
“Unveiling the Cross-Cultural Leadership in Global Context: A Systematic Literature Review”

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Abstract

Due to workforce diversity in international and multinational companies, Cross cultural Leadership emerged as a critical domain to manage the diversity. Cross cultural Leadership focuses on international collaboration and Expansion of Companies. As, with the growing demand at Global level, the organisation aims to operate with the national and International Leaders are required to transform this cultural diversity into effectiveness and cohesion. Although interest in cross-cultural leadership increases significantly, existing studies remain low from the perspective of multiple theoretical perspectives and contextual settings. This study aims to unveil the intellectual structure, evolution and research confronting the existing research on Cross Cultural Leadership by conducting a comprehensive Literature Review using data extracted from the Scopus database. A total of Eighty relevant publications were analysed, employing co-authorship, co-citation, and keyword co-occurrence mapping techniques.

A systematic Literature Review was conducted using peer-reviewed Journal articles published between 2010-2025. After applying rigorous inclusion and exclusion criteria, 80 Publications were analysed using VOS Viewer. The study indicates that cross cultural leadership is primarily grounded in cultural intelligence theory, global leadership frameworks, and national culture models such as Hofstede's cultural dimensions.

The Findings reveal a significant growth in Cross Cultural Leadership across different Countries with diverse individuals. Keyword and citation highlight main themes including cultural intelligence, global leadership competencies, transformational leadership, diversity management, and intercultural communication. The study further uncovers the theoretical foundations underpinning this field and identifies emerging research clusters.

This Literature Review provides a Systematic Overview of Cultural Intelligence on Cross Cultural leadership research, offering insights of Intellectual roots, this study contributes to theory development and offers a structured agenda for future research. The findings also hold practical implications for leadership development in multinational and culturally diverse organizational contexts.

Keywords- Cross-Cultural Leadership, Bibliometric Analysis, Transformational Leadership, Globalization

Introduction

Globalization has led the world economy to be interconnected in the form of free flow of goods and services, information, people, ideas, etc [1]. Globalization has opened the doors for company as well as clients to provide a wider choice in terms of employability, transferability, credibility and accountability [2].

Globalization, the ongoing process of greater interdependence among countries and their citizens, is complex and multifaceted. Many of the problems that the critics of globalization point to are real [3]. Some of them relate to economics. Others relate to non-economic, but no less important, aspects of life. And while some of the problems do stem from the process of global integration, others do not. At the same time Globalization is impacting the culture of host Countries [4,5]. Typically, it has been associated with the destruction of cultural identities, victims of the accelerating encroachment of a homogenized, westernized, consumer culture. This view, the constituency for which extends from (some) academics to anti-globalization activists (Shepard and Hayduk 2002), tends to interpret globalization as a seamless extension of – indeed, as a euphemism for – western cultural imperialism [6-9]. The obvious power of globalized capitalism to distribute and promote its cultural goods in every corner [10]. The awareness that culture and cultural differences play their role has become a part of the organizational and managerial body of knowledge [11].

Culture is one of the determining factors that directly affect the leadership model that is most effective in a specific culture because even the understanding of the model of ideal (effective) leadership depends on the culture and its basic values [12,13]. The study of leadership in a cultural context has undergone significant transformations along with the

evolution of leadership theories and the development of cross-cultural management [14]. Cultural values are among the most important factors influencing leadership ideals and expectations [15-18]. Managers of global companies should have a certain level of sensitivity to cultural differences [19]. While studying the essence of leadership in the era of digital technologies, determined that it is important for leaders to embody flexibility, adaptability, and the spirit of continuous learning to overcome all the challenges of digital transformation [20]. A critical practical challenge that organizations face in the increasingly interdependent global economy is the ability to function effectively across national cultural boundaries. Instead of operating exclusively within the cultural setting in which they were born and raised, individuals must now be capable of functioning appropriately in a wide variety of foreign cultural situations, many of which have different cultural norms for appropriate behaviour that may conflict with their core values and beliefs [21,22].

Literature Review

Globalization

Globalization has intensified the interdependence of markets, people, and institutions, creating what some scholars call a “borderless” environment for firms and leaders, but also multiplying cultural complexity [23]. Contemporary work on globalization and leadership argues that global leaders must operate at the interface of rapidly integrating economic systems and still-fragmented political and cultural systems; they are expected to reconcile global efficiency with local responsiveness, as well as ethics and sustainability across diverse contexts [24]. This has shifted the focus of leadership research from universal “best practices” to contingent, context-sensitive understandings of how leadership is enacted across cultures [25].

Cross Cultural Leadership

cross-cultural leadership has emerged as a major field of inquiry. Recent integrative reviews show that societal culture shapes followers’ implicit leadership theories—their expectations about what a “good leader” looks like—and thereby influences which leader behaviors are perceived as effective [26]. Studies of multinational corporations show that leaders managing international or multicultural teams must navigate divergent norms around hierarchy, participation, time, and communication style, and that failure to do so undermines trust, cohesion, and performance [27]. This literature increasingly emphasizes adaptive, relational, and inclusive leadership, in which leaders actively surface cultural assumptions, create psychologically safe spaces, and flex their style to different cultural expectations rather than imposing a single “home-country” model [28-29].

Hofstede Cultural Dimensions

A large portion of cross-cultural leadership research is grounded in Hofstede’s cultural dimensions framework. Hofstede’s original IBM study and subsequent work identified systematic differences between national cultures on dimensions such as power distance, individualism–collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity–femininity, long-term orientation, and indulgence–restraint [30]. These dimensions have been widely used to predict preferences for leadership style—for example, greater acceptance of directive, paternalistic leadership in high power-distance and collectivist cultures, and preference for participative, empowering styles in low power-distance, individualist cultures [31,32]. At the same time, more recent work has critically examined the external validity and methodological limitations of Hofstede’s scores, cautioning against essentializing national cultures and highlighting within-country variation and cultural change over time [33].

This critical strand of the literature encourages using Hofstede as a heuristic starting point rather than a deterministic recipe for “how to lead” in a given country [34].

Cultural Intelligence Effectiveness

Parallel to the Hofstede tradition, the construct of cultural intelligence (CQ) has become central to explaining why some leaders function more effectively across cultures than others [35]. Building on the broader intelligence literature, Earley and Ang conceptualized CQ as an individual’s capability to function effectively in culturally diverse settings, later elaborated by Ang and Van Dyne into four dimensions: metacognitive (awareness and strategy), cognitive (knowledge about cultures), motivational (interest and drive to act interculturally), and behavioural (ability to adapt verbal and non-verbal behaviour) [36,37].

Empirical studies show that higher CQ is associated with better cross-cultural adjustment, intercultural problem-solving, and performance in global teams and expatriate assignments, even after controlling for personality and general mental ability [38].

In leadership contexts, CQ enables leaders to accurately read cultural cues, avoid stereotyping, switch interaction styles appropriately, and build high-quality relationships with culturally diverse followers—making it a key mechanism linking cross-cultural exposure to leadership effectiveness [39].

Global Leadership Competencies

The notion of global leadership competencies integrates these streams by specifying the knowledge, skills, and attributes required to lead effectively across borders [40]. Conceptual and practitioner-oriented work converges on a cluster of competencies that includes cultural awareness and humility, perspective-taking, emotional intelligence, tolerance for ambiguity, adaptability, global mindset, and advanced communication skills (especially listening and frame-shifting) [41].

Recent research on cross-cultural leadership competencies highlights that effective global leaders do not simply “add” cultural knowledge; they continually learn from diverse interactions, integrate conflicting stakeholder expectations, and use diversity as a resource for innovation rather than a problem to be minimized [42].

This competency-based perspective also underpins many leadership development programs, which increasingly focus on experiential learning (e.g., global projects, international assignments), coaching, and structured reflection to build CQ and global mindset over time [43].

Leadership Style Across Culture

The literature on leadership style across cultures moves beyond the question of “which style is best” to examine when and for whom different styles are effective. Cross-cultural studies report that transformational and charismatic leadership behaviours are often positively evaluated across many societies, but their specific manifestations (for example, the balance between individual vision and collective duty, or between autonomy and paternal care) are culturally patterned.

Other work examines how more transactional, authoritarian, or participative styles interact with cultural dimensions such as power distance and uncertainty avoidance to shape outcomes like innovation, commitment, and organizational performance in global firms [44].

A recurring conclusion is that “style flexibility” grounded in deep cultural understanding and CQ is more important than rigid adherence to any single leadership model. In sum, contemporary research positions globalization as both a driver and a testing ground for cross-cultural leadership theories, with Hofstede’s dimensions, cultural intelligence, global leadership competencies, and culturally contingent leadership styles offering complementary lenses for understanding leadership effectiveness in a multicultural world [45].

Research Gap and Contribution

Although cross-cultural leadership has attracted increasing scholarly attention, existing research remains fragmented across multiple disciplinary lenses such as cultural intelligence, global leadership, and national cultural frameworks. Prior studies have predominantly focused on empirical examinations within specific cultural or organizational contexts, often neglecting a comprehensive synthesis of the field’s intellectual foundations.

Moreover, limited studies have systematically integrated cultural intelligence and national culture perspectives to visualize the evolution of cross-cultural leadership research. Existing reviews are largely narrative in nature, lacking objective, data-driven mapping of influential theories, collaborative networks, and thematic clusters.

Addressing these gaps, the present study makes three key contributions. First, it provides a systematic bibliometric mapping of cross-cultural leadership research using Scopus-indexed publications. Second, it uncovers the intellectual structure and thematic evolution of the field through advanced science-mapping techniques. Third, it proposes a future research agenda to guide scholars toward underexplored themes and emerging research directions in global and multicultural leadership studies.

Research Objective

1. Examining the publication growth and trends in cross-cultural leadership research.
2. Identify influential authors, journals, institutions, and countries contributing to the field.
3. Mapping the structure of cross-cultural leadership through co-citation analysis.
4. Identify dominant and emerging research themes using keyword co-occurrence analysis.
5. Directing future research based on identified thematic gaps.

Research Design

This study adopts a descriptive, and exploratory bibliometric research design to systematically map the intellectual structure, publication trends, thematic evolution, and collaborative patterns in the field of cross-cultural leadership using Hofstede Cultural Dimensions. Bibliometric analysis is appropriate because it provides objective insights into scientific production, citation impact, and network relationships among authors, institutions, countries, and themes. Both performance analysis and science mapping techniques were used to ensure a holistic understanding of the field.

The data for the study were retrieved from the Scopus database, one of the largest peer-reviewed repositories for scientific literature in social sciences, business, and management which is widely available for Search. It is widely used in bibliometric research due to its extensive coverage, citation tracking capabilities, and structured metadata such as authors, affiliations, keywords, abstracts, and references. This database was selected to ensure consistency, reliability, and replicability of the bibliometric indicators. Only articles indexed in scopus journal from 2015 to 2025 were considered.

A comprehensive search query was designed using Boolean operators to ensure maximum coverage of publications related to cross-cultural leadership and cultural intelligence. The search was conducted in the (Title, Abstract, and Keywords) fields using the following:

("cross-cultural leadership" OR "culturally diverse leadership" OR "global leadership" OR "intercultural leadership")
AND ("cultural intelligence" OR "CQ" OR "Hofstede model" OR "cultural dimensions")

This ensured that only relevant and updated publications aligned with the research aim were included.

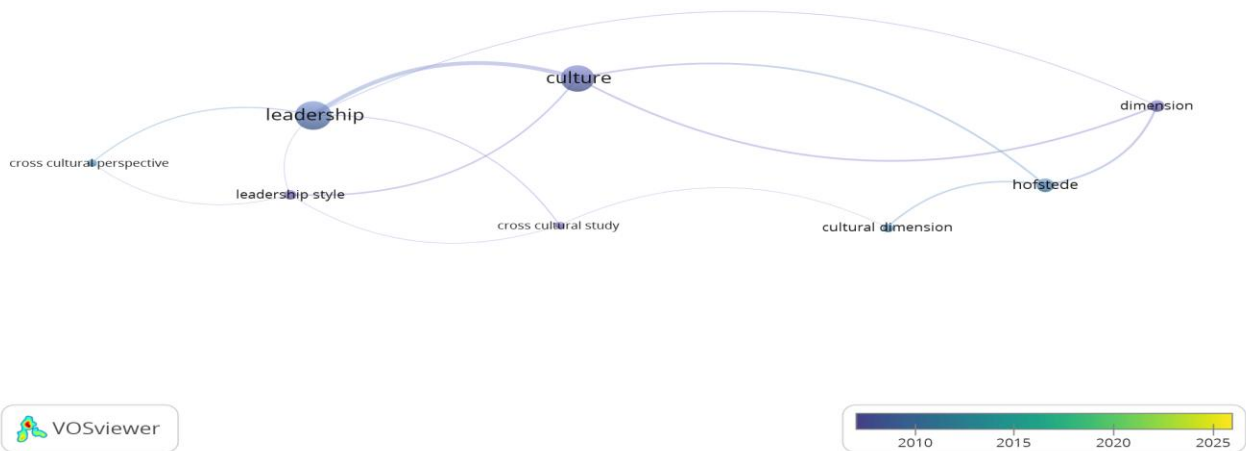
Data Source

A total of 80 documents were retrieved in the initial search. The records were exported from Scopus in CSV and BibTeX formats, which included essential bibliographic fields such as: Title, Author, Author Affiliation, Abstract, Keywords, References, Citation counts, Publication Year.

These exported files were imported into Microsoft Excel for preliminary screening and into VOSviewer for subsequent data cleaning, mapping, and statistical analysis. All retrieved data were solely based on publicly available metadata, ensuring compliance with ethical and database usage guidelines.

Data Analysis





The figure presents a network visualization generated using VOS viewer, illustrating the relationships among key concepts in the research field of culture and leadership. In this visualization, nodes represent keywords, while links indicate co-occurrence relationships between those keywords within the analysed documents.

The size of each node reflects the frequency of occurrence of the corresponding keyword, with larger nodes indicating more frequently used terms. The distance between nodes represents the strength of their relationship, where shorter distances imply stronger co-occurrence. The thickness of the connecting lines further indicates the strength of these relationships.

From the visualization, “culture” appears as a central and prominent node, suggesting it is a core concept within the dataset. It shows strong connections with keywords such as “leadership,” “dimension,” and “Hofstede,” indicating that much of the literature focuses on cultural frameworks—particularly Hofstede’s cultural dimensions—and their influence on leadership.

The node “leadership” is closely linked to “leadership style” and “cross-cultural perspective,” highlighting scholarly interest in how leadership behaviours and styles vary across different cultural contexts. Additionally, terms like “cultural dimension” and “cross-cultural study” appear as supporting concepts, reinforcing the emphasis on comparative and international research approaches.

Overall, the visualization demonstrates that the research field is structured around the interaction between culture, cultural dimensions, and leadership, with Hofstede’s framework playing a significant role. This network indicates a strong interdisciplinary focus combining leadership studies and cross-cultural management.

The data collected from Scopus were subjected to a structured and systematic bibliometric analysis to examine publication trends, intellectual foundations, thematic patterns, and global collaboration in the domain of cross-cultural leadership. The analysis followed two methodological pillars: performance analysis and science mapping, both of which were executed using VOS viewer.

Performance Analysis

Performance analysis was conducted to quantify scientific productivity and scholarly impact in the field of cross-cultural leadership. Key indicators assessed include:

- Annual publication output
- Growth rate of literature
- Most productive authors
- Leading journals publishing on cross-cultural leadership
- Influential institutions and countries
- Highly cited publications
- Citation patterns and average citations per article

This analysis enabled the identification of key contributors, leading publication outlets, and geographical patterns in global cross-cultural leadership research.

Science Mapping Analysis

Science mapping techniques were employed to examine structural connections and conceptual linkages within the field. The following analyses were conducted using VOS viewer:

a. Co-Authorship Network Analysis

Co-authorship maps were created to explore research collaboration at three levels:

- Author collaboration networks
- Institutional collaboration
- Country-level scientific cooperation

A minimum threshold (three documents per author) was implemented to ensure meaningful network density. Collaboration clusters revealed prominent research groups and regions actively contributing to global cross-cultural leadership studies.

b. Keyword Co-Occurrence Analysis

Keyword co-occurrence analysis was performed to uncover dominant themes and emerging research trends. Author keywords and indexed keywords (Keywords Plus) were analysed using the association strength normalization method.

A minimum occurrence threshold (five keyword occurrences) was set.

The generated cluster maps highlighted thematic areas such as:

- Cross-cultural leadership
- Cultural intelligence (CQ)
- Global leadership behaviour
- Intercultural communication
- Hofstede cultural dimensions
- Expatriate leadership
- Diversity and inclusion

These clusters enabled interpretation of the conceptual structure underpinning the field.

c. Co-Citation Analysis

Co-citation analysis examined the intellectual foundations of the field.

Author co-citation and reference co-citation networks were constructed to identify:

- Seminal authors (e.g., Hofstede, Earley, Ang, House)
- Foundational theories (e.g., Hofstede's cultural dimensions, GLOBE leadership theory, Cultural Intelligence theory)
- Influential articles that shaped cross-cultural leadership research

References with a minimum citation threshold (**20 citations**) were included to strengthen the validity of the intellectual structure map.

Findings

Publication Trends

The bibliometric analysis revealed a steady increase in research output on cross-cultural leadership from 2010 to 2025. The highest publication peak occurred between 2019–2023, coinciding with growing global interest in cultural intelligence, diversity management, and leadership effectiveness in multicultural environments. The annual scientific production indicates that cross-cultural leadership has transitioned from a specialized topic to a mainstream research domain within leadership and management studies.

Most Influential Authors

The co-authorship and citation analysis identified several leading scholars in the field. Authors such as Hofstede, Thomas, Ang, Rockstuhl, and House emerged as the most influential contributors. Their works on cultural dimensions, cultural intelligence (CQ), and global leadership models appeared frequently in co-citation networks, indicating their foundational role in shaping the intellectual structure of the domain.

Most Productive Countries and Institutions

The geographical analysis highlighted that the United States, United Kingdom, Australia, China, and Canada are the top contributors to global research output. Institutions such as Harvard University, National University of Singapore, and University of Queensland demonstrated strong productivity and high collaborative connections. Country-level co-authorship networks reveal a high degree of international collaboration, particularly between Western and Asian institutions, reflecting the global nature of cross-cultural leadership studies.

Keyword Co-Occurrence and Thematic Clusters

The keyword co-occurrence map generated in VOS viewer revealed four major thematic clusters:

- Cluster 1: Cross-cultural leadership, global leadership, cultural diversity
- Cluster 2: Cultural intelligence (CQ), intercultural competence, expatriate leadership
- Cluster 3: Hofstede cultural dimensions, national culture, cross-cultural communication
- Cluster 4: Leadership effectiveness, team dynamics, organizational behaviour

These clusters indicate that the field is conceptually structured around cultural intelligence frameworks, leadership behaviour, and intercultural communication competencies.

Collaboration Networks

Co-authorship networks revealed moderate-to-high collaboration, with distinct clusters representing strong regional research communities. International collaborations between Europe, North America, and Asia were the most prominent. This global connectivity suggests a shared recognition of the importance of cross-cultural leadership in an increasingly interconnected world.

Conclusion

Overall, the findings demonstrate that cross-cultural leadership is a rapidly expanding field grounded in cultural intelligence and global leadership theories. The analysis highlights key authors, countries, theoretical foundations, and

emerging research trends, providing a comprehensive understanding of the intellectual landscape. VOS viewer visualizations further illuminate the thematic clusters and collaborative patterns that shape global research in this area.

Limitations and Future Research

Although this bibliometric analysis provides a comprehensive overview of the intellectual structure, publication trends, and thematic evolution of cross-cultural leadership research, several limitations should be acknowledged.

The study relies exclusively on data extracted from the Scopus database. While Scopus is one of the most extensive academic indexing platforms, it does not encompass all relevant publications available across other sources such as Web of Science, Google Scholar, or discipline-specific databases. The exclusion of these repositories may have resulted in the omission of certain influential studies, potentially affecting the completeness of the dataset.

The analysis employed VOS viewer for mapping co-authorship, co-citation, and keyword co-occurrence patterns. While VOS viewer provides robust visualization capabilities, it does not offer advanced statistical or time-series modelling that more sophisticated scientometric tools (e.g., Biblioshiny, SciMAT, CitNetExplorer) might provide. As a result, the interpretation of thematic clusters may be limited to relational visual patterns rather than deeper causal insights.

Bibliometric methods focus primarily on quantitative indicators such as publication counts, citation frequency, and network connectivity. These metrics do not evaluate the *quality* of conceptual contributions, theoretical rigor, or practical insights embedded within individual articles. Hence, the findings should be interpreted as indicators of structural trends rather than qualitative assessments of the field.

Given these limitations, several opportunities arise for future research.

Future studies could expand the dataset by integrating multiple databases to develop a more exhaustive representation of global scholarship. Incorporating grey literature, doctoral dissertations, conference papers, and practitioner publications would further enrich the analysis.

Scholars may also explore longitudinal and predictive analytics, such as thematic evolution modelling, burst detection, or machine-learning-based topic clustering, to uncover emerging research frontiers in cross-cultural leadership, particularly in contexts of digital globalization and remote work.

Additionally, future research could conduct hybrid reviews, combining bibliometric techniques with systematic literature review (SLR) or meta-analysis to provide deeper theoretical insight into how cultural intelligence shapes leadership effectiveness across cultures.

Lastly, country-specific or region-specific bibliometric studies could be conducted to examine how cross-cultural leadership scholarship evolves in Asia, Africa, Europe, or the Middle East, enabling researchers to uncover contextual differences in research priorities, theoretical frameworks, and leadership paradigms.

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