you have any questions before we proceed? If there is no clarification question, let us start with the survey.

1. To get started, please introduce yourself. I would like to know who you are and what your designation in this field is in your introduction.
2. Please briefly describe your role and responsibilities within your organization.
3. How many years of experience do you have in a leadership position?
4. What is the scope of your leadership in terms of team size and geographic regions covered?
5. How does your organization support leaders in developing cross-cultural competencies?
6. What strategies or training programs does your company have to enhance multicultural leadership?
7. How do you measure the success of these initiatives?

Appendix 4: Main study questionnaire

Interview location _____ Date _____

Starting Time _____

Number of persons attending the interview _____

Number of researchers conducting the interview _____

Hello, my name is Jie Jing and I will be facilitating this semi-structured interview for 50 minutes.

This study's core objective is to explore the influence of cross-cultural experiences on leadership in the context of CMNEs. It examines the effect of cross-cultural experiences on cross-cultural leaders' performance in various aspects, including problem-solving, innovation, and self-regulation. It also discusses the cultivation of leadership styles and relationships with others, which include collaboration, interpersonal communication, and ethical decision-making processes.

This session shall take approximately 50 minutes, and I will follow an interview protocol.

Did you bring a copy of your consent letter? If not, I have some with me here. You can fill before we start. Do you have any questions before we proceed? If there is no clarification question, let's start with the survey.

1. To get started, please introduce yourself. I wish to know who you are and your designation in this field in your introduction.
2. Leaders demonstrate cultural competency when recruiting diverse members within groups or teams. How have you gained commitment from your teams and cross-cultural experience as a corporate leader?

(cultural competency : The ability to understand, appreciate, and interact with people from cultures or belief systems different from your own.)
3. Cultural competence is the ability to interact effectively in cross-culture situations. How has cultural competence helped transform you as a leader?
4. From your cross-cultural experience as a corporate leader, how do you get others to accept your ideas?

5. As a corporate leader, how often do you feel meeting with your team is necessary?
6. Cross-cultural experiences can make individuals better communicators and more effective leaders, mainly when overseeing multinational teams.

Probe: How would you get cohesion among a team who disagrees?

7. How do you think cultural diversity can affect the mechanism of leadership improvement?
8. How do you measure success for you as a leader?
9. What Leadership Assessment Tools would you recommend for a multinational corporation aiming to recruit expatriates to work in cross-cultural markets?
10. From your cross-cultural experiences, have you ever been a mentor to another aspiring leader?

Probe: If yes, how did you go about establishing that relationship?

11. As a corporate leader, what do you do when unsure how to achieve the team's goals?
12. From your corporate leadership and cross-cultural experience, how do you build support for ideas or goals with members who do not report to you and whom you have no authority over?
13. How has your corporate leadership position influenced how you delegate responsibilities to your team?
14. How has your corporate leadership and cross-cultural experience developed you into an innovative solution to a non-traditional problem?
15. How has your corporate leadership position taught you to delegate an essential assignment to others while ensuring it will be completed successfully?
16. From your cross-cultural experiences, how do you handle the pressure?

Probe: How do you establish rapport with a new employee?

Appendix 5: Coding, Categorization and Theoretical Construction

Literature Review	Literature Review	Interview code	Quotations	Leadership analysis
External Environment Compliance: Complying with Local Regulations 2.2.1	“Adhering to regulatory compliance helps firms align with the host country's legal, economic, and societal systems” Kostova & Zaheer (1999)	001	“During the merger and acquisition process, the Dutch have a strong sense of rules and regulations, benchmarking against Chinese companies. Even if the management team sees a lot of room for improvement in production efficiency, it is impossible to achieve the goal with Chinese standards and incentive mechanisms... local labor laws must be followed...”	Individual Sub2: Problem-solving ability Hofstede cultural dimension Cross-cultural awareness/emotional intelligence
	“doing business in emerging economies face obstacles due to institutional voids, which are holes in corporate governance and regulatory compliance” Walsh & Gleeson (2023)	001	“Brazil is another situation. If there are loopholes in the management system, Brazilians will study them and are also very sensitive to incentive mechanisms... For Chinese management teams, it is very important to timely fill management loopholes, establish assessment and	Individual Sub2: Problem-solving ability Hofstede cultural dimension Solve problems/drive organizational success

	“ some academics contend that rigorous adherence to host-country legislation might reduce risks (Benson, 2024), others counter that overly stringent compliance can stifle strategic flexibility and creativity.		evaluation systems, including incentive mechanisms for evaluation” “Once the mechanism is established, Brazilians will complete tasks flexibly and creatively according to policies...”	
Cross-cultural communication 2.2.2	“Effective cross-cultural communication is crucial, especially when working with diverse teams, developing trust, and interacting with the local culture”	004	“Pay attention to informal communication, different cultural backgrounds, and educational backgrounds. Foreigners are most averse to preaching and output, so when communicating, seek common values first and integrate management goals into value exchange”	Individual Subject3 : Self-awareness Ability

Cross-cultural communication 2.2.2	“Even though language is an important part of trust-building for cross-cultural plasticity, it takes more than that; one exhibits understanding, dignified, and considerate behavior toward other cultures.” Cochran (2021)	007	“The only communication was when my colleague translated my words, and I took some time to pour water for NICK and his wife. In the middle, I saw that the water cup in front of her was empty and got up to add water to her... When the acquisition team left, she said, "I believe you can take good care of our farmers. You are the best partner of our factory..."	Individual Sub 3: Self-awareness ability Hofstede cultural dimension Effective learning and action
	“cross-cultural leaders must possess good communication skills. .” Cotter & Reichard (2019)	006	“My Hong Kong colleagues wrote a summary of several thousand words, mostly in the form of a journal. Following the Chinese approach, I asked them to refine their work and personally made changes for them. They	Relational Sub 1: cross-cultural communication

		also thought it was good, but they didn't know how to do it... After several revisions, they gradually understood this thinking model and learned how to apply it after adaptation and integration. The level of the summary report has significantly improved, and the team also agrees with it”	
“Effective leadership is usually measured in terms of the time team members take to accomplish a given task shorn of any friction, and good communication skills play a significant role in reaching organizational goals...”Gupta and Gregory (2017)	008	“Acquisition of Tully Sugar Industry used interpersonal communication methods to narrow the spatial and psychological distance, sent its own employees to participate in activities suitable for interaction and communication with the local public, approached and convinced shareholders, reversed their resistance to the acquisition, and ultimately achieved success...”	Relational Sub 2: Integrating the mediating role of complexity

Cross-cultural communication 2.2.2	“Culture and communication, which underpins cultural integration, are crucial in cross-cultural leadership because personal values, social beliefs, values, and cultural norms make up different cultures...” Chen & Zhu (2020)	007	“Respecting privacy is a social moral concept that safeguards individual freedom, dignity, and independence by protecting their right to privacy. In China, officials are required to clearly state what their wives and children do when submitting resumes, but in foreign management, these are considered privacy and are not included in resumes... Our management also decides to respect privacy when making collective decisions...”	Collective Sub 1: Making effective and ethical decisions in diverse organizations
	“strong leaders adapt national cultural norms to the targeted cultures and lead the way while upholding a diversity and inclusion atmosphere for every individual in the workplace...” Boivin (2020)	005	“Hehe culture is the essence of Chinese culture, harmony, peace; cooperation, integration... When managing Czech enterprises, we also integrate our national culture into it, making Czech employees identify with our culture and facilitating work...”	Collective Sub 5: Interpersonal Efficacy of Teams and Leaders Soft skills, cultural

				awareness
	“cross-cultural experiences enhance leaders’ abilities by strengthening their communication, conflict resolution, decision-making, and negotiation skills. ...” Futaqi 和 Mashuri (2022)	008	“In communication, it is important to downplay the identity of state-owned enterprises as much as possible, avoid mentioning the significant significance of merger and acquisition strategies for the national economy and people's livelihood, and maintain a distance from public perception... The acquisition was very successful“	Relational Sub2: Integrating complex mediation information processing capabilities
Value Internalization: Developing a Core Value for a Diverse Team 2.2.3	“Having strong leaders with the ability to integrate different cultural practices needs a focused value internalization system that aids in establishing a cohesive set of core values.“ (Chen and Zhu, 2020)	001	We invested 1 billion US dollars in this project, and for our investment team, if this transaction is not done well, it will have a great impact on my lifelong reputation and the credibility of the industry. Therefore, everyone has a strong motivation to turn the situation around, so they have come up with various ways to do it and put in a lot	Collective Sub 3: Specific cross-cultural regulation

			of effort. In fact, the most crucial thing here is to establish a set of leading by example, fair and transparent systems to incentivize, assess and evaluate the business below...”	
	“CMNEs are leveraging diverse cultural experiences toward innovation and improvement of performance. Leaders who can effectively integrate cross-cultural perspectives are often better positioned to enhance their enterprise's global competitiveness “ (Crawford, 2023)	001	“In the past, these companies were not in the perspective of Chinese investment. They wanted to do many things or couldn't think of them, but didn't have the financial strength to do them. In this way, because we entered, we also built a lot of fixed assets locally, added a lot of job opportunities, and created better development space for young people. The company also achieved better development. The market share we entered in Brazil at the beginning was probably only 16 corn seeds, but now it has exceeded 23, which may increase by six or seven points...”	Collective

	“leaders that involve staff members in the process of developing core values increase loyalty and trust, promoting an inclusive leadership style that improves team cohesiveness.” (Forgeard , 2021)	009	“The intensification of climate change, loss of biodiversity, and resource scarcity are intertwined with multiple challenges, bringing unprecedented pressure to food and agricultural production. Therefore, as a specialized company under COFCO Group that operates overseas bulk agricultural products, COFCO International has formulated a new sustainable development strategy and put forward more ambitious goals to create a green, low-carbon, safe and smooth global food supply chain“	Collective
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Appendix 6: Interviewees 2024-2025

1. Senior Management of CITIC Agri Fund; Former Manager of Strategic Investment of COFCO International; Former Non-executive Director of Ausnutria Dairy Co.,Ltd
2. Region Manger of the Southeast Africa Regional Center of China First Highway Engineering Co. LTD.
3. Senior Management of COFCO International
4. Country Manager of COFCO International Brazil
5. Senior Management of CITIC Europe Holdings
6. Region Manger of Bank of China (Hong Kong) Limited
7. PR manager of PetroChina International (London) Co., Ltd
8. PR manager of COFCO International
9. Senior Management of Bank of China
10. Human Resources Manager of COFCO International
11. Senior Management of CRRC Corporation Limited
12. Former Senior Management of China Agri Trading (HK) Limited
13. Human Resources Manager of CITIC Group
14. Former Region Management of ICBC Branch
15. Country Manager of CITIC Bank International
16. Former Senior Management of COFCO International