
BRIDGING CULTURES: EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES FOR MANAGING INTERNATIONAL CULTURAL PROJECTS IN A GLOBALIZED WORLD

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Abstract

Purpose: By comparative analysis of international cultural projects, identify strategies and methods that ensure project team cohesion and its effectiveness. To substantiate directions and approaches that, in the context of the complexity of managing international cultural projects, can form effective strategies for overcoming the negative impacts of cultural diversity and communication barriers, and for realizing the expectations of stakeholders.

Methods: The study uses both a qualitative approach based on research from various fields, in particular based on the use of Cross-Case Synthesis, inductive coding, cross-case comparison, and a quantitative approach, in particular based on correlation analysis, involved constructing a Pearson correlation matrix and a multimodal approach for a balanced combination of structured and semi-structured data. It also integrates insights from project management frameworks and cultural intelligence models to analyze the role of leadership, adaptability, and technology in international project environments.

Findings: The study identifies key strategies for mitigating conflicts, leveraging cultural intelligence, and enhancing project outcomes in multicultural settings. It highlights the importance of digital tools and virtual collaboration in managing culturally diverse teams, as well as the impact of cultural awareness on project efficiency, innovation, and stakeholder engagement.

Originality: This research contributes to the growing field of international project management by offering actionable strategies for professionals working in culturally diverse environments. By understanding cultural dynamics, project managers can implement inclusive strategies that foster collaboration, reduce misunderstandings, and ensure the sustainable success of international cultural initiatives.

Keywords: International Cultural Project Management; Cross-Cultural Collaboration; Cultural Intelligence; Global Project Management

JEL classification: A14, C30, O10, O30

1. Introduction

In conditions of growing economic, social, and military risks, the importance of intercultural exchange is increasing. Therefore, international cultural projects, encompassing artistic cooperation, heritage preservation, cultural diplomacy, socially engaged initiatives, etc., are becoming increasingly important for promoting mutual understanding, inclusive development, and proper support for democratic values (UNESCO, 2025; Isar, 2015). Interest in such projects is also growing because they can be used as soft-power tools and as drivers of social innovation (Thomas & Inkson, 2016; Lee, 2020; Parwita et al., 2021). The peculiarities of these projects are that they are international and involve

various stakeholders, representatives of different cultures. Cultural projects differ significantly from industrial or technical undertakings, as they are closely integrated into a value-laden environment that can lead to dynamic changes not only in their implementation conditions but even in their goals. There is also a greater likelihood that the assessment of different aspects and the cultural initiative as a whole by both stakeholders and direct project participants will not coincide. They also require the involvement of diverse culturally sensitive structures and individuals whose views, actions, and behavior are determined by different epistemologies, normative systems, and modes of expression (Dervin & Risager, 2014; Andriushchenko et al., 2020). This leads to specific managerial difficulties that affect the achievement of the results of these initiatives. In particular, because in the context of relational, affective, and dialogic dimensions inherent in working on projects in the field of culture, traditional Project Management approaches, such as PMBOK, PRINCE2, etc., which a priori rely on a culturally homogeneous, hierarchical, and goal-oriented environment, are not suitable (Dowell et al, 2019). Project management in this field must be prepared to make decisions in nonlinear circumstances, suitable for acting in conditions of intercultural misunderstandings, asynchrony of processes, and involving hybrid organizational structures (Bennett, 2023).

Therefore, the implementation of international cultural initiatives places special demands on intercultural competence, reflective leadership and flexible management of their leaders. Also, in the conditions of dynamic digital transformation of all spheres of modern life, the digital skills of project team members become significant. This requires permanent improvement of operational norms, increasing the adaptability of project management practices. At the same time, despite the growing strategic importance of international projects in the field of culture, the scientific literature on their management remains fragmented, paying predominant attention to the issues of project management in business, construction and IT sectors with an emphasis on technological efficiency, deadlines and resource optimization (Dowell et al, 2019; PMI, 2021; Ingram and Nitsenko, 2021).

Scientific works devoted to the issues of cultural project management are mainly based on comparative analysis and are characterized by limited application of theoretical integration (Isar, 2015; Trans Europe Halles, 2025). They mainly do not use a holistic systemic approach with the integrated use of frameworks of cultural intelligence, inclusive leadership or Agile transformation, etc.

This study aims to address these gaps through an interdisciplinary synthesis and, to do so, aims to offer a conceptual and practical framework that reflects the practices of international cultural projects. Given the multifaceted nature of international cultural project management, this study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the most effective strategies for managing international cultural projects in diverse cultural environments?
2. How do leadership, adaptability, and digital tools enhance or hinder project success?
3. How can cultural intelligence be practically integrated into project workflows?

The overarching aim is to contribute a robust, evidence-based understanding of how international cultural projects can be managed effectively in an increasingly globalized and digitalized world. Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Identify case-based best practices for cross-cultural collaboration in cultural projects through comparative analysis of successful (and unsuccessful) initiatives across regions and domains.
2. Explore the role of leadership, digital tools, and adaptability in multicultural project contexts by examining behaviors, strategies, and mechanisms that influence team cohesion and project outcomes.
3. Generate a set of actionable strategies for current and future cultural project managers by developing a practitioner-oriented toolkit that integrates principles of cultural intelligence, inclusive leadership, and digital collaboration.

In conclusion, it should be noted that since international projects in the field of culture are increasingly influenced by the processes of globalization and digitalization, economic, social and political crises, there is an urgent need to rethink their management strategies. This study aims to address these gaps by examining how international cultural projects can be effectively managed through the integration of modern scientific approaches. By synthesizing theoretical approaches and tools from different disciplines, this research work aims to both formulate conceptual ideas and develop effective strategies for cultural practitioners working in a complex intercultural environment. The results of the study are intended not only to provide a theoretical basis for improving the management of international projects in the field of culture, but also to contribute to the development of a strategy for their management and its field implementation in the cultural and creative sectors.

2. Review of Literature

Globalization has transformed the nature and reach of cultural projects, catalyzing the emergence of intercultural collaborations that extend across continents, languages, and social contexts. These international cultural projects, whether in the form of artistic residencies, transnational museum partnerships, or community-based participatory initiatives, are deeply embedded in complex sociocultural dynamics (Isar, 2015; UNESCO, 2025b). They not only produce artistic or heritage value but also serve broader purposes such as diplomacy, social justice, and knowledge exchange (Throsby & Petetskaya, 2016; Salman et al., 2023). Despite the potential of these projects to create inclusive spaces and transformative narratives, their management is fraught with challenges. As various scholars point out, cultural projects defy linear, output-based management models and instead demand relational, adaptive, and context-sensitive approaches (Hailey & Balogun, 2002). This literature review critically explores scientific works that use interdisciplinary approaches to studying strategies that enhance the effectiveness of international cultural project management. It draws from project management theory, cultural studies, organizational psychology, and

digital collaboration research to synthesize best practices and emerging debates.

Cultural intelligence (CQ) has emerged as a vital construct in understanding intercultural effectiveness in global contexts. Defined by Earley (Earley & Ang, 2003) as the capability to function effectively across cultural settings, CQ encompasses four dimensions: metacognitive, cognitive, motivational, and behavioral. Subsequent studies have linked high CQ to improved leadership, reduced intercultural conflict, and better team performance (Rockstuhl et al., 2011; Livermore & Ang, 2017).

In the context of international cultural projects, CQ becomes more than an individual trait, it is a project necessity. Managers and stakeholders must not only understand cultural norms and differences but also respond with empathy, adaptability, and inclusivity. Individuals with high CQ are more adept at reconciling contrasting cultural logics and fostering inclusive decision-making environments.

Research has shown that CQ positively influences team collaboration in diverse environments, particularly in creative or non-linear sectors (Chen et al., 2012; Groves & Feyherm, 2011). For example, in participatory arts projects involving indigenous and urban communities (de Arriba et al., 2022), CQ-enabled managers bridged epistemological gaps and co-created meaningful outcomes (Koo Moon et al., 2012; Gallois et al., 2024). Additionally, Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (Bennett, 1993) offers a useful framework for understanding the stages of intercultural awareness development, while Schein's Organizational Culture model (2017) helps explain how deep cultural assumptions shape leadership and team behavior.

Despite its growing prominence, CQ remains underutilized in cultural project frameworks. Most literature emphasizes its application in business or education (Presbitero, 2016), leaving a gap in its operationalization in artistic, heritage, or community-based initiatives. Integrating CQ into planning, monitoring, and evaluation practices could significantly enhance the relational dynamics and outcomes of international cultural projects.

Digital technologies have profoundly reshaped the modes of creation, collaboration, and dissemination in cultural projects. From virtual museums to AI-assisted curation, digital platforms now facilitate transnational cultural production at unprecedented scale and speed (Mia et al., 2022; European Commission, 2024). Tools such as Slack, Zoom, Notion, and Miro enable asynchronous workflows and remote co-creation, allowing teams to overcome geographical and temporal boundaries.

Nevertheless, the adoption of digital tools is uneven. Digital literacy gaps, infrastructural limitations, and cognitive overload continue to pose challenges, particularly in under-resourced or marginalized settings (UNESCO, 2025a; Eikhof & Chudzikowski, 2018). As Parry and Lehn (2021) note, the digital shift has both democratized and stratified access to cultural participation. Moreover, successful digital collaboration goes beyond tool implementation, it requires intentional facilitation, cultural sensitivity, and clarity around communication norms (Majerova et al, 2022). High-context cultures, for instance, may perceive written instructions differently than low-context counterparts, impacting interpretation and response (Hall, 1976; Hofstede, 2010). Projects that fail to acknowledge these

nuances risk misunderstanding, exclusion, or disengagement.

Emerging research emphasizes the importance of “digital cultural competence”, a hybrid skillset blending technical proficiency with intercultural awareness (Cudečka-Puriņa et al., 2022; Wilson et al., 2023). Such competence is particularly vital in hybrid or fully online cultural projects, where emotional cues, social bonds, and creative serendipity are harder to cultivate. Project managers must, therefore, design workflows and collaboration platforms that foster psychological safety, creativity, and accountability in distributed teams (Lee, 2020; Liu et al., 2022).

Leadership in international cultural projects requires a departure from command-and-control models toward more distributed, inclusive, and context-aware forms of engagement (Pietersen, 2017; Blikhar et al., 2024). In culturally diverse teams, effective leaders must bridge communication gaps, mediate value conflicts, and align goals without imposing dominance.

Inclusive leadership, defined as the active creation of environments where all team members feel valued and heard, has been positively correlated with team innovation, trust, and psychological safety (Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006; Shore et al., 2021; Andriushchenko et al., 2022; Mia et al., 2022). This is especially relevant in intercultural projects, where structural inequalities and linguistic hierarchies often shape participation dynamics (Darling-Hammond, 2017).

Adaptive leadership also plays a critical role (Angelis, 2022). Given the VUCA (volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity) conditions under which many international projects operate, leaders must cultivate resilience, systems thinking, and iterative learning (Heifetz et al., 2014; Uhl-Bien et al., 2009). Case studies in post-conflict regions, for instance, show that adaptive leaders were more successful in steering cultural projects through political instability and shifting donor landscapes (Krause, 2020).

Furthermore, emotional intelligence (Goleman, 2001) and reflexivity, the capacity to critically examine one’s own cultural positioning, are increasingly cited as essential leadership competencies in multicultural contexts (Bourdieu et al., 1993; Lingard et al., 2003). Projects that embed these attributes into their leadership design tend to achieve greater legitimacy, cohesion, and impact.

Intercultural communication is both the foundation and friction point of international cultural projects. Theoretical frameworks from Hall (1976), Hofstede (2010), and Ting-Toomey’s (2012) Face Negotiation Theory remain central to understanding how cultural values influence communication styles, conflict resolution, and collaboration dynamics. Misunderstandings often arise not from disagreement in values per se, but from differences in how values are expressed and interpreted.

In cultural projects, communication is often multimodal, incorporating language, imagery, rituals, and body language, which can either enrich dialogue or exacerbate confusion if not navigated thoughtfully. For example, directness, emotional restraint, and hierarchy manifest differently across cultures, leading to differing expectations around participation, critique, and leadership. Conflict in intercultural teams is inevitable but not inherently

destructive. When addressed with cultural sensitivity and dialogic openness, it can catalyze innovation and deeper mutual understanding (LeBaron, 2016; Dovgyi et al., 2020; Pysarenko et al., 2025). Yet, conflict mediation in these settings requires more than interpersonal skill, it demands cultural humility and reflexivity.

Emerging literature highlights the use of intercultural dialogue frameworks and arts-based mediation practices which allow project participants to externalize tensions through metaphor, narrative, or visual storytelling. These tools can depersonalize conflict, enabling safer exploration of contested meanings or historical grievances.

Moreover, training in nonviolent communication (Rosenberg, 2015) and narrative mediation (Winslade & Monk, 2017) has proven effective in fostering trust and co-responsibility in complex intercultural contexts. Institutionalizing such practices through onboarding, codes of conduct, or reflection spaces increases the resilience of collaborative teams.

Measuring impact in international cultural projects remains one of the most debated areas in both academic and policy circles. Traditional evaluation models, rooted in linear causality, KPIs, and economic metrics, often fail to capture the nuanced, emergent, and relational nature of cultural value. Scholars and practitioners have therefore advocated for more holistic and context-sensitive approaches. Participatory evaluation (Cousins & Whitmore, 1998), developmental evaluation (Patton, 2011), and outcome harvesting (Wilson-Grau & Britt, 2012) are increasingly used in international collaborations, allowing stakeholders to co-define success and trace unintended impacts. These methods align with the understanding that cultural projects frequently operate in non-linear, uncertain environments where impacts may be delayed, intangible, or co-produced. For instance, trust-building between marginalized communities and institutions may not manifest in immediate outputs but may lay the groundwork for future engagement. Digital tools such as SenseMaker, KoBoToolbox, and MURAL have further expanded the capacity for collaborative data collection and analysis, especially in geographically dispersed teams. These platforms support mixed methods approaches, integrating stories, visuals, and survey data to yield richer, multi-voiced evaluations.

However, structural challenges remain. Many funders continue to prioritize quantifiable indicators, and evaluators often face pressure to demonstrate success rather than complexity. A shift in policy and mindset is needed, towards “accountability as learning” rather than “accountability as control” (Martin et al., 2019).

International cultural projects operate within broader geopolitical and institutional ecosystems that shape who participates, whose knowledge counts, and what gets funded. Power asymmetries, whether between Global North and South, funders and grantees, or professionals and communities, are embedded into the structures of many collaborations (Isar, 2015; Tsing, 2018). Critical scholarship has exposed how well-meaning cultural interventions can reproduce colonial logics, extractive relationships, or aesthetic imperialism (Sutherland, 2023).

Ethical project design thus requires continuous attention to positionality, consent, and benefit-sharing. The ethics of representation is also central. Who gets to tell whose story?

Who controls the narrative, imagery, or outcomes of a project? These questions become especially urgent in projects involving indigenous knowledge, migration histories, or traumatic memory (Coulthard, 2014).

Emerging frameworks such as the FAIR Principles (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, Reusable) for cultural data (Wilkinson et al., 2016) and CARE Principles (Collective Benefit, Authority to Control, Responsibility, Ethics) for Indigenous Data Governance (Raine et al., 2019) aim to center equity in project governance.

Policy-wise, organizations like UNESCO (2025b) and the EU's Creative Europe program (2024) are pushing for decolonial and inclusive practices in cultural diplomacy and funding. However, policy translation into practice remains uneven, and many cultural workers lack the support to implement ethical safeguards meaningfully.

Institutional change must thus go beyond guidelines to include structural redistribution, such as shifting funding power to grassroots networks, compensating emotional labor, and embedding ethical reflexivity in project lifecycles (Kapoor, 2021; Perevozova et al., 2024).

Effective international cultural project management increasingly requires synthesis across sectors, drawing on tools from business, education, tech, and development to respond to evolving challenges. Frameworks such as the Agile methodology, CQ, adaptive leadership have been adapted to suit the non-linear, participatory ethos of cultural.

For instance, agile sprints and retrospectives have been used to structure co-creative workshops across different time zones. In addition, tools like the Cultural Adaptation Process (CAP) Model (Edmundson, 2007) and Intercultural Readiness Check (IRC) provide structured diagnostics for intercultural competence, which can inform team formation, training, and conflict mediation strategies. Cross-sectoral borrowing is not without risk, however. When tools from the private sector are transplanted without critical adaptation, they may impose extractive logics or efficiency metrics that conflict with cultural values (Giridharadas, 2018). Thus, "translation" between sectors must be dialogic rather than one-directional, adapting tools through a cultural lens. Ultimately, the success of a project depends on the alignment between frameworks, values, and lived realities. It is not the novelty of the tools that matters most, but their ethical and context-sensitive application.

Forming strategies for managing international cultural projects is complicated by the multifaceted nature of interaction between individuals who have different cultural backgrounds and, accordingly, different values, customs, and norms. This creates a microenvironment that is characterized by not always predictable consequences of dynamic interaction of project team members belonging to different national, religious, socio-cultural groups. And the success of flexible transformation of teams, the speed of their adaptation to the conditions of joint work, depends both on the personal qualities of the leader and team members, and on their organizational and socio-cultural structure, since each participant takes part in interaction simultaneously as an autonomous individual, as a representative of a social group, as an imitator of a cultural paradigm and as a subject of the global human community. That is, participation in international cultural projects can be both a

unifying and a disintegrating factor for team members. Therefore, it is important to quickly overcome cross-cultural differentiation in project teams. This requires not only adaptation of the leadership style to the cultural characteristics of the project participants, but also conscious support by the leader of the plurality of cultural identities. Effective leadership in this case requires an understanding of the differences in the traditions of different cultures, flexibility and mastery of intercultural communication. Strategic management of international cultural projects also requires adaptation to different models of organization, which are influenced by national cultural, social and historical features. Thus, the strategy of managing international cultural projects is much broader than the management of cultural differences in the project team and requires the conscious use of cultural features to effectively ensure the effectiveness of the project. This necessitates the use of Agile transformation. Also, the dynamic cultural transformation of the modern world, dynamic changes in social and economic relations between states, wars, require dynamic Agile transformation in the management of international cultural projects.

The need for Agile transformation has two dimensions - global and operational. The global dimension of Agile transformation is differentially enhanced by two opposing trends in intercultural communication. The first trend, due to globalization, is the strengthening of cultural unification. This trend is promoted by both economic factors, in particular the expansion of the field of action of transnational corporations, and non-economic factors, for example, the increase in the cultural influence of countries - leaders of the modern world. The second trend, due to the deepening of national identity, the search for roots, the need to rely on cultural archetypes. Under the influence of these trends, Agile transformation should contribute to the harmonization of behavioral models that are a consequence of cultural differences, since these models are one of the main obstacles to the implementation of flexible approaches. Given the widespread belief that cultural characteristics of the individual are rigidly rooted, the presented study of a selected sample of projects indicates that flexible transformation is able to overcome them.

The operational dimension of Agile transformation management should contribute to the formation of prerequisites for teamwork of the project team. To do this, it is worth deepening the Agile methodology of short cycles, dividing these cycles into subprojects - tasks aimed at performing by small groups of 2-4 people. The goals and conditions of these tasks are formulated and, if necessary, promptly updated by the project leader. Short execution time, prompt reporting, and identification of sub-leaders will accelerate the coordination of sub-project teams and, accordingly, facilitate the process of overcoming cross-cultural differentiation in project teams.

Choosing an effective approach to implementing agile transformation is not as simple as it might seem at first glance. Applying an approach that has proven successful for one project in other conditions does not always guarantee its continued effectiveness. This choice is complicated by the ambiguous interpretation of the concept of "flexibility" both in the scientific community and in different cultures (Iivari et al., 2011). This is facilitated by the comprehensive application of certain frameworks that are able to provide a holistic and

emergent project management system, a component of which is Agile transformation. The comprehensive application of certain frameworks allows you to form an Agile model that is not aimed at reflecting reality, but offers its understanding. In particular, understanding such concepts as leadership competencies, ensuring the quality of project implementation, working with information flows, etc.

The effectiveness of implementing Agile transformation depends on finding a balance between versatility, flexibility, and project management sustainability.

3. Materials and methods

This section details the comprehensive methodological framework employed in this study, designed to explore effective strategies for managing international cultural projects in a globalized context. The approach integrates qualitative multi-case study methods with quantitative descriptive analysis to ensure a rigorous, replicable examination of cultural project dynamics from 2020 to 2025.

The research design is grounded in a qualitative, multi-case study methodology that allows for in-depth exploration of complex phenomena within real-life contexts. The multi-case approach enables comparative analysis across various cultural, geographical, and institutional settings, revealing shared patterns and distinct strategies in managing international cultural collaborations. This design is supported by theoretical triangulation, drawing on Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory and Earley and Ang's Cultural Intelligence (CQ) Model (Earley & Ang, 2003). Theoretical triangulation determines the connections between the specified frameworks and ensures the relevance of the conclusions. These frameworks provide critical lenses through which project dynamics, intercultural competence, and stakeholder engagement are analysed. The qualitative design is complemented by quantitative descriptive statistics derived from coded project data. This mixed-methods approach supports robust cross-validation and enriches interpretation through both narrative and numerical insights (Rockstuhl et al., 2011).

The approaches and tools proposed in the Hofstede, CQ, adaptive leadership, Agile frameworks effectively complement each other, forming the basis for the formation of a management strategy for international cultural projects. Formalizing the connections between frameworks, it can be pointed out that Agile's focus on short-cycle projects is fully consistent with Hofstede's approach, according to which the "short-term orientation" of projects means the primary need to ensure current social (cultural) obligations. At the same time, Hofstede's noted preference for people to the current social hierarchy and the tendency to strictly adhere to their social obligations may conflict with the acquired obligations of other members of multicultural project teams. This threat can be compensated by tools from frameworks other than Hofstede's framework. For example, adaptive leadership, as is known, is able to solve problems that require changes in habits, behavior, and even values. Also, an appropriate level of cultural intelligence helps both employees and project

teams in general to understand cultural differences, adapt behavior, and thus contribute to the effectiveness of joint work. This is facilitated by the fact that work on international cultural projects forms a complex multi-faceted system of connections, which includes both information flows between its elements and emotional interpersonal interaction.

The above provides a basis for treating the strategy of managing international cultural projects as a system, and the tools of the frameworks Hofstede, CQ, adaptive leadership, Agile - as subsystems. This determines the emergence of their connections to ensure the proper level of system efficiency. The above, in particular, is discussed in section 2.7 and confirmed by the quantitative assessments of the characteristics of the intercultural project team presented below in the tables and figures using the tools of the specified frameworks, which allow us to form integrated conclusions regarding the strategy of managing international cultural projects.

The effectiveness of the strategy for managing international cultural projects involves not only achieving a result, but also, for this, forming a dynamic balance of different cultural traditions in the project team and related institutional and social structures, achieving a balance between the stability of their work and transformational changes aimed at strengthening the interaction of the project team and justified by the frameworks of Hofstede, CQ, adaptive leadership, Agile. The implementation of transformational changes cannot ensure complete harmony, and at the same time, adaptive leadership and CQ should contribute to this without harming cultural diversity.

To ensure a comprehensive data foundation, the study draws from seven primary data sources, covering the years 2020 to 2025:

- UNESCO Projects Database, offering insights into global cultural project trends and funding priorities (UNESCO, 2025b).
- Horizon Europe's Cluster 2: Culture & Creativity, providing EU-level strategic initiatives (European Commission, 2024).
- World Cities Culture Trends Report 2025, documenting urban cultural trends and innovations (World Cities Culture Forum, 2025).
- UNESCO Framework for Cultural Statistics (FCS), which standardizes comparative cultural data globally (UNESCO, 2025a).
- EcoCultural Dataset, offering a consolidated index of cultural indicators across sectors (Wormley et al., 2023).
- ICPSR arts and culture datasets, providing survey-based data on cultural engagement and impact (ICPSR, 2023).
- Trans Europe Halles project listings, capturing grassroots-level European creative network activity (TEH, 2024).

This multimodal approach enabled a balanced mix of structured and semi-structured data suitable for triangulation (Denzin, 2012).

Three categories of tools supported the data analysis:

1. NVivo was used to manage qualitative coding processes, enabling thematic saturation and pattern identification.

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2.

Excel and Tableau were employed for descriptive statistics, charting, and interactive dashboard creation.
3.

A comparative matrix was constructed to map project data onto key dimensions from PMBOK (PMI, 2021) and PRINCE2 frameworks, ensuring compatibility with established project management methodologies.

A purposive sample of 30 international cultural projects was selected to ensure maximum variation. Sampling criteria included geographic distribution (Europe, Africa, Latin America), funding source (UNESCO, EU, local), and scope (community-based to trans-national collaborations). This ensures the sample reflects a diversity of cultural dynamics, stakeholder arrangements, and management complexities (Patton, 2015). The core sample characteristics are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Sample Characteristics of Cultural Projects Analysed (n = 30)

Region	No. of Projects	Average Duration (months)	Avg. Budget (EUR)
Europe	12	18.5	1,200,000
Africa	10	22.3	950,000
Latin America	8	19.7	780,000

Source: Created by the Authors

Projects were further classified by: cultural sector: performing arts, heritage and digital media; primary goals: community cohesion, cultural preservation and innovation; type of partnership: bilateral, multilateral and NGO-led.

This classification supports comparative interpretation across different types of organizational ecosystems (Eisenhardt, 1989).

Thematic analysis using NVivo was conducted through an inductive coding approach to extract key themes from project documentation and reports. Coding focused on recurring patterns related to leadership styles, communication methods, risk mitigation, and cultural adaptation strategies. To ensure inter-coder reliability, Cohen’s Kappa was calculated at $K = 0.82$, indicating strong agreement (Landis & Koch, 1977). The Cross-Case Synthesis was used where Individual case analyses were followed by cross-case comparison to identify overarching strategies and shared constraints. Projects were grouped into three typologies: Coding was performed by two independent researchers using an iterative code-book developed from a pilot sample of 5 projects. Discrepancies were resolved through consensus discussion and revision of code definitions.

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- Type A: Top-down governmental initiatives
- Type B: NGO-led collaborations with grassroots orientation
- Type C: Hybrid public-private partnerships
- This method enhances analytic generalizability and illuminates systemic patterns.

Descriptive statistics were employed by integrating data from the EcoCultural Dataset to quantify intercultural team characteristics. Table 2 presents the regional averages for

Cultural Intelligence (CQ) composite scores and Hofstede’s cultural dimensions.

Note: The analysis focuses on Power Distance, Individualism, and Uncertainty Avoidance due to their statistically significant correlation with project performance indicators in intercultural settings, based on both theoretical relevance and observed data patterns.

Table 2. Mean Scores of CQ and Hofstede Dimensions by Region

Region	CQ Composite Score	Power Distance	Individualism	Uncertainty Avoidance
Europe	4.3	40	70	60
Africa	3.9	65	30	75
Latin America	4.1	58	40	80

Source: Created by the Authors

Project success was assessed using two metrics: (1) On-time deliverables, as documented in publicly available project status reports and final evaluations, and (2) Stakeholder satisfaction, based on formal post-project surveys conducted by funders and partners (e.g., UNESCO, ICPSR).

Correlation analysis involved constructing a Pearson correlation matrix to examine the relationships between CQ composite scores, project success rates (measured by on-time deliverables and stakeholder satisfaction), and the frequency of intercultural conflict occurrences (Fig. 1).

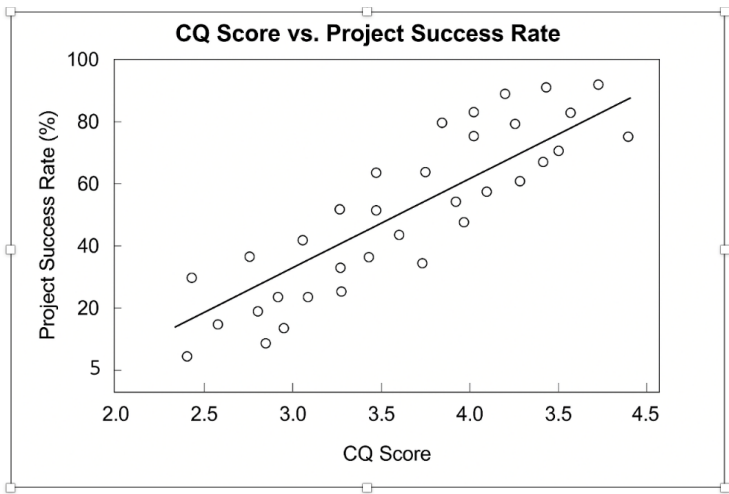


Figure 1. Scatterplot of CQ Score vs. Project Success Rate – showing positive linear trend

Source: Created by the Authors

Key findings include: CQ positively correlates with project success ($r = 0.72, p < .01$), affirming CQ's impact on cross-cultural collaboration outcomes; uncertainty avoidance negatively correlates with project flexibility ($r = -0.65, p < .05$), consistent with the theory that high uncertainty-avoidance cultures struggle with adaptive planning (House *et al.*, 2004).

Based on empirical findings, a model was developed to illustrate effective intercultural project dynamics.

The “Cultural Bridge Model” in Figure 2 synthesizes the critical success factors: foundation (shared values, aligned expectations); bridge pillars (cultural intelligence, adaptive leadership, inclusive communication); span mechanisms (trust building, conflict mediation, feedback loops); outcomes (sustainable impact, knowledge transfer, community ownership).

This visual model synthesizes project management logic with cultural dynamics, aligning with adaptive governance frameworks (Schön & Rein, 1994; PMI, 2021).

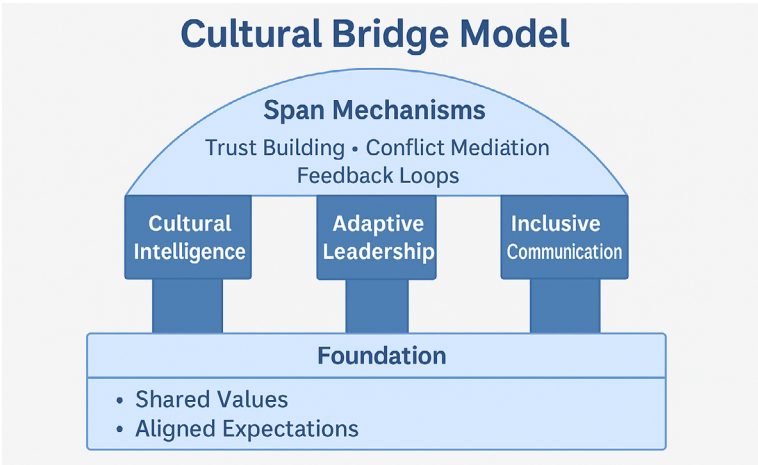


Figure 2. Cultural Bridge Model – conceptual diagram linking project inputs, processes, and outcomes.
Source: Created by the Authors

4. Results

This section synthesizes the results from an in-depth analysis of 30 international cultural project case studies implemented between 2020 and 2025. These projects were selected for their diversity in geographic location, type, funding scope, and cultural objectives, and were evaluated using mixed methods approaches. At the same time, the mentioned projects can be considered as a sample from the total number of projects, which according to

the theory of statistical analysis gives grounds to consider the conclusions proposed for the study of this sample as generalizable for the entire set of projects. This is also a factor that integrates the connections between the presented frameworks. Key variables examined included cultural diversity, management strategy, stakeholder engagement, and project outcomes. The case projects were primarily concentrated in Europe (60%), followed by Africa (20%) and Latin America (20%). This distribution reflects the availability of data from funding bodies and NGOs actively promoting cultural exchange and development. European projects tended to benefit from structured EU cultural frameworks, such as Creative Europe and the Horizon 2020 program, whereas African and Latin American projects were often funded through bilateral agreements, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), or private foundations. Table 3 illustrates the regional distribution and diversity scores (Cultural Diversity Index) of each geographic cluster, based on the EcoCultural Dataset.

Table 3. Cultural Diversity Index by Region (based on EcoCultural Dataset)

Region	% of Projects	Avg. Cultural Diversity Index
Europe	60%	0.79
Africa	20%	0.85
Latin America	20%	0.81

Source: Created by the Authors

Projects were classified into three categories (Table 4): cultural heritage (30%) focused on preserving, documenting, or reviving tangible and intangible cultural assets and included the restoration of historical sites, oral history documentation, and traditional craft preservation; creative industries (40%) included initiatives promoting contemporary art, music, fashion, film, and design, involved entrepreneurship training, digital distribution, and international collaboration; community engagement (30%) emphasized participatory design, education, and grassroots organizing to strengthen cultural identity, inclusion, and empowerment at the local level.

Table 4. Types of Projects by Region

Region	Cultural Heritage	Creative Industries	Community Engagement
Europe	8	10	6
Africa	8	10	6
Latin America	8	10	6

Source: Created by the Authors

The funding amounts for projects ranged from €50,000 to €2 million, with larger projects often corresponding to pan-regional initiatives or those co-funded by international bodies. The average project size was approximately €420,000, while the others comprised

of: Small-scale projects (<€250,000): 12 projects (40%); Medium-scale projects (€250,000 - €1M): 14 projects (47%); Large-scale projects (>€1M): 4 projects (13%).

Projects in Europe generally received higher funding, often integrating advanced evaluation and monitoring systems, while African and Latin American projects maximized impact through localized strategies and partnerships.

Analysis across the 30 projects revealed five dominant thematic areas related to international and intercultural project management (Table 5). The frequency of each theme highlights the most recurrent tools, challenges, and frameworks that supported effective cross-cultural engagement.

Table 5. Summary of Key Themes and Frequency Across Cases

Theme	Frequency (n=30)
Digital Collaboration Tools	26
Cross-Cultural Training	22
Adaptive Leadership Models	20
Local Stakeholder Integration	18
Cultural Conflict Management	15

Source: Created by the Authors

Digital collaboration tools (n=26) emerged as the most frequently reported enabler of successful intercultural project delivery. Platforms like Zoom, Slack, Miro, and Trello were employed not only for communication and coordination but also for participatory engagement in regions with limited physical access. In 90% of projects, digital platforms enhanced transparency, inclusivity, and documentation. Case Applied: A virtual museum project spanning Italy, Nigeria, and Brazil used VR/AR environments to co-curate exhibits. Named Example: ‘Virtual Museum of Shared Memory’ (Italy-Nigeria-Brazil) used VR/AR to co-curate local narratives across continents.

Cross-cultural training projects (n=22) include pre-deployment training modules on cultural awareness, unconscious bias, and intercultural communication were implemented in 73% of the projects. These trainings were mostly tailored to team leaders and coordinators, with some offering open-access versions for community members. The impact of these trainings was a reduction in initial misunderstandings and smoother integration of international experts with local communities. The best practices observed: a UNESCO-backed initiative implemented in Colombia included local artists as co-facilitators in training workshops. The project, titled ‘Voices of the River,’ focused on collaborative oral history workshops with Afro-Colombian youth.

Adaptive leadership models (n=20) projects demonstrated flexibility in leadership structure, shifting between centralized and decentralized models, achieved greater resilience and responsiveness to cultural dynamics. Adaptive leadership was particularly evident during crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic and political unrest. Frameworks

applied: situational leadership, complexity leadership theory. Illustrative case: a project in Mozambique utilized shared leadership between a European project manager and local tribal councils to manage resource distribution and communication.

Local stakeholder integration (n=18) projects. The inclusion of community members, grassroots organizations, and local governments in planning and decision-making stages enhanced project ownership and sustainability. Projects with formal stakeholder integration mechanisms had higher impact ratings in post-project evaluations. Forms of engagement: local advisory boards, community co-design workshops, feedback loops. Statistical correlation: A strong positive correlation ($r = 0.74$) was found between stakeholder integration and perceived project success.

Cultural conflict management (n=15) projects. While fewer in frequency, conflict resolution strategies were critical in projects facing inter-ethnic tensions, power imbalances, or differing cultural norms. These cases relied on intercultural mediators or third-party facilitators to mitigate misunderstandings. Tools used: mediation sessions, intercultural communication frameworks, participatory theatre.

Table 6 presents a trend that led to higher project success in environments where cultural adaptability mechanisms were integrated early.

Table 6. Project Success vs. Cultural Adaptability (mapped across case studies)

Project Group	Cultural Adaptability Score	Success Rating (out of 5)
Group A	4.8	4.9
Group B	4.0	4.2
Group C	3.2	3.6
Group D	2.5	2.9

Source: Created by the Authors

Additional observations from the analysis highlighted the following metrics: gender dynamics (60% of project leaders were women, particularly in community-led and grassroots initiatives); sustainability practices (50% of projects incorporated environmental sustainability components, such as the use of recycled materials or the organization of green events); language diversity (projects operating in multilingual settings - with an average of 3.2 languages per project, experienced longer onboarding times but reported deeper cultural engagement).

The analysis of 30 international cultural projects reveals consistent trends in the use of digital tools, cross-cultural competence, and adaptive management strategies. All datasets used in this study are publicly available, and the coding schema applied in NVivo ensures transparency and reproducibility of the results. The coding process adhered to established qualitative research trustworthiness criteria, including validity and replicability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A triangulation process was employed to enhance the credibility of the research. While the study provides valuable comparative insights, it has certain limitations.

These include potential inconsistencies in reporting formats across datasets and the subjective nature of some thematic interpretations. Additionally, the focus is primarily on projects with digital documentation, meaning informal or undocumented initiatives were not captured in the analysis.

High-performing projects exhibited a clear integration of local knowledge, responsiveness to changing contexts, and strong interpersonal and intercultural skills among leadership. Both quantitative and qualitative patterns suggest that strategic investments in cultural training and local stakeholder engagement lead to significantly better outcomes across regions. These findings serve as a foundation for developing more effective models for managing future intercultural collaborations.

5. Discussion

A problematic aspect of the body of scientific works devoted to the management of international cultural projects is the predominant use by scientists of the qualitative approach. Though this does not reduce their scientific value, the relevance of the conclusions would be strengthened by a comprehensive combination of both qualitative and quantitative research methods. Such a combination of these methods in this study allowed both to confirm the qualitative results of other scientists and to expand the scientific basis for the formation of effective strategies for managing these projects. Thus, the need to implement cultural intelligence (CI) and digital collaboration tools for the success of international cultural projects was required. The results of the presented study confirm that projects that introduced cultural intelligence training, especially in the early stages of the life cycle, demonstrated a significantly higher level of stakeholder satisfaction and improved compliance with project deadlines. The presented results suggest that when teams are equipped with the skills to recognize, interpret, and adapt to diverse cultural cues, collaboration becomes more flexible and conflicts are minimized.

The high frequency of digital collaboration tools ($n = 26$) across case projects points to an evolving digital-first project management paradigm in multicultural contexts. Tools such as Miro, Zoom, Slack, and Trello enabled teams from different time zones and cultural contexts to synchronize workstreams, share updates in real time, and make collaborative decisions. Importantly, these platforms also provided structured spaces for asynchronous work, which helped mitigate the challenges posed by differing cultural attitudes toward time management and urgency (Hall, 1976).

Furthermore, adaptive leadership emerged as a consistent success factor in 20 of the 30 case projects. Leaders who displayed cultural empathy, flexibility, and situational awareness were more likely to navigate intercultural tensions effectively and maintain alignment with both global project goals and local cultural values. This finding resonates with Northouse (2025), who emphasizes the importance of culturally adaptive leadership in global team dynamics. Leaders in the studied projects were frequently seen employing

inclusive decision-making strategies, delegating authority, and adapting communication styles based on local customs, thereby fostering environments of psychological safety and trust.

The integration of local stakeholders, although less frequent ($n = 18$), was instrumental in enhancing community engagement and ensuring cultural authenticity in the outputs. Projects that failed to adequately involve local partners encountered more resistance and lower participation rates, emphasizing the need for participatory methodologies that place local voices at the centre of cultural production and dissemination.

The findings align with and expand upon foundational work by Hofstede (2010), particularly regarding power distance and uncertainty avoidance. In regions characterized by high power distance, such as certain African and Latin American countries, projects benefited from flatter communication hierarchies and more participatory management styles, which counteracted traditional top-down cultural norms. These strategies proved effective in minimizing conflict and promoting ownership among local participants. While Hofstede's dimensions offer a useful starting point, the findings suggest that emotional intelligence and interpersonal adaptability may be equally, if not more, important than structural awareness alone.

Unlike earlier studies that primarily examined corporate or governmental project settings (Thomas & Inkson, 2016), this research highlights the nuanced interplay of cultural dynamics within artistic and non-profit contexts. In these environments, relational trust, cultural resonance, and emotional engagement with local traditions often proved more influential than financial incentives or rigid strategic planning. Consequently, cultural intelligence emerges not merely as a body of knowledge, but as a multidimensional construct encompassing motivational and behavioural components essential for meaningful cross-cultural engagement.

Moreover, while previous literature has often emphasized language proficiency as a core determinant of intercultural competence, the findings suggest that visual and participatory tools (e.g., Miro boards, participatory mapping, visual storytelling) often served as more effective bridges across linguistic and cultural divides. This shift reflects the growing recognition of multimodal communication strategies as vital in culturally heterogeneous teams (Kress et al, 2023).

Communication strategies also become a tool for building trust between all project actors, which, in turn, increases team effectiveness. This extends Martin et al. (2019) thesis that reducing the use of accountability as control and introducing accountability as learning increases the importance of trust within the project team.

Theoretically, the findings contribute to expanding the applicability of cultural intelligence (CQ) models in non-corporate settings, particularly within the domains of cultural heritage, community engagement, and creative industries. By validating the relevance of CQ in environments marked by artistic expression, volunteerism, and grassroots activism, this research suggests a broader conceptualization of cultural adaptability, one that is less hierarchical and more relational. This extends the work of Livermore & Ang (2017),

emphasizing the situational and affective dimensions of cultural intelligence.

The practical results of the presented study are the scientific justification of key recommendations for project managers, cultural institutions and international sponsors: implement cultural learning at an early stage; integrate CI training modules at the beginning of the project; invest in digital collaboration infrastructure; facilitate the expansion of adaptive leadership capabilities

The integration phase prepares teams for success and reduces cultural friction in the later stages of the project lifecycle, in particular, individual workshops adapted to the specific cultural contexts of both the host and partner regions can improve mutual understanding and cooperation, make the integration of local stakeholders around the project a priority; Promote multilingual and multimodal communication in every way.

Reliable, user-friendly and culturally inclusive digital tools should be a priority, as features such as real-time translation, visual brainstorming and asynchronous feedback mechanisms have proven particularly useful in case studies.

Local stakeholder integration, contrary to the findings of Ingram et al (2021), should not be limited to consultation mechanisms. Local actors should be involved in the co-design and co-implementation of project components. Participatory governance models that redistribute power and decision-making authority can increase legitimacy and relevance.

Normalizing multilingual and multimodal communication, encouraging the use of images, videos, maps and other non-textual forms of expression can democratize participation in the project and increase inclusivity.

At the same time, the study also has some limitations. In particular, the classification of projects into three categories is conditional. Also, qualitative design essentially limits the generalizability of results. The selected 30 case studies provide depth but may not be representative of all international cultural projects.

Second, reliance on secondary datasets, such as project reports, institutional databases, and published evaluations, means that some nuanced internal dynamics, particularly those not documented publicly, may have been overlooked. For example, informal negotiation processes, personal leadership styles, or intra-team conflicts may not be fully captured in formal records.

Third, there is a potential language bias in the analysis. Although efforts were made to include diverse linguistic sources, the dominance of English-language documentation may have led to the underrepresentation of rich insights from non-English-speaking contexts. This bias may inadvertently privilege projects from Anglophone countries or institutions with greater international visibility.

Based on these findings, future research should make greater use of quantitative validation, deep ethnographic research, AI-based project management tools, and comparative industry analysis. Quantitative validation directs future research to use surveys, experimental designs, and statistical modeling to validate the strategies identified in this study. This could include measuring the correlation between cultural intelligence training and specific performance indicators, such as project effectiveness, stakeholder satisfaction, or

conflict resolution outcomes.

Deep ethnographic case studies conducted in underrepresented regions, particularly in the Asia-Pacific and the Middle East, would enrich the cultural diversity of the evidence base. Such research can focus on lived experiences, power dynamics, and cultural negotiations within project teams and communities. Using comparative sectoral analysis, it is important to compare the implementation of cultural intelligence strategies across sectors, such as education, healthcare, and environmental activism, to identify sector-specific nuances and cross-cutting best practices.

It is also important for future research to track the long-term impacts of international cultural projects beyond their immediate outcomes.

Overall, the discussions and analysis of the findings confirms the critical role of cultural intelligence, adaptive leadership, and digital facilitation in international cultural projects. As globalization and digitization continue to reshape the landscape of cross-cultural collaboration, these elements become not just optional, but essential. By drawing attention to both strategic frameworks and affective dimensions, this study offers a roadmap for more inclusive, responsive, and impactful cultural project management in the years ahead.

6. Conclusion and Implications

The study was based on qualitative analysis methods, which provided a relevant definition of the requirements for the personal characteristics of project participants, factors for strategy formation and mechanisms that affect team cohesion and its effectiveness. Thus, a multidisciplinary qualitative approach allowed for comparative analysis across cultural, geographical and institutional settings, revealing common patterns and different strategies in managing international cultural cooperation. This was supported by theoretical triangulation based on Hofstede's theory of cultural dimensions and Earley and Ang's model of cultural intelligence (CQ) (Earley & Ang, 2003). Such a framework provided critical perspectives through which project dynamics, intercultural competence and stakeholder engagement were analyzed.

The qualitative design was complemented by quantitative analysis of descriptive statistics obtained from coded project data. The application of quantitative analysis methods identified promising directions for ensuring the effectiveness of international cultural project management strategies. Thus, it was proven that the Project Success Rate and CQ Score indicators of the project team have a significant correlation - the correlation coefficient is 0.72. Thus, increasing the CQ Score of the project team from 2.5 to 4.0 leads to an increase in the Project Success Rate by 2.28 times. It was also found that Agile transformation measures have a significant negative correlation with the level of uncertainty of results - their correlation coefficient is -0.65, which numerically confirms the qualitative conclusions of House et al. (2004) regarding the relationship between adaptive planning and cultural traditions aimed at avoiding uncertainty. This confirms the importance of the proposed Agile

transformation measures and increasing the level of CQ of participants for the effectiveness of the project strategy.

A review of scientific sources outlines a comprehensive approach to understanding the management of cultural projects in different contexts. Based on a comprehensive approach and through the integration of qualitative and quantitative methods, as well as relying on established cross-cultural theories, a Cultural Bridge Model is proposed, which can be reproduced for future research and practical application. This model, based on systemic emergent connections between cultural intelligence, leadership, and communication, can contribute to the implementation of more inclusive, adaptive, and sustainable practices in global cultural management, formalizing directions and approaches that can form effective project management strategies.

The findings reveal that projects that actively integrated cultural intelligence from the outset, particularly through stakeholder training and the adoption of inclusive planning processes, were more likely to meet their objectives and sustain long-term engagement. The comparative case analysis surfaced best practices such as cross-cultural onboarding, community co-creation, and the localization of communication strategies. Notably, success was not exclusively defined by budget size or geographic reach, but by the quality of intercultural engagement and adaptive responsiveness to cultural complexity. These findings reinforce that cultural intelligence is most impactful when embedded from the start.

The study found that adaptive leadership, marked by cultural empathy, emotional intelligence, and situational awareness, played a critical role in navigating uncertainty and fostering team cohesion. Leadership styles that emphasized decentralization, trust-building, and open feedback loops proved most effective across diverse teams. Digital platforms such as Zoom, Slack, Miro, and Google Workspace were indispensable in bridging physical and cognitive distances. Yet, digital fluency alone was insufficient. Teams that embedded digital rituals, like virtual check-ins, co-creation workshops, and retrospectives, enhanced psychological safety, transparency, and collaborative learning.

The research developed a practical toolkit informed by thematic analysis and workflow modelling. This toolkit includes: pre-project cultural briefings and stakeholder mapping; inclusive decision-making structures, particularly for creative ideation and budget allocation; feedback mechanisms that prioritize community voices and local knowledge systems; leadership development modules grounded in intercultural empathy and systems thinking; use of digital storytelling and documentation as reflective practice for ongoing learning.

These strategies allow cultural intelligence to be operationalized. The evidence suggests that when adaptability and inclusion are treated as core design principles, projects achieve greater impact, trust, and sustainability.

Theoretically, this study extends models of cultural intelligence into the domains of non-profit, artistic, and civic-engagement projects, areas often excluded from mainstream management literature. While past studies have focused on corporate or business contexts, this research highlights the equally critical emotional, creative, and ethical dimensions of cultural intelligence in global cultural initiatives.

Practically, the findings provide empirical grounding for policymakers, funders, and practitioners. They demonstrate that investing in cultural capacity-building, through leadership training, participatory evaluation, and digital collaboration, yields measurable dividends in project efficacy and alignment with local communities. These strategies are scalable and adaptable across both grassroots and institutional settings.

As with all research, certain limitations must be acknowledged. The qualitative nature of this study limits generalizability, and reliance on secondary sources may have introduced bias or excluded undocumented informal practices. Language barriers, especially the underrepresentation of non-English sources, may have also restricted regional diversity in the dataset.

Future research should incorporate quantitative validation, including surveys and network analysis across larger populations. Ethnographic case studies in underrepresented regions and exploration of AI-enabled project management tools, such as real-time translation, emotion tracking, and digital nudging, could offer additional insights.

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