SCIENTIFIC CULTURE

www.sci-cult.com

SCIENTIFIC CULTURE, Vol. 12, No. 4, (2026), pp. 4081-4090
Open Access. Online & Print

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.12426461

CROSS-CULTURAL COMPETENCE FOR SUSTAINABLE AND RESILIENT GLOBAL PROJECTS: INTEGRATING INTERCULTURAL DYNAMICS WITH ESG-ORIENTED PROJECT STRATEGIES

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Received: 18/06/2025
Accepted: 19/01/2026

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ABSTRACT

This study is an empirical investigation of how cross-cultural competence increases sustainability and resilience in ESG-focused worldwide endeavors. The study is based on cultural intelligence, intercultural communication, and adaptive leadership theories, which makes the study of 250 professionals working in multicultural and international project settings a quantitative study design. SPSS was used to analyze the data with descriptive statistics, reliability test, correlation analysis, and hierarchical multiple regression. The results reveal that cultural intelligence, effectiveness of intercultural communication, and adaptive leadership are important predictors of ESG-oriented sustainability and resilience of projects, which contributes 61% of the variance of project outcomes. The most predictive was adaptive leadership. The findings show that the sustainability of any global project is strongly determined by socio-cultural and leadership skills as opposed to technical or financial factors. The research provides empirical confirmation of the theory of cross-cultural competence in the context of ESG-oriented projects and practical recommendations to organizations interested in enhancing the performance of sustainable and resilient delivery of global projects.

KEYWORDS: Cultural Intelligence, Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG), Global Project Management, Intercultural Communication, Stakeholder Engagement, Sustainable Development.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Over the years, important corporate sustainability initiatives have developed due to resource depletion, climate change, rising socio-economic inequalities, and so on. Today, more and more enterprises are embracing ESG practices aimed at making this world a better place (Shmelev et al., 2025). Currently, multi-national companies are placing priority on the sustainability management (ESG) activities. In compliance with the law, meeting stakeholders' expectations or developing an advantage is something that strategy expert companies are focusing on in order to develop resilience and sustainable growth (Friede. et al., 2023). Research continues to prove that ESG efforts boost business success. These steps will also foster social justice, environmental sustainability, and good governance (Cojoianu et al., 2021; Pekovic et al., 2018). Moreover, firms that follow a strong ESG framework are far more agile during crises. For instance, a strong ESG framework can enhance a company's crisis response during a pandemic like COVID-19 or the 2008 financial crisis. Thus, following ESG instils confidence in all stakeholders and ensures business continuity (Albuquerque et al., 2019). More organizations are getting involved in global projects. There is also an increasing expectation for sustainability, resilience, and ESG performance. Cross-cultural competence is considered a very strategic capability for organizations delivering global projects, as it promotes the understanding of differences in language and culture (Bird et al., 2024). ESG is no longer viewed as a mere "add-on" with projects but is considered a strategic imperative under which projects are conceived, delivered, and assessed. Investors, regulators, and communities are increasingly assessing environmental impact, governance integrity, and social inclusion. Simultaneously, a majority of large-scale initiatives are carried out through teams situated in far-off locations, cultural teams, and stakeholder networks whose members maintain different assumptions about time, risk, hierarchy, communication, and accountability (Stahl et al., 2024).

The objectives of this study are:

- To examine the level of cross-cultural competence among global project professionals
- To analyze the impact of cultural intelligence, intercultural communication, and adaptive leadership on ESG-oriented project sustainability
- To empirically validate a cross-cultural competence–sustainability framework using survey data

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 ESG and Sustainable Project Performance

The concept of Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) has become central to corporate and project performance evaluation. Empirical evidence shows that ESG integration enhances long-term financial stability, reduces risk exposure, and strengthens stakeholder trust (Friede et al., 2015; Albuquerque et al., 2019). Beyond compliance, ESG is increasingly viewed as a driver of resilience and competitive advantage. However, much of the literature emphasizes financial and reporting outcomes while overlooking the human and cultural capabilities required for effective implementation. In global project contexts, ESG success depends not only on policies but also on intercultural collaboration, leadership adaptability, and stakeholder management capacity.

2.2 Cross-Cultural Competence in Global Project Environments

Cross-cultural competence is widely recognized as essential for managing multicultural teams and global partnerships. It is defined as a multidimensional construct encompassing awareness, adaptability, and behavioral flexibility in diverse cultural contexts (Bird et al., 2024). Empirical research shows that culturally intelligent leaders enhance trust, reduce conflict, and promote inclusive decision-making (Stahl et al., 2010). However, its linkage to ESG-oriented project sustainability remains underexplored. While ESG practices improve sustainable performance through mediating organizational culture and adaptive behaviors (Chen et al., 2025), limited research integrates cross-cultural competence with ESG-driven project resilience, revealing a significant theoretical and empirical gap.

2.3 Intercultural Communication and Stakeholder Engagement

Intercultural communication is critical for stakeholder management in international and development projects, enhancing governance transparency, participation, and collaborative problem-solving (Martens & Carvalho, 2024). Poor cross-cultural communication can lead to delays, conflict, and governance breakdowns. Although communication is recognized as central to project success, its integration within ESG-driven

sustainability frameworks remains limited. ESG emphasizes governance quality, inclusion, and stakeholder engagement, yet empirical links between intercultural communication and ESG outcomes are scarce. Research on global institutions such as the UN shows that effective intercultural communication strengthens stakeholder involvement and supports sustainable ESG practices and SDG implementation (Dinu et al., 2025).

2.4 Adaptive Leadership and Project Resilience

Adaptive leadership is critical in dynamic, multicultural project environments, where leaders must adjust strategies and behaviors to cultural expectations and uncertainty. Leadership flexibility enhances project resilience by enabling teams to absorb shocks and sustain long-term viability. However, resilience research remains largely risk-focused, with limited integration of cultural leadership dynamics in ESG-oriented contexts. ESG literature emphasizes strategic integration and stakeholder engagement as drivers of resilience and value creation (Adeyoyin et al., 2021), while ESG performance influences financial outcomes such as dividend stability (Aulia et al., 2025). Broader systemic reforms also link finance to socio-ecological sustainability (Change, 2025), yet cross-cultural adaptive leadership remains underexplored.

Identified Research Gap

A critical synthesis of the literature reveals three major gaps:

1- ESG studies mostly focus on financial performance and governance indicators and underestimate human and cultural competencies.
2- The literature on cross-cultural competence seldom relates cultural intelligence, the effectiveness of communication, and adaptive leadership to ESG-based project sustainability directly.
3- Empirical support of an integrated framework aiding the connection between the dimensions of cross-cultural competence and sustainable and resilient performances in global projects is limited.

Although the current research recognizes the value of culture, communication, and leadership separately, it lacks empirical research to check the overall impact of the combination on project sustainability in line with ESG. Thus, the current research fills a critical gap in the research as it establishes and empirically supports a cross-cultural competence-ESG sustainability model based on quantitative survey data of professionals involved in the global project setting.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study employs a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design to examine the relationship between cross-cultural competence and ESG-oriented project sustainability. Standardized questionnaires were used to measure cultural intelligence, intercultural communication, adaptive leadership, and project sustainability. Data were collected at a single point in time, capturing perceptions within global and multicultural project environments. The survey approach enables statistical testing of relationships using correlation and regression analysis, ensuring reliability and replicability. This design is widely used in project management and ESG research to analyze predictive relationships. Figure 1 outlines the systematic process from literature review and instrument development to data analysis and interpretation.

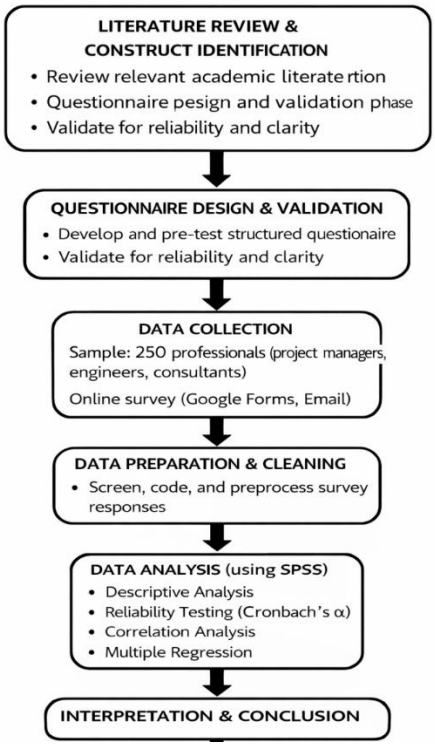

Figure 1: Research Methodology Workflow.

It provides a systematic approach to the research methodology, which is a sequential presentation of the research process: literature review, questionnaire design, sampling, data gathering, statistical analysis, and results interpretation.

3.2 Sampling Strategy and Rationale

This study employed a combination of purposive and convenience sampling to target professionals

with relevant experience in global and multicultural project environments. Purposive sampling ensured that participants had direct exposure to cross-cultural settings, enabling meaningful assessment of cultural intelligence, intercultural communication, and adaptive leadership. Convenience sampling facilitated access to geographically dispersed professionals within a limited timeframe. Such non-probability approaches are common in project management research involving specialized and hard-to-reach populations. However, this method limits statistical generalizability. Therefore, findings reflect trends within multicultural project contexts rather than all project professionals. Future studies should adopt probability or stratified sampling to enhance external validity.

3.3 Sample Size Adequacy and Statistical Power

There were 250 respondents in the study, and this is believed to be substantial to conduct a multiple regression analysis with three predictor variables. Adequacy of sample size was determined by the generally accepted statistical guidelines and power considerations. The smallest possible sample needed to test overall model fit may be estimated by the formula, as recommended by regression sample size rules (e.g., Green, 1991):

$N \geq 50+8m$

where m represents the number of predictors. With three predictors, the minimum recommended sample size is:

$50+8(3) =74$

Similarly, for testing individual predictors, the recommended minimum sample is:

$N \geq 104+m=107$

The existing sample size of 250 is more than big enough to surpass both thresholds, and thus has adequate statistical power to identify meaningful effects.

A post-hoc power analysis indicates that with a sample size of 250, three predictors, and a medium effect size ($f^2 = 0.15$), the regression model achieved statistical power exceeding the recommended 0.80 threshold (Haoxing and System, 1988). This confirms that the study was adequately powered to detect meaningful relationships and generate stable regression estimates between cross-cultural competence and ESG-oriented project sustainability. Data were collected through an online structured questionnaire distributed via Google Forms and email, enabling wide geographic reach and anonymity. Responses were screened, coded, and prepared for statistical analysis using SPSS.

3.4 Instrument Development

The data collection instrument consisted of a structured questionnaire divided into five sections, with all construct-related items measured using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree) in Table 1. Section A captured respondents' demographic information, including gender, age, educational qualification, years of project experience, type of organization, and exposure to international projects. Sections B, C, and D measured key dimensions of cross-cultural competence—namely Cultural Intelligence, Intercultural Communication Effectiveness, and Adaptive Leadership—focusing on awareness of cultural differences, communication clarity, leadership flexibility, and inclusiveness in decision-making. Section E assessed ESG-oriented project sustainability and resilience, emphasizing social and stakeholder sustainability, governance and ethical compliance, and project adaptability. The instrument was designed based on established literature to ensure content validity and suitability for professionals working in global and multicultural project environments.

Table 1: Questionnaire Structure and Measurement Constructs.

Section	Construct	Dimensions Measured	Scale
A	Demographic Profile	Gender, Age, Educational Qualification, Project Experience, Organization Type, International Exposure	Nominal / Ordinal
B	Cultural Intelligence (CQ)	Awareness of cultural differences; Adaptability to new cultural contexts; Understanding cultural norms	5-Point Likert
C	Intercultural Communication Effectiveness	Clarity in cross-cultural communication; Managing misunderstandings; Stakeholder communication effectiveness	5-Point Likert
D	Adaptive Leadership	Flexibility in leadership style; Inclusiveness in decision-making; Responsiveness to cultural diversity	5-Point Likert
E	ESG-Oriented Project Sustainability & Resilience	Social & stakeholder sustainability; Governance & ethical compliance; Project adaptability & resilience	5-Point Likert

3.5 Tools, Software, and Data Analysis Techniques

Survey data were coded, screened, and cleaned using Microsoft Excel to remove incomplete responses and errors before analysis. The refined dataset was then analyzed in SPSS (Version 26/27). Descriptive statistics summarized respondent demographics and key variables. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha to ensure internal consistency of measurement

scales. Pearson correlation analysis examined relationships among cross-cultural competence dimensions and ESG-oriented project sustainability. Finally, multiple regression analysis evaluated the predictive effects of cultural intelligence, intercultural communication effectiveness, and adaptive leadership on ESG-oriented project sustainability and resilience, empirically validating the proposed research framework.

3.6 Common Method Bias Assessment

Since all variables were collected through self-reported surveys at a single time, Common Method Bias (CMB) was assessed. Harman's Single Factor Test was conducted using SPSS with an unrotated exploratory factor analysis including all measurement items. Multiple factors emerged with eigenvalues above 1, and the first factor explained 38.4% of total variance, below the 50% threshold, indicating no dominant method bias. Additionally, procedural remedies were applied, including respondent anonymity, conceptual separation of predictor and outcome variables, and clear, non-leading questionnaire items. Together, these statistical and procedural steps reduce the likelihood that findings are inflated by common method variance.

4. RESULTS & DISCUSSION

4.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

The demographic profile of the 250 respondents indicates a predominance of male participants (64.8%) compared to females (35.2%), reflecting the typical gender composition in global project management and engineering roles in Table 2. In terms of professional experience, the sample was well distributed: 29.6% had 1–5 years of experience, 38.4% had 6–10 years, and 32.0% had more than 10 years. This balanced representation across experience levels strengthens the credibility of the study, as it captures perspectives from both early-career and highly experienced professionals working in multicultural and international project environments.

Table 2: Demographic Profile of Respondents (n = 250).

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	162	64.8
	Female	88	35.2
Experience	1–5 years	74	29.6
	6–10 years	96	38.4
	>10 years	80	32.0

4.2 Reliability Analysis

Reliability analysis was conducted to assess the internal consistency of the measurement scales used in the study. Cronbach's alpha values were calculated for all major constructs, including Cultural Intelligence, Intercultural Communication, Adaptive Leadership, and ESG-Oriented Project Sustainability and Resilience. The results indicate that all constructs achieved alpha values well above the recommended threshold of 0.70. Cultural Intelligence recorded a Cronbach's alpha of 0.86, while Intercultural Communication and Adaptive Leadership achieved values of 0.84 and 0.88, respectively. The highest reliability was observed for Project Sustainability and Resilience ($\alpha = 0.90$), indicating excellent consistency among the items in Table 3. These results confirm that the questionnaire items reliably measure their respective constructs and are suitable for further inferential analysis.

Table 3: Reliability Analysis.

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha
Cultural Intelligence	0.86
Intercultural Communication	0.84
Adaptive Leadership	0.88
Project Sustainability & Resilience	0.90

4.3 Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation analysis assessed relationships among study variables and revealed strong, statistically significant positive associations between all dimensions of cross-cultural competence and ESG-oriented project sustainability. Cultural Intelligence was strongly correlated with ESG sustainability ($r = 0.71$, $p < 0.01$), followed by Intercultural Communication ($r = 0.69$, $p < 0.01$) and Adaptive Leadership ($r = 0.74$, $p < 0.01$) in Table 4. These findings indicate that higher cross-cultural competence aligns with improved sustainability and resilience outcomes in global projects. Significant positive correlations among independent variables suggest they are interrelated dimensions, while no correlations exceeded 0.85, indicating no multi-collinearity concerns.

Table 4: Correlation Analysis.

Variables	CQ	IC	AL	ESG-PSR
Cultural Intelligence (CQ)	1			
Intercultural Communication (IC)	0.62**	1		
Adaptive Leadership (AL)	0.58**	0.65**	1	
ESG Project Sustainability (PSR)	0.71**	0.69**	0.74**	1

Note: p < 0.01

4.4 Multiple Regression Analysis

Multiple regression analysis was conducted to assess the predictive influence of cross-cultural

competence dimensions on ESG-oriented project sustainability and resilience. The model included Cultural Intelligence, Intercultural Communication, and Adaptive Leadership as independent variables, with ESG Project Sustainability and Resilience as the dependent variable. The regression model was statistically significant and explained 61% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.61$) in ESG-oriented project sustainability outcomes. Among the predictors, Adaptive Leadership emerged as the strongest predictor ($\beta = 0.35$, $p < 0.001$), followed by Cultural Intelligence ($\beta = 0.32$, $p < 0.001$) and Intercultural Communication ($\beta = 0.28$, $p < 0.001$). These findings indicate that leadership adaptability, cultural awareness, and effective intercultural communication significantly contribute to sustainable and resilient project performance in ESG-driven global environments (Table 5).

Table 5: Multiple Regression Results.

Predictor	Beta (β)	t-value	Sig.
Cultural Intelligence	0.32	5.87	0.000
Intercultural Communication	0.28	4.96	0.000
Adaptive Leadership	0.35	6.41	0.000

$R^2 = 0.61$

Figure 2 presents the regression path diagram illustrating the predictive strength of cross-cultural competence dimensions on ESG-oriented project sustainability and resilience. The standardized beta coefficients indicate that Adaptive Leadership ($\beta = 0.35$) is the strongest predictor, followed by Cultural Intelligence ($\beta = 0.32$) and Intercultural Communication Effectiveness ($\beta = 0.28$), all of which are statistically significant ($p < 0.01$). The model explains 61% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.61$) in ESG-oriented project sustainability, demonstrating the substantial influence of cross-cultural competence on sustainable and resilient outcomes in global project environments.

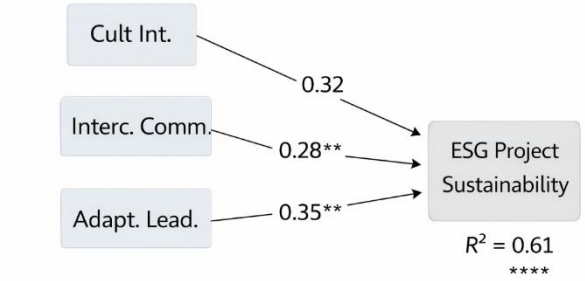

Figure 2: Regression path diagram illustrating the influence of cross-cultural competence dimensions on ESG-oriented project sustainability and resilience.

The findings confirm that cross-cultural competence significantly enhances ESG-oriented project sustainability and resilience in global environments characterized by diverse cultural norms and stakeholder expectations. Professionals with strong cultural intelligence, effective intercultural communication, and adaptive leadership are better positioned to align project goals with ESG principles, strengthening stakeholder engagement and ethical governance (Tao, 2025). Among these competencies, adaptive leadership emerged as the strongest predictor, emphasizing the importance of flexibility, inclusiveness, and responsiveness to cultural diversity. Leaders who adjust their styles to multicultural contexts manage conflict more effectively and sustain project continuity in dynamic settings (Yu et al., 2024). Additionally, cultural intelligence and intercultural communication positively influence ESG outcomes by fostering trust, collaboration, and governance quality, thereby supporting sustainable and resilient global project performance.

4.5 Hierarchical Regression with Control Variables

4.5.1 Inclusion of Control Variables

In order to enhance the soundness of the results, demographic variables were introduced as the control variables in the regression analysis. In particular, Gender, Years of Experience, and Organization Type were managed to ensure that they could not have affected the ESG-oriented project sustainability results. It is also reasonable to assume that more experienced professionals might prove to be more aligned with sustainability as they are exposed to practices of global projects. Equally, the organizational setting (e.g., multinational vs. domestic firms) can also have an effect on the practices of ESG implementation. Consequently, omitting these variables may provide false claims of overestimating the independent role of cross-cultural competence.

4.5.2 Hierarchical Regression Analysis

To discuss the hypothesis of the study on whether the cross-cultural competence anticipates the ESG-oriented project sustainability but not the demographic factors, the hierarchical multiple regression analysis was performed.

In Step 1, control variables (Gender, Years of Experience, Organization Type) were entered.

In Step 2, the main predictors (Cultural Intelligence, Intercultural Communication, and Adaptive Leadership) were added.

The findings suggest that control variables contributed alone 12% of the variance in ESG-

oriented project sustainability (R2 =0.12). Years of Experience revealed a small but significant influence, whereas Gender and Organization Type had no significant influence. Step 2, with the entry of cross-cultural competence variables lead to a significant change in variance explained, that is, an increased explained variance of 61% (R2 = 0.61), which was a significant difference in variance explained (ΔR^2 = 0.49, $p < 0.001$). Adaptive Leadership became the most predictive, and then there were Cultural Intelligence and Intercultural Communication in Table 6. Notably, these predictors were also significant even when demographic factors were factored in. These findings confirm that cross-cultural competence explains substantial additional variance in ESG-oriented project sustainability beyond demographic characteristics.

Table 6: Hierarchical Multiple Regression Predicting ESG-Oriented Project Sustainability.

Variables	Model 1 (Controls) β	Model 2 (Full Model) β
Gender	0.05	0.03
Years of Experience	0.18*	0.09
Organization Type	0.07	0.04
Cultural Intelligence	–	0.30***
Intercultural Communication	–	0.26***
Adaptive Leadership	–	0.33***
R^2	0.12	0.61
ΔR^2	–	0.49***

Note: *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

4.5.3 Interpretation and Implications

The hierarchical regression results add to the internal validity of the study. Whereas professional experience adds little to the results of ESG, cross-cultural competence does add significantly more. This shows that sustainability in international projects is not a mere subject of tenure or demographic orientation, but it is greatly influenced by the adaptability of the leadership, the cultural intelligibility, as well as the effectiveness in communication. The study boosts the believability of the causal inferences that are made on the basis of the findings of the regression by means of statistically controlling the effect of demographic factors and testing the common method bias.

5. DISCUSSION

This current research gives empirical support that cross-cultural competence is of significant benefit towards sustainability and resilience in ESG-oriented global projects. Although the statistical results prove that there is a strong predictive relationship between some competencies, the results need further analysis to comprehend the reasons why some of them are more influential and how these results can agree with the current theory and practice.

Why Adaptive Leadership Emerged as the Strongest Predictor

Adaptive leadership emerged as the strongest predictor of ESG-oriented project sustainability (β = 0.35), highlighting the central role of leadership flexibility in complex global projects. International ESG initiatives operate within volatile cultural, regulatory, and institutional environments, where stakeholder expectations and governance requirements frequently shift. Rigid leadership approaches are insufficient in such contexts. Instead, leaders must continuously adjust decision-making styles, communication patterns, and conflict management strategies. Adaptive leadership enables managers to respond effectively to ambiguity, cultural diversity, and competing sustainability priorities, balancing environmental, social, and governance objectives. Unlike cultural intelligence or communication alone, leadership translates these competencies into coordinated strategic action. As global projects face rapid regulatory change, geopolitical risk, and sustainability pressures, flexible leadership becomes critical for maintaining resilience and long-term project continuity in ESG-driven environments.

Comparison with Existing Literature

The findings align with prior research emphasizing the strategic role of cultural and leadership competencies in sustainability and global governance. Consistent with Chen et al. (2025), the results confirm that ESG performance improves when supportive cultural conditions and adaptive mechanisms are present. However, this study extends their work by demonstrating that adaptive leadership serves as the key mechanism translating cultural knowledge into sustainable project performance within multicultural contexts. Similarly, the positive influence of intercultural communication on ESG-oriented sustainability supports Dinu et al. (2025), who highlighted its role in strengthening stakeholder engagement and governance. Unlike earlier studies that examined cultural intelligence and communication separately, this research integrates them within a unified cross-cultural competence framework. By empirically validating their combined impact in project-based environments, the study advances the understanding that global project sustainability is shaped by interconnected competency networks rather than isolated capabilities.

Theoretical Implications of the Model ($R^2 = 0.61$)

The explanatory power of the regression model is high because it covers 61% of the variation in ESG-oriented project sustainability and resilience. Theoretically, this observation is very important. One, the high values of R2 indicate the idea that human and cultural factors have a strong influence on sustainability and resilience in global projects, and not only technical or financial factors. The conventional theories of project management focus on cost, time, and scope as major success parameters. The current results, however, support the current trends in international project management and sustainability theory, which tend to focus on socio-cultural capabilities as strategic resources. Second, the model offers empirical support for the cross-cultural competence theory as a multidimensional construct that has an impact on organizational outcomes. Intercultural communication, adaptive leadership, and cultural intelligence are collectively aiming at complementary skills that facilitate the implementation of ESG in an effective way. This favors integrative models of global leadership and intercultural management that perceive competence as a dynamic system but not independent traits. Third, the reported unexplained variance (39%) implies that the results of sustainability depend on other contextual elements, e.g., organizational structure, institutional settings, digital collaboration tools, and power relations between stakeholders. This brings chances in the further theoretical evolution of this field by bringing the structural and technological variables into the model of cross-cultural sustainability. Altogether, the R2 value shows that cross-cultural competence is one of the main theoretical mechanisms by which human capability is associated with performance in terms of sustainability in the global project context.

Implications for Global Project Sustainability Theory

They affirm that cultural adaptability of leadership is one of the main sources of sustainable project performance within the culturally diverse set-ups. They offer evidence-based grounds that support the inclusion of intercultural competence in the ESG implementation models. These affirm the perception that sustainability is a socio-cultural process, which is influenced by human interaction, rather than a technical or regulatory product. The study validates theoretical integration of cross-cultural management, the theory of leadership, and the sustainability of ESG-oriented projects through empirical demonstration of the relationships.

6. CONCLUSION

This research contributes to the current knowledge about sustainability concerns in the international project environment by showing empirically that cross-cultural capability is one of the most essential strategic abilities to achieve the success of an ESG-driven project. Although the modern project management systems focus more on sustainability and resilience, which is a key aspect of the modern system, compared to some of the previous systems, which concentrate on costs and the duration of time and completeness, the current results indicate that the socio-cultural and leadership aspects are crucial in determining the aspect of sustainability and resilience. Combining cultural intelligence and intercultural communication effectiveness with adaptive leadership in a single analytical context, the study empirically validates a cross-cultural competence ESG sustainability model. The model demonstrates a significant amount of the variance (R2 = 0.61), meaning that the human and leadership abilities are the major contributors to viable project performance in multicultural settings. Adaptive leadership was the most significant predictor among the studied competencies, which proves the importance of a flexible and culturally responsive leadership in dealing with volatility, complexity of stakeholders, and demands of governance within global projects. This observation builds on the current sustainability and leadership theories that deal with global issues by making adaptability one of the central mechanisms that may connect cultural awareness to ESG performance.

7. FUTURE SCOPE

While the present study provides valuable empirical insights, several opportunities for future research remain. First, future studies may adopt a longitudinal research design to examine how cross-cultural competence and ESG outcomes evolve over different phases of the project lifecycle. Such an approach would allow for stronger causal inferences and a deeper understanding of sustainability dynamics over time. Second, future research could employ advanced analytical techniques such as Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to examine mediating and moderating relationships among cultural intelligence, leadership styles, stakeholder engagement, and ESG performance. Cross-country comparative studies may also be conducted to explore cultural variations and contextual differences in global project environments. Finally, future studies may investigate the role of digital technologies, artificial intelligence, and virtual collaboration tools in

enhancing cross-cultural competence within remote and hybrid project teams. Integrating qualitative methods such as interviews or case studies could further enrich understanding by capturing nuanced cultural and contextual factors influencing ESG-oriented project sustainability and resilience.

8. LIMITATIONS

Although the research can give important empirical information, it is necessary to consider some methodological drawbacks. First, convenience and purposive sampling restrict the extrapolation of the results. The selected sample might not be the most representative of the world population of project professionals because the selection of the respondents was not carried out using a probability sample, but through accessibility and relevancy. Consequently, the results are not to be generalized and applied to other industries, regions, or organizational settings. Second, though the sample size was statistically sufficient to conduct a regression analysis, it might fail to represent the complete range of cultural, institutional, and sectoral differences in the global project setting. Future studies can utilize bigger and more varied samples through probability based sampling method in order to increase external validity. Even though the Single Factor Test conducted by Harman did not raise the issue that there was intense common method bias, the internal cross-sectional data, which was self-reported, could still provide residual method variance. Future studies can consider the use of multi-source data gathering methods (e.g., supervisor ratings, objective ESG performance indicators, or longitudinal designs) to enhance the causal validity further.

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