

# Effective Management of Multi-Cultural Construction Project Teams Issues and Strategies for Improving Team Performance

Sahan Nishok Purasinghe  
LIGS University  
Hawaii, USA

**Abstract:-** The seminar paper provides a pragmatic perspective of the topic of effective management of multi-cultural construction project teams. The paper provides a detailed collated review of issues pertaining to multi-cultural construction project teams and the strategies that can be adopted to overcome those issues thereby improving the performance of the team in its entirety based on the findings of previous research. The paper has been structured in a manner that includes a brief introduction into the topic, definition of the term “Culture”, definition of a “multi-cultural” project team, importance of multi-cultural construction project teams, issues of multi-cultural construction project teams and finally, strategies to overcome the issues from previous research as well as novel concepts and tools that have proven to work in the global project management arena. The author anticipates that the content provided in this seminar paper shall be beneficial for effective decision making by organizational leadership to establish high performing construction project teams that acknowledge and respect cultural diversity whilst utilizing the benefits of cultural heterogeneity and mitigating the detrimental impacts of the same.

**Keywords:-** Multi-Cultural Construction Project Teams, Cultural Diversity in Construction Project Teams, Cultural Issues in Construction Industry, High-Performing Multi-Cultural Project Teams.

## I. INTRODUCTION

It is understood that the ability of construction projects to play a vital role in establishing the necessary infrastructure which enables improvement of the global gross domestic product through direct and indirect employment creation proves the reliance of the global economy in the construction industry (Tariq & Gardezi, 2022). Its importance is so much that any delays or flaws within the sector could heavily impact the economic wellbeing of the world in its entirety, which justifies the claim of the sector being the backbone of all industries (Tariq & Gardezi, 2022). The ongoing need for quick delivery of construction projects, improving cost, quality and safety monitoring and controlling, alongside the technological advancements and environmental concerns have resulted in a surge of complexity in construction projects (Price & Ochieng, 2010).

It is important to investigate into the realm of workforce efficiency as it significantly influences the cost (approximately 30 to 50 percent of the entire project cost), schedule and overall productivity of the project (Kuoribo et al., 2022). According to Kuoribo et al. (2022) and Wu et al. (2019), productivity and performance have been identified as the two critical indicators by stakeholders that could ascertain the level of success of construction projects. Aspects pertaining to human resources involved in the project such as conflict management and stakeholder satisfaction too play a significant role aside the conventional time, cost, quality and risk parameters in determining the performance of projects (Wu et al., 2019).

According to data from United States of America, the workers who are involved in the construction industry accounts to nearly 8 percent of the entire workforce which manifests that construction is one of the largest industries as well as riskiest in United States due to its deterioration in terms of safety over the years (Ibarra-Mejía et al., 2021). According to Ibarra-Mejía et al. (2021), the construction sector is found to be the fastest in the realm of good-production and fourth-fastest overall. Construction project teams are often multi-cultural and is proved based on research carried out in United States of America, which states that nearly 25 percent of the workforce comprise of foreign-born employees out of which most of them are occupied in high-risk industries such as construction (Ibarra-Mejía et al., 2021). According to Kuoribo et al. (2022), many construction practitioners have shown an increased tendency to be employed abroad as a result of globalization of the industry. As per study done in UAE, it is found that over 90% of the private sector workforce is comprised of expatriates, which manifests how multi-cultural the project teams are based on increased globalization (Jaafar, 2020).

According to Ibarra-Mejía et al. (2021), the probability of experiencing a disabling injury in 90 percent for Hispanic workers between the 20 to 65 years of age compared to 75 percent for native workers from United States due to varying risk perception and comprehension, which states the importance of effectively managing multi-cultural construction project teams. It is also found that foreign-born Hispanic workers are the most vulnerable pertaining to occupational deaths accounting to over 74 percent of total deaths in the Hispanic construction sector (Ibarra-Mejía et al., 2021).

Considering the surge in globalization of the entire employment industry, culture has shown to be a critical component which influences the success of projects and organizations (Kuoribo et al., 2022). Especially with the increasing number of joint ventures that are being established across the world to leverage benefits of cultural diversification such as transfer of skills and practices, it has confirmed the vital relationship between culture and the success of construction projects which proves the importance of focussing more on issues pertaining to multi-cultural work settings and strategies to overcome those (Kuoribo et al., 2022). This is the reason as to why this study focusses on the issues and benefits of establishing multicultural teams and strategies to overcome those issues whilst maintaining the benefits thereby leveraging those to improve team performance.

## II. METHODOLOGY

The study has been completed in the form of a literature review and summary. The literature review has been performed using the keywords “Multi-Cultural Construction Project Teams”, “Cultural Diversity in Construction Project Teams”, “Cultural Issues in Construction Industry” by utilizing the google scholar search engine. A total of 14 journal articles have been utilized for the review as the findings seem to be repetitive towards the last set of journal articles which indicated the feasibility of terminating the literature survey. The findings from the review have then been perused and classified into broader topics “Definition of Culture”, “Multi-Cultural Project Teams”, “Importance of Multi-Cultural Construction Project Teams”, “Issues of Multi-Cultural Construction Project Teams”, & finally, “Strategies to Overcome the Issues” which that could be adopted to enhance the performance in construction project management teams. The recommendations have then been verified for relevance and applicability with the assistance of 5 selected industry practitioners who possess at least 10 years of Construction Project Management experience.

## III. DISCUSSION

### A. Definition of Culture

Culture is a response that is established by a cohort of individuals who crave for solutions to a common range of problems which influences the values, perception, and behaviour of individuals (Price & Ochieng, 2010). Individuals who reside outside of their native country tend to get influenced by the culture of the residing country over the years, which could result in a distortion of the alignment of their perception with the native culture (Jones et al., 2020). These cultural differences often give rise to conflicts that could be both constructive as well destructive for the performance of the project (Wu et al., 2019). According to Wu et al. (2019), cultural diversity of the team has the potential to bring about task and relationship conflicts thereby posing positive as well as negative effects on the performance. It is also found that managing cultural diversity is easier in industrialized countries to adoption of value-oriented work approach and definition of detailed work procedures (Dulaimi & Hariz, 2011).

The functionality of the human mind based on unique beliefs that result in differentiating cohorts of human beings from each other is known as the culture (Kuoribo et al., 2022). Further, culture has also shown close association with the industry practices, procedures, skills of employees, and organizational policies (Kuoribo et al., 2022). According to Ibarra-Mejía et al. (2021), the myths that derive from the culture that have been accepted by their native society tend to shape the perception of employees and their interpretation of various phenomena. Accordingly, it could be argued that pre-conceived beliefs of people influence their interpretation of various elements of projects, such as the risk perception and it is not confined to an individual but shared within a wider community of similar cultural affiliations (Ibarra-Mejía et al., 2021).

Power Distance which defines the degree of belief of hierarchy within a society, Individualism which defines the individualistic/collective nature of the society, Uncertainty Avoidance which defines the tolerance for ambiguity inclusive of risk taking, Masculinity which defines the nature of approach for situations, Long Term Orientation which defines the focus/sight of the society and Indulgence which defines the degree of freedom considered as accepted within the society are the culture dimensions that have been defined by Hofstede (Jaafar, 2020; Jones et al., 2020).

Based on the GLOBE study done in 62 societies, it is found that Western Countries seem to score high in terms of Individualism and less in terms of power distance. Whereas Eastern countries seem to score less in terms of individualism and high in terms of power distance, which manifests the degree of variability across cultures hailing from different parts of the world (Jaafar, 2020).

According to Dulaimi and Hariz (2011), cultural diversity could be classified as basic and secondary dimensions of which basic dimension comprises of racial, ethnicity and gender differences as well as physical capability and level of cognition that has been received by birth or acquired during their lifetime. Whereas secondary dimensions focus on the characteristics/qualities that have been developed by the individual over their lifetime (Dulaimi & Hariz, 2011).

According to Slap and Stureson (2024), organizational or team culture can be considered as an independent organization with the sole purpose of shielding itself from change which has a potential to result in challenging the degree of autonomy, nature of work, and the existing workload of the employees. Team/Organizational culture tend to prioritize its wellbeing over any monetary benefit and perks which is the reason as to why change does not become successful if it contradicts the culture that is usually formed based on actual values of the organization (Slap & Stureson, 2024). Further, culture is also the way employees react to their environment, hence, if the team culture is inferior then work environment too is the same (Slap & Stureson, 2024).

According to Kissi et al. (2022), the rapid evolution of the global market and prevalence of significant number of multicultural teams have shown the importance of the awareness of cultural diversity alongside the technical know-how (Kissi et al., 2022). Due to the influence the culture has on inter-personal collaboration within teams, cultural awareness is found to be a key trait that should be satisfied for global teamwork (Kuoribo et al., 2022).

### *B. Multi-Cultural Project Teams*

A cohort of individuals that comprises of members from diverse cultures, specifically from two or more distinct cultures that work towards a common goal is identified as a multicultural team (Dulaimi & Hariz, 2011; Kissi et al., 2022). According to Price and Ochieng (2010), culture is the set of beliefs and values based on which a cohort (a group of individuals) is formed. Hence, a multi-cultural organization is an organization that comprises of multiple groups of individuals with varying beliefs which refers to their perception of how things are done and values which refers to how things should be done based on their dominant cultural influence (Price & Ochieng, 2010). According to Kuoribo et al. (2022), a workforce that comprises of varying ages, genders, ethnic and racial backgrounds, capabilities, and diverse employment locations are often considered as a multicultural workforce.

Further, a construction project which accommodates diverse opinions of stakeholders pertaining to work practices and norms either in terms of technical or behavioral aspects is also identified as a multi-cultural project (Price & Ochieng, 2010).

According to Dulaimi and Hariz (2011), nearly half of differences in attitudes, perceptions and values of project managers are found to be influenced by their native national culture. Construction Projects are often popular to possess heterogeneous teams with diverse cultural backgrounds which leads to two distinct dimensions namely, knowledge and value diversity (Wu et al., 2019). The degree of diversity within projects teams based on their experience, professional background, qualifications and resolution approaches is known as knowledge diversity whereas the degree of diversity in prioritizing the objectives of the project, welfare of team members and the perception towards sharing a common goal is known as value diversity (Wu et al., 2019). Value diversity is found to be crucial within project teams that require addressing issues in a non-constrained space that is not governed contractually or influenced by industry accepted best practices (Wu et al., 2019).

### *C. Importance of Multi-Cultural Construction Project Teams*

Although most of the studies that had been conducted around organizational diversity focusses on issues and barriers, there has also been a considerable amount of literature that has emphasized on the benefits of cultural diversity namely, increase in creativity, efficient and product or process quality (Kissi et al., 2022).

It is found that culturally diverse teams tend to ideate above-par ideas and concepts due to varied perspectives that hail from their cultural exposure, practices and varied methods of decision making, which assists in increasing the pace at which issues are being addressed thereby resulting in an enhancement of the productivity of the project team compared to that of homogenous teams (Kissi et al., 2022). Further, multicultural teams have shown less avoidance of uncertainty hence, more flexible and backs innovative approaches which increase the innovativeness of the organization (Kissi et al., 2022).

Multi-cultural teams have also shown to establish avenues for personal as well as professional growth thereby enabling effective and efficient decision making and have also shown to increase the profitability of projects compared to homogenous teams (Kissi et al., 2022). Further, guidelines that are developed around governance of multi-cultural project teams are often found to be relatively less complex and have simpler common goals and objectives which results in diminishing interpersonal disputes compared to that of monocultural teams (Kissi et al., 2022). Based on a study that has been conducted pertaining to multicultural project team settings, Kissi et al. (2022) has found that the ability to possess varying styles of decision-making and issue resolution alongside opportunities for skilling up have proven to be the most beneficial aspects pertaining to prevalence of cultural diversity within teams. According to Dulaimi and Hariz (2011), multi-cultural project teams, if led adequately, have shown the potential to outclass its homogenous counterparts by at least 15% in terms of project performance. This is prominent within service-oriented firms compared to product-oriented firms; hence, it is very much applicable to construction projects (Dulaimi & Hariz, 2011).

Culture is a crucial aspect that influences employee engagement, ethical decision making, and the efficiency of dissemination of information interpersonally which could collectively determine the degree of success of a project (Kuoribo et al., 2022).

According to Konara and Mohr (2023), cultural distance that is found within multi-cultural project teams and organizations act a vital factor which determines the performance of organizations, especially within International Joint Ventures. Although cultural distance is usually considered as a liability for effective functioning of organizations, Multi National Enterprises often consider this as an asset due to the versatility it brings to the practices that could assist immensely when functioning in different markets as it provides a competitive advantage to comprehend various perceptions and behaviours of the multi-cultural workforce thereby increasing talent acquisition, retention and increasing overall performance (Konara & Mohr, 2023).

Further, according to Jones et al. (2020), based on his study targeting 500 corporate executives, has argued that diversity of culture within project teams and organizations is positively associated with the openness for innovation as varied viewpoints which stem from diverse cultures tend to ascertain and address issues in dissimilar ways. It has also

been argued that multi-cultural teams possess a higher tolerance of risk compared to homogenous teams (Jones et al., 2020). This cross-cultural competence within culturally diverse project teams also adds value when dealing with external stakeholders due to the ability to relate to the requirements of customers and suppliers that could stem from diverse cultural backgrounds (Jones et al., 2020). According to Jaafar (2020), it is argued that an increase in power distance results in effective use of available resources. However, this could contradict with the perception of individuals hailing from western countries. Hence, this proves how important multi-cultural teams are for projects as diversity could help identify blind spots of the two distinct approaches that could have been missed if the team was mono cultural.

#### *D. Issues of Multicultural Construction Project Teams*

Leading construction project teams that comprise of team members from diverse cultural backgrounds are known to be arduous due and has shown to pose impacts on project performance and subsequently the overall outcome of the project. According to the study performed by Adi and Musbah (2017), there has been a dip of approximately 54 percent in project performance in multi-cultural project teams due to cultural differences.

Although there's a preference to acquire culturally diverse talent for construction projects, it is argued that this cultural diversity within Project Managers have found to be troublesome as the cultural barriers especially around varying values of team members, tend to affect coordination and the degree of influence they could have on the subordinates thereby constraining the level of performance they could offer (Price & Ochieng, 2010; Kuoribo et al., 2022). According to Kuoribo et al. (2022), firms that manage multi-cultural teams often face 3 challenges namely, working towards a common goal, optimization of inputs from each member, and ensuring equality of opportunity and treatment.

Cultural diversity within project teams lead to bearing of varying perceptions by team members pertaining to the purpose of the endeavor, decision-making approach, resolution of conflicts, enhancement of interpersonal engagement and planning of tasks (Kuoribo et al., 2022).

The tendency of people to utilize societal classifications based on various ethnic groups to comprehend the differences between work approaches, impact integration within the team which is also further proven that not only individuals themselves, but also large scale construction companies based in Great Britain but functioning abroad has a tendency to respond to issues based on the ethnical classification of the employees there by impacting equality and equity within the organization that has a potential to transition into more complexities (Kissi et al., 2022; Kuoribo et al., 2022).

Safety within construction projects is also a crucial aspect that is affected greatly by cultural diversity which even has a potential to result in a failed safety culture that could terminate a project (Adi, & Musbah, 2017). This is significant within projects that encompass construction

workers from Latin American countries and this cultural barrier is accentuated due to a number of factors namely, lack of education or training, lack of exposure to the usage of safety equipment as it may have not been actively practiced in their native societies, linguistic barriers, negligence of safe work procedures, and also the desperate need of employment as securing a job itself could be considered as a luxury within their community (Ibarra-Mejía et al., 2021).

Further, multicultural teams often possess intricate communication channels and dynamics within the team which often leads to misinterpretation of information that could lead to misunderstandings and disputes (Kuoribo et al., 2022). This is primarily as team members hailing from the same region or speak the same language may bear a different interpretation which may have originated from one person who has not comprehended properly. Since the success of construction projects depend on the ability of workers to interpret the instruction provided in terms of drawings, log etc. that are often provided in English, linguistic shortfalls within foreign construction workers have the tendency to impact the quality of the process and the final product (Kuoribo et al., 2022).

According to Kuoribo et al. (2022), inadequate cultural awareness within the team leads to substandard leadership practices which results in interpersonal conflicts within team members that impact teamwork thereby causing a ripple effect pertaining to productivity, delays, non-conformity and eventually, project failure. Inadequate comprehension of varying norms, values and beliefs of team members who hail from various cultural backgrounds, and inability to accept interpersonal differences have led organizations especially multi-national firms, to expend hefty amounts of funds and lags in adapting to different cultural environments (Konara & Mohr, 2023).

According to Adi, and Musbah (2017), cultural differences within the project team have found to disrupt the transfer of knowledge within construction projects which has led to an increase in the amount of rework thereby decreasing the efficiency of the project. Various cultural barriers, predominantly surrounding the language, perception and attitude have led to a decrease in sharing of knowledge among team members which has been detrimental for the knowledge asset of the firm (Adi, & Musbah, 2017). Project teams of cultural diversity in multinational entities have often shown issues pertaining to knowledge sharing due to lack of fluency in the overarching customs and traditions of the organization (Adi, & Musbah, 2017). Differences in culture have also negatively associated with trust, openness to innovation and acquisition of new skills and knowledge (Adi, & Musbah, 2017).

Further, according to Price and Ochieng (2010), it is found that migrant workers are usually governed by terms and conditions that deviate from that of native workers thereby impacting the common ground of the organization.



It is found that in UAE, organizations often experience lapses in communication due to cultural differences which leads to conflicts thereby failing to satisfy customer requirements (Dulaimi & Hariz, 2011). Although multicultural teams have shown significant benefits in terms of the potential competitive advantage there is also a significant increase in dissatisfaction of team members and loss of purpose thereby impacting the inherent drive of workers (Dulaimi & Hariz, 2011).

Culturally diverse teams have also shown an increase in mistrust within the team and is often hard to develop trust as the members tend to align together based on their cultural and national similarities which subsequently results in substandard cohesion and increase in conflicts within the team ((Dulaimi & Hariz, 2011; Jones et al., 2020). Further, according to Dulaimi and Hariz (2011), adoption of one's own culture as a reference to evaluate the performance of another individual or a validity of a decision is considered undermining and shall provide inaccurate results.

Construction projects teams often experience 3 types of conflicts backed by cultural differences namely, task related due to contradictory viewpoints about the content of the task, relationship related due to incompatibilities in between the team members and process related due to disagreements with the approach that has been used to determine the course of action that is required to fulfill an endeavour (Wu et al., 2019). Diversity of values due to cultural differences has been found to influence the eruption of above-mentioned conflicts (Wu et al., 2019).

According to Sarwar et al. (2020), issues pertaining to ethical conduct and corruption are often witnessed in collectivistic cultures with a greater power distance which could alter the perception and behaviour of employees to accept deceptiveness, non-accountability, and ill-treatment by superiors as an acceptable norm thereby potentially giving rise to a conflict of conduct with team members hailing from cultures with low power distance. Based on the study done by Hofstede, it is found that employees from collectivist culture tend to carry a risk of losing their work identity and becoming alienated (Jaafar, 2020). Further, according to Jaafar (2020), organizations from cultures with high power distance tend to possess a negative viewpoint towards change and shall also establish voids within the communication channel in between the project team and the management which could result in masking the reality of the project performance. Organizations from high uncertainty avoidance cultures tend to focus more on the contingency than taking measures to improve effectiveness and efficiency of actions which in turn could also waive the possibilities of winning projects especially in the global context (Jaafar, 2020). Organizations backed by short term-oriented cultures have shown to increase non-conformities and non-adherence to the timeline thereby impacting the success of the project in its entirety (Jaafar, 2020).

Although many organizations have taken measures to offer formal training courses to mitigate the detrimental impacts, it has not been that fruitful as certain workers tend

to portray hesitancy to renounce the concepts they have absorbed from their cultural backgrounds which proves that if these issues are not addressed attentively achievement of success in projects could be significantly difficult within multi-cultural project teams (Choudhry & Zafar, 2017; Yu et al., 2021).

#### *E. Strategies to mitigate issues and improve the team performance*

The nature of the work environment regardless of the composition of the project team plays a significant role in establishing an atmosphere that is conducive to self-development of the team members (Kissi et al., 2022). It is found that there is an increasing trend of establishing culturally diverse teams due to the benefits it brings to the project management and implementation approach and the competitive advantage it provides to accomplish organizational strategic objectives. Hence, it is vital to ascertain the strategies to mitigate the issues whilst ensuring prevalence of the benefits thereby improving project's overall performance.

According to Kissi et al. (2022), the performance of multicultural project teams has shown significant enhancements through establishment trust that is given rise through mutual comprehension of requirements among the team members. Trust that is established through increased sharing of information and cultural awareness has enabled team members to determine the differences and similarities among each other thereby enhancing teamwork which results in a surge in productivity levels (Kuoribo et al., 2022). According to Adi, and Musbah (2017), trust also plays a pivotal role in eliminating the lapses that could surface during knowledge transfer between members of a multi-cultural project team. According to the study performed by Yu et al. (2021) targeting 117 project management professionals, interaction, transparency among the team members, and empathy within the team members have posed significant influence in establishing trust thereby improving intercultural communication within construction project teams. Teams with cultural diversity often considers trust a key component for engagement as it plays a crucial role in eliminating any uncertainties and misunderstandings in between team members which in return benefits financially as lesser cost is required to be incurred for conflict resolution and mediation (Yu et al., 2021). Psychological safety, support from higher management, accountability and empathy are found to be antecedents of trust which assists in overcoming personal biases influenced by cultural exposure there by improving knowledge transfer and interpersonal communication within the project team (Yu et al., 2021). Effective communication with minimum cultural biases has proven to be tightly associated with project success (Yu et al., 2021). Hence, establishment of an organizational culture that acknowledges and respects cultural diversity, definition of a communication style that is accepted collectively by team members and clear dissemination, regular training sessions and activities to improve emotional intelligence of all team members, and unblemished transparency when communicating responsibilities, rewards distribution and policies by Project Managers of construction projects and the

organizational leadership is critical to establish trust and improve performance within construction project teams (Yu et al., 2021).

Based on the study performed targeting project management teams in United Arab Emirates, cultural ratings from employees that are residing in a different country a deviation from that of employees residing in the native countries which could potentially be due to adaptation to the working/residing country (Jaafar, 2020). Team members from diverse cultures and states of origin has shown differences in the extent of understanding of the job requirements and responsibilities based on the duration they have resided in the host country which suggests the strategy of recruiting employees that have been in the host country for a significant period (Ibarra-Mejía et al., 2021).

International Joint Ventures that operate in foreign countries deal with cultural difference in between home and host nations and often adopt the cultural bridging approach by partnering up with a third-party firm from a country that possesses a lesser cultural difference and increased similarity with the host country (foreign environment) (Konara & Mohr, 2023). Although the cultural distance between home and host country could affect resource, capability and skills sharing it also could affect positively through diverse repertoire of skillsets and enhanced opportunities with wider access to the global economy (Konara & Mohr, 2023). The greater the cultural difference between home and partner countries, higher the potential of capabilities of the partner is, which enables strengthening of positive effects of the cultural differences whilst diminishing the detrimental effects (Konara & Mohr, 2023).

According to Price and Ochieng (2010), multinational construction firms either use a defensive approach that does not acknowledge the issues that arise due to cultural differences within the organization, complaints and feedback seeking that act as a reactive approach or a proactive approach that prevents surfacing of issues through establishment of inclusivity when dealing with the cultural diversity related issues within the organization.

According to the study done based on 31 construction firms from Kenya and United Kingdom, effective and transparent communication, smooth and efficient handover proceedings, improved teamwork, effective resolution of issues, collective decision making, effective recruitment and prioritization of work activities have found to be the key areas that should be addressed in order to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of multi-cultural construction project teams (Price & Ochieng, 2010). Further, the study has also stressed the importance of clarity and firmness during issue resolution and dissemination of decisions and requirements in a way that is clearly comprehended by all team members in order enhance the overall performance of the project team (Price & Ochieng, 2010). Further, Price and Ochieng (2010) have also found that proper selection of team members is the most importance factor for creating a high-performing multi-cultural construction project team, hence, should adopt a selection procedure with well-defined criteria

that aligns with the requirements of the role to ensure compatibility of the team members with the assigned project task.

Structured formal training pertaining to development of skills and capabilities to increase the level of cultural intelligence among the team members has found to result in enhancements surrounding interpersonal relationships, elimination of misunderstandings and communication shortfalls within the team thereby establishing an environment that enables employees to socialize with new colleagues from diverse cultures which could lead to inclusivity (Jones et al., 2020). According to Jones et al. (2020), western cultures show a greater preference for low context and direct communication compared to the eastern cultures that tend to prefer high-context and indirect communication which depicts the necessity of identifying the preferred communication style of the team members based on the cultural diversity of the team.

Adoption of CQS cultural intelligence framework for evaluation of candidates during recruitment and selection of employees for various project related roles has been useful due to its multi criterion consideration approach based on the aspects of motivation, cognition, strategy and action (Jones et al., 2020). The conflict mode instrument that has been developed to assist employees to identify their natural style among compete, accommodate, avoid, collaborate and compromise thereby enabling comprehension of the reasoning behind the responses and to obtain training to make use of a different style if it seems more appropriate based on the circumstances (Jones et al., 2020).

According to Dulaimi and Hariz (2011) the impacts of national culture on team members can be mitigated through an organizational culture that establishes a physically and psychologically safe place for employees to perform their activities and voice their concerns. Symptoms of a toxic project leadership is when the project manager/leadership functions on the basis that they should be served by the employees they lead which could result in division among employees based on their national and organizational cultural exposure (Slap & Stureson, 2024). Based on the study done by Dulaimi and Hariz (2011) on a large-scale construction contractor in Dubai, it manifests that performance of project teams led by project managers who are employee oriented has not changed with the cultural diversity index of the team as they have shown more concern about the wellbeing of employees. Comprehending the values of each individual at its inception is vital when assigning employees to leadership roles due to the emotional commitment that is required to lead a project team towards success, and this could be strengthened by being able to live true to their own personal values (Slap & Stureson, 2024).

Although conflicts are identified as detrimental to the performance of project teams, lesser amounts of task conflict are found to be beneficial as these welcome new ways to perform the task especially when its unconventional or complex, improve communication and enhances the

interpersonal relationship in between the team members (Wu et al., 2019).

Further, according to Wu et al. (2019), construction project teams tend to lean towards either of collectivism or individualism based on the composition of the project team. When there is homogeneity in the team there is a higher change of leaning on the extremes of either which shall not

be beneficial for the project if extremely individualistic, or individual members itself if extremely collectivist. Hence, ensuring cultural diversity in the project team alongside skills diversity whilst adopting measures to control the potential process and relationship related conflicts within the team, is an acceptable strategy to strike a balance between the two extreme ends, so that it benefits the project as well as the team members (Wu et al., 2019).

**Table 1 Cultural Strategies for Team Performance Improvement**

Strategy		Source
1.	The business/project should clearly define what it stands for and prove it by action by bringing in changes gradually instead of an entire overhaul.	(Slap & Sturesson, 2024)
2.	Use surveys with provocative open-ended questions to obtain insights into organizational culture instead of adopting the traditional employee engagement surveys.	
3.	Ensure that change initiatives align with the values of the organization and team members.	
4.	Practice/process changes can be taught whereas behavioral changes should be convinced; hence, an environment that empowers individuals and shows results could increase the level of adoption of change measures.	
5.	Encouraging vulnerability from leaders and establishment of an environment that is conducive to fail fast and learn fast.	(Almlöf & Sturesson, 2024)
6.	Assignment of individuals whose personal values align with the organizational values as leaders and provide cross functional/cultural learning.	
7.	Schedule one-on-ones with the team to get to know them personally and provide emotional support.	(Rogelberg & Sturesson, 2023)
8.	Encourage the employees to list their plan against all the aspects that could be impacted and then during the meeting give suggestions about project manager/leadership findings, so that the meeting becomes collaborative instead of instructional.	
9.	Provide constant feedback and follow up on feedback routinely instead of the conventional performance appraisal method that often fails since it is a single event based on past data and not a process of continuous improvement.	
10.	Commence meetings with some reflection; this improves openness and makes the environment conducive for sharing ideas/thoughts.	(Moosmayer & Sturesson, 2024)
11.	Collaboratively develop the code of ethics for the organization and avoid siloed governance.	
12.	Determine what the personal values of each individual employee are; then ensure that those values prevail on a day-to-day basis.	(Lesandrini & Sturesson, 2024)
13.	Adopt an approach where if a project leader finds any dilemma, share it with an ethical friend (a person who does not agree but asks questions); share what is felt, so that the ethical friend can ask questions to help identify the blind spots that might prevent the decision from being misaligned with the values.	
14.	Never consider team members as tools and that they should serve the project leadership; instead become a facilitator to provide the required support for them to perform.	(Bakalov & Sturesson, 2024)

According to Sarwar et al. (2020), individualism has shown a negative association with ethical behaviour compared to that of collectivism which shows a positive association. Based on a study performed on the hospitality industry employees of Italy and Pakistan, it is found that Italy has scored a high score in terms of individualism compared to that of Pakistan which, however, does not imply that Pakistan possesses a greater degree of ethical leadership (Sarwar et al., 2020).

Ethical leadership which establishes a relationship with subordinates based on ingenuity has been found to increase employee motivation and increased dedication towards the role which has increased project success significantly (Sarwar et al., 2020). Hence, leaders should value ethics and sustain ethical behaviour as this directly influences the attitude of the subordinates especially if they hail from a

country that is centred on collectivist social norms and values (Sarwar et al., 2020). Further, supporting propagation of ethical behaviour within the team through respect and recognition too shall ensure inclusivity and assist in mitigating any issues pertaining to cultural differences within the project team (Sarwar et al., 2020).

Western Countries like Australia and USA have shown tendency to motivate their employees by aligning their personal values with the objectives of the project. Whereas Eastern Countries have adopted the approach to motivate their employees by aligning the culture with the project's objectives. This could be the very reason as to why it is convenient to bring forth change in Western countries than in Eastern countries as the employees of Western countries can be influenced easily individually whereas Eastern countries should be influenced collectively. Further, since the Power

Distance and Long-Term orientation in Western countries are less, the carrot and stick methods (extrinsic motivation) may not work compared to Eastern countries, hence, intrinsic motivation plays a major role in motivating employees in Western countries or hailing from Westernized cultures (Jaafar, 2020).

According to Jaafar (2020), provision of adequate authority to Project Leadership has increased the efficiency of the project team through enhanced control measures over budget and resources. This could be beneficial especially when dealing with a team of cultural diversity as it diminishes the eruption of any agendas within cohorts of similar culture within the team that could harm realization of the objectives of the project. Further, establishing a long-term focused problem-solving approach and advocating best-for-project ideation too have shown greater success at completing projects within budget (Jaafar, 2020). Establishment of an organizational culture that is conducive for risk taking too has shown an increase in project success as this eliminates uncertainty avoidance that could lead to inefficiencies in the long run due to sole reliance on the contingency (Jaafar, 2020). Hence, it is paramount that adequate project controls backed by considerable awareness of cultural differences within the team are in place through routine cultural training programs to manage individual cultural biases and prioritize approaches that are best for the project (Jaafar, 2020).

In addition to the above, Table 1 enlists some of the strategies that have been proven to provide results in terms of team performance improvement in the global project management arena through elimination of cultural biases of team members.

According to Kuoribo et al. (2022), the strategies that are developed to counteract the detrimental effects imposed by the drawbacks of cultural diversity within project teams should be evaluated monthly to ensure validity with ever changing circumstances.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this research aimed to analyze issues and benefits of establishing multicultural teams and strategies to overcome those issues whilst maintaining the benefits thereby leveraging those to improve construction project team performance. Through a comprehensive analysis of past research studies, it is found that there are several benefits as well as shortfalls in terms of team performance pertaining to prevalence of cultural diversity.

The implications of these findings are significant for higher management, project leadership, practitioners, and future researchers. Specifically, the cultural strategies that can be utilized to improve team performance. Moreover, this study highlights the need for further research pertaining to the effectiveness of suggested strategies in terms of location and the type of role in the construction industry.

Overall, this research contributes to the growing body of knowledge on multi-cultural construction project teams and provides a foundation for future work aimed at mitigating the shortfalls of cultural diversity whilst utilizing its strengths to improve overall performance of construction projects.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The Author would like to acknowledge LIGS University for supporting with adequate direction to complete this research work.

#### REFERENCES

- [1]. Adi, & Musbah, A. (2017). The cultural differences influence on knowledge sharing activities in construction project collaboration. *IPTEK Journal of Proceedings Series*, 3(1), 85–89.
- [2]. Almlöf, A., & Stureson, T. (2024, February 16). Develop Leaders to Transform Your Culture (No. 84) [Apple Podcast]. *Leading Transformation Change By Heart Management*. <https://podcasts.apple.com/in/podcast/084-develop-leaders-to-transform-your-culture/id1504162092?i=1000645383248>
- [3]. Bakalov, G., & Stureson, T. (2024, April 25). Managing Ethics Amid War's Extreme Pressures – Lessons from Ukraine (No. 89) [Apple Podcast]. *Leading Transformation Change By Heart Management*. <https://podcasts.apple.com/in/podcast/089-gleb-bakalov-managing-ethics-amid-wars-extreme/id1504162092?i=1000653508722>
- [4]. Choudhry, R. M., & Zafar, B. (2017). Effects of skills, motivation, and personality traits on the competency of masons. *International Journal of Sustainable Real Estate and Construction Economics*, 1(1), 16. <https://doi.org/10.1504/ijisre.2017.10005277>
- [5]. Dulaimi, M., & Hariz, A. (2011). The impact of cultural diversity on the effectiveness of construction project teams. *Engineering Project Organization Journal*, 1(4), 213–221. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21573727.2011.621419>
- [6]. Ibarra-Mejía, G., Gómez-Bull, K. G., & Vargas-Salgado, M. M. (2021). Differences in Workplace Risk Perception between Foreign-Born and First-Generation Mexican American Construction Workers. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18(11), 5652. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18115652>
- [7]. Jaafar, K. (2020). The Impact of Culture Diversification on Project Processes. Evidence from Dubai -UAE. *Journal of Modern Project Management*, 8(1). <https://doi.org/10.19255/JMPM02309>
- [8]. Jones, G., Chirino Chace, B., & Wright, J. (2020). Cultural diversity drives innovation: empowering teams for success. *International Journal of Innovation Science*, 12(3), 323–343. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ijis-04-2020-0042>



- [9]. Kissi, E., BabonAyeng, P., & Agyekum, A. K. (2022). Benefits of multicultural project team setting: views of professionals in the Ghanaian construction industry. *EPiC Series in Built Environment*, 3, 110–120.
- [10]. Konara, P., & Mohr, A. (2023). Cultural bridging and the performance of international joint ventures. *International Business Review*, 32(4), 102109. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ibusrev.2023.102109>
- [11]. Kuoribo, E., Amoah, P., Kissi, E., Edwards, D. J., Gyampo, J. A., & Thwala, W. D. (2022). Analysing the effect of multicultural workforce/teams on construction productivity. *Journal of Engineering, Design and Technology*, 22(3), 969–990. <https://doi.org/10.1108/jedt-11-2021-0636>
- [12]. Lesandrini, J., & Stureson, T. (2024, May 28). Empowering Ethical Decision-Making When Stakes Are High (No. 91) [Apple Podcast]. Leading Transformation Change By Heart Management. <https://podcasts.apple.com/in/podcast/091-jason-lesandrini-empowering-ethical-decision-making/id1504162092?i=1000656592314>
- [13]. Moosmayer, K., & Stureson, T. (2024, April 11). Cultivating Trust and Ethical Leadership at a Global Pharmaceutical Company (No. 88) [Apple Podcast]. Leading Transformation Change By Heart Management. <https://podcasts.apple.com/in/podcast/088-klaus-moosmayer-cultivating-trust-and-ethical/id1504162092?i=1000652075946>
- [14]. Price, A., & Ochieng, E. G. (2010). Factors influencing effective performance of multicultural construction project teams. *Procs 26th Annual ARCOM Conference*, 2010, 1159–1167.
- [15]. Rogelberg, S., & Stureson, T. (2023, December 14). Why One-on-One Meetings Are Vital to Cultural Health and How to Make Them Better (No. 83) [Apple Podcast]. Leading Transformation Change By Heart Management. <https://podcasts.apple.com/in/podcast/083-steven-rogelberg-why-one-on-one-meetings-are-vital/id1504162092?i=1000638500381>
- [16]. Sarwar, H., Ishaq, M. I., Amin, A., & Ahmed, R. (2020). Ethical leadership, work engagement, employees' well-being, and performance: a cross-cultural comparison. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 28(12), 2008–2026. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2020.1788039>
- [17]. Slap, S., & Stureson, T. (2024, March 24). Getting Cultural Commitment for Critical Change Initiatives (No. 87) [Apple Podcast]. Leading Transformation Change By Heart Management. <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/087-stan-slap-getting-cultural-commitment-for-critical/id1504162092?i=1000650671303>
- [18]. Tariq, J., & Gardezi, S. S. S. (2022). Study the delays and conflicts for construction projects and their mutual relationship: A review. *Ain Shams Engineering Journal*, 14(1), 101815. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.asej.2022.101815>
- [19]. Wu, G., Zhao, X., Zuo, J., & Zillante, G. (2019). Effects of team diversity on project performance in construction projects. *Engineering, Construction and Architectural Management*, 26(3), 408–423.
- [20]. Yu, W., Cormican, K., Wu, Q., & Sampaio, S. (2021). In whom do we trust? Critical success factors impacting intercultural communication in multicultural project teams. *International Journal of Information Systems and Project Management*, 9(3), 21–40. <https://doi.org/10.12821/ijispm090302>