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Research Article

Effect of Cultural Intelligence on Employee Performance in Cross-Cultural Teams Within Multinational Chinese Companies: The Role of Employees' Perception of Inclusiveness, Knowledge Sharing, and Employee Innovative Behavior

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: With the rapid rise of economy of China, Chinese multinational corporations have gradually gained significant advantages in global market competition. Cross-cultural teams play a crucial role in addressing global challenges and maintaining high market share. However, such teams often face three major challenges: internal communication barriers, differences in work styles among employees with diverse cultural backgrounds, and leadership decision-making disagreements caused by cultural diversity. These issues may have a negative impact on the overall performance of the enterprise.

Objectives: This study aims to explore how cultural intelligence mediates employees' perceptions of inclusiveness, knowledge sharing , and innovative behavior, ultimately affecting their work performance. The ultimate goal is to provide theoretical basis and practical recommendations for cross-cultural teams in Chinese multinational corporations to address these challenges.

Methods: A questionnaire survey was conducted to randomly select a sample of 500 employees from Chinese multinational corporations. A total of 407 valid questionnaires were collected, and data analysis was conducted based on partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM).

Results: The research findings indicate that: (1) cultural intelligence has a significant positive impact on employees' perception of inclusiveness, knowledge sharing , and innovation behavior; (2) The employees' perception of inclusiveness, knowledge sharing , and innovative behavior also show a significant positive impact on work performance; (3) The above three mediating variables play a chain mediating role between cultural intelligence and work performance.

Conclusions: Employees with higher cultural intelligence are more likely to perceive team inclusivity, actively participate in knowledge exchange and practice innovative behaviors, thereby improving overall work performance. It is recommended that enterprises systematically optimize the effectiveness of cross-cultural team management by strengthening cultural intelligence training, building an inclusive team atmosphere, and incentive mechanisms.

Keywords: Cultural Intelligence, Employee Performance, Cross-Cultural, Inclusiveness, Knowledge Sharing, Employee Innovative Behavior

INTRODUCTION

With the rapid growth of the Chinese economy, many large multinational corporations have emerged in China, which have also reshaped a new global business landscape. Companies such as Huawei, Alibaba, Lenovo, Tencent, BYD, Xiaomi, and Haier have not only achieved success domestically in China, but also held leading positions in the industry worldwide(Casanova & Miroux, 2018). These companies are typical examples of Chinese enterprises' globalization and adaptation to complex international markets. Huawei is a global leader in the telecommunications industry, operating in over 170 countries and having a diverse workforce that supports its extensive product and service portfolio(Hall & Ren, 2020).Alibaba is one of the leaders in e-commerce, utilizing cloud computing and artificial intelligence capabilities to enhance the global e-commerce network and maintain its leading position in the world market(Havinga, Hoving, & Swagemakers, 2016; Kim, 2018). After acquiring IBM's personal computer division, Lenovo has transformed from a computer assembly company to a technology giant that designs and manufactures products for consumers and businesses in over 180 markets(M. Thomas, 2016). Tencent, known for its dominance in social media and gaming, has expanded its global presence through investments in international gaming companies, creating a multicultural workforce spanning several continents (Pu, 2024).In the automotive industry, BYD has become a leader in electric vehicles (EVs), occupying a large market share in Europe, North America, and Asia through the high cost-effectiveness of its products. Its localization strategy for production and marketing has played an important role in managing cultural differences in overseas markets(Pan, 2024) .Another Chinese tech giant, Xiaomi, has successfully combined affordability with high technology, with high product sales in India, Southeast Asia, and Europe, seizing a large market share.(Schäfer, 2024).Similarly, Haier, a leader in home appliances, has championed cultural integration by establishing regional R&D centers and employing local talent to adapt products to specific markets(Duysters, Jacob, Lemmens, & Jintian, 2009).

With the success of these companies, cross-cultural teams have played a crucial role in addressing global challenges and maintaining high market share. These cross-cultural teams play a crucial role in managing diversified operations, fostering creativity, and maintaining international market competitiveness.((Hensmans & Liu, 2020). However, cross-cultural teams often face challenges from three aspects: internal communication barriers, differences in work styles among employees with different cultural backgrounds, and differences in leadership decisions stemming from cultural diversity. When the team cannot perfectly solve these three challenges, they may undermine the overall cooperation of the team and reduce overall performance. " (Y. Zhang & Santos, 2023).

Cultural diversity within cross-cultural teams creates opportunities for innovation by drawing on varied viewpoints. However, differences in core values, communication styles, and decision-making approaches may simultaneously generate potential conflicts.(Hofstede, 2001; Nikolova, Rodionov, & Mokeeva, 2014).Misunderstandings rooted in cultural differences can disrupt team dynamics, diminish job satisfaction, erode employee engagement, and ultimately compromise overall team performance.(An, 2022; Moy, Van Dyne, & Hattrup, 2023). Proactive management practices—including fostering cultural awareness, adopting inclusive communication frameworks, and implementing flexible conflict resolution protocols—serve as critical levers to mitigate these risks while optimizing team productivity.(Brimhall, 2019; D. Thomas et al., 2008)In hypercompetitive markets, employee performance constitutes the cornerstone of organizational success. Top performers propel innovation, drive customer-centric operational excellence, and fortify long-term organizational sustainability through strategic value creation(Cooke, Wu, Zhou, Zhong, & Wang, 2018; Mittal et al., 2023). Research indicates that high-performance work practices, encompassing employee development opportunities and incentive systems, are critical to unleashing workforce potential and fostering creative capacity.(J. Combs, Liu, Hall, & Ketchen, 2006) . Through strategic investments in these frameworks, enterprises can strengthen workforce commitment, mitigate talent attrition, and drive sustainable value creation. (Becker, 1998).

Within this operational landscape, cultural intelligence (CQ) has emerged as a pivotal competency for navigating cross-cultural team leadership challenges. CQ encompasses an individual's capacity to execute contextually adaptive behaviors, facilitate intercultural communication efficacy, and maintain collaborative synergy across multicultural contexts.(Ang & Van Dyne, 2015). Employees with high CQ are better able to adapt to cultural differences, resolve

cultural conflicts, and find innovation in cross-cultural environments(Ang, Van Dyne, & Koh, 2006; Earley & Ang, 2003).Within Chinese MNCs, CQ's significance intensifies given their navigation of markets marked by divergent cultural norms and operational practices. While CQ's value is acknowledged, scholarly inquiry remains scarce regarding its specific effects on employee performance metrics, workplace inclusiveness, and innovation outputs within these organizational contexts. This investigation addresses the research void by analyzing how CQ shapes performance outcomes in multicultural team settings, specifically exploring its capacity to enhance collaborative inclusivity, stimulate knowledge exchange, and cultivate innovative behaviors among multinational corporate personnel.(Chen & Dong, 2024)

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

Culture Intelligence

Cultural Intelligence (CQ) is defined as an individual's capability to adapt, communicate, and function effectively in culturally diverse team settings(Earley & Ang, 2003). Cultural Intelligence (CQ) synthesizes Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences and Sternberg's triarchic theory of intelligence, transcending conventional IQ and EQ assessment paradigms to tackle the multifaceted challenges inherent in cross-cultural team dynamics.(Detterman & Sternberg, 1986; Gardner, 1983).It provides a robust framework for understanding how team members navigate cultural differences and collaborate effectively in diverse environments. CQ consists of four interconnected dimensions essential for cross-cultural teamwork:

Metacognitive Cultural Intelligence (Metacognitive CQ) emphasizes the continuous monitoring, assessment, and adjustment of an individual's understanding of culture during cross-cultural interactions (Ang et al., 2007; Flavell, 1979). It centers on reflecting on cultural assumptions, anticipating potential misunderstandings, and dynamically adjusting cognition to fit the team's cultural context. Higher metacognitive cultural intelligence in cross-cultural teams can help avoid conflict and promote collaborative fluency (Kanyingi & Withanagamage, 2024). Cognitive CQ, on the other hand, focuses on the acquisition of cultural rules and behavioral patterns through systematic learning and practical experience (Hofstede, 2001; Van Dyne et al., 2012), and encompasses both culturally specific knowledge (e.g., hierarchical functioning) and cross-cultural generalizations (e.g., differences in communication styles). Team members with good cognitive cultural intelligence are better at solving culturally relevant challenges (Albaharna et al., 2024). From a theoretical perspective, metacognitive cultural intelligence reflects an individual's proactive process of reviewing, evaluating, and adjusting cultural perceptions during interaction (Bandura, 2002; Deci & Ryan, 1985).It includes thinking about cultural assumptions, expecting possible misunderstandings, and changing perspectives to match the team's cultural background. In cross-cultural teams, having strong metacognitive CQ helps stop conflicts and makes teamwork easier (Richter, Martin, Hansen, Taras, & Alon, 2021).Behavioral CQ refers to adapting communication styles to meet cultural norms (Hammer, Gudykunst, & Wiseman, 1978; Neuliep, 2016). This includes adjusting tone, gestures, and expressions to fit the team's cultural context. Strong behavioral CQ facilitates clear communication and strengthens team cohesion (Kanyingi & Withanagamage, 2024).In cross-cultural teams, CQ reduces misunderstandings, builds mutual respect, and enhances collaboration. Members with high CQ bridge cultural gaps, resolve conflicts, and align diverse perspectives toward common goals (Ang & Van Dyne, 2015; Bogilović, Černe, & Škerlavaj, 2017). By developing CQ, teams unlock innovation and improve performance in global settings.

Employees' Perception of Inclusiveness

Employees' perception of inclusiveness refers to the extent to which individuals feel they belong to an organization while maintaining their authenticity(Shore et al., 2011) . It reflects an employee's ability to actively engage in organizational processes, access resources, and express their unique identity without fear of exclusion or rejection. The concept, introduced by Mor-Barak & Cherin (1998), bridges individual differences such as race, gender, and age with employees' effective contributions to their teams and organizations(Mor-Barak & Cherin, 1998).

Inclusiveness is often conceptualized through two primary dimensions(Jansen, Otten, & van der Zee, 2015; Shore et al., 2011): Belongingness refers to the extent to which employees feel accepted and valued as part of their team or organization. Employees experience belonging when they perceive themselves as integral to group achievements and social cohesion. For instance, statements such as "My team makes me feel like an indispensable contributor" reflect a robust sense of belonging (Baumeister & Leary, 2017). Authenticity centers on employees' capacity to preserve their genuine identities within professional environments. This entails voicing personal convictions, core values, and

viewpoints without apprehension of adverse evaluation (Jansen, Otten, & van der Zee, 2017). Authenticity fosters psychological safety and encourages employees to contribute innovative ideas without conforming to organizational norms (Roberts, Cha, Hewlin, & Settles, 2009). Within cross-cultural teams, inclusiveness operates as a pivotal mechanism for harmonizing diversity and nurturing cooperation. It elevates psychological safety levels, allowing members to exchange perspectives transparently absent judgment concerns(Randel et al., 2018). This proves especially vital in multicultural environments where variations in communicative approaches and cultural conventions may hinder collaborative efficiency. Inclusiveness further catalyzes knowledge transfer and innovation through environments that prioritize diverse cognitive inputs(Carmeli, Reiter-Palmon, & Ziv, 2010). Members perceiving inclusive climates demonstrate heightened propensity to share distinctive expertise and participate in collective solution-building, thereby advancing team efficacy and creative outputs(Nishii, 2013).Furthermore, inclusiveness reinforces team unity by developing shared identity and reciprocal esteem. Employees experience stronger affiliation with their teams and heightened motivation toward collective objectives, ultimately enhancing group productivity and organizational results(Triana, Kirkman, & Wagstaff, 2012; Van Der Vegt & Bunderson, 2005).

Knowledge Sharing

Knowledge sharing is characterized as the process through which individuals or groups exchange mission-critical concepts, information, and specialized competencies to attain collective objectives(Hansen, 1999; Lin, 2007). This process involves disseminating codified knowledge—such as documented procedures and systems—alongside experiential knowledge encompassing personal insights, contextual wisdom, and applied techniques (Nonaka & Toyama, 2003). Through enabling knowledge circulation within and between teams, this exchange enhances strategic decision-making, complex problem resolution, and innovation cycles, positioning it as a fundamental pillar of organizational development and competitive advantage (Imamoglu, Ince, Turkcan, & Atakay, 2019).The mechanism requires both proactive knowledge contribution from sources and effective knowledge assimilation by recipients (Hansen, 1999). It strengthens cooperative relationships and cross-functional understanding, allowing organizations to harness varied professional expertise and cognitive diversity for sustained organizational evolution and environmental responsiveness(Collins & Smith, 2006).

This organizational phenomenon is systematically divided into two complementary dimensions: explicit and tacit knowledge transfer, collectively representing the multidimensional reality of intellectual resource exchange (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995).Explicit knowledge comprises information that can be systematically articulated, formalized, and communicated through institutional channels. Illustrations include technical manuals, analytical reports, operational protocols, and structured databases. The structured nature of explicit knowledge transfer enables predictable replication, enhances process reliability, and supports broad-scale implementation of optimized practices. This systematic approach proves particularly vital for organizations requiring formalized documentation to maintain learning trajectories and operational stability (Hansen, 1999; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995).Tacit knowledge remains intrinsically tied to individual experience and professional intuition, resisting easy formalization. Its transmission occurs primarily through relational engagements like apprenticeship models, collaborative diagnostics, and informal knowledge dialogues. The transfer of tacit knowledge drives inventive problem-solving by enabling the circulation of context-dependent expertise and subtle professional insights. This modality proves critical for establishing relational trust and team solidarity, particularly in volatile operational contexts(Faraj & Sproull, 2000; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995).The synergistic interaction between explicit and tacit knowledge modalities enables organizations to maintain operational discipline while preserving adaptive capacity, thereby supporting both standardized processes and responsive learning mechanisms (Lin, 2007). Combined, these complementary channels sustain knowledge generation, distribution, and implementation across organizational units.Within multicultural environments, knowledge exchange assumes heightened significance by bridging cultural divides and language barriers to develop unified cognitive frameworks that synergize team members' diverse capabilities(Tsai, 2001). Nevertheless, variations in cultural expectations, communication conventions, and trust-building patterns may create obstacles, requiring intentional intervention strategies to cultivate psychologically safe and inclusive collaborative ecosystems(Ang & Van Dyne, 2015).

Employee Innovative Behavior

Employee innovative behavior denotes employees' purposeful initiatives to conceptualize, advocate, and operationalize novel concepts, methodologies, products, or protocols aligned with organizational objectives (Amabile, 1988; Scott & Bruce, 1994).This construct spans a spectrum of initiatives ranging from opportunity recognition and

solution formulation to practical workplace execution.The phenomenon exhibits dual orientation toward both procedural dynamics and outcome realization. Procedurally, it integrates creative ideation, persuasive communication of proposals, and tactical implementation efforts(Janssen, 2000; West & Farr, 1989). Outcome-oriented analysis prioritizes measurable impacts on performance enhancement, problem resolution, and organizational evolution(G. Wang, Saher, Hao, Ali, & Amin, 2024).Research frameworks established by Scott and Bruce (1994) and Janssen (2000) underscore this behavioral pattern's strategic importance in overcoming institutional challenges and maintaining competitive differentiation. Beyond creative ideation, it encompasses the complete innovation lifecycle—from challenge diagnosis to solution deployment(Papachristopoulos, Gradito Dubord, Jauvin, Forest, & Coulombe, 2023). Consequently, it serves as a critical driver of organizational resilience in fluctuating operational landscapes.Scholarly consensus delineates innovative behavior as a phased progression comprising three core components that mirror innovation maturation within organizations: solution conception, proposal advocacy, and practical application(Scott & Bruce, 1994).Solution conception constitutes the foundational phase where employees detect improvement opportunities, reframe challenges, and devise inventive approaches. This stage emphasizes creative cognition and exploratory thinking as innovation catalysts (Amabile, 1988; Janssen, 2000; Scott & Bruce, 1994).Proposal advocacy entails mobilizing organizational support and resources through effective stakeholder persuasion. Employees must articulate proposals' technical viability and strategic value to secure cross-functional buy-in(Scott & Bruce, 1994).Practical application represents the implementation phase where validated concepts transition into operational reality. This stage necessitates resource orchestration, collaborative execution, and iterative optimization to achieve measurable outcomes(Scott & Bruce, 1994; West & Farr, 1989).These interdependent components establish a unified analytical model for understanding employee-driven innovation mechanisms. Collectively, they encapsulate the cyclical and adaptive nature of organizational innovation processes.

In multicultural team environments, innovation-oriented conduct enables organizations to harness cognitive diversity for creative problem-solving. Such practices enhance competitive positioning through differentiated offerings(Prahalad & Hamel, 2009), increase market responsiveness(Tushman & O'Reilly III, 1996), and streamline operational processes (Damanpour, 1991). Furthermore, innovation-centric cultures elevate workforce motivation and fulfillment(Amabile, 1996), while accelerating organizational learning to capitalize on emerging opportunities (Senge, 2006). Culturally diverse teams prioritizing proactive innovation ultimately emerge as agile, high-performance entities(Kanter, 1984).

Work Performance

Work performance constitutes a multidimensional construct integrating efficiency benchmarks, quality metrics, and outcome-based contributions to organizational objectives(Campbell, 1990). This concept evaluates both the volume of task completion and the strategic alignment of outputs with institutional priorities. Drucker conceptualizes performance as input-output optimization, emphasizing employees' resource management proficiency across temporal, financial, and material dimensions(Drucker, 1999).Employee performance is systematically defined through three interdependent dimensions: task performance, contextual performance, and adaptive performance(Motowidlo, Borman, & Schmit, 1997; Pulakos, Arad, Donovan, & Plamondon, 2000).This tripartite framework enables holistic assessment of workforce contributions to institutional success.Task performance involves behaviors directly fulfilling formal role requirements. It measures compliance with established standards of output quality, production volume, and deadline adherence.

The operational core dimension of organizational performance is closely related to contractual responsibility (Motowidlo et al., 1997). Contextual performance encompasses voluntary behaviors that reinforce the institutional culture, such as peer support, active participation, and norm compliance (Motowidlo et al., 1997). Non-mandatory contributions, although not necessarily related to direct tasks, have a significant effect on overall effectiveness; adaptive performance reflects the overall ability of employees to cope with change in the workplace, encompassing a variety of dimensions such as technology iterations, role transitions, and unexpected challenges (Pulakos et al., 2000). This dimension highlights its critical value in turbulent environments that require operational resilience. Empirical research has shown that these dimensions are both independent and intrinsically linked, revealing the complexity of performance and its impact on the organization (Hurtz & Donovan, 2000). A comprehensive assessment of these dimensions provides insight into the micro-mechanisms of employee value creation.

Performance determinants in cross-cultural teams include situational facilitators and individual competencies. Multicultural identity and cultural intelligence development programs are positively associated with increased satisfaction and optimized output quality (Shore et al., 2011), and cross-cultural training resources reinforce the ability to cope with complexity (G. M. Combs & Luthans, 2007). Individual traits such as cognitive flexibility and achievement orientation significantly influence team cohesion, and individuals with adaptability and intrinsic drive tend to drive collaborative success (Shkoler & Kimura, 2020; Ybarra, 2023). Cultural intelligence (CQ), a key determinant of performance efficacy, integrates cognitive, motivational, and behavioral dimensions, providing significant support for strategic synergy, conflict mediation, and synergy (Gooden, Creque, & Chin-Loy, 2017).Elevated metacognitive CQ particularly enhances innovative capacity and inclusion management, optimizing team functionality in diverse settings(Du, Wang, & Jiang, 2023; Garamvölgyi & Rudnák, 2023).

Theory and Hypothesis development

Social Identity Theory (SIT) and Social Cognitive Theory (SCT)

Social Identity Theory (SIT) was proposed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner in the 1970s, mainly explaining how people establish self-awareness through group relationships(Tajfel, Turner, Austin, & Worchel, 1979).This theory suggests that people automatically classify themselves and others into different social categories based on common characteristics such as racial background, cultural traditions, or organizational relationships. This classification forms' in group 'and' out group ', directly affecting the way people perceive and interact with each other(Abrams & Hogg, 2006).This theory emphasizes two key processes: self-identity and social categorization. Simply put, self-identity is the acquisition of a sense of value through adherence to group norms, while social categorization can lead to people favoring members of their own group and forming biases against "outsider groups"(Mitchell et al., 2015).In multicultural teams, this effect is particularly evident - cultural differences are like magnifying glasses, making the boundary between 'us vs them' clearer (Smith & Long, 2016).In this situation, team members may overly emphasize cultural uniqueness, which in turn hinders knowledge sharing and collaboration. Research shows that when people feel their cultural identity is threatened, they develop a defensive mentality and undermine team trust(Mitchell & Boyle, 2015).To solve this problem, it is necessary to establish inclusive mechanisms, reduce group bias, and cultivate common goals.

Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) posits that human behavior emerges through dynamic interactions between personal, behavioral, and environmental factors(Bandura, 1986, 1991). Three core constructs define this framework: 1) observational learning (acquiring behaviors by observing role models), 2) self-efficacy (confidence in task-specific capabilities), and 3) reciprocal determinism (bidirectional person-environment-behavior influences)(Bandura, 1977; Bandura & Wessels, 1997). Social cognitive theory (SCT) mechanisms drive adaptive development in cross-cultural teams. Individuals with high cultural intelligence quotient (CQ) model context-sensitive behaviors through observational learning for non-reinforcement transfer of collaborative skills (Bandura, 2002). Members with a strong sense of self-efficacy can proactively cope with cross-cultural conflicts and communication barriers; the self-regulatory component of SCT further enhances team efficacy through goal calibration, process monitoring, and feedback-based behavioral adjustments. Such processes promote the alignment of individual behaviors with collective cultural norms and facilitate knowledge sharing and innovation (Bandura, 2002). Social Identity Theory (SIT) and Cultural Cognition Theory (SCT) provide complementary perspectives on cross-cultural teams: the former explains the barriers to cooperation caused by cultural differences, while the latter provides pathways to solutions. Behavioral modeling, self-regulation, and other strategies can be implemented to promote team integration, trust building, and innovation stimulation. These theoretical frameworks provide an important foundation for exploring how cultural intelligence affects team inclusiveness, knowledge sharing, and innovation performance.

Hypothesis development

Cultural intelligence (CQ) has a significant effect on employees' perceptions of inclusiveness in cross-cultural teams; high CQ individuals are more adept at understanding and adapting to multicultural environments, which enhances their perceptions of team inclusiveness. This phenomenon stems from the fact that high CQ members possess the ability to diffuse cultural differences, reduce prejudice, and promote mutual respect among coworkers (Bogilović et al. 2017; Pidduck, Shaffer, Zhang, Cheung & Yunlu, 2022). Of these, metacognitive cultural intelligence is particularly critical, as it enables employees to analyze and adapt their own cross-cultural understanding to effectively respond to cultural challenges, which in turn creates a sense of security and enhances perceptions of inclusiveness in the

workplace (Du et al., 2023). Meanwhile, motivational cultural intelligence reinforces these effects by promoting active participation and collaboration, enabling employees to feel valued and connected to their teams (Afsar, Al-Ghazali, Cheema & Javed, 2021).

Research suggests that employees with higher cultural intelligence typically perceive inclusiveness more strongly; for example, Pidduck et al. found that team members with cultural intelligence valued different perspectives and communication styles, which enhanced their sense of team belonging (Pidduck et al., 2022). Similarly, Du and his team (2023) confirmed that metacognitive cultural intelligence helps build environments that are welcoming to diversity and enhances employees' perceptions of inclusiveness and their willingness to collaborate.By implementing cultural intelligence training programs, companies can improve employees' perceptions of inclusiveness, reduce cultural conflicts, and build stronger teams. High cultural intelligence employees serve as role models of inclusive behaviors in multicultural environments, which helps coworkers view teams as more inclusive collectives (Ratasuk & Charoensukmongkol, 2020; Suthatorn & Charoensukmongkol, 2018).

H1: Cultural Intelligence (CQ) has a positive relationship with Employees' Perception of Inclusiveness in cross-cultural teams.

Cultural Intelligence (CQ) and employees' perception of inclusiveness are important for effective knowledge sharing in cross-cultural teams. Employees with high CQ are good at handling cultural differences, and this helps them communicate clearly and work well with people from different backgrounds. This ability connects cultural gaps and creates shared understanding, which improves knowledge sharing(Bogilović et al., 2017; Chua, Morris, & Mor, 2012). Additionally, CQ helps employees see culturally diverse organizations as unified groups, reduces divisions between "us" and "them," and focuses on shared goals, which encourages more knowledge sharing (Chu & Zhu, 2023; Pidduck et al., 2022).Next, the different parts of CQ have specific roles in knowledge sharing. Metacognitive CQ makes employees more aware of cultural preferences and helps them adapt, which leads to mutual respect and more idea exchanges(Chua et al., 2012). Motivational CQ, which comes from personal interest in cultural diversity, pushes employees to actively share both formal and informal knowledge (Xue, 2024). Behavioral CQ, through adjusting words and actions, removes communication problems and improves teamwork(Hu, Wu, & Gu, 2019). Together, these skills support knowledge sharing and innovation in multicultural teams.

At the same time, employees' feeling of inclusiveness is key to knowledge sharing. When team members feel treated fairly and included, they feel closer to the group and work harder for shared goals. Inclusiveness solves challenges from cultural diversity by creating psychological safety and reducing communication issues. These conditions make teams more effective, united, and consistent in sharing knowledge (Grindstaff, 2022; Imamoglu, Erat, & Turkcan, 2023). Research has shown that inclusion building significantly promotes the formation of psychological safety and trust mechanisms that motivate employees to share unique insights without fear of exclusion (Enwereuzor, 2021; Shore & Chung, 2023). Such mechanisms effectively enhance diverse team effectiveness by enhancing willingness to collaborate and stimulating innovative thinking. An inclusive environment removes psychological barriers to knowledge sharing and lays a solid foundation for collaborative innovation and organizational success (Jansen et al., 2014; Qi et al., 2019). Cultural intelligence and inclusiveness complement each other to build a benign ecology that promotes knowledge sharing in cross-cultural teams. Individuals with high cultural intelligence actively promote cross-cultural collaboration, while an inclusive environment builds a foundation of trust, opens communication channels, and helps diverse teams realize sustainable development and innovation breakthroughs.

H2: Cultural Intelligence (CQ) has a positive relationship with knowledge sharing in cross-cultural teams.

H3: Employees' perception of inclusiveness positively influences knowledge sharing in cross-cultural teams.

Cultural intelligence (CQ), a key driver of innovation behavior in cross-cultural teams, centers on empowering individuals to effectively respond to multicultural perspectives and adapt to multicultural environments (Ely & Thomas, 2001; Roberson, 2019). Individuals with higher levels of cultural intelligence can facilitate the transparent flow of information, stimulate synergies, and optimize knowledge transfer, which together form the cornerstone of innovation advancement. By reconciling cultural differences and identifying points of common interest, high CQ team members actively participate in the generation and implementation of original concepts, thereby enhancing the team's overall innovation capability (W. Zhang, Zeng, Liang, Xue, & Cao, 2023). Empirical studies have shown that

employees with high CQ exhibit significant advantages in dealing with cultural complexity and ambiguity; such adaptability not only supports the integration of multiple perspectives but also enhances problem solving effectiveness and helps generate innovative and practical solutions (Fan, Song, Nepal, & Lee, 2020). In addition, cultural intelligence enables individuals to adapt communication and interaction strategies to different cultural frameworks, thereby enhancing cross-cultural collaboration and optimizing innovation output (Hu et al., 2019).

Knowledge sharing occupies a central position in cross-cultural team innovation behaviors, and its mechanism promotes individuals to transform creative thinking into practical solutions by facilitating the circulation of ideas, experiences, and expertise within the organization, and by linking conceptual thinking to concrete practices (Radaelli et al., 2014). Continuous knowledge interactions build collaborative ecosystems where team members can integrate their collective wisdom to address complex challenges (Kang & Lee, 2017). Research has shown that knowledge sharing exhibits a significant positive correlation with innovation performance. Ahmad & Karim (2019) state that organizations that value knowledge sharing mechanisms perform better at the level of creativity and team innovation; Estrada et al. (2016) confirm that internal knowledge exchange enhances product innovation performance, an effect that is particularly pronounced in dynamic, collaborative-oriented environments. An open flow of information enables cross-cultural teams to adapt to environmental changes and maintain innovation continuity. Cultural intelligence and knowledge sharing have a synergistic effect in the innovation process of cross-cultural teams: the former provides cultural competence support for effective collaboration, and the latter ensures that innovative ideas are transformed into concrete results, which together builds an organizational environment conducive to innovation and lays the foundation for enterprises to maintain a global competitive advantage.

H4: Cultural Intelligence (CQ) has a positive relationship with innovative behavior in cross-cultural teams.

H5: Knowledge sharing has a positive relationship with innovative behavior in cross-cultural teams(Tuan, 2020).

Employees' perception of inclusiveness substantially bolsters work performance by cultivating belongingness and psychological security. When teams are perceived as inclusive environments, employees experience recognition and esteem, driving them to actively fulfill responsibilities and align efforts with collective objectives (Ely & Thomas, 2001; Tuan, 2020). This perception stimulates transparent dialogue and joint efforts, allowing members to exchange viewpoints and contextual insights, thereby refining problem resolution and strategic decision-making. Employees sensing inclusiveness exhibit elevated job satisfaction, organizational dedication, and output efficiency, as their inputs receive acknowledgment and validation(Jiatong et al., 2022; P. Wang, Rode, Shi, Luo, & Chen, 2013). Consequently, inclusiveness perception forms a psychological scaffold for optimizing individual and group effectiveness in culturally heterogeneous teams (Shore et al., 2011).

Knowledge sharing operates as a pivotal mechanism for advancing work performance in cross-cultural teams. By enabling the circulation of heterogeneous ideas, specialized competencies, and experiential insights, it overcomes cultural divides and accelerates cooperative synergies. This process elevates creative output, operational precision, and adaptive responsiveness—key determinants of enhanced individual and organizational results(Kang & Lee, 2017; Radaelli et al., 2014). Trust critically amplifies these dynamics, as heightened interpersonal confidence within teams facilitates more substantive and recurrent knowledge interactions, directly elevating productivity metrics (Hughes, Lee, Tian, Newman, & Legood, 2018). Additionally, cultural openness and collaborative values foster both tacit and explicit knowledge sharing, ensuring innovative solutions and efficient workflows(Castaneda & Ramírez, 2021).

Innovation behavior significantly enhances work performance by driving adaptability, creative problem-solving, and collaboration. Employees who engage in innovative behaviors introduce new methods and solutions that optimize processes, reduce inefficiencies, and improve task effectiveness(Khan, Abbas, Gul, & Raja, 2015). These behaviors are particularly valuable in cross-cultural teams, where diverse perspectives foster creativity and teamwork(Scott & Bruce, 1994). Organizations that support risk-taking and provide resources for innovation further amplify these positive outcomes, embedding innovation into their strategic goals and enhancing both individual and collective performance(Hartmann, 2006; Martins & Terblanche, 2003). Innovation behavior not only sustains organizational relevance in dynamic markets but also strengthens team cohesion and communication, driving long-term success(Hartley, 2024).

H6: Employees' perception of inclusiveness has a positive relationship with work performance in cross-cultural teams.

H7: Knowledge sharing has a positive relationship with work performance in cross-cultural teams.

H8: Innovation behavior has a positive relationship with work performance in cross-cultural teams.

Conceptual model is shown in the Figure 1

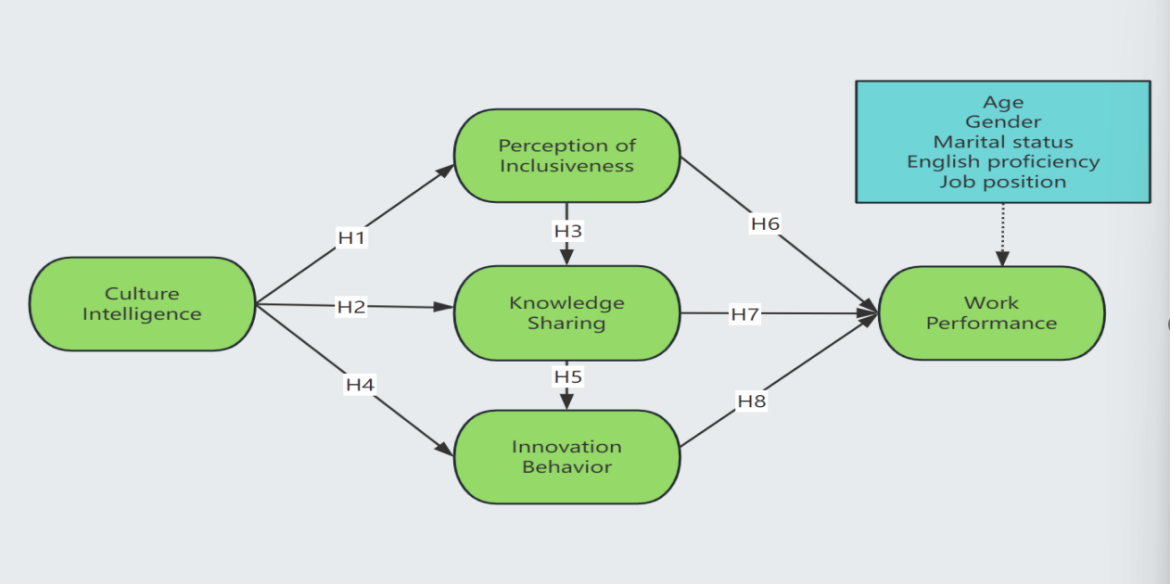

Figure 1. Conceptual model.

METHODOLOGY

Sample Selection

This study focuses on employees from cross-cultural teams within seven leading multinational Chinese companies: Huawei, Alibaba, Lenovo, Tencent, BYD, Xiaomi, and Haier. These companies were selected because of their extensive international operations and diverse workforce compositions, making them ideal settings for exploring the effects of cultural intelligence on employee performance. A convenience sampling method is used to target employees who are readily accessible and willing to participate. This method is particularly practical for reaching a geographically dispersed and culturally diverse workforce within a limited research timeline, ensuring feasibility while aligning with the study's objectives. In order to ensure the representativeness of the sample, participants were required to meet the following criteria: first, to be part of a cross-cultural team with members from two or more cultures; second, to have at least one year of work experience in order to fully understand the dynamics of cross-cultural integration; and third, to be actively involved in a project that requires frequent cross-cultural collaboration. Based on the 95% confidence interval and 5% margin of error, the minimum sample size for this study was calculated to be 385 individuals. In view of the possibility of sample loss and incomplete questionnaires, the target effective sample size of this study was set at 500 participants. The above parameters were set to ensure that the demographic characteristics of the study population adequately reflect the diversity of cross-cultural team functioning and the complexity of their relationships in the selected organizations, thus laying a solid foundation for assessing the impact of cultural intelligence on work output.

Data Collection Procedure

This research uses a self-administered survey sent by email to easily collect data from employees in cross-cultural teams. Sending surveys by email is a simple way to reach people working in different locations while keeping their answers private and letting them complete the survey at their own pace.

The researcher works with chosen companies to get email addresses of qualified employees. First, a welcome email is sent to explain the study's goals, confirm that responses will stay confidential, and provide clear steps to participate.

The survey is shared either as an email attachment or through a secure online link, with easy-to-follow instructions and a clear deadline. Reminder emails are sent later to boost participation and ensure enough responses.

This email method makes data collection quick and flexible while keeping information reliable and convenient for participants.

Questionnaire Development

This research used existing ready-made scales created by other experts. Using these pre-tested tools has several advantages. First, these scales have been thoroughly checked and proven reliable by past studies, making them more trustworthy than designing new ones from scratch. Second, using existing scales saves time and effort, letting researchers concentrate on gathering and studying data(Hyman, Lamb, & Bulmer, 2006). Lastly, standardized tools make it easier to compare this study's findings with other research that used the same methods(Meadows, 2003).

Measurement

Culture Intelligence

The most widely used cultural intelligence (CQ) scale is Ang et al.'s (2007) CQ scale, which measures CQ from four dimensions: metacognitive CQ, cognitive CQ, motivational CQ, and behavioral CQ. This scale has been widely used, so it is quite reliable and reasonable

In addition, B ü cker further explored the correlation between the four dimensions of cultural intelligence, providing additional support for the validity of the scale(Ang et al., 2007; Bücker, Furrer, & Lin, 2015). Based on these studies, this research uses a refined scale with eight questions, covering all four dimensions of CQ:

1.I am conscious of the cultural knowledge I use when interacting with people with different cultural backgrounds.

2.I plan how I'm going to relate to people from a different culture before I meet them.

3.I know the basic norms and rules of different cultures.

4.I know the rules (e.g., vocabulary, grammar) of other languages

5.I enjoy interacting with people from different cultures.

6.I am confident that I can socialize with locals in a culture that is unfamiliar to me.

7.I change my verbal behavior (e.g., accent, tone) when a cross-cultural interaction requires it.

8.I use pause and silence differently to suit different cross-cultural situations.

The Perception of Inclusiveness

The Perception of inclusiveness scale adapts Jansen and Shore's two-dimensional model measuring belonging (sense of team acceptance) and authenticity (freedom to express true selves)(Jansen et al., 2014; Shore et al., 2011). The original 16-item scale was condensed to 5 context-specific items while retaining theoretical coherence:

1.I feel included in my cross-cultural team.

2.My cross-cultural team makes me feel accepted.

3.I feel safe sharing different ideas in my culturally diverse team.

4.I can be myself without hiding my beliefs at work.

5.My cultural background is respected in team discussions.

Knowledge Sharing

This study's knowledge sharing measurement combines Nonaka and Takeuchi's (1995) explicit-tacit knowledge framework with Van den Hooff and de Ridder's (2004) behavioral scale(Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995; Van Den Hooff & De Ridder, 2004). The validated five-item scale effectively measures both documented information exchange (explicit) and experience-based knowledge transfer (tacit) in cross-cultural team collaborations.

1.I share clear work documents like reports or guides to help the team get things done

2.I use emails or shared files to pass along official information that keeps our work running smoothly

3.When solving problems together, I talk about my own experiences to help find solutions

4.In private chats, I give personalized advice based on what I've learned from my job

5.I start open conversations where everyone can swap ideas and learn from each other

The Innovative Behavior of Employees

In the expansion of the scale for measuring employee innovative behavior, this study integrates the three dimensions of innovation proposed by Scott and Bruce and the work of Janssen , which emphasize individual creativity and the application of innovative ideas(Janssen, 2000; Scott & Bruce, 1994). Based on these frameworks, we constructed a comprehensive scale to more effectively assess employees' innovative behavior across three dimensions: idea generation, idea promotion, and idea implementation. Scott and Bruce's framework highlights the iterative nature of innovation, focusing on employees' ability to generate, promote, and implement ideas in organizational settings. Janssen's approach complements this by emphasizing practical applications of innovative behavior within teams. Combining these perspectives, we carefully selected the following 5 items to form the scale for this study:

1.I often proactively seek new ideas to improve my work processes.

2.I actively promote my innovative ideas to my team members and supervisors.

3.I communicate my innovative ideas effectively to gain support from others.

4.I take the initiative to implement innovative ideas in my work.

5.I collaborate with colleagues to transform ideas into practical outcomes.

Work Performance

In this study, to comprehensively evaluate work performance, we integrate the widely recognized three-dimensional framework proposed by Borman and Motowidlo and Pulakos (Borman & Motowidlo, 1993; Pulakos et al., 2000).his framework includes Task Performance, Contextual Performance, and Adaptive Performance as the key dimensions of employee performance. To operationalize this framework, the following five questions are included in the scale:

1.I consistently meet the quality standards required for my job tasks.

2.I complete my work efficiently and on time.

3.I willingly help colleagues with their work when needed.

4.I actively contribute to maintaining a positive and supportive work environment.

5.I can adapt quickly to changes in my work processes or responsibilities.

Control Variables

This study incorporates five control variables—Age, Gender, Marital Status, English Proficiency, and Job Position—based on their significant influence on employee job performance in cross-cultural teams. Age is positively associated with job performance, as older employees often possess greater experience, knowledge, and problem-solving skills, which enhance efficiency and adaptability compared to younger employees who are at the early stages of their careers(Kooij, Jansen, Dikkers, & De Lange, 2010). Gender diversity in cross-cultural teams significantly enhances creativity, innovation, and collaborative effectiveness by integrating multiple perspectives and problem-solving strategies (Edgar, Blaker, & Everett, 2021). Marital status should not be overlooked; married employees typically exhibit higher job satisfaction, engagement, and productivity due to the stability of their personal lives (Ahituv & Lerman, 2007). English proficiency plays a significant role in cross-cultural teams, not only enhancing communication and collaboration, but also enabling team members to better adapt to multicultural expectations, which promotes effective teamwork and knowledge sharing (Harzing & Pudelko, 2013; Kalra & Szymanski, 2023). The impact of position hierarchy on employee performance is also noteworthy; top positions tend to be associated with greater responsibility, autonomy, and recognition, which together enhance motivation, productivity, and satisfaction. The hierarchical nature of position levels highlights their critical role in shaping employee engagement and contribution to the organization (Jin & Kim, 2022).

Statistical Analysis Method

In this study, partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) was used for data analysis. This method effectively handles complex relationships among variables through component analysis and regression modeling (Magnanensi, Maumy-Bertrand, Meyer, & Bertrand, 2021); its applicability is particularly significant in team-level studies with limited sample sizes or non-normal data distributions (Abdi, 2003; Kock, 2013).PLS-SEM provides important support for cross-cultural team dynamics research by simultaneously testing multiple hypotheses and extracting key data patterns. SEM provides important support for cross-cultural team dynamics research by simultaneously testing multiple hypotheses and extracting key data patterns. The analysis process was completed using SmartPLS 4 software, which provides reliable path modeling and hypothesis testing; its intuitive design ensures the accuracy of framework modeling and hypothesis testing by automatically calculating path coefficients, factor loadings, and other features.

RESULTS

Data were gathered from employees of cross-cultural teams at Huawei, Alibaba, Lenovo, Tencent, BYD, Xiaomi, and Haier. Data collection was undertaken between September and November 2024 through online questionnaires distributed and collected via email. The initial email included an introduction to the study, instructions for completing the questionnaire, and assurances of confidentiality. Follow-up reminder emails were sent to ensure a higher response rate. A total of 500 questionnaires were disseminated to employees, resulting in the acquisition of 407 valid questionnaires after excluding incomplete or inconsistent responses. This corresponds to a return rate of 81.4%. The respondents were managerial and operational employees, representing diverse roles within the companies.

Table1.Distribution of Company Affiliation Among Respondents

Company Name	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Huawei	63	15.5	15.5	15.5
Alibaba	58	14.3	14.3	29.7
Lenovo	63	15.5	15.5	45.2
Tencent	52	12.8	12.8	58
BYD	56	13.8	13.8	71.7
Xiaomi	51	12.5	12.5	84.3
Haier	64	15.7	15.7	100
Total	407	100	100	

According to the data in Table 1, Haier had the highest number of survey respondents with 64, representing 15.7% of the total responses. Huawei and Lenovo both had 63 respondents, each contributing 15.5% to the total. BYD's 56 respondents constituted 13.8%, while Tencent had 52 respondents, accounting for 12.8%. Alibaba had 58 respondents, representing 14.3%, and Xiaomi recorded the fewest with 51 respondents, making up 12.5% of the total.

Table2.Age Distribution Among Respondents

Age	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
21-27	82	20.1	20.1	20.1
28-34	75	18.4	18.4	38.6
35-41	83	20.4	20.4	59
42-48	86	21.1	21.1	80.1
49-55	81	19.9	19.9	100
Total	407	100	100	

According to the data in Table 2, the age distribution among respondents shows a relatively even spread across different age groups. The age group 42-48 has the highest number of respondents, with 86 individuals making up

21.1% of the total. Close behind are the 35-41 and 21-27 age groups, each with 83 and 82 respondents respectively, contributing 20.4% and 20.1% to the total. The 49-55 age group has 81 respondents, accounting for 19.9% of the total, and the 28-34 age group has the fewest respondents with 75, representing 18.4% of the total.

Table3.Gender Distribution Among Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Female	188	46.2	46.2	46.2
Male	219	53.8	53.8	100
Total	407	100	100	

According to the data in Table 3, the gender distribution among respondents indicates that males were slightly more represented than females in the survey. There were 219 male respondents, making up 53.8% of the total, compared to 188 female respondents who comprised 46.2% of the total. The survey collected responses from a total of 407 individuals

Table4.Marital Status Distribution Among Respondents

Marital Status	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Single	111	27.3	27.3	27.3
Married	218	53.6	53.6	80.8
Divorced	54	13.3	13.3	94.1
Widowed	24	5.9	5.9	100
Total	407	100	100	

According to the data in Table 4, the distribution of marital status among respondents shows that the majority are married, with 218 individuals accounting for 53.6% of the total. Single respondents make up 27.3%, with 111 individuals. Divorced respondents are represented by 54 individuals, making up 13.3% of the total, while widowed respondents are the least, with 24 individuals representing 5.9% of the total. The survey collected responses from a total of 407 individuals.

Table5.English Proficiency Levels Among Respondents

English Proficiency	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Beginner	42	10.3	10.3	10.3
Elementary	142	34.9	34.9	45.2
Intermediate	132	32.4	32.4	77.6
Upper Intermediate	73	17.9	17.9	95.6
Advanced	18	4.4	4.4	100
Total	407	100	100	

According to the data in Table 5, the English proficiency levels among respondents are primarily concentrated in the lower to intermediate levels. The largest group is at the Elementary level, with 142 individuals making up 34.9% of the total. This is followed by the Intermediate level with 132 respondents, representing 32.4%. The Upper Intermediate level includes 73 respondents, accounting for 17.9%, while only 42 respondents are at the Beginner level, constituting 10.3% of the total. The least represented is the Advanced level, with 18 individuals making up 4.4% of the total. The survey collected responses from a total of 407 individuals.

Table6.Job Position Distribution Among Respondents

Job Position	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Entry Level	161	39.6	39.6	39.6
Mid-Level	120	29.5	29.5	69
Senior Level	88	21.6	21.6	90.7
Executive Level	38	9.3	9.3	100
Total	407	100	100	

According to the data in Table 6, the job position distribution among respondents shows that the majority are at the Entry Level, with 161 individuals accounting for 39.6% of the total. Mid-Level positions are held by 120 respondents, making up 29.5% of the total. Senior Level positions are represented by 88 individuals, constituting 21.6%, while Executive Level positions are the least common, with 38 respondents or 9.3% of the total. The survey collected responses from a total of 407 individuals.

Table7.Correlations Among Variables

Correlations		Culture Intelligence	Perception of Inclusiveness	Knowledge Sharing	Innovation Behavior	Work Performance
Culture Intelligence	Pearson Correlation	1	.735**	.726**	.717**	.763**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0	0	0	0
	N	407	407	407	407	407
Perception of Inclusiveness	Pearson Correlation	.735**	1	.687**	.637**	.665**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0		0	0	0
	N	407	407	407	407	407
Knowledge Sharing	Pearson Correlation	.726**	.687**	1	.628**	.656**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0	0		0	0
	N	407	407	407	407	407
Innovation Behavior	Pearson Correlation	.717**	.637**	.628**	1	.740**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0	0	0		0
	N	407	407	407	407	407
Work Performance	Pearson Correlation	.763**	.665**	.656**	.740**	1

Sig. (2-tailed)	0	0	0	0	
N	407	407	407	407	407

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

According to Table 7, which presents the statistical correlations among several critical organizational variables from a sample of 407 respondents, the data reveal a marked interconnectedness that underscores the role of cultural intelligence (CQ) in shaping workplace dynamics and outcomes through perception of inclusiveness (PI), knowledge sharing (KS), innovation behavior (IB), and work performance (WP). CQ demonstrates significant correlations with PI ($r = .735$, $p < .001$), KS ($r = .726$, $p < .001$), IB ($r = .717$, $p < .001$), and WP ($r = .763$, $p < .001$). These strong results show that people with higher Cultural Intelligence (CQ) – meaning they can understand, adapt to, and work well in different cultures – are more likely to see their workplace as inclusive, share knowledge, show creative actions, and perform better at work. This shows CQ is important not just for individual success but also for creating workplaces that support teamwork, new ideas, and good results.

Also, Perceived Inclusivity (PI) acts as a key link, showing strong connections to Knowledge Sharing (KS) ($r = .687$, $p < .001$) and Work Performance (WP) ($r = .665$, $p < .001$). These results mean that workers who feel included are more willing to share knowledge and ideas, which helps them perform better. Inclusiveness builds trust, respect, and teamwork, making knowledge sharing normal and valued. The strong link between KS and WP proves that open communication and sharing knowledge improve both efficiency and performance for individuals and teams.

The link between KS and Innovative Behavior (IB) ($r = .628$, $p < .001$) further shows how sharing knowledge drives innovation. When workers share knowledge freely, it helps solve problems creatively and create new ideas, which are needed for innovation. This also connects to WP ($r = .656$, $p < .001$), showing that knowledge sharing helps both creativity and job performance. In this way, KS connects inclusivity and innovation to better work results.

Lastly, IB has a strong link to WP ($r = .740$, $p < .001$), showing that innovation directly improves organizational success. Workers who innovate help teams become more efficient, effective, and competitive. This strong connection means companies should encourage innovation by letting workers try new ideas and take smart risks.

In total, these results show CQ affects WP in two ways: directly and through PI, KS, and IB. These factors work together: PI helps KS by creating inclusivity, KS drives IB by enabling teamwork and knowledge flow, and IB boosts WP by turning ideas into real results. Together, these connections explain how CQ and related behaviors lead to organizational success. This proves companies should focus on cultural adaptability, inclusivity, knowledge sharing, and innovation to improve performance.

Model assessment

Table8.Construct reliability and validity

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability (rho_a)	Composite Reliability (rho_c)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Culture Intelligence	0.935	0.936	0.946	0.687
Innovative Behavior	0.902	0.906	0.927	0.717
Knowledge Sharing	0.898	0.903	0.925	0.711
Perception of Inclusiveness	0.911	0.913	0.934	0.738
Work Performance	0.893	0.894	0.918	0.651

The analysis in Table 8 assesses the psychometric properties of the constructs Culture Intelligence, Innovative Behavior, Knowledge Sharing, Perception of Inclusiveness, and Work Performance. The results indicate exceptional reliability and validity across all variables:

Cronbach's Alpha values range from 0.893 to 0.935, all exceeding the 0.7 threshold (Hair et al., 2012), demonstrating strong internal consistency of the measurement scales.

Composite Reliability (rho_a) scores span 0.894 to 0.936, surpassing the 0.7 benchmark, which confirms high reliability and stability of the constructs.

Composite Reliability (rho_c) values fall between 0.918 and 0.946, further validating the model's robustness as these significantly exceed the 0.7 standard.

Average Variance Extracted (AVE) ranges from 0.651 to 0.738, with all values above the minimum requirement of 0.5. Notably, Perception of Inclusiveness achieves the highest AVE (0.738), indicating exceptional convergent validity. This suggests that the constructs effectively capture variance from their respective indicators.

In conclusion, the statistical metrics robustly support both reliability (through Cronbach's Alpha and composite reliability) and validity (via convergent validity) for all constructs. These results confirm that the measurement model is empirically sound and theoretically grounded, making it suitable for advanced analysis and hypothesis testing.

Table9.Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio (HTMT)

	CQ	IB	KS	PI	WP
CQ					
IB	0.782				
KS	0.797	0.702			
PI	0.798	0.703	0.761		
WP	0.836	0.825	0.734	0.738	

Table 9 demonstrates robust discriminant validity among the five constructs – Cultural Intelligence (CQ), Innovative Behavior (IB), Knowledge Sharing (KS), Perception of Inclusiveness (PI), and Work Performance (WP) – through Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) analysis. All HTMT ratios (0.702–0.836) strictly comply with Henseler et al.'s (2015) 0.85 threshold(Henseler, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2015), confirming distinct operationalization of theoretically separate constructs. While the CQ-WP ratio (0.836) approaches the upper limit, it remains within acceptable parameters, empirically verifying the measurable independence between cultural intelligence and work performance despite their conceptual association. Crucially, all pairwise comparisons systematically maintain sub-threshold values, providing statistical confirmation that the measurement model effectively discriminates between latent variables. This consistent pattern of results strengthens the theoretical framework by demonstrating minimal shared variance between constructs. The HTMT evidence conclusively establishes each construct's conceptual independence, ensuring the research model's structural validity through psychometrically distinct measurement.

Table10.Fornell-Larcker criterion

	CQ	IB	KS	PI	WP
CQ	0.829				
IB	0.723	0.847			
KS	0.737	0.639	0.843		
PI	0.739	0.642	0.694	0.859	
WP	0.764	0.744	0.661	0.667	0.807

The discriminant validity analysis presented in Table 10 systematically applies the Fornell-Larcker criterion by comparing the square roots of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) with inter-construct correlations. For Cultural

Intelligence (CQ), the AVE square root (0.829) substantially exceeds its correlations with other constructs: 0.723 (CQ-IB), 0.737 (CQ-KS), 0.739 (CQ-PI), and 0.764 (CQ-WP), all falling below the threshold, thereby confirming discriminant validity. Innovative Behavior (IB) demonstrates robust validity with an AVE square root of 0.847, surpassing its correlations ranging from 0.639 (IB-KS) to 0.744 (IB-WP), reinforcing construct distinctiveness. Notably, Knowledge Sharing (KS) achieves strong discriminant validity with an AVE root value of 0.843, consistently higher than its correlations (0.639–0.737) across all paired constructs. Perception of Inclusiveness (PI) exhibits the highest AVE square root (0.859), while its correlations (0.642–0.739) remain well below this benchmark, underscoring exceptional measurement robustness. Although Work Performance (WP) shows a relatively lower AVE root (0.807), all its correlations (0.661–0.764) remain strictly subordinate, meeting validity standards. Crucially, the systematic pattern across constructs—where AVE roots universally dominate inter-construct correlations—validates that each latent variable shares greater variance with its indicators than with other constructs. This alignment with the Fornell-Larcker criterion conclusively establishes strong discriminant validity for the measurement model, ensuring theoretical distinctness and empirical reliability(Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Tabble11. R-square

	R-square	R-square adjusted
IB	0.548	0.546
KS	0.592	0.59
PI	0.547	0.546
WP	0.64	0.632

The structural model demonstrated strong predictive accuracy in explaining the variance of key constructs:

Innovative Behavior (IB): Cultural intelligence and knowledge sharing collectively explain 54.8% of the variation in employees' innovative behaviors, supporting hypotheses H4 and H5.

Knowledge Sharing (KS): 59.2% of knowledge sharing dynamics are accounted for by cultural intelligence and perceived inclusivity, confirming hypotheses H2 and H3.

Perceived Inclusivity (PI): Cultural intelligence alone explains 54.7% of the variance in employees' inclusivity perceptions, validating hypothesis H1.

Work Performance (WP): The combined influence of perceived inclusivity, knowledge sharing, and innovative behavior accounts for 64% of performance differences, substantiating hypotheses H6, H7, and H8.

Adjusted R-squared values remain nearly identical to unadjusted estimates (ranging from 0.546 to 0.632), indicating model robustness against overfitting. Following established social science benchmarks, all explanatory power values exceed the 0.26 threshold for large effect sizes, confirming the substantive significance of these relationships.

This evidence positions cultural intelligence as a pivotal resource that cascades through inclusivity perceptions and knowledge exchange processes, ultimately driving both innovation and job performance outcomes.

Table 12. Path coefficients.

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (|O/STDEV|)	P values
CQ -> IB	0.552	0.553	0.042	13.167	0
CQ -> KS	0.494	0.495	0.04	12.27	0

CQ -> PI	0.739	0.74	0.018	41.631	0
IB -> WP	0.469	0.471	0.04	11.616	0
KS -> IB	0.233	0.232	0.05	4.662	0
KS -> WP	0.208	0.208	0.044	4.671	0
PI -> KS	0.329	0.328	0.046	7.205	0
PI -> WP	0.222	0.221	0.043	5.195	0

H1: Cultural Intelligence (CQ) has a positive relationship with Employees' Perception of Inclusiveness (PI).

Cultural Intelligence showed a significant positive effect on employees' perception of inclusiveness ($\beta = 0.739$, p-value < 0.001). The analysis confirms a strong direct relationship between CQ and PI. Thus, hypothesis 1 is supported.

H2: Cultural Intelligence (CQ) has a positive relationship with knowledge sharing (KS).

A significant positive effect of CQ on knowledge sharing was observed ($\beta = 0.494$, p-value < 0.001). This indicates that higher cultural intelligence enhances knowledge sharing in cross-cultural teams. Therefore, hypothesis 2 is supported.

H3: Employees' perception of inclusiveness (PI) positively influences knowledge sharing (KS).

Employees' perception of inclusiveness had a significant positive impact on knowledge sharing ($\beta = 0.329$, p-value < 0.001). These findings validate the mediating role of inclusiveness in fostering knowledge exchange. Hence, hypothesis 3 is supported.

H4: Cultural Intelligence (CQ) has a positive relationship with innovative behavior (IB).

CQ exhibited a significant positive effect on innovative behavior ($\beta = 0.552$, p-value < 0.001). This suggests that culturally intelligent employees are more likely to engage in innovation. Hypothesis 4 is supported.

H5: Knowledge sharing (KS) has a positive relationship with innovative behavior (IB).

Knowledge sharing significantly predicted innovative behavior ($\beta = 0.233$, p-value < 0.001). The results highlight the importance of knowledge exchange in driving innovation. Thus, hypothesis 5 is supported.

H6: Employees' perception of inclusiveness (PI) has a positive relationship with work performance (WP).

Perception of inclusiveness showed a significant positive effect on work performance ($\beta = 0.222$, p-value < 0.001). This underscores the direct contribution of inclusive environments to performance outcomes. Hypothesis 6 is supported.

H7: Knowledge sharing (KS) has a positive relationship with work performance (WP).

Knowledge sharing had a significant positive impact on work performance ($\beta = 0.208$, p-value < 0.001). The findings emphasize the role of collaborative knowledge transfer in enhancing team effectiveness. Therefore, hypothesis 7 is supported.

H8: Innovative behavior (IB) has a positive relationship with work performance (WP).

Innovative behavior significantly improved work performance ($\beta = 0.469$, p-value < 0.001). This confirms that innovation is a critical driver of performance in cross-cultural teams. Hence, hypothesis 8 is supported.

Table 13. Path coefficients

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (|O/STDEV|)	P values
CQ -> PI -> WP	0.164	0.164	0.033	5.043	0
CQ -> KS -> WP	0.103	0.103	0.025	4.172	0
CQ -> IB -> WP	0.259	0.26	0.032	8.133	0

2. Mediation Analysis: Core Indirect Pathways

CQ → PI → WP: Indirect Effect

Cultural Intelligence indirectly influenced work performance through employees' perception of inclusiveness (β = 0.164, p-value < 0.001). This indicates that fostering inclusiveness serves as a key mechanism linking CQ to enhanced performance.

CQ → KS → WP: Indirect Effect

A significant indirect effect of CQ on work performance via knowledge sharing was observed (β = 0.103, p-value < 0.001). This demonstrates that CQ enhances performance by promoting knowledge exchange among team members.

CQ → IB → WP: Indirect Effect

Cultural Intelligence also exerted an indirect effect on work performance through innovative behavior (β = 0.259, p-value < 0.001). The results highlight innovation as a vital pathway through which CQ contributes to organizational success.

DISCUSSION

This study systematically examines the intricate relationships among cultural intelligence (CQ), employees' perception of inclusiveness (PI), knowledge sharing (KS), innovative behavior (IB), and work performance (WP) within cross-cultural teams of multinational Chinese companies. The findings robustly support all proposed hypotheses (H1–H8), revealing that CQ serves as a pivotal driver of workplace dynamics, both directly and indirectly, through mediating pathways involving PI, KS, and IB. Specifically, culturally intelligent employees are more likely to foster inclusive environments, engage in knowledge exchange, and exhibit innovative behaviors, all of which collectively enhance individual and team performance.

Notably, the structural model demonstrated strong predictive power, with CQ explaining 54.7% of variance in PI, while the combined effects of CQ, PI, KS, and IB accounted for 64% of variance in WP. The mediation analysis further highlighted critical indirect pathways: CQ→PI→WP (β = 0.164), CQ→KS→WP (β = 0.103), and CQ→IB→WP (β = 0.259). These results underscore the cascading impact of cultural intelligence, where its influence permeates organizational processes to drive performance outcomes.

Importantly, the analysis of control variables (age, gender, marital status, English proficiency, and job position) revealed minimal contributions, with negligible R-squared values and path coefficients. This suggests that demographic and positional factors play a limited role in shaping performance outcomes compared to the central constructs of CQ, inclusiveness, knowledge sharing, and innovation.

Theoretical and practical implications are substantial. Organizations should prioritize cultivating cultural intelligence through targeted training programs, fostering inclusive climates that encourage collaboration, and implementing systems to facilitate knowledge exchange and innovation. Limitations include the focus on Chinese multinational firms, which may limit generalizability to other cultural contexts. Future research could explore these dynamics in diverse settings and investigate longitudinal effects of CQ development on sustained performance. Overall, this study provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how cultural adaptability and collaborative behaviors synergize to achieve organizational excellence in cross-cultural environments.

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