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FOSTERING SYNERGY THROUGH DIVERSITY IN MULTINATIONAL PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Yana Dybchynska*

*Zaporizhzhia National University
Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine*
ORCID 0000-0002-0992-7326

Valeriya Volkova

*Zaporizhzhia National University
Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine*
ORCID 0000-0001-5802-7095

*Corresponding author email: yanasd73@gmail.com

Abstract. The aim of the study is to analyze the influence of pluralism business context, namely overcoming diversity challenges in international project teams. The specific paper objectives are to review the existing approaches to the concept of diversity; to analyze the concept of diversity management; to outline the possible solutions for achieving the synergetic effect in local operating practices with the purpose of improving business performance of multinational teams. **Methodology.** The research is an investigation of existing practices aimed at acquiring additional knowledge or idea to raise the level of an existing understanding of the problem of managing cultural diversity in multinational business context. The process for this study has involved a combination of research, synthesis and analysis. **Findings.** Effectively managing cultural diversity in multinational projects enhances innovation, problem-solving, and decision-making while fostering employee engagement and organizational cohesion. Inclusive organizational cultures that value diverse perspectives support structural and informal integration of minority members, improve talent attraction and retention, and strengthen corporate reputation and financial performance. Applying cultural frameworks such as Hofstede's, Hall's, and Trompenaars' dimensions enables managers to understand team behaviors and tailor strategies to diverse workforces. By addressing challenges such as communication barriers, conflicts, and differing work styles through cross-cultural training, inclusive leadership, and flexible project management, organizations can transform diversity into a strategic advantage, aligning individual and organizational goals and supporting sustainable global operations.

Keywords: diversity, management of international projects, inclusive organizational culture.

JEL Classification: F6, M1, M5

INTRODUCTION

Culture plays a decisive role in how individuals make decisions, as it shapes their perceptions of the world and their understanding of personal fulfillment. Differences in cultural backgrounds often lead to conflicting values, which may cause misunderstandings and tension and ultimately reduce team effectiveness. As globalization accelerates and social as well as cultural traditions

intersect, new ways of thinking and behaving emerge at points of intercultural interaction. This increases the necessity for organizations to understand how to manage culturally diverse teams.

A manager's responsibility extends beyond simply recognizing which cultural characteristics influence team performance. They must also be able to leverage these differences to break down cultural barriers, build a cohesive and highly productive team, and generate a synergistic effect that aligns organizational goals with employees' individual aspirations. Ensuring constructive cross-cultural cooperation is becoming an essential component of sustainable organizational development. This need is even more pronounced in international project management, where challenges such as tight deadlines and uncertainty heighten the importance of effectively handling cultural diversity.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of organizational culture is crucial for understanding the peculiarities of cross-cultural project management. The existing theories are presented in the works of J. Coleman (2012), E. H. Schein (2017), N.J. Adler (2003), F. Laurent (1986). These studies consider the place of organizational culture in the life of modern organization, its structure, formation, and existing problems.

The features of organizational culture have been fairly completely studied, the most notable contributors being R.D. Lewis (2006), G. Hofstede (1991), F. Trompenaars (2012), E.T. Hall (1990), R.E. Quinn, K.S. Cameron (2011). National cultural differences, studies and described by these researches, still consist the basis of modern cross-cultural management technologies as they provide the knowledge and understanding about the reasons for the behavioral patterns. However modern management following the demands of the society considers organizational culture not only as a tool for sustainable development of the company, but as a result of the formation of global culture. The organizational culture changes under the influence of the processes in the global economy preserving, at the same time, the own basic components.

The problem of managing cross-cultural teams is being actively research in both domestic and foreign scientific literature, with most studies aiming at specific aspect of this problem. The guidelines for communication planning with the regard to cultural awareness was provided by Binder (2016) who makes the emphasis on techniques for managing multicultural and remote project teams, basing his study on multiple cases. Farah Rahal (2021) explores cultural diversity influencing management and team dynamics in international projects. These study grounds the need for "intercultural management" for the purpose of efficient dealing with challenges of the team with different perceptions and cultural backgrounds. Mushynskyi (2024) studies the issues of project-team management in hybrid environment. His work is dedicated to such important features of team communication as flexibility, inclusiveness, and emotional intelligence. Mazur, Chukhray & Dronyuk (2025) survey IT professionals of diverse cultural backgrounds. These study identifies certain cultural dimensions significantly affecting team productivity, methodology choice, innovation. The contemporary research of dynamics and challenges of multicultural teams in TNC was provided in the study of Reed, Stephenson, Kim, Lee & Todd (2025). This work highlights the peculiarities of multicultural team management in complex organizations working across borders. Salamanina & Niameshchuk (2024) consider the issues of leadership in managing cross-cultural teams. The emphasis is made on the importance of intercultural sensitivity, tailored leadership behavior, and communication adaptation for global teams. The perspectives and practical recommendations for managing multicultural project teams are presented in the work of Vorobiova & Krupskyi (2024). They highlighted such features as communication adaptation, empathy, and modern leadership.)

PAPER OBJECTIVES

The study is targeted at analyzing the peculiarities of organizational diversity as a factor of optimizing performance in international projects.

The specific objectives of this paper are threefold and are designed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the role of cultural diversity in international project management.

First, the study aims to critically review the primary Cultural Dimension Models that form the theoretical foundation for contemporary project management methodologies. These models, including those proposed by Hofstede, Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, and Hall, offer systematic frameworks for understanding cultural differences and are essential for addressing communication challenges, managing interpersonal interactions, and optimizing collaboration within culturally heterogeneous teams.

Second, the paper seeks to delineate the advantages and strategic value of diversity in international projects. By examining how culturally diverse teams contribute to enhanced creativity, innovation, problem-solving, and decision-making, the study emphasizes the potential for diversity to serve as a key driver of organizational performance and competitive advantage. This objective also includes consideration of the ways in which inclusive practices foster employee engagement, motivation, and retention, thereby reinforcing the overall effectiveness of project teams.

Finally, the research aims to identify and analyze the principal challenges that arise within diverse teams operating in multinational contexts. These challenges encompass communication barriers, cultural misunderstandings, differences in work styles and decision-making approaches, conflicts, and difficulties in integration and cohesion. By systematically exploring these obstacles, the study seeks to provide actionable insights and strategies that project managers can employ to mitigate potential risks, enhance team functioning, and fully leverage the benefits of cultural diversity.

Collectively, these objectives are intended to advance both theoretical knowledge and practical understanding of diversity management in multinational projects, offering guidance for effective cross-cultural collaboration and optimized team performance.

METHODOLOGY

The present study constitutes a systematic investigation of established practices and approaches, with the objective of generating new insights and enhancing the current understanding of the complex issue of managing cultural diversity within multinational business environments. This research seeks to examine the ways in which organizations navigate the challenges associated with diverse workforces and to identify strategies that facilitate effective cross-cultural collaboration. The methodology employed in this study integrates multiple scholarly approaches, combining comprehensive literature review, critical synthesis of existing theoretical frameworks, and detailed analytical evaluation of empirical evidence. By drawing on a range of sources and perspectives, the research not only elucidates prevailing trends and best practices in diversity management but also highlights gaps in knowledge, offering directions for future investigation and practical application in the management of culturally heterogeneous teams.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The fundamental concept underpinning the study of diversity in international projects is that of “culture.” Broadly conceived, culture can be defined as an organized system of values, norms, and behavioral standards that individuals internalize from an early age, which subsequently shapes their perceptions, interactions, and decision-making processes within social and organizational contexts.

Organizational culture (“economic culture”, “corporate culture”) is regarded as “shared by a group of people values that help individuals understand organizational functioning and thus provide them with norms for behavior in the organization (Deshpande, R., Webster F., 1989). The concept of organizational culture becomes particularly salient for individuals at the outset of their professional careers, serving as a framework that facilitates adaptation and effective functioning within the business environment. It shapes employees’ attitudes, cognitive approaches, and behavioral patterns, while also influencing their morale and engagement within the organization. In terms of structure organizational culture is a sophisticated system. At the level of a team it can be identified as a corporate culture influenced and modified by each team member. The task of the project manager is not only to see the visible aspects of culture, but to realize the motives behind certain behavior to be able to efficiently manage the people from different cultures in the team.

At the structural level of an organization diversity is viewed as an organizational tool for international project manager that recognizes differences among employees and helps leverage the positive contribution to globalization—the economic interdependence between nations that develops through international flows of goods and services, capital, innovation, and people. Diversity management focuses primarily on organizational methods for recruiting, training, and rotating personnel within an organization. According to T. Cox and S. Blake (1991), “diversity management refers to the various management issues and activities associated with the recruitment and effective use of personnel from diverse cultural backgrounds”.

A comparative management approach allows us to conceptualize diversity management as a company's ability to provide opportunities and utilize the resources of people from different cultures. The concept of cultural diversity is associated with a certain amount of definitional confusion as different researchers define the cultural context of this concept differently. Culture is understood as such characteristics of individuals and social groups as their ethnicity, religion, native language, shared values, customs, behavioral norms, attitudes toward social status in the social structure, etc. Experts in the field of cultural diversity rightly note that it is often unclear which sources of cultural effects (religion, ethnicity, nationality, etc.) or which features of diversity are most influential in human resource management in organizations (L. Shore, A. Randel, B. Chung, et al (2011). Diversity patterns may be observable (e.g., a distinct accent, religious beliefs) or subtler due to varying degrees of acculturation in the host culture (e.g., an immigrant retaining cultural attributes of the country of origin while living in another country).

According to T. Cox Jr. and S. Blake (1991), managing cultural diversity in an organization encompasses a whole philosophy of diversity, including human resource management systems, perceptions of diversity, organizational culture, educational programs, and addressing cultural differences, race/ethnicity/nationality, and gender heterogeneity. Within the framework of diversity, equality based on sameness is replaced by equality based on difference. Diversity management also challenges the traditional way of ensuring equal opportunities at work: diversity is now viewed not only as a legal or moral issue, but also as a business case. The interaction of culturally diverse employees is not without problems, such as increased turnover among individuals from the dominant group, decreased group integration, and communication barriers. In order to overcome these obstacles and benefit from a diverse workforce, some authors argue that organizations should develop an organizational culture that approves, supports, and values diversity.

Diversity management is increasingly recognized as a significant and innovative framework for interpreting and evaluating how people behave within organizational settings. Organizational culture can be understood as a collection of shared assumptions, values, norms, and behavioral expectations that shape how employees act in various workplace situations. Newcomers are often encouraged to align themselves with established cultural norms and visible organizational symbols, whereas long-standing employees may react with caution or aversion toward colleagues who introduce unfamiliar perspectives. As a result, many organizations naturally gravitate toward hiring and promoting individuals with similar social or demographic traits, while unintentionally

marginalizing those from different backgrounds throughout recruitment, advancement, and informal networking processes. Cultural symbols and practices may appear to promote integration, yet they often conceal institutionalized forms of exclusion that undermine genuine equality.

In workplaces that are not fully welcoming to minority groups, achieving broader internationalization objectives—such as those promoted by the Bologna Declaration—becomes challenging, to say nothing of building an inclusive environment that affirmatively values diversity. Organizational culture, under such conditions, operates as a mechanism of social regulation, reinforcing uniform behavior and encouraging adherence to dominant value systems. This pressure can create considerable stress for employees from underrepresented groups who strive to maintain their cultural identity. Consequently, cultural obstacles—whether concrete physical barriers, like inaccessible infrastructure, or subtle forms of exclusion, such as dismissing someone's input due to their minority status—may restrict their ability to succeed.

Strong organizational cultures, in particular, tend to require individuals to conform unilaterally to established norms. In contrast, scholars have suggested a shift toward a more inclusive cultural model that actively incorporates the needs and perspectives of minority employees into workplace policies, practices, and values. Following the recommendations of Cox and Blake, managers can design socialization processes in which members of dominant cultural groups and those from alternative backgrounds exchange key values and norms while retaining their own identities. Such interactions aim to facilitate both structural inclusion—ensuring minorities are represented across organizational levels—and meaningful participation within informal networks.

According to these authors, contemporary organizations should build cultures that support trust, cooperation, innovation, and collaborative work, as these characteristics enable diversity to become a strategic advantage. Leaders who cultivate sensitivity to cultural differences and use these differences constructively enhance overall organizational effectiveness. Over the past thirty years, diversity management has become firmly embedded in modern practice, driven by rising cultural heterogeneity and the ongoing globalization of business and labor markets. Today, it represents a relevant and sought-after approach: it can mitigate the concerns of organizations hesitant about diversity, while also helping those already committed to inclusion fully benefit from it.

In practice, effective diversity management requires shifts in mindsets, behaviors, organizational routines, structural design, and corporate ethical standards. From a multicultural perspective, its ultimate goal is to build an organization in which individuals from diverse backgrounds can meaningfully contribute to shared objectives and fully develop their potential.

The basis for understanding the motives behind the behavior were provided in well-established and widely spread Cultural Dimension Models: Hofstede's cultural dimensions, Hall's high-/low-context communication, Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner's value orientations. These models allow us to define the principle aspects to consider while developing communication strategies for multinational teams by classifying cultures and enabling their comparison:

Power distance affects decision-making and hierarchical expectations;

Individualism versus collectivism influences collaboration, accountability, and conflict style;

Uncertainty avoidance impacts risk perception and planning rigidity;

Context communication shapes communication clarity and implicit assumptions;

Masculinity versus femininity influences leadership and communication styles, motivation and reward system;

Long-term orientation versus short term orientation shapes human resources policy of companies;

Indulgence versus restraint influences organizational culture and climate;

Internal control versus external control determines relation to nature;

Universalism versus particularism shapes leadership and management style and determines the decision-making process;

Affectivity versus emotionality shapes communication processes;

Specificity versus diffusion defines the approach to roles and responsibilities; Achievement versus ascription influences the employee motivation; Proxemics affects communication, teamwork, organizational culture, and workplace dynamics;

Monochronic versus polychronic concept of time shapes leadership style, work scheduling and task management.

The way national cultural dimensions are incorporated into an organization's culture can vary. In some instances, a company's corporate culture fully reflects the cultural characteristics of the host country, while in other cases, the organization operates in a multinational context. This may introduce diverse, and sometimes even conflicting, cultural traits into the organizational culture. For project managers, cultural dimensions should be treated as general guidelines to better understand team members. Additionally, these dimensions need to be carefully analyzed and considered alongside other elements of the motivational system and within the framework of the existing corporate culture.

Global practices show the interdependence between diversity management strategies, organizational performance, and competitiveness. Properly managing diversity brings benefits and improvements to management, namely attracting top talent from various backgrounds, improving decision-making, enhancing team collaboration and problem-solving, and reducing opportunity costs by reducing turnover, absenteeism, job satisfaction, loyalty, and organizational agility (Cox, T.H., Blake, S., 1991).

Diversity and inclusion as drivers of organizational performance

Diversity and inclusion are recognized as key catalysts for innovation within organizations. Inclusive environments, which bring together individuals from varied sociocultural backgrounds and experiences, facilitate the generation of novel ideas and the development of innovative products and services. By leveraging diverse perspectives, organizations can achieve a competitive advantage in the marketplace.

Diverse teams also demonstrate enhanced problem-solving capabilities and more effective decision-making. Empirical research indicates that teams composed of members with heterogeneous ethnic and social backgrounds consider a wider array of perspectives and alternatives, resulting in superior decisions compared to homogeneous teams. Consequently, this contributes to overall organizational effectiveness and success.

Moreover, inclusive workplaces foster higher levels of employee engagement. When employees perceive that their contributions are valued and impactful, they exhibit greater motivation, commitment, and loyalty, which in turn enhances productivity, strengthens corporate culture, and reduces turnover.

Financial performance is also positively influenced by diversity and inclusion. Numerous studies suggest that organizations with higher levels of diversity consistently outperform their competitors in terms of profitability, growth, and shareholder value.

Furthermore, diversity and inclusion improve talent acquisition and retention. In a competitive labor market, organizations that cultivate inclusive practices attract a broader and more skilled applicant pool while retaining employees who feel respected and supported, facilitating career development and organizational growth.

Finally, prioritizing diversity and inclusion enhances corporate reputation. Organizations that actively embrace these principles differentiate themselves from competitors, expand their customer base, increase brand loyalty, and improve service satisfaction, thereby contributing to sustained business success.

Challenges in managing diversity within international projects and strategies for their mitigation.

Communication Barriers. Linguistic differences, high-/low-context communication variations, and misinterpretation of non-verbal cues can hinder effective collaboration. Strategies include

providing language support, fostering clear and inclusive communication (e.g. a shared collaboration platform in English, video conferences with structured agendas to minimize misunderstandings), encouraging continuous feedback, and offering cross-cultural communication training.

Cultural Misunderstandings. Divergent values, norms, and attitudes toward hierarchy may lead to misalignment. Addressing this requires cultural awareness workshops, promoting respect for diverse perspectives, and establishing explicit team norms (e.g. pre-project workshops explaining cultural norms regarding decision-making and work schedules for team members from different countries).

Conflict and Tension. Differences in perspectives and stereotypes can generate interpersonal friction. Conflict can be mitigated by implementing structured resolution processes, fostering open dialogue, and creating a psychologically safe environment (e.g. structured feedback sessions and anonymous suggestion boxes to resolve conflicts before they escalate).

Integration and Cohesion Issues. Challenges in building trust and ensuring inclusion may arise, resulting in informal cliques or isolation. These can be addressed through team-building activities, mentoring programs, inclusive decision-making, and networking opportunities (e.g. joint hackathons and peer mentoring programs to integrate new members and encourage collaboration).

Differences in Work Styles and Expectations. Variations in approaches to problem-solving, risk tolerance, and individualism versus collectivism can affect performance. Solutions include clarifying roles, setting shared goals, aligning expectations, and using flexible project management methodologies (e.g. Agile project management with clearly defined sprints to accommodate varying work styles while maintaining deadlines).

Leadership and Management Challenges. Misalignment of leadership styles and inequitable task distribution can undermine team effectiveness. Managers should receive intercultural leadership training, adapt their approaches to team needs, and monitor equity in task allocation. Training project managers in intercultural leadership allows them to balance participative and directive approaches based on team composition.

Resistance to Change. Biases, reluctance to adapt, and unsupportive organizational culture may hinder diversity initiatives. Overcoming these obstacles involves promoting diversity and inclusion policies, encouraging continuous learning, and demonstrating the benefits of diverse teamwork (e.g. online courses on unconscious bias and cultural intelligence).

CONCLUSION

The study highlights the critical role of cultural pluralism and diversity management in enhancing the effectiveness of multinational project teams. Cultural diversity, while presenting challenges such as communication barriers, differing work styles, hierarchical expectations, and potential conflicts, also provides significant opportunities for organizational growth, innovation, and competitive advantage. Effective management of cultural diversity enables organizations to convert these differences into a strategic resource rather than a liability.

The research confirms that organizational culture serves as both a framework and a mechanism for managing diversity. Strong cultures that demand conformity may hinder minority participation and creativity, whereas inclusive cultures that value diverse perspectives facilitate collaboration, trust, and engagement. By fostering cross-cultural understanding, organizations can achieve structural and informal integration of minority members, thereby improving cohesion, problem-solving, and decision-making processes.

Diversity and inclusion positively impact organizational outcomes, including employee engagement, innovation, decision-making quality, financial performance, talent attraction and retention, and corporate reputation. Multiculturalism and cultural pluralism ensure fair treatment,

equal development opportunities, and social stability, while also mitigating the risks of marginalization, stereotyping, and conflict within teams.

For managers, practical approaches to overcoming diversity-related challenges include cross-cultural training, language support, structured communication, conflict resolution mechanisms, inclusive leadership, and flexible project management methodologies. The application of Cultural Dimension Models—such as those proposed by Hofstede, Hall, and Trompenaars—provides valuable guidance for understanding and managing culturally heterogeneous teams, enabling managers to adapt strategies while respecting individual and collective cultural identities.

Ultimately, the study demonstrates that diversity management is not only a moral or legal imperative but also a business-critical strategy. Organizations that successfully leverage cultural differences can achieve a synergistic effect, aligning individual aspirations with organizational goals, enhancing team performance, and securing sustainable success in the global business environment.

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СТИМУЛОВАННЯ СПІЛЬНОЇ РЕЗУЛЬТАТИВНОСТІ ЧЕРЕЗ РІЗНОМАНІТНІСТЬ В УПРАВЛІННІ МІЖНАРОДНИМИ ПРОЄКТАМИ

Дибчинська Яна Станіславівна
Запорізький національний університет
Запоріжжя, Україна

Волкова Валерія Володимирівна
Запорізький національний університет
Запоріжжя, Україна

Метою дослідження є аналіз впливу плюралістичного бізнес-контексту, а саме подолання проблем різноманітності в міжнародних проектних командах. Конкретні цілі статті полягають у огляді існуючих підходів до концепції різноманітності; аналізі концепції управління різноманітністю; окресленні можливих рішень для досягнення синергетичного ефекту в локальних операційних практиках з метою покращення бізнес-ефективності багатонаціональних команд. Дослідження є вивченням існуючих практик, спрямованих на отримання додаткових знань або ідей для підвищення рівня існуючого розуміння проблеми управління культурним різноманіттям у контексті багатонаціонального бізнесу. Процес цього дослідження включав поєднання дослідження, синтезу та аналізу. Ефективне управління культурним різноманіттям у багатонаціональних проектах покращує інновації, вирішення проблем та прийняття рішень, одночасно сприяючи залученню співробітників та організаційній згуртованості. Інклюзивні організаційні культури, які цінують різноманітні точки зору, підтримують структурну та неформальну інтеграцію представників меншин, покращують залучення та утримання талантів, а також зміцнюють корпоративну репутацію та фінансові показники. Застосування культурних фреймворків, таких як виміри Хофтеде, Холла та Тромпенаарса, дозволяє менеджерам розуміти поведінку команди та адаптувати стратегії до різноманітних робочих сил. Вирішуючи такі проблеми, як комунікативні бар'єри, конфлікти та різні стилі роботи, за допомогою міжкультурного навчання, інклюзивного лідерства та гнучкого управління проектами, організації можуть перетворити різноманітність на стратегічну перевагу, узгоджуючи індивідуальні та організаційні цілі та підтримуючи сталій глобальний розвиток.

Ключові слова: різноманітність, управління міжнародними проектами, інклюзивна організаційна культура.