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# CULTURAL INTELLIGENCE AND LEADERSHIP EFFECTIVENESS: A MANAGEMENT PERSPECTIVE IN GLOBAL ORGANIZATIONS

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## ABSTRACT

*This study examines the role of cultural intelligence in enhancing leadership effectiveness and its subsequent impact on employee engagement and organizational performance within global organizations. In an increasingly globalized business environment, leaders are required to navigate cultural diversity and manage cross-cultural interactions effectively. The study adopts a quantitative research design using a cross-sectional dataset of 300 participants from diverse countries and industries. Cultural intelligence is considered the independent variable, while leadership effectiveness and employee engagement are treated as mediating variables, and organizational performance as the dependent variable. Descriptive, correlation, regression, and mediation analyses were employed to examine the relationships among the variables. The results reveal that cultural intelligence has a significant positive impact on leadership effectiveness and employee engagement. Furthermore, leadership effectiveness and employee engagement strongly influence organizational performance, with employee engagement showing the highest predictive effect. The findings also confirm that leadership effectiveness and employee engagement mediate the relationship between cultural intelligence and organizational performance, indicating both direct and indirect effects. These results highlight the critical role*

*of cultural intelligence as a strategic leadership capability in multicultural environments. The study contributes to the existing literature by providing an integrated framework linking cultural intelligence with leadership and organizational outcomes. It also offers practical implications for organizations to invest in cultural intelligence development and employee engagement strategies to enhance overall performance in global contexts.*

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**KEYWORDS:** Cultural Intelligence; Leadership Effectiveness; Employee Engagement; Organizational Performance; Global Organization; Cross-Cultural Leadership; Multicultural Work Environment; Organizational Behavior.

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## 1. Introduction

It is in the modern era of globalisation that organisations are experiencing the cross-border operations in national, cultural as well as institutional levels. This development has resulted in the complex work cultures in which cultural diversity is reflected and organisations are forced to address the cross-cultural interaction. As organisations venture into the global markets, the leaders are met with the challenge of severely having to contend with cultural differences, communication gaps and variations among employees expectations. These challenges have enhanced the need of the flexible, inclusive and culturally sensitive leadership styles. Cultural intelligence is a relevant skill, in this instance, that is likely to emerge among leaders who are operating in a multi-cultural environment.

Cultural intelligence is the capacity of an individual to operate in culturally diverse working environments. It has various dimensions, such as cognitive, metacognitive, motivational, and behavioural ones, which, in combination, will help people in their understanding of the new cultural signals, modulation of behaviour, and effective cross-cultural interaction. The notion is intertwined with intercultural competence and emotional cross-cultural knowledge that emphasises the combination of cultural and psychological activities (Matsumoto and Hwang, 2012; Leung et al., 2014). With the rise in the global interconnectedness of organisations, the applicability of cultural intelligence in leadership has increased a notch higher.

The effectiveness of leadership is a decisive factor of organisational success, especially in international organisations where leaders are supposed to deal with different teams and interaction of various cultures. Quality leadership is a skill of influencing, motivating and guiding employees with the objective of organisational target achievement. Leadership performance in multicultural setting needs more than technical and managerial competencies, it must have the capacity to comprehend and adapt to cultural variations as well. Having high cultural intelligence enables leaders to become more adaptable in their leadership approach and create inclusive workplaces which, eventually, enhance team processes and performance (Hu and Judge, 2017).

The connexion between leadership effectiveness and cultural intelligence has been an issue of focus in the recent past. Managing cultural diversity within an organisation requires leaders to be flexible, empathic, and have good interpersonal skills in order to handle their employees. Cultural

intelligence allows leaders to negotiate cultural complexities, minimise misunderstanding and create trust within the team. Such abilities are needed to increase teamwork and knowledge exchange especially in international settings (Stoermer et al., 2021). Further, the development of culturally intelligent leadership has been linked to the better outcomes of multinationals working in project teams and a cross-cultural setting (Henderson et al., 2018).

Employee engagement has become a significant concern that affects the performance of an organisation besides the effectiveness of its leadership. Employee engagement is a level of emotional and cognitive investment employees put on their work and organisation. Motivated employees have a higher drive to work and achieve organisational success as well as being productive. Leadership is very important in promoting employee engagement especially in a culturally diverse setting where the employees can represent a wide range of expectations and values. Even more, effective communication and transformational leadership contribute to the better team performance and engagement outcomes (Eisenberg et al., 2019).

The final result of good leadership and employee engagement is organisational performance. It shows how successfully an organisation can realise its strategic goals, be competitive and grow in the long term. Leadership quality, employee behaviour and cultural adaptability determine performance in global organisations. Cultural intelligence is found to be a strategic capability that improves the adaptability in the organisation and also facilitates the process of managing change (Mangla and Singh, 2024). Moreover, it leads to the enhanced cross-cultural adaptation and performance in foreign environments (Tripathi et al., 2024).

Even though the importance of cultural intelligence in leadership studies has been growing, various gaps are still identified in the available literature. Numerous studies have been conducted on cultural intelligence and leadership effectiveness as two aspects in isolation without creating a systemic framework that takes into account employee engagement and organisational performance. Also, past studies have tended to target expatriate situations or particular sectors, thereby restricting the applicability of their results. Recent systematic reviews indicate that additional integrative models are required to focus on the greater influence of cultural intelligence concerning organisational outcomes (Toumi & Su, 2025).

The other weakness of the current studies is the lack of emphasis on how cultural intelligence affects the performance of organisations. Although it has been shown to play a significant role in global mobility and leadership development (Caligiuri, 2023), the scholarly literature lacks empirical support on how cultural intelligence can be converted into better performance results. Learning organisations and knowledge-sharing processes have been known as one of the possible paths, yet the relationships need to be further investigated to determine them (Mangla & Singh, 2024). Moreover, the process of cultural identity assimilation and societal condition can also impact the adaptation of individuals to multicultural settings, which in turn affects the results of leadership and performance (Ferrari *et al.*, 2019).

In order to fill these gaps, the current research intends to investigate the significance of cultural intelligence in improving leadership performance and the consequent effect on employee engagement and organisational performance in international organisations. Through the incorporation of an integrated framework, the research aims at offering a holistic insight on the role of cultural intelligence in organisational success. The research is concerned with both direct and indirect relationship between the main variables and provides the picture of what mechanisms allow the leadership and employee-related variables affect the performance outcomes.

The research questions derive out of major research concerns that the study seeks to answer in regard to the relationship between cultural intelligence and leadership effectiveness as well as relationship between leadership effectiveness on organisational performance using employee engagement. The study answers these questions, and thus, adds another explanation to global leadership and provides an actual research on organisations that strive to improve leadership performance within multicultural environments.

In conclusion, the world of business is increasingly becoming complex and demanding, and that is the reason why more knowledge is required on how the cultural intelligence can be utilised in the leadership and organisational performance. It is increasingly becoming important that leaders should be flexible to the cultural differences as organisations will operate in various cultural environments. Integrating the cultural intelligence, the efficacy of the leadership, and the engagement of the employees into one construct, the assigned study may introduce serious disclosures to the factors that contribute to the successful functioning of organisations in the

environment of the multicultural environment. It is hoped that the results would be welcomed in the academic literature and in the managerial practise and the value of cultural competence in modern leadership.

## **2. Research Methodology**

### **2.1 Research Design**

This research paper embraces a quantitative research design in order to establish the correlation among cultural intelligence, leadership effectiveness, employee engagement, and organisational performance in global organisations. This research is especially suitable to use the quantitative method because it facilitates the systematic analysis of the relationships between variables through the use of the statistical methods. Through this approach, the research will be objective, accurate and will generalise results in the context of different organisations.

It makes use of a cross-sectional design in which data is examined at one time. The design is ideal in establishing patterns, association, and possible causal relationship between variables without the need of tracking them longitudinally. Since global organisations are dynamic and the concept of cross-cultural leadership is gaining prominence, the cross-sectional method offers an effective and efficient way of gathering pertinent information. Moreover, it has a design that allows testing hypotheses and also allows the researcher to test variations between constructs which are direct and indirect in a structured analytical framework.

### **2.2 Data Collection**

The information of the research is set on a systematised dataset of the answers given by 300 respondents who represent a broad variety of cultural and organisational orientations. The sample also includes the individuals working in different countries and areas and therefore they can reflect the variety of global organisational environments. This kind of diversity enhances the validity of the research to the outside world and allows deeper understanding of how cultural intelligence works in the environment of various cultural settings.

The data will consist of important behavioural, organisational, and cultural variables that are pertinent to the results of leadership and performance. The fact that the respondents were working in different industries will guarantee that the results are not sector specific and thus the research results will be more generalised. Moreover, the cross-national sample of the participants allows

the research to consider the cultural differences and offer the wider vision on the effectiveness of leadership in the multicultural environment. The format of the data does not create a problem of inconsistency in answer, as it is structured and therefore allows a statistical analysis without any controversy.

### 2.3 Variables

The paper includes various types of variables to consider the proposed relationships in their entirety. The main independent variable is the cultural intelligence that is taken as the ability of an individual to perform efficiently under culturally distinct circumstances. The construct forms the core of the research, as it is the capacity of leaders to be flexible, communicate, and work in international settings.

The dependent variable is the organisational performance and it is the overall quality of efficiency and success of organisations in achieving their strategic goals. This is one variable which can be argued to be the ultimate outcome of interest, the role of leadership and employee-related issues on organisational success.

Leadership effectiveness and employee engagement are included as the mediating variables. The effectiveness of leadership is the same as the ability of leaders to influence, motivate and guide the employees to achieve organisational objectives, especially in cross cultural environments. Employee engagement on the other hand is a measure of how much employees are emotionally and cognitively involved in their work. These mediating variables play a key role in comprehending how cultural intelligence mediated the organisational performance.

Besides these key variables, the study has the control variables to provide a representation of the contextual differences. Such controls involve country and industry which are environmental and industry specific differences that can affect leadership and performance results. Other cultural aspects like power distance and individualism are also factored in to define individual differences in cultural norms and values in different contexts. These control variables make the analysis robust because the effects of cultural intelligence are isolated and it minimises the possible confounding factors.

### 2.4 Measurement Scale

The measurement of all the variables in the study is based on the Likert-type scale that is well known in

the social science research and is used to cover perceptions, attitudes, and behavioural predilections. The level scale is normally from low to high which implies the degree of concurrence or strength. This standardisation of measurement is consistent when comparing responses and standardised measurements and the use of parametric statistical methods.

Subjective constructs like cultural intelligence, leadership effectiveness, and employee engagement can be quantified using a Likert scale and therefore they can be analysed statistically. Moreover, the reliability and validity of the measurements are strengthened by the fact that the scale is structured. The study will be able to compare and make accurate comparisons when assessing the relationship between constructs due to the use of a valid measurement framework among all the variables.

### 2.5 Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis is carried out through the integration of a descriptive and inferential statistical method to obtain a complete interpretation of the relationship between the variables. First of all, descriptive statistics will be used to condense the data and give general information about the sample features. The variables are described in terms of central tendency and dispersion by use of measures like mean and standard deviation.

Correlation analysis is then conducted to determine how strong and positive the relationships between the key variables are. The presented analysis gives preliminary data regarding the relationships between cultural intelligence, leadership effectiveness, employee engagement, and organisational performance.

In order to test the proposed hypotheses, it is proposed to carry out regression analysis to test the influence of cultural intelligence on leadership effectiveness, employee engagement and organisational performance. The method permits the determination of the important predictors and estimation of the size of their effects. Moreover, mediation analysis is conducted to determine the indirect impact of cultural intelligence on the organisational performance based on the leadership effectiveness and employee engagement. The strategy assists in the discovery of the underlying processes that provide explanations on how cultural intelligence enhances organisational results.

The combination of these analytical techniques in totality will ensure that analytical analysis on the research model is done strictly and systematically.

The descriptive and inductive methods enhance the richness and realism of the findings, and they provide informative data concerning the effect of culture intelligence on the performance of leadership and performance of organisations in the global environment.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1 Descriptive Statistics

Statistical descriptive measures have been calculated to give a picture of the main tendencies of the key

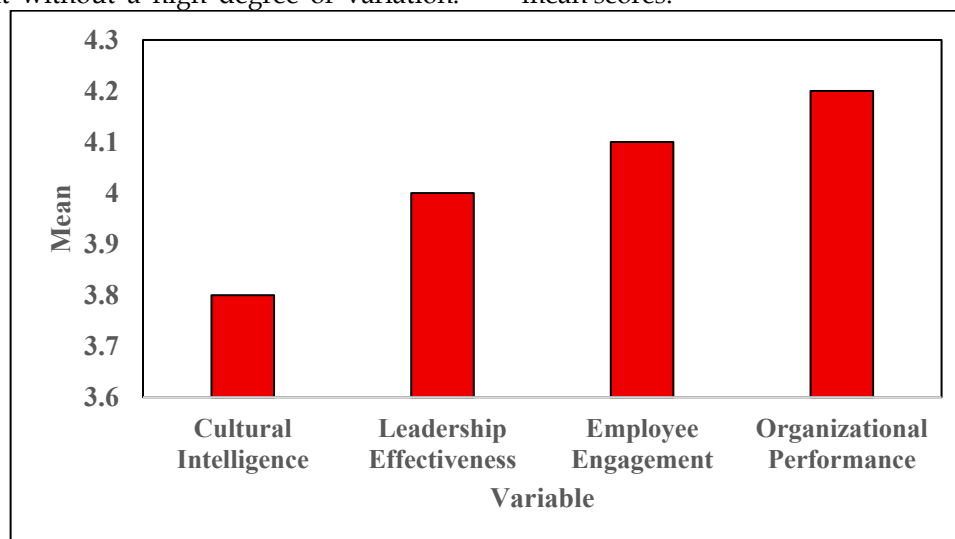
variables used in the study and its variability. The cultural intelligence, leadership effectiveness, employee engagement, and organisational performance have moderate to high mean values as has been mentioned in Table 1 which implies that there were generally positive perceptions among the sample. The mean is highest in the organisational performance, followed by the employee engagement and the effectiveness of the leadership, which is an indication of high overall performance orientation in the organisations under study.

**Table 1.** Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation
Cultural Intelligence	3.8	0.6
Leadership Effectiveness	4.0	0.5
Employee Engagement	4.1	0.4
Organizational Performance	4.2	0.5

All the standard deviation of the variables are within acceptable ranges, which shows that the responses are consistent without a high degree of variation.

Distribution of these variables is further depicted in Figure 1 which graphically shows the comparative mean scores.



**Figure 1.** Mean Scores of Key Variables

The figure shows that the cultural intelligence to organisational performance is gradually growing, which supports the assumption that there is a positive flow, across the constructs.

#### 3.2 Correlation Analysis

Correlation was employed in order to investigate the strength and direction of relationship between the study variables. The outcomes, which are indicated in Table 2, indicate positive and statistically significant correlations among all the key constructs.

**Table 2.** Correlation Matrix

Variables	CQ	LE	EE	OP
CQ	1.00	0.75	0.69	0.64
LE	0.75	1.00	0.80	0.85
EE	0.69	0.80	1.00	0.93
OP	0.64	0.85	0.93	1.00

Cultural intelligence has a good positive relationship with the effectiveness of leadership, which implies that the higher the cultural intelligence of a person, the higher the chances of better leadership are in a multicultural setting. Likewise, cultural intelligence has been strongly linked with the employee engagement implying that culturally intelligent leaders are more effective in creating commitment and participation among the employees. Organisational performance has a very strong positive relationship with leadership performance,

demonstrating the important role of leadership in the success of the organisation. The relationship between employee engagement and organisational performance is also exceptionally high, which implies that engaged employees mean a lot in enhancing organisational performance. Figure 2 and Figure 3 are used to support visually these relationships. The correlation between cultural intelligence and leadership effectiveness is shown in Figure 2 and is positive.

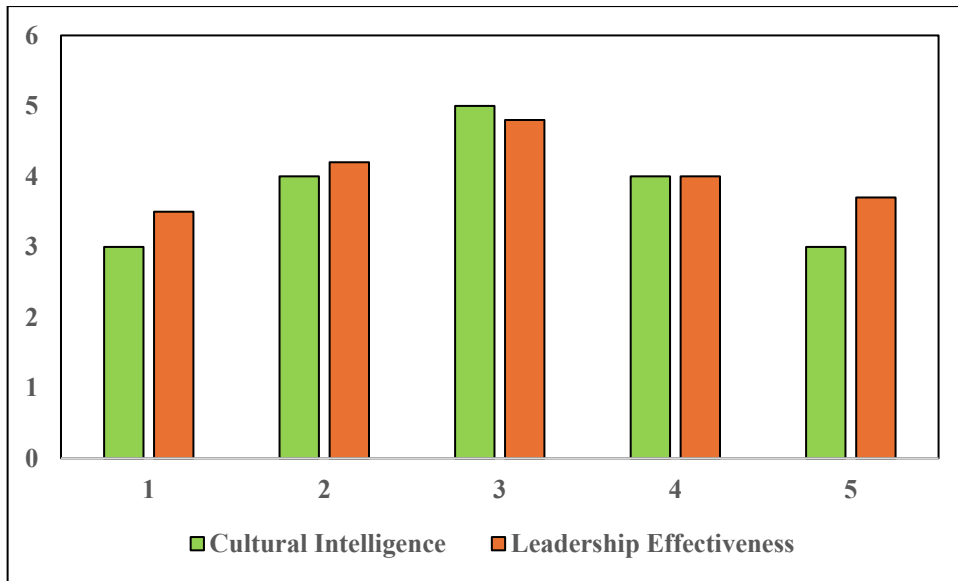


Figure 2. Cultural Intelligence vs Leadership Effectiveness

Whereas Figure 3 illustrates that there is a close correlation between the level of employee engagement and performance in an organisation.

The positive trends in these numbers also confirm the results of correlation.

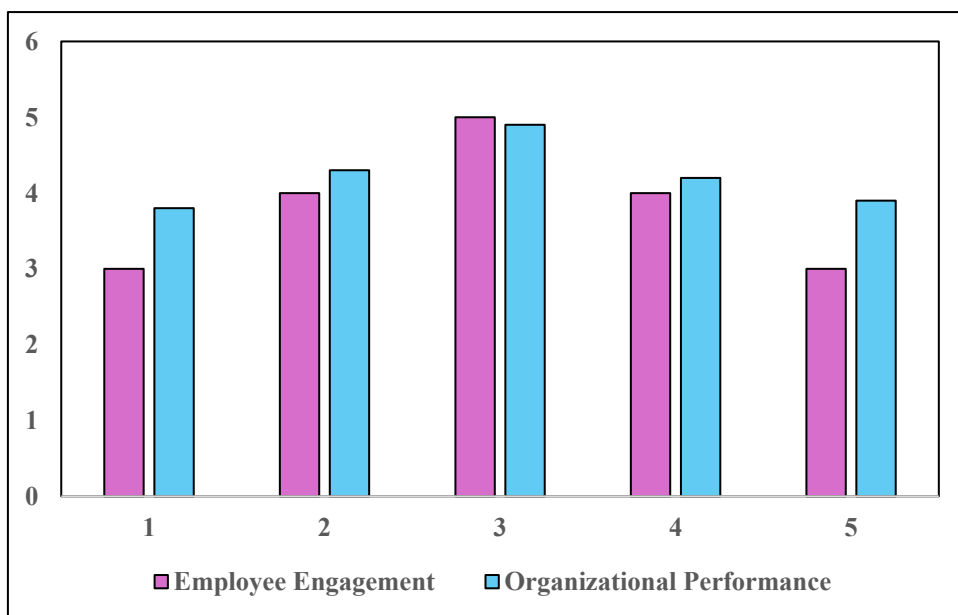


Figure 3. Employee Engagement vs Organizational Performance

### 3.3 Regression Analysis

Multiple regression analyses were done to test the postulated hypotheses. The findings are summarised

in Table 3 that gives the standardised beta coefficients and levels of significance of each relationship.

**Table 3.** Regression Analysis Results

Model	Beta Coefficient	Significance (p-value)
CQ → LE	0.75	<0.001
CQ → EE	0.69	<0.001
LE → OP	0.85	<0.001
EE → OP	0.93	<0.001

The results show that cultural intelligence plays a large and positive role on leadership effectiveness, which proves that the culturally intelligent people are better prepared to lead in the different environment. Employee engagement is also largely influenced by cultural intelligence, and therefore cultural intelligence indicates that leaders who are more culturally aware are better placed to build inclusive and engaging working environments.

Moreover, the effectiveness of leadership has been identified to have a strong and significant influence on organisational performance and this supports its relevance as one of the factors that dictate organisational success. Employee engagement also becomes one of the strong forecasting variables of organisational performance, and the largest beta coefficient between all the relationships tested. This shows that the employee engagement is especially important in improving the performance outcomes. All in all, the regression models are close to high explanatory power, where the cultural intelligence, leadership effectiveness, and employee engagement have been confirmed as all contributing to organisational performance.

### 3.4 Mediation Analysis

In order to investigate the indirect relationship between cultural intelligence and the organisational performance, the mediation analysis was implemented considering the leadership effectiveness and the employee engagement as the mediating variables.

The outcomes show that leadership effectiveness and employee engagement are important mediating variables in the correlation between cultural intelligence and organisational performance. The leadership ability is boosted by cultural intelligence and this leads to better organisational performance. In the same way, cultural intelligence enhances an increase in employee engagement, which in turn increases performance.

The observed mediation effects are similar to the high relationships in Table 2 and Table 3, and the

trends shown in Figure 2 and Figure 3. These results prove that cultural intelligence has a direct and indirect impact on organisational performance using major organisational processes.

The study findings are solid empirical evidence to the proposed research model. The descriptive statistics as seen in Table 1 indicates that there is a positive general trend among the variables. The graph of Figure 2 and the correlation analysis in Table 2 show that the constructs have strong relations between one another. Moreover, the regression outcomes in Table 3 indicate that cultural intelligence, leadership effectiveness, and employee engagement have a major predictive value.

Overall, the findings affirm that cultural intelligence is an important predictor of leadership effectiveness and employee engagement that are crucial towards enhancing the organisational performance. Such results are consistent with the objectives of the research and form a concrete foundation on the theorising and critical implications.

### 4. Discussion

The main aim of the research was to test how cultural intelligence contributes to improving the effectiveness of leadership and its further influence to employee engagement and organisational performance in global organisations. The research results are a good empirical evidence of the suggested associations and valuable information about the processes of how cultural intelligence leads to company success.

The findings show that cultural intelligence significantly influences leadership performance in a positive way. The result supports the theoretical claim that culturally intelligent people have the cognitive, motivational, and behavioural capacity they need to survive in a complicated cross-cultural context. High-cultural intelligence enables leaders to comprehend the different views and adapt their communication strategies, as well as effectively manage multicultural work teams (Ang and Van Dyne, 2015; Livermore, 2016). This is consistent with

the available literature that puts cultural intelligence as a key competence of a global leader (Ott and Michailova, 2018). Moreover, recent reports suggest that cultural intelligence is an effective leader and especially in highly diversified businesses (Yüksel Sakınç and Ergün, 2024; Živković, 2025).

Besides the role it plays in the effectiveness of leadership, cultural intelligence was also reported to have significant effects on the engagement of the employees. The implication of this observation is that culturally aware and culturally sensitive leaders achieve greater success in building inclusive and accommodating work environments. Employees who are perceived to be known and respected, especially in culturally diverse environments, have a higher chance of being highly engaged emotionally and cognitively (Presbitero & Attar, 2018). It is aligned with the available studies that show that cultural intelligence enhances interpersonal relations, communication efficacy, and knowledge exchange, which leads to enhanced engagement (Bücker et al., 2016). In this way, cultural intelligence appears as a not only leadership skill but also one of the main contributors to positive attitudes to employees.

Another finding of the study indicates that the correlation between the effectiveness of leadership and the performance of the organisation is strongly positive. Such an outcome corroborates the pivotal aspect of the role of leadership in influencing the results of organisations. Efficient leaders can manage to coordinate team activities with organisation purposes, inspire employees, and support smooth decision-making. When leaders have to deal with multicultural settings, the issue of leadership effectiveness is even more important, as leaders have to find their ways between cultural variations and organisational unity. This relationship is supported by previous studies, which point out that leadership performance plays a significant role in enhancing the organisational performance (Nosratabadi et al., 2020). Also, cultural intelligence empowers leadership skills, which subsequently improve organisational performance (Thomas et al., 2015).

In addition, the employee engagement was also identified as a strong factor that contributes to the organisational performance. This indicates that a motivated employee is more productive, dedicated, and ready to put in efforts to the goals of the organisation. This relationship strength is consistent with the larger body of literature on organisational behaviour, which has found engagement as a major occurrence of performance and organisational success (Azevedo, 2018). Active employees have a

better chance of exhibiting increased performance, innovativeness, and commitment towards the organisation.

The valuable aspect of this study is that it investigates the effects of mediation. The findings show that both effectiveness in leadership and employee engagement is a mediating factor between cultural intelligence and organisational performance. It means that cultural intelligence does not work directly, but it is an outcome of critical processes in the organisation. In particular, culturally intelligent leaders become more effective, and thus, the organisational performance gets improved too. On the same note, cultural intelligence brings in increased employee engagement, thus resulting to better performance. The results can be aligned with the existing studies that emphasise the indirect mechanisms in which cultural intelligence influences organisational success (Ng et al., 2012; Ott and Michailova, 2018).

The fact that cultural intelligence has a partial mediation indicates that although the performance of an organisation is directly affected by cultural intelligence, the indirect effects of cultural intelligence on organisational performance are greater via leadership effectiveness and employee engagement. Employee engagement seems to be of particular importance among the two mediators, which is why it is vital as a channel through which the leadership skills are converted into actual results in terms of performance. This justifies the claim that a powerful leadership should be accompanied with high employee engagement rates in an organisation to realise the best organisational outcomes.

There are also significant theoretical implications of the findings of this study. The study can enhance the body of knowledge on global leadership and organisational behaviour in that it presents a convergence of cultural intelligence, leadership effectiveness, and employee engagement into one framework. It expands research in the past to not only develop direct correlations but also the processes behind such correlations that exist between personal talents and organisational performance. This combined perspective aligns with the existing literature on the topic of multidimensionality of leadership performance in culturally diverse environments (Ott and Michailova, 2018; Živković, 2025).

In practical terms, the findings point to the necessity of organisations to develop cultural intelligence in their leaders. In a business world that is growing considerably global, organisations need to ensure the development of their leaders with the skills

necessary to handle cultural diversity. Cultural-awareness, adaptability, and cross-cultural-communication-based training programmes could also have a considerable positive effect on the leadership performance and, by extension, organisational performance (Ang and Van Dyne, 2015; Livermore, 2016). In addition, the organisation ought to adopt measures to promote employee engagement especially in multi-cultural teams since engagement is a key to converting leadership capacities into performance deliverables.

In spite of the good results, some limitations are to be considered. Although the study offers useful information, the study design used is cross-sectional which makes it difficult to determine causality. Further, even though major cultural dimensions were taken into consideration, other cultural aspects can also impact leadership and organisational performance. These aspects need to be expanded in future research and longitudinal designs need to be considered to bring further understanding of dynamism between these variables.

To sum up, the paper has shown that cultural intelligence is a highly imperative factor of leadership success and organisational performance in international organisations. Cultural intelligence is crucial in the improvement of organisational performance by improving leadership skills and cultural engagement of employees. These results support the relevance of cultural competence to contemporary leadership and offer useful implications to the researchers and practitioners who aim to enhance the effectiveness of leadership in multicultural setting.

## 5. Conclusion

This study examined the role of cultural intelligence in enhancing leadership effectiveness and its subsequent impact on employee engagement and

organizational performance within global organizations. The findings highlight that cultural intelligence is a critical capability that enables leaders to navigate complex multicultural environments effectively. By fostering adaptability, improving communication, and promoting cultural awareness, culturally intelligent leaders are better positioned to manage diverse teams and achieve organizational objectives. The results demonstrate that cultural intelligence significantly contributes to leadership effectiveness, which in turn plays a vital role in driving organizational performance. Additionally, employee engagement emerged as a key factor influencing performance outcomes, indicating that engaged employees are more productive, committed, and aligned with organizational goals. The study further reveals that leadership effectiveness and employee engagement serve as important mechanisms through which cultural intelligence influences organizational performance, emphasizing the interconnected nature of these constructs. These findings underscore the importance of developing cultural intelligence among leaders as a strategic priority for organizations operating in global contexts. From a managerial perspective, investing in cross-cultural training and leadership development programs can enhance both leadership capabilities and employee engagement, ultimately leading to improved organizational outcomes. While the study provides valuable insights, it also suggests the need for future research to explore additional cultural dimensions and adopt longitudinal approaches to better understand causal relationships. Overall, the study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on global leadership by demonstrating that cultural intelligence is a key driver of effective leadership and organizational success in an increasingly interconnected world.

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