

# Challenges and Opportunities in Managing and Collaborating with Multicultural Virtual Teams in the Entertainment Industry

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## ABSTRACT

With the rise of globalized business practices, companies have expanded internationally, leading to a rise of intercultural workplace collaboration. Multicultural individuals present high levels of divergent thinking, flexibility and adaptability. Nevertheless, there are challenges rooted in cultural differences and virtual collaboration such as team cohesion, role ambiguity and synergy impacting team effectiveness and overall performance. Unlike technical sectors, the entertainment industry is driven by creativity. It requires a team to think and collaborate strategically, be flexible and highly adaptable to the environment forces. There is a need to address this area of virtual multiculturalism, considering the impact of a company's culture and overarching factors on daily communication, team dynamics and leadership styles for cross-cultural virtual team performance.

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## Keywords

Multicultural teams, Virtual collaboration, Challenges multicultural virtual teams, Leadership styles, Entertainment industry, Creativity, Opportunities Multicultural virtual teams

During the preparation of this work, the author used Open AI. ChatGPT, to refine the bachelor thesis by checking grammar and spelling and as idea generation for literature review but not to create the thesis. After using this tool/service, the author reviewed and edited the content as needed and takes full responsibility for the content of the work.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

With the rise of globalized business practices, companies expanded to other countries, leading to the rise of intercultural workplace collaboration.

Multicultural virtual teams provide organizational opportunities for creativity and international insight. Culturally diverse individuals may lead to a higher cognitive complexity (Tadmor et al., 2009), sociocultural adjustment (Ngyuen & Benet-Martinez, 2013), intercultural skills (Fitzsimmons et al., 2016) and enhance creative thinking practices (Backmann et al., 2020). Nevertheless, some challenges in these structures are reported regarding communication barriers, team cohesion, intercultural competence and leadership skills (Alkoud, et al., 2023). This bachelor thesis focuses on the challenges and opportunities to effectively manage and collaborate in the multicultural virtual environment. It will closely look at their effect in the Entertainment Industry, given that cultural diversity is a success factor in the creative sectors (Reed, 2020) effective management of virtual collaboration will leverage the positive impact of multicultural teams. Moreover, this thesis will highlight critical factors for a team success such as the influence on company's culture, team dynamics, transparent and open communication, while exploring a leader's qualities for these teams.

While extensive research using cultural dimensions (Hofstede, 2011) and the GLOBE study (Peterson, 2004) have provided valuable frameworks for understanding cultural differences in social and organizational areas these studies primarily rely on quantitative methods and standardized models. The complexity of multicultural collaboration cannot always be captured through generic analysis alone. Wisesa et al., (2021) conducted a systematic literature review with up to 40 qualitative articles, about cross-cultural collaboration. They highlight the need to further develop how cultural diversity impacts virtual team performance (Chang et al., 2022). Establishing quality communication for virtual team contains one the biggest challenges faced across industries (Wisesa et al., 2021). The virtual environment collaboration and communication process requires different skills and techniques to promote virtual team effectiveness (Vittoro et al., 2022) considering the geographical dispersion, cultural behaviors, customs and working culture. As other studies discuss, given the digitalized globalized economy, new labor markets are opening for corporations allowing them to connect in different time zones, backgrounds and spoken languages. The rise of global virtual teams highlights the need to optimize teams' performance (Jimenez et al., 2017). Therefore, how cultural diversity in virtual teamwork transforms daily collaboration is critical for team effectiveness.

Multicultural virtual teams can be found in all industries, no matter the business they are in. The most recent studies have been primarily focused on the software development industries. This is due to the sectors' nature of cross-cultural collaboration and dependence on digital communication (Marinho et al., 2018; Clear et al., 2021; Hoffmann et al., 2021; Welsch et al., 2023). Studies such as Hoffman et al., (2021) explain that the higher the degree of virtual collaboration, the more challenges will arise in teamwork. Although previous research has established ground foundations into these operational structures, technical industry models might fail to represent other types of businesses. Not every industry requires the same skillsets for virtual cross-cultural communication.

The Entertainment industry has undergone an exponential evolution triggered by the expansion of on-demand, online streaming services. The type of consumer and consumption

dramatically shifted since COVID-19. Companies opened offices around the world to better serve the needs for local consumers carried by the digital revolution (Maghsoudi, et al., 2023). New actors and key stakeholders have come into play and competition presses the need to continuously adapt and innovate to the ever-changing environment (Domenghini, 2020). The industry is becoming a combination of Tech & Entertainment and is leading to the rise of new team structures, virtual and cross-cultural (Domenghini, 2020). Unlike other technical sectors, the entertainment industry is driven by creativity and innovation. It requires a team to think and collaborate strategically, be flexible and highly adaptable to the environment forces. As most studies are focused on technical industries there is a need to address this area of virtual multiculturalism, considering the impact of a company's culture and overarching factors on daily communication, team dynamics and leadership styles.

With all the above following the research gap the Research Question for this bachelor thesis is the following:

*"What are the Main Challenges and Opportunities in Managing and Collaborating with Multicultural Virtual Teams in the Entertainment Industries?"*

This research will give an in-depth, context-specific insights into the interplay of culture, teamwork collaboration and strategies within the global business environment. By exploring the role of leadership, this qualitative study will identify practical recommendations for organizations in the Entertainment industry, shed light to cultural differences, optimize diversity management styles, refine trust mechanisms, and leverage multicultural virtual collaboration.

## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### 2.1 Culture

There is not an all-fits-all definition for culture. It is a complex multifaceted concept with multiple interdependencies and factors to take under consideration. The differences in culture are not merely conceptual (Avruck, 1998, pp. 6-7), many anthropologists have tried to form a complete definition, its applications often depend on societal or ideological context that still impacts today. According to Spencer-Oatey (2012) culture is represented at different layers of depth, starting from the visible aspects to values and basic underlying assumptions. It describes how a group behaves, what are the patterns and why they act the way they do. In addition, it is both socially and psychologically distributed in a group, leading to an ambiguous limitation of a culture's features (Spence-Oatey, 2012). Culture is a concept that is learned, is both individual and social and can be differentiated both from universal human nature and particular individual personalities (Spencer-Oatey, 2012).

Hofstede defines culture as "the collective programming of the mind" (1994, p. 5), while other psychologists view culture as the set of values, beliefs and behaviors shared by a group of people across time. This research will use Enklaar (2024) definition of culture as "the typical ways of thinking, feeling and behaving of a specific group of people, and the meaning they assign to it". Enklaar (2024) explains that culture goes beyond tradition or routines, it explores the sentiment, behavioral pattern and ways of thinking for a group of individuals. His definition for culture aligns to the intent of this research, emic in nature. Rather than looking at the superficial patterns for culture, it is a further down-layer that studies why people behave in the way they do and what are the underlying factors for it (Enklaar, 2024).

Alexander Thomas, a German social psychologist, defines culture as “an orientation system”. A core concept that revolves on cultural standards. According to him, cultural standards are ways of observing, behaving and judging that someone has with another from its own culture (Enklaar, 2024). To identify cultural standards, often hard to perceive, qualitative researchers used the Critical Incident Technique (CIT). Critical incidents are defined as situations in interactions with people from different countries that can be strange, frustrating or awkward (Enklaar, 2024). Exploring cultural standards through critical incidents, allows to uncover patterns, behaviors through a practical identification of cultural differences.

### 2.1.1 Multicultural people

A team of culturally diverse employees can explore a higher level of problem-solving skills while fostering innovation and creativity (Wang et al., 2019). Nevertheless, there are potential challenges leading to critical incidents, from differing communication styles and decision-making (Hoffmann et al., 2021).

Multicultural employees comprise differences in mental models, perception and approaches to conflict-resolution (Wang et al., 2019). Having diverse values and worldviews is the root of divergent thinking that multicultural teams might enjoy (Jang, 2017). Culturally diverse individuals develop intercultural competence, or the ability to understand people with different cultural backgrounds, key in today’s working environment (Yousef, pp. 139-150, 2024). Multicultural employees’ attributes can be theoretically defined as cultural intelligence (CQ), describing the ability to adapt to different settings (Earley & Ang, 2003) therefore cognitive, motivational and behavioral dimensions in cultural intelligence allow team members to learn about different norms and values of a culture (Early et al., 2003). Individuals might effectively adapt to others and their perspectives, leading to higher team performance (Wisesa et al., 2021).

## 2.2 Globalization and Rise of Global Virtual Teams

The rapid development of information technology and globalized business activities created new models of virtual teamwork (Stefan et al., 2023). Virtual teamwork has become an organizational structure used by multinational corporations (MNCs) to overcome the challenge of decentralizing work in different locations.

During COVID-19, most business activities were conducted remotely. This virtual arrangement resulted in fewer team interactions, and activities outside of work. As virtual teams may conduct activities geographically dispersed, the increase of cross-cultural collaboration increased (Wisesa et al., 2021). This underscores the need to study how to effectively manage cultural differences under a virtual setting (Mahadevan & Steinmann, 2023).

The mixture of factors of: (1) use of technology, (2) degree of diversity between each other and (3) shared procedures (Yousef, 2024) are critical to assess the differences between virtual work and methodologies used. Therefore, to understand cross-cultural virtual teams (CCVTs), it is key to differentiate classical virtual teams, COVID-induced virtual teams and an additional fourth post-COVID hybrid virtual teams. The first three share the use of digital communication form, degree of diversity, dispersion and a shared operational procedure (Mahadevan et al., 2023). Compared to the others, post-COVID teams combine work-from-home and on-site arrangements.

Although cross-cultural virtual teams present opportunities related to higher flexibility, innovation and motivation (Velez-

Calle et al., 2021) there might be many disadvantages in communication, role overload, role ambiguity, lack of synergy amongst team members, goal conflicts, as well as problems related with cultural barriers (Hertel et al., 2005). Moreover, cultural differences affect virtual coordination in team dynamics, making cultural diversity a risk factor (Yousef, 2024). Factors such as time differences, language barriers or different working schedules can negatively impact virtual teams. Trust deficits occur more often in virtual interaction because of limited face-to-face interactions (Ngoc Tran, 2025), and the role of leadership can greatly impact the performance of these team structures. Online collaboration and communication require different skill sets than face-to-face interactions (Schulze et al., 2017) however currently, there isn’t a clear framework on how to lead in a digital working setting. Understanding these differences will improve intercultural competencies in areas like trust, communication and leadership styles (Yousef, 2024).

### 2.2.1 Leadership and Management of MVTs

Leadership plays a key role in minimizing cultural conflicts in cross-cultural virtual teams. The challenge in managing culture conflicts effectively is to recognize the overarching causes and conflicts and to increase multicultural virtual team empowerment for future challenges (Stefan et al., 2023)

Through culturally diverse employees, companies have great potential for development, the capacity adapt to changes and act flexible leveraging their skills, knowledge and unique experiences of different markets. Studies argue that cross-cultural virtual teams can be influenced by management strategies (Wisesa et al., 2021). Going back to business strategy literature, there are many leadership styles developed throughout the years. For instance, the behavioral school used a situational approach. A leader adapts its management style based on the task and behavior of others. Through the visionary school the definition of transformational leadership style was developed. This is defined by an individual’s charisma, inspiration and intellectual stimulation. Leaders with these qualities “transform” coworkers (Bass, 1999), by a “lead by example” culture through verbal and nonverbal communication (Greimel et al., 2023). Showing cultural empathy, and ethical approaches mitigates some of the risks of globally dispersed teams (Jurado, 2025) increasing team performance (Wisesa et al., 2021).

Wisesa et al., (2021) conducted a systematic literature review that explores how virtuality affects multicultural teams. They structured a nomological map of knowledge stating that virtual team performance is influenced by virtual engagement. This study hypothesizes a model on how to achieve it. First, everyone’s personal characteristics should be considered. These are cultural differences, emotional intelligence, clarity of tasks and technology capabilities. All of this is affected by a virtual transformational leadership style and the internal team dynamics like team cohesion. Ultimately, trust mechanisms and cultural intelligence as they suggest, increases virtual team engagement and consequently team performance. Additionally, Wisesa et al., (2021) claim that previously published research is based on work environments with culturally homogeneous individuals, thus the long-term impacts of digital leadership strategies remain underexplored, since multicultural teams are not considered. This requires a re-evaluation for leadership frameworks on heterogeneous teams in the virtual setting (Ngoc Tran, 2025).

Although these studies provide a foundation on leadership styles for virtual arrangements, most of the articles and research from Wisesa et al., (2021) systematic literature review is targeted at student populations on universities and research institutions. Jurado (2025) argues that to reduce risks related to team performance in virtual multicultural teams, further research

should focus on communication styles and cultural dimensions for effective cross-cultural virtual collaboration. He argues that future research should also investigate practical application of leadership theories across non-technical industries to explore leadership effectiveness for digital collaboration in cross-cultural teams.

### 2.3 The Entertainment Industry

Within the entertainment industry, the development of streaming services revolutionizing the way people consume media has become the dominant mode of media consumption (Koutsou & Koutsou, 2022). This highlights localized context strategies that capture and retain consumers in their markets while attracting investments and fostering international collaboration (Dašić & Kostadinović, 2021).

Understanding multicultural virtual interactions daily in the entertainment industry is crucial given the interconnected nature in cross-border activities (Maghsoudi et al., 2023). Moreover, when a country goes global, creating the right business culture is key for success (Reed, 2020). Studies on virtual teams in the entertainment industry are scarce and the dynamics and structures that define these corporations remain yet underexplored (Maghsoudi et al. 2023). Companies tend to systematically collaborate, merge and form short to long-term partnership, resulting in the emerging trend where joint ventures can access new markets to pool resources while delivering its content portfolio. Consequently, business must overcome not only the workplace culture but the country's specific behavioral set where they conduct business in. Meyer (2014) in the Culture Map explained that individuals perceive and behave differently depending on their cultural context. How decision-making is established, how trust is built in different parts of the world as well as differing communication styles in a professional environment (Meyer, 2014). The nature of this sector triggers a trend of globally dispersed working structures steering unique and complex collaborative interactions (Maghsoudi et al., 2023). Structures can be visible in teams, often allocated across its entire global market to effectively serve the needs of niche customers. HQ and sub-units are ambiguously defined, and team members, often geographically dispersed, work in hybrid virtual settings. By narrowing the scope down to multicultural virtual teams in the entertainment industry, a sector driven by creativity and innovation, we can identify processes and mechanisms that tackle risks in creative performance, more exposed than face-to-face communication (Mayer, 2019). Subsequently, this study aims to identify roots causes and optimized tools for exploring collaboration between multicultural virtual teams in a business where creativity and adaptability is critical for competitive success.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, the thesis design will be discussed. From research layout, what will be the data collection methods and research instrument to how insights will be analyzed.

### 3.1 Research Design

To study the communication and collaboration of multicultural virtual teams, the thesis follows a qualitative method, where in simple terms, words are used as data (Brain & Clarke, 2006). Qualitative research offers rich insights into the complexities of human behavior, social dynamics and cultural contexts (Okello, 2024). It allows the researcher to collect authentic, insights through their meanings, values and interpretations from participants by finding patterns of meaning (Brain & Clarke, 2006). Multicultural virtual teams entail extensive quantitative literature; however, these studies have been developed under small-case research that address other study areas (e.g., industries

and participants such as students), neglecting other areas of multiculturalism under virtual settings. Qualitative research is the most suitable approach to identify cultural nuances, sentiment and in-depth view of a cultural attribute. Within the qualitative ethnographic field, this thesis takes on an emic perspective in qualitative evaluation, referring to the study of the insider's perspective, that is, how individuals from a specific culture assign meaning and interpretation to their own experience (Okello, 2024).

### 3.2 Data Collection

The thesis data collection is based on semi-structured interviews with six employees working for a multinational company X in the entertainment industry. The choice for this corporation lies in its unique and emerging structure, given the advantages of a start-up but financially backed and responsible from big established production companies in the industry. The HQ are established in UK and The Netherlands and serve different European regions comprising the Nordics, Eastern Europe and Southern Europe. Its corporation structure presents flexible coordination among all offices requiring cross-cultural collaboration, often virtually.

Given the nature of the data collection methods that involve direct human participation; to extract findings, sensitive topics and conflict of interest between interviews and researchers (Patton, 2002), it required an ethical evaluation. Once approved by the Ethics Committee BMS of the University of Twente and in alignment with the supervisors for the thesis, the interviews and data collection were conducted.

#### 3.2.1 Research instrument

The data was collected through one-on-one semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews comprise a list of open-ended questions as well as topics that must be covered during the session, normally in a particular order. The nature of this structure is to allow room for further development of interesting topics raised during the conversation. The interview script was developed both in English and Spanish, as it ensures higher accuracy in data collection when interviewing in an individual's native language (Enklaar, 2024).

Before conducting the interviews, participants were asked to sign a consent agreement in which it explicitly explained the purpose of the thesis, permission to record the session and use data extracted from the interviews. Before conducting the sessions, the right to step back at time of process was explained to ensure transparency and integrity on both ends. Findings were analyzed and kept under confidentiality for participants personal anonymity. The purpose of the interviews allowed the researcher to tap on the complexities when communicating, managing and collaboration with multicultural virtual teams. Open-ended questions were structured to identify critical incidents in daily communication as well as challenges, opinions on how to manage expectations and increase creativity driving innovation under dynamic teams. The time was up to 45 minutes per interview, to ensure engaged flow in conversation. They were audio recorded and transcribed with Teams platforms. To ensure accuracy in the insights, the transcript was reviewed and corrected.

#### 3.2.2 Sample Size and Selection

The thesis relies on qualitative research, explaining the need to extract data taken from interviews in direct contact with the participants. The researcher selected the interviewers through an inside contact working at the company but has not relation with the interviewees. Purposeful sampling, defined as consciously selecting participants on their specific attributes, knowledge, among other criteria (Suri, 2011) is applied. Firstly, participants

were considered if they work at the specific corporation. They are not part of the same team but often collaborate with each other. They are directors of the company, upper management some of which have similar roles managing different geographic regions in Europe. Additionally, they have extensive professional expertise in the entertainment industry, with various intercultural/international backgrounds. They interact and work with people from different cultures regularly and have been doing so for a minimum of 6 months. Six participants have been interviewed in total. This is probably not enough for data saturation but in the context of the bachelor thesis it's a good compromise between the time needed to conduct and analyze the interviews, and the quality of the overall findings.

P #	Age	Gender	Years	Location	Nationality
1	48	Female	20	Madrid	Spanish
2	43	Male	25	Madrid	Spanish
3	41	Male	12	Madrid	Mexican
4	40	Female	11	London	French
5	51	Male	24	Madrid	Mexican
6	35	Female	12	Amsterdam	Hungarian

**Table 1: Demographics Participants**

### 3.2.3 Data Analysis

Once the text was reviewed and corrected, to identify, analyze the data from the interview the Thematic Analysis (TA) was used (Brain & Clarkle, 2017). TA follows a systematic procedure that generates codes and themes to analyze and interpret the patterns of meaningful "themes" within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2017). Therefore, TA defines codes or units that contain critical insights from the text and build themes that lead to an organizing concept, "core idea" (Braun & Clarke, 2017). It is used not to simplify the text but uncover sentiments from a passage guided by the research question. This allows high-quality analysis and procedures to ensure all interesting data to be identified (Brain & Clarke, 2017)

Thematic analysis (TA) encompasses a wide array of usages. This thesis applied as a guiding tool to explore the "critical" frameworks within personal or social meaning in a topic, its interdependencies and implications (Braun & Clarke, 2017)

## 4. RESULTS

This section presents the findings collected from six semi-structured interviews. The participants helped uncover insights regarding the challenges and opportunities of managing and collaboration with multicultural virtual teams within the entertainment industry.

In the following sections, the most often recurring themes are showcased in detail, supported by quotes from the interviews as well as figures in 4.2 and 4.4 to visually display key insights into multiculturalism and virtuality. To ensure anonymity and confidentiality, participants will be named as *Participant (number)*.

### 4.1 Evolution and key factors of the Entertainment industry

In the interviews, many participants argued that during the pandemic, the impact on online streaming services, disrupting the industry's environment, shifted the type of consumer and type of consumption. It completely transformed the sector, and

companies had to adapt to fast changes, innovate quickly, and be flexible.

"We come from large, well-established companies, but they are creating projects that **have to work very quickly**." – Participant 3 (translated from Spanish)

To cover all increasing demand, companies needed to expand globally and establish local teams to deliver tailored content to all different regions efficiently. Companies must undergo structural changes and find a balance between how much to centralize and decentralize, how much control are they willing to give to local teams while centralizing financial resources to effectively meet targets.

"When it comes to international growth, as it has happened with Max, HBO, now Netflix again, yes, the original import is American but then **they had such a huge international expansion** that they have **had to resort to give freedom to local teams for their growth**, and **to generate that innovation**, so that's why there is such a marked character". – Participant 3 (translated from Spanish)

"**One is English, one is Dutch, one is Spanish, which is very good** and that's very good for us, especially **to try to reflect all the sensibilities** and make sure that in all countries **we have someone who understands the consumer of that country**, which is very important." Participant 2 (translated from Spanish)

"For example, **a financial team** doesn't matter because the **numbers remain the same in any language**, but, for example, **the creative side** is a little **different that local part that adds a little bit of that difference** – Participant 1 (translated from Spanish)

This company has a British culture, having the HQ established in London. British culture avoids confrontation and prefers indirect communication when sharing opinions. Decision-making is based on the inclusion of everyone's contribution, reaching consensus. Participants argued that approach is not beneficial for the type of products offered in the sector.

"In the entertainment world **to reach that middle ground, I think it kills the product**, ultimately when it comes to trying to reach consensus on visions." – Participant 3 (translated from Spanish)

In the case of XXX, **it is very British**, that is to say, the company's culture is very much to give 20 turns to everything, **to debate everything, to make sure** that everything is done by **consensus**, because the **English do not like confrontation**. In Spain, for example, we are more of a group of four in a room, if three people have a different opinion, they say, "*that's it, we have won 3 against 1, come on, bang*", and this in England is a huge conflict because it is like *no, we have to be all in agreement and all aligned with a good decision*, because it is a different type of leadership. – Participant 2 (translated from Spanish)

I don't know if it is a thing of **ego**, or if it is an issue of personality **to always add that small contribution**, to see their contribution reflected. **It makes the decision-making process slower** and the products, instead of being more genuine, end up being a Frankenstein or make the Top Management happy with things, **it**

**makes the products lose the genuineness or the soul that they may have.**" – Participant 3

The impact on the online streaming services in the industry not only derived from a different type of entertainment consumption but the global expansion allowed companies to attract international talent and opened opportunities towards hybrid and remote work like never before.

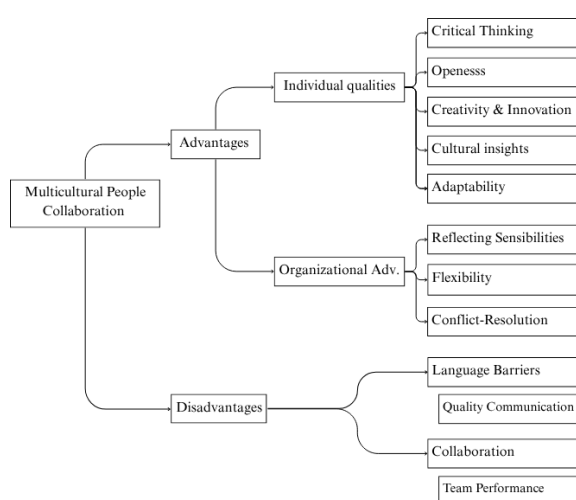
"I was working from Hungary and **pre covid I don't think that the current setup would have worked because everybody works from the office** so there was **no opportunity for me to be relocated to Amsterdam**. At that time, it was also way more challenging to manage a regional team, because I remember back in that time who **was my current line manager**, he was in my position at XXX and I remember **he only saw the teammates when they travelled to Budapest, which was one time in months**. Otherwise, they just exchanged emails and that was it. **No personal touch, like no one-to-ones and stuff like that. But because of COVID, it changed.**" - Participant 6

With the exponential development of the online streaming services, talent from other industries, such as technical profiles, add another level of diversity and collaboration in the sector.

"The arrival of streaming **in this industry has incorporated a lot of profiles** that came in my case for example, **from technology companies because it is a mix of tech and entertainment.**" – Participant 2 (translated from Spanish)

## 4.2 Team dynamics: Opportunities and Challenges of Multicultural People

In this sub-section it is discussed what were considered the challenges and Opportunities of collaborating with multicultural people. In the figure below it is displayed key factors associated with each section.



**Figure 1: Advantages and Disadvantages of Multicultural people Collaboration**

### 4.2.1 Individual Qualities

Given their international background and experience from interacting and getting out of their comfort zone, they argue that being open to changes drives creativity and innovation.

**"That might be a very naive approach of me, but I see the multicultural element and the diversity of opinions only as a positive thing.** It can only bring positivity to the organization because **it challenges you what is taken for granted.**" – Participant 4

"Man, **multiculturalism helps you a lot**, because in the end, **it opens people's minds**, which is very important. When it comes to working with someone, then someone who has an open mind and **more in the marketing part, that you need to be more creative, a little more innovative**, I would say even less conservative, to **be open to change, nowadays is super important** because that's what we were talking about before, **everything changes so fast.**" Participant 1 (translated from Spanish)

Multiculturalism adds value to daily operations and team dynamics, particularly in a sector that requires a creative and an open-minded attitude. Subsequently, diversity should be represented at any layer of an organization, globally and within local teams.

**The Entertainment Product is a Cultural Product.**" – Participant 1 (translated from Spanish)

"So, for me **it is a mix**, I think that **having international people enriches the company**. But the fact that there are **also local people** in these **companies who have had international experience enriches the company as much or more** than the fact of having people from other countries." Participant 3 (translated from Spanish)

### 4.2.2 Collaboration & Team Performance

Healthy tension is beneficial for team performance; however, it must be effectively managed, as a group of culturally diverse people may trigger conflicts in decision-making processes.

**"When you have to make a joint decision sometimes it is difficult**, because sometimes some people want one thing and sometimes others want another and it is complicated, that is, **for example, for us to make a team off-site**, it is very difficult because there are people who want to go running, there are people who do not want to do sports with their office colleagues, there are people who prefer to go to lunch but there are people who want to have a meeting and talk about important things and there are people who want to dance, so it is like well, I don't know. **I mean, it's all good, but in the end, you have to make a decision**, and you have to decide, and with campaigns and with work it's a little bit the same thing." – Participant 2 (translated from Spanish)

Moreover, there are other factors such as time differences and working culture of each country that impacts collaboration.

**"The cultural issue, the issue of schedules and customs.** For example, the Nordic people start at 8 o'clock but at 4 o'clock they disconnect because they go to pick up their children from school. In the case of Spain, it is like the other day that the Hungarian did not believe that "I have in my contract an hour for lunch" that I never do it, **so that kind of thing sometimes makes it clash.**" – Participant 1 (translated from Spanish)

#### 4.2.2.1 Communication

During the interviews, a critical factor identified was that language barriers and communication differences can hinder risks in team engagement and performance, making team meetings less dynamic and time consuming.

**"The multicultural issue is sometimes more complex. The language issue happens to us, sometimes we work with purely local content, but we have to bring in international people, so I was saying because we don't have all the resources here locally, it makes the meetings less dynamic because when you explain yourself not only in your native language, but in your local jokes in your things, and then you have to give context that had double meaning and their things were very difficult to explain."** – Participant 1 (translated from Spanish)

To effectively communicate with each other, multicultural teams need to adapt the spoken language and the underlying behaviors of a culture. The ability to adapt and observe the other persons behavior, by being open and neutral to learn how others behave and react is key to make communication less time consuming and more effective. Multicultural collaboration might result in misunderstandings and constraints the quality of communication.

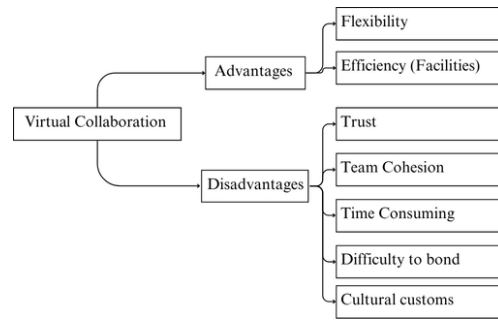
**"You need to learn to speak to all the different cultures. Because let's say people in Warsaw and Serbia, are super straightforward. They are not going to go around the bushes. They skip the sweet talk, and they will tell you what they want. So, if you go there and start, you know the chit chat, the thing they will think like, OK I'm not going to talk to you. So, with them, you need to treat them as they want to be treated and go right in the middle of the subject when you when you negotiate a deal with them."** – Participant 6

**"I arrived with my version of Mexican Spanish with my words, with my expressions, and suddenly I saw that I was not understood here, then I had to make the conscious choice of either I continue speaking as Mexican, with my vocabulary and have to explain myself three times every time I say something or I adapt the expressions and vocabulary that is the one that everyone here understands. I am not interested in wasting my time and wasting the time of others, I am going to adapt myself to the place where I am now with the objective of making communication more efficient. Simply to make communication more effective and efficient."** – Participant 5 (translated from Spanish)

### 4.3 Impact on Virtuality

The influence on virtuality in cross-cultural collaboration results in critical areas related to team performance and empowerment.

Remote and hybrid work allows higher level of flexibility and the ability to open a wider talent pool globally, nevertheless there are other factors hindering team effectiveness such as trust, lack of alignment and role ambiguity.



**Figure 2: Advantages and Disadvantages of Virtual Collaboration**

The impact of the Pandemic enabled teams to collaborate cross-borders, through flexible collaboration and multidisciplinary exchange.

**"I have people in Warsaw, I have people in Budapest, and I have people in Zagreb working in the team. And I don't feel that we are not connected. I am equally connected to people who are involved in Zagreb as I am connected with the person in Budapest, even if I'm not sitting there. Because I would still talk via teams"** – Participant 6

**"I think that with my local team, the video call is more effective. I mean, it's like when you're in the office, so the hybrid collaboration, I think it's wonderful, because it also allows you to reconcile what I was saying, an hour of traffic jams every day is hell in Madrid, of course that part of the hybrid is ideal for me"** – Participant 1 (translated from Spanish)

#### 4.3.1 Trust & Cohesion

Although the online tools promote flow of communication and collaboration, participants highlighted that human contact is critical to develop trust and cohesion. Subsequently, working online is efficient acknowledging the benefits of physical contact.

**"When you have one-to-one with someone, you have to have all your attention on that person, that is I cannot be talking to you and looking at the phone and such because then the distrust that is created is much more than in person."** Participant 2 (translated from Spanish)

**"I would say that the online element is more transactional, and you need to make an effort to make things personal, so you need to ask how was your weekend? anything interesting you know, to make it more social. Is less intuitive when its online than when it's in person. And in person there is immediately the warmth and the social element that comes to being together in the same room, so creating team bonding and alignment is way more challenging online."** Participant 4

**"Many times, when I'm on meetings and I have people that I'm on a recurring meeting with and it's only about business. Like you join at 00, you log out at 30, you have 30 minutes, you have 40 minutes amount of topic to fit in 30 minutes so basically there is no better talk. there is not how are you. And you miss the personal touch; I think that it's harder to develop that trust because I believe in trust is learned through persistent and consistent actions or representing the same value consistently."** – Participant 6



I think it is important that personal connection, in the end we are all people, **we are not in a factory**, making keys, no, **we are not robots**. Here you work with people, you work in a team, and **you need** what you say, **that trust, that good vibes**.”- Participant 1 (translated from Spanish)

Moreover, the nature of the entertainment sector requires higher flexibility to drive innovation and enhance collaboration. Unlike other industries that are more technical, the creative sector needs face-to-face interaction.

"It's also important to highlight that in the end this might be different than the tech or IT field you mentioned in the beginning, but **media is still a human-to-human business**. So, I'm travelling a lot.”- Participant 6

"There is already a return to travel both from the team to headquarters and from headquarters to local offices because **in the end human contact cannot be underestimated, even though this technology exists**, we cannot ignore thousands and thousands of years of human interaction, which has always been personal.” – Participant 3 (translated from Spanish)

#### 4.4 The Role of Leadership

Considering the opportunities of multicultural people, participants suggested that a leader must be culturally diverse.

"Open-mind, high level of empathy, and understanding willingness to learn. **Be curious all soft skills**, I think it's crucial to have or to develop or want to develop" – Participant 6

##### 4.4.1 Team Empowerment, Flexibility & Ownership

In order have successful multicultural virtual teams, managers should apply the right techniques to empower employees and leadership styles to effectively manage the differences.

"You have to **feed the question** so that people talk or **at least feel validated that**, ah *I've been invited to speak and then I have something to say because I have an opinion* of course like everybody else, but you have to make sure that **when it comes to leading, you give that space and try to include everybody**.” Participant 2 (translated from Spanish)

During the interviews it was highlighted that micromanagement is considered a negative management skill, killing creativity, empowerment and overall performance.

"**When you have little emperors**, where they are looking for the mistake of the one next to them, to judge them and tell them you made a mistake in this, nobody wants to work in that kind of company and they totally **kill creativity and innovation** because in the end you don't stop feeling that **you are constantly in the spotlight and then people don't take risks** and the fact of wanting to **innovate always involves risk**.” – Participant 3 (translated from Spanish)

In the end, the culture of the **place ends up outweighing the culture of the company**, especially in small international offices where the culture is dictated by the office manager, so when I started working at Warner in Mexico, it was a small office of 10 or 12 people, and the office manager was **the most**

**tyrannical person I have ever worked with in my life**. In other words, it was a baptism of fire, that man was a **micro manager**, passive, aggressive, violent, a liar, in short, a narcissist”. -Participant 5 (translated from Spanish)

In contrast with this Mexican manager, to avoid frustration and low productivity among team members, when leaders delegate control, employees feel accountable for their actions and become more motivated.

"He said, *you can work from wherever you want, so if you want to come to the office, come, or if you don't want to come to the office, don't come. If you want to come Monday through Thursday, come if you want to come Monday through Friday from 8 to 5. You organize your life, but meet your goals, always keep informed of what you are doing and know where you are physically*. And of course, from coming from an environment where we were treated like little kids and naughty children to **being treated like an adult, it was incredible**.” – Participant 5 (translated from Spanish)

Giving away ownership, allowing them to be responsible for their own decisions will ultimately lead to trust among the team..

"In short, I think the fact of **having previous international experience**, or that these individuals had international experience, for **example in headquarters**, would have **helped them to listen better to the local team**, they would have **trusted the local team more** because a lot of that is **also about mistrust**. It's saying “*Hey, I'm afraid of what you're doing because I've never done it that way*”. So the multiculturalism or the **multicultural experience makes you let go a little bit** and say “*hey look these people that are from that country have been doing these things for 15 years, I've hired them because they have a proven track record, I'm going to trust them*” and well then **in the end it results in less frustration for the local team as well**.”- Participant 3 (translated from Spanish).

##### 4.4.2 Active Listening, Vulnerability, Curiosity

Throughout the interviews, they highlighted how critical it was for leaders to be vulnerable and acknowledge that through humility they are closer to the team.

"There are a lot of articles about it, which is **vulnerability**, So at the end of the day, if your boss recognizes that **he does not know everything** and that many times he is just as lost as you are and that he makes mistakes every day just like you, it is good because **it gives you that security** to be able to talk to your boss and say, “*Hey, look, I know I wasn't sure, but I have looked for this solution, what do you think about it?*” If you see that this is a person who already knows, everything is super sure, he doesn't have any kind of insecurity, it's like “*well, this person is already God, so I'm not going to correct him*” – Participant 2 (translated from Spanish)

A leader that is curious, that feels he can learn more from employees, will make room for new ideas and creativity to come in.

“For me curiosity means to really have an **interest in learning and knowing how things are done in other places** and in other disciplines **without prejudice**, simply, having an ability **to take a real and honest interest** in things and **then make the best decisions**



without prejudice.” – Participant 3 (translated from Spanish)

A leader who has a clear vision, is a key quality when managing multicultural virtual teams with diverse backgrounds.

“The vision, I think a leader has to be very clear about **where he wants to take things, influenced by curiosity**. A vision that is based on previous **knowledge, on previous experience, on the delegation in their teams...** that vision at the end also has to do **with how much you recruit certain people, certain areas, you are recruiting people** who will execute your vision, **but that vision will enrich it.**” – Participant 3 (translated to Spanish)

The ability of active listening, a trait that encompasses other areas, to be open-minded, responsible and curious, is key for conflict resolution practices as well as when dealing with the healthy tension that arises in multicultural virtual teams.

**“We are terrible listeners, because nobody has taught us how to listen.** A lot of emphasis has been put on the delivery of the message, but no emphasis has been put on the reception of the message, and they are equally important. I would say that the reception is more important than the delivery because **if you go around throwing messages and they are not received in the way you intended them to be received, you have wasted all your time and you have wasted the other person's time**, because the listener has not invested the time to make sure that what they are saying is what they really wanted to say. Since I started active listening, **I notice an impressive qualitative leap in the quality of my communications**”. – Participant 5 (translated from Spanish).

In the end, active listening requires a set of skills that through open feedback, can positively influence a team’s performance, and empower them.

“So what you need is **people who know how to listen**, it is very important in this type of culture, I would say **the feedback**, that is, that people are able to give feedback **for that two things have to happen**, one that the manager or **the boss wants to listen**, but then **that people are sufficiently empowered**, or have the ability or feel that they have a safe space to speak, and that is very important.” – Participant 2 (translated from Spanish)

## 4.5 The Effect on Company’s Culture

A lesson learnt during the interviews was the effect of a company’s culture on the collaboration and management of multicultural virtual teams. It might begin based on where HQ are established, the dominant cultural group, or the openness of a national culture.

“There was a **very multicultural team in the Paris office itself, although with a very French DNA**, very Parisian and there, well, there **was more of a challenge in understanding each other culturally**, because although the official language of the company was English, **it was noticeable that the bulk and the mentality of the company was more French** but the interactions were almost 90% virtual and **there was a lot of remote work.**” Participant 3 (translate from Spanish)

“In the end, what everyone has to do is to **adapt first to the values of the company, and then to the culture of the company, which is defined first by the number of people in a culture**, i.e. if the company is 80% of the leaders of one way and 20% of another, the dominant culture is that 80%, then if 80% of the leaders are English or have been working for a long time in the United Kingdom and have adapted their leadership style to the United Kingdom, **we have a way of discussing and debating.**” Participant 2 (translated from Spanish)

### 4.5.1 The Role of leadership in a company’s culture

Although the culture of a workplace is defined by employees, the foundations are dictated by the leaders and it’s in their strategies where they can shed light to multiculturalism collaboration and inspire them towards a shared vision.

“For me it is a **process of iteration**. You have to **create a culture, but the culture lives in the people**, so if you are **recruiting professionals with a certain experience, certain values, personal and moral, that will have an impact on how the culture will flow** and also now speaking **precisely about multiculturalism**, if you are recruiting people with more international experience, that will also probably enrich and **be more open to the culture.**” Participant 3

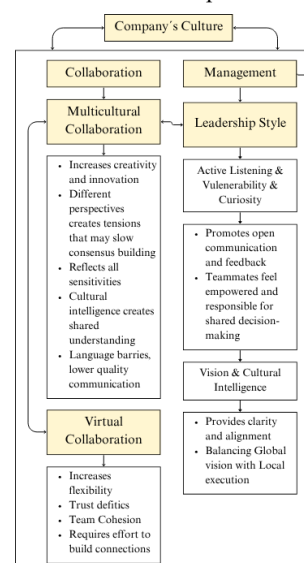


Table 1: Relationship between multicultural virtual collaboration and transformational leadership style given the company’s culture and external forces.

## 5. DISCUSSION

The findings enabled an exploration of the underlying effects on collaboration and management in multicultural virtual teams within the entertainment industry. While theoretical frameworks exist, there is a need to look at real-life experiences to support the theoretical applicability of previous studies (Jurado, 2025).

### 5.1 Theoretical Relevance

Teams are required to adapt to a company’s culture. According to the findings, the wider the number of cultures a corporation has, in its HQ, the more open-minded and flexible the corporate culture will be. According to Meyer (2014), the culture in the UK tends to avoid confrontation. The British speak between the lines, and they believe disagreement and open conflict are inappropriate. In this case, the company has a British culture,

which explains a cultural tendency to avoid addressing an issue directly, using indirect communication. This challenges decision-making and reaching a consensus. Therefore, findings underscored the significance of using open feedback and direct conflict resolution mechanisms to develop trust and alignment for multicultural virtual teams.

This case study highlights the effect of cultural intelligence (CQ) and the overarching influence on cognitive, motivational, and behavioral dimensions (Earley & Ang, 2003). Findings explain that having a cluster of cultures can be time consuming, it is difficult to reach shared understanding impacting decision-making. Nevertheless, culturally diverse people can greatly adapt to changes and create necessary tension to think outside of the box. An individual that presents high levels of CQ effectively navigates challenges and adapts to different viewpoints and behaviors. Existing research on cultural intelligence supports this argument such as Early & Ang (2003) as well as Ngoc Tran (2025).

Another significant theme identified is the quality of communication. Existing online tools increase flexibility. Nevertheless, there was an overwhelming agreement that technology is not enough. Virtual collaboration makes meeting less engaging. It is task-focused rather than relationship-focused. Given that remote work is time-constrained and there is geographical distance, team members end up feeling frustrated and unmotivated. Teams cannot only perform online effectively unless they have regular physical contact and while connecting online saves the geographical distance, there is still the need for teams to travel and conduct off-sites in person to meet the rest of their co-workers. Consequently, it increases trust, cohesion and allows them to foster closer interpersonal connections. This is supported in other studies on virtual collaboration such as Welsch et al., (2023) or Hoffmann et al., (2021). Findings also indicated that language barriers play a crucial role on team synergy. It impacts quality of communication, prevents alignment and misinterpretation of feedback (Jurado, 2024). Therefore, it is needed to set a reciprocal understanding and acknowledgement of the differences between the dominant company's culture with other nationalities and ways of collaborating and communicating.

When it comes to an optimal company structure, Hastings & Meyer (2020) argues that a company needs to be as diverse as the subscribers to have a sound product understood in a country. Having employees that represents the local element, and cultural sensitivity is necessary in the creative industries. In the management scope this translates to flexibility, ownership and consideration of cultural standards. Findings argue that an optimal balance between flexible and centralized working styles is essential to foster a culturally adaptive work environment. Having what is called a loosely coupled organization, term coined in a technical-driven sector and applied at the creative business (Hastings, 2020), enables local offices and headquarters to share and innovate interdependently towards the same direction. Given the emerging structures of tech and entertainment (Domenghini, 2020), this will leverage multicultural virtual collaboration in the creative industries.

A manager can minimize cultural conflicts (Stefan et al., 2023), and mitigate risks associated with globally dispersed teams (Greimel et al., 2023, Jurado, 2025, Wisesa et al., 2021) by applying an adaptive style, showing cultural empathy, and openness. The findings disclosed that the role of leadership is key in the success of multicultural virtual teams. Leaders must create an open culture, based on the ability to listen and empower employees. Skills include being flexible and having an open mindset, trusting, and allocating more responsibility to them, as

key actors in a collaborative virtual work environment. These are signs of freedom, trust and ownership. Teams will feel empowered, motivated as though they have the space to express themselves without judgment. Its effect results on creativity and innovation. Like studies (Greimel et al., 2023) confirm, a manager that shows vulnerability, who can admit mistakes, and is open to feedback creates a space where people feel validated and differences are praised. A leadership quality defined by flexibility and trust can positively impact the company's long-term success. When leaders decentralize decision-making, new ideas come into play.

To sum up, it should be highlighted that although existing technological tools are effective for virtual collaboration, human interactions shouldn't be disregarded. Most of theoretical frameworks were applied at software development teams, through an agile method and loosely coupled company's structure (Marinho et al., 2018; Clear et al., 2021; Hoffmann et al., 2021; Welsch et al., 2023). Given the emerging trend in the sector involving new actors from the technical industries, findings confirm that teams in the creative industries can benefit from these strategies in areas related to communication and collaboration. Nevertheless, unlike the data-driven sectors, cultural diversity is highlighted as a key success factor to deal with the local demand and is the source of creativity and innovation. The situation requires balancing creativity and data-driven approaches in a multicultural setting.

Above all, cross-collaboration with other members of the company in projects enhances not only cultural diversity but also divergent thinking. Effective leadership allows to recognize the strengths within the team by assigning tasks not solely based on their expertise but by who can understand the culture better. Creativity and innovation are more likely to emerge in spaces characterized by autonomy and responsibility. Micromanagement kills productivity and motivation. Consequently, a leader who is highly adaptable can overcome cultural barriers and embrace inclusivity, ultimately, they will motivate and empower multicultural virtual teams.

Finally, entertainment industry is in a strategic position compared to other industries as it embraces diversity in terms of gender, sexual orientation, etc. However, according to the findings, cultural diversity is still underestimated and seen transversally.

## 5.2 Practical Applications

With all the above, findings present several strategies to apply under the multicultural virtual team's structures in the Entertainment industry.

For recruiters, they should develop a company's culture that reflects cultural diversity. They are encouraged to hire multicultural people as it is proven that they can adapt fast to change, show higher levels of creativity and bring the necessary tension to drive innovation, a key element in the entertainment industries. A company should train leaders and employees on cultural intelligence practices to develop more effective teams, bringing awareness to the cultural differences. The findings disclosed that a leader who is culturally diverse and has cultural intelligence enhances team performance.

When it comes to communication practices having a cluster of cultures triggers the collaboration practices. There are many tools that can help bridge the gap and create stronger team synergy. Firstly, managers should have a clear and consistent vision. This is critical because through a transparent direction regarding teams' roles, expectations and outcomes, it will mitigate risks associated with role ambiguity, and team cohesion created from

virtual arrangements. When it comes to reinforcing and aligning the team virtually, leaving the first few minutes off before a meeting to discuss non-related work will bring closeness and create interpersonal bonds. This doesn't leave the fact that it is a necessity to meet up in person, conduct off-sites, team activities or travel to check up on the team to bring the warmth of social interactions. Consequently, although human interaction is key for team performance, regular virtual meetings avoid potential misunderstandings and fuel a shared purpose, ultimately shaping an open environment where members have the space to express themselves, share ideas and give open feedback.

Leaders play a key role in creating inclusive team cultures. They should adopt a flexible management practice, allocating freedom and control to the team. Managers should consider and equally value each members contribution, international background and behaviors rooted in cultural difference, to take conflict resolutions in a culturally sensitive way. Mentorship programs can help shed light to the culturally diverse structure of a company and increase cultural awareness. Access to informal interaction, at team-level through open forums, office events, and social exchange can create affective trust and closer team bonds.

On a broader picture, organizations who are in the creative sectors should recognize that decentralizing decision-making to identify local insights is considered a success factor and competitive advantage. A loosely coupled model can effectively balance the global strategic vision while allowing localized decision-making.

## 6. LIMITATIONS

While this study presents valuable insights into the interplay of virtual cross-cultural collaboration and management within the creative industries, it is important to highlight the limitations from this qualitative research.

Firstly, the study used a small sample of six participants, being a reasonable compromise for a bachelor thesis. This prevents transferability of results to other backgrounds. Moreover, there were time constraints during interviews influencing the depth of insights collected. Participants were recruited from a particular company which might have impacted on their perspectives and viewpoints.

Another limitation refers to researcher bias. Although an expert validated the findings to reduce risks related to subjectiveness, the Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2017) relies on research's interpretation, resulting in a degree of subjectivity that might affect the accuracy and credibility of insights.

Future research could use a bigger sample, less endogamic to enhance transferability of findings and reach wider insights across different contexts. Adding more data collections such as focus groups might enrich the findings.

Acknowledging these limitations allows a clear context for interpreting and understanding the bachelor thesis findings while highlighting areas for future research.

## 7. CONCLUSION

This bachelor thesis explored the challenges and opportunities when managing and collaborating with multicultural virtual teams within the entertainment industry. Through the study of the literature and six semi-structure interviews with participants from a leadership role in a multinational company, this qualitative research presented rich in-depth findings into the overarching effect of cross-cultural collaboration online.

Multicultural teams often present opportunities related to creativity, innovation, adaptability. Increasing importance on the development of cultural intelligence (CQ), that supports studies

of Earley and Ang (2003), participants highlighted that diversity, when effectively leveraged, fosters problem-solving abilities and innovations. Subsequently, multicultural teams positively impact the internal team dynamics of the entertainment industry. These insights are supported by existing literature such as Wang et al., (2019) and Yousef (2024). The research also identified several challenges to virtual collaboration such as in the quality of communication, language barriers, or differing customs in cultural collaboration influencing team cohesion, synergy and decision-making. During the interviews, participants argued that building trust and alignment online is challenging but essential for effective team performance in the creative industries. This bachelor findings confirm that although technological tools break down the physical barrier for collaboration, the human element is a requirement for fostering long-term trust and team cohesion. Leadership is a key factor in navigating these challenges. Participants highlighted that effective leaders should entail skills related to active listening, trust-based delegation and ownership.

This qualitative research explored the importance of organizational culture, showing how the right company's culture shape communication styles, responsibility and cultural diversity. Managers play a key role in bridging the differences, promoting inclusivity and finding the key balance between global strategies with local adaptation.

This bachelor thesis contributes by filling a research gap for the creative sector, through in-depth, context-specific insights. Additionally, it offers actionable strategies to leverage the collaboration with multicultural virtual teams. Finally, it highlights the need for leaders to emphasize on cultural intelligence and build an inclusive environment through an open culture.

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