

Research Paper

Intercultural Competence in Multicultural Teams: Examining the Links Between Cultural Intelligence, Intercultural Sensitivity, and Adaptability

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the relationships between Cultural Intelligence (CQ), Intercultural Sensitivity (ISS), and Adaptability within the context of multicultural teams. A sample of 167 professionals (85 males and 82 females) aged 21–60 years and working in culturally diverse team environments across various industries was selected through purposive sampling. Participants completed the Cultural Intelligence Scale (CQS), the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS), and the Adaptability in Multinational Teams Scale (AMTS), which was developed specifically for the purposes of this research. Pearson's correlation analysis was employed to identify relationships between these variables. Findings revealed significant positive associations between CQ and ISS, CQ and Adaptability, and ISS and Adaptability. The findings highlight the critical role of intercultural skills in fostering better teamwork and inclusivity in diverse workplaces. These results suggest that organizations can enhance collaboration in multicultural teams by investing in training programs that develop Cultural Intelligence and Intercultural Sensitivity.

Keywords: *Cultural Intelligence, Intercultural Sensitivity, Adaptability, Multicultural Teams*

Cultural Intelligence

Cultural Intelligence refers to an individual's capacity to adjust successfully to novel cultural environments shaped by the beliefs of a specific society. This intellect facilitates the adjustment of culturally fitting behaviours (Earley et al., 2003: 26). It involves being proficient and adaptable in comprehending different cultures, learning from interactions, and gradually modifying one's mindset and behaviour to be in sync with the expectations of others during exchanges (Thomas et al, 2003, p. 14). Cultural Intelligence (CQ) is structured into four essential dimensions:

- 1. Metacognitive CQ:** Metacognitive CQ pertains to the mental strategies individuals use to acquire and comprehend cultural knowledge. It includes being aware of, controlling, and regulating one's thought processes related to cultural ethos (Flavell, 1979). People who demonstrate greater levels of metacognitive CQ are mindful of

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others' cultural choices and adapt their cognitive frameworks to navigate intercultural interactions effectively (Brislin et al., 2006; Triandis, 2006).

- 2. Cognitive CQ:** Cognitive CQ is the awareness individuals have about cultural norms, practices, and regulations, acquired through learning and one's experiences. This awareness spans economy, Judicial structure, sociolinguistics, as well as inter-personal arrangements across various cultures (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2001; Triandis, 1994). People with greater Cognitive CQ are adept at identifying similarities and differences between cultures (Brislin et al., 2006).
- 3. Motivational CQ:** Motivational CQ represents one's ability of channelling energy and attention in context to learning and operating effectively in diverse contexts. It includes managing emotions, cognition, and behaviors to achieve goals in challenging cultural settings (Kanfer & Heggestad, 1997). This dimension is driven by a person's curiosity and willingness to adjust to unfamiliar cultural environments, fostering resilience and responsiveness to ambiguity.
- 4. Behavioral CQ:** It involves one's ability to showcase appropriate both verbal and nonverbal activity during interactions with individuals from different cultures. People with greater behavioural Cultural Quotient adjust their language, tone, gestures, and facial expressions to align with cultural norms (Gudykunst, Ting-Toomey, & Chua, 1988). This dimension is crucial for maintaining effective and culturally appropriate relationships (Earley & Ang, 2003; Earley & Peterson, 2004).

Culture and Intercultural Sensitivity

Culture is a multifaceted and evolving concept encompassing the shared values, beliefs, attitudes, customs, behaviors, and traditions passed down through generations in a society. It serves as a framework that shapes how individuals perceive their experiences and engage with others. In societies characterized by cultural diversity, these collective understandings can range from areas of commonality to complex differences. Elements as age, sex, ethnicity, economic background, religion, sexuality, and historical influences contribute to this diversity. These elements shape the way individuals and groups express themselves, solve problems, and make decisions. In culturally diverse communities, this dynamic interplay of influences can foster both harmony and misunderstandings, depending on how differences are perceived and managed (Bayık, 2008; Bolsoy and Sevil, 2006; Cetişli et al., 2016).

Each culture brings with it distinct norms, traditions, and worldviews, which significantly impact communication and interpersonal interactions. These cultural frameworks determine acceptable ways of speaking, behaving, and expressing emotions. Consequently, individuals from differing cultural backgrounds may encounter challenges in achieving mutual understanding or building connections. For instance, certain cultures may value direct communication, while others may prioritize indirect or nuanced exchanges. Similarly, nonverbal cues like eye contact, gestures, and personal space may vary widely between cultural groups. These differences, while enriching in many ways, can create barriers when individuals from diverse cultures work or interact together. Addressing these challenges requires conscious effort to recognize and appreciate the cultural norms that shape others' perspectives and actions, thereby fostering more inclusive and meaningful interactions.

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Intercultural sensitivity is crucial for navigating these cultural differences and building bridges between diverse groups. It refers to the ability to adopt positive attitudes and behaviors that encourage understanding and respect for cultural diversity. More than just awareness of differences, intercultural sensitivity involves actively cultivating traits such as empathy, self-control, open-mindedness, and mutual respect. For example, empathy allows individuals to consider another person's experiences and feelings within the context of their cultural background, while self-control helps regulate emotional responses to unfamiliar or challenging cultural situations. Open-mindedness encourages curiosity rather than judgment, enabling individuals to engage with diverse perspectives constructively. Chen (1997) and Mercan (2016) emphasize that intercultural sensitivity also entails effective interactive communication and the avoidance of prejudice, creating an environment where all cultural identities are acknowledged and valued.

The importance of intercultural sensitivity has grown significantly in today's interconnected world, driven by factors such as migration, displacement, globalization, and the pursuit of better opportunities. These phenomena have brought individuals from different cultural backgrounds into closer and more frequent interaction, making intercultural competence an essential skill. For instance, in healthcare systems, where cultural diversity is often pronounced, practitioners frequently interact with patients whose cultural values, beliefs, and expectations differ from their own. In countries like Turkey, where populations are culturally diverse, the ability to navigate these differences becomes critical for providing equitable and effective care. This growing emphasis on cultural sensitivity extends beyond healthcare into workplaces, schools, and community settings, highlighting its vital role in fostering inclusivity, mutual understanding, and respect (Seibert, Stridh-Igo, & Zimmerman, 2002).

In conclusion, culture influences the way individuals communicate, interact, and perceive the world, while intercultural sensitivity provides a means to bridge differences and foster understanding. As global interconnectedness increases, developing cultural awareness and sensitivity has become essential for thriving in diverse societies, building stronger relationships, and creating inclusive environments.

Adaptability

Adaptability is a critical psychological trait, often viewed as a self-regulation mechanism that enables individuals to navigate and respond effectively to changes and challenges in their environment (Muraven & Baumeister, 2000, p. 247). It is essential for managing transitions, especially in unfamiliar or rapidly shifting circumstances, allowing individuals to achieve favorable outcomes (Wilkins et al., 2014). Adaptability can be defined as the ability, willingness, and motivation to modify behaviors, thought processes, and attitudes to meet the demands of different tasks, social settings, or environmental conditions (Ployhart & Bliese, 2006). Those with greater adaptability tend to have more robust mental and emotional resources, which equip them to manage stress and uncertainty more effectively than individuals with lower adaptability levels (Ployhart & Bliese, 2006). This trait is particularly valuable for individuals encountering new environments, such as employees entering unfamiliar organizational cultures or roles.

In today's fast-paced and ever-evolving world, adaptability has become a necessity. Successfully handling changes requires a combination of cognitive flexibility and the ability to adjust actions and behaviors to meet new demands (Ployhart & Bliese, 2006). The

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conservation of resources model highlights the importance of both personal and situational resources in helping individuals manage stress across various life domains (Hobfoll, 2001). By actively developing and protecting these resources, individuals can minimize the effects of resource loss, enhance resilience, and improve their quality of life. This proactive approach fosters not only stress management but also long-term success and satisfaction (Hobfoll, 1989).

Ultimately, adaptability serves as a fundamental skill for thriving in an increasingly unpredictable world. It empowers individuals to face transitions with confidence, adjust to dynamic circumstances, and maintain emotional well-being. Developing adaptability not only reduces the impact of stress but also enables continuous growth, fostering success and fulfillment in both personal and professional domains.

Crowne (2012) examined how cultural exposure influences both emotional intelligence and cultural intelligence. The research included 485 participants from a university in the northeastern United States and employed a quantitative approach using regression analysis. Cultural exposure was analyzed through various dimensions, such as binary, breadth, depth, and the interaction between breadth and depth. The results demonstrated that cultural exposure, in all its forms, significantly influenced cultural intelligence but showed no effect on emotional intelligence. This research underscores the critical role of cultural exposure in enhancing cultural intelligence, particularly in the context of increasing global interconnectedness and international experiences within organizations.

Bhawuk and Brislin (1992) introduced the 46-item Intercultural Sensitivity Inventory (ICSI) to assess sensitivity to cultural norms through the lens of individualism and collectivism. The instrument, tested with participants from the East-West Center and MBA students, evaluated individuals' ability to adapt behaviors appropriately in individualistic (e.g., the U.S.) and collectivist (e.g., Japan) cultural contexts. The ICSI showed high reliability ($r = .84$) and validity, with high-scorers demonstrating strong cross-cultural skills, enthusiasm for intercultural experiences, and significant exposure to other cultures. The study highlighted the importance of adapting behaviors to cultural norms as essential for effective interactions across diverse environments.

Arnulf (2012) examined the influence of dominant personality traits within management teams on their ability to adapt during periods of significant organizational change. Over a three-year period, the financial operations of ten management teams were monitored, with managers' personality traits measured during the first phase. A market crisis that arose after 20 months served as a critical point for assessing team adaptability. The analysis revealed that teams characterized by strong traits often defaulted to habitual business behaviors, limiting their capacity to adapt. However, traits like intelligence and emotional stability were positively linked to better performance following the crisis, indicating that some traits may enhance flexibility while others promote rigidity. The study emphasizes the importance of addressing dominant traits in team composition to prevent barriers to adaptability, advocating for strategies such as reflection-in-action to foster flexibility. This research introduces a fresh approach to understanding the relationship between personality and adaptability in real-world business settings.

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Rationale

In today's globalized world, multicultural teams are integral to workplaces, requiring individuals to navigate diverse cultural dynamics effectively. Cultural Intelligence (CQ), Intercultural Sensitivity (ISS), and Adaptability are essential competencies for fostering inclusion, collaboration, and productivity in such settings. While CQ enables effective functioning across cultures, ISS emphasizes emotional readiness to appreciate cultural differences, and Adaptability reflects the ability to adjust to diverse or changing environments.

Despite their individual importance, limited research examines the relationships among these variables within multicultural teams. By exploring their interplay this study seeks to fill this gap, providing insights into how these competencies collectively contribute to effective team functioning. Findings aim to enhance both theoretical understanding and practical approaches, supporting organizations and societies in building inclusive, adaptable, and collaborative environments.

Aim

- To explore the associations among Cultural Quotient, inter-cultural sensitivity, and adaptability within multi-cultural work teams.

Objectives

- To analyse the correlation amid Cultural Quotient with Intercultural Sensitivity.
- To explore the correlation between Cultural Intelligence and Adaptability.
- To assess the association between Intercultural Sensitivity and Adaptability.

Hypotheses

- **H01:** There is no meaningful direct connection between Cultural Quotient and Intercultural Sensitivity.
- **H02:** There is no notable positive association linking Cultural Quotient and Adaptability.
- **H03:** There is no significant direct link amid Intercultural Sensitivity and Adaptability.

METHODOLOGY

Design

The study employs a cross-sectional, correlational quantitative research design, utilizing survey methodology to collect data. It focuses on exploring correlation between Cultural Quotient, Sensitivity, and Adaptability within the context of professionals working in multicultural teams. Participants were selected through purposive sampling, targeting individuals accessible to the researcher who are actively engaged in culturally diverse team environments.

Sample

The study employed purposive sampling to select 167 professionals working in multicultural teams, aged 21 to 60, comprising 85 males and 82 females. Participants were chosen based on their relevance to the study's focus on Cultural Intelligence, Intercultural Sensitivity, and Adaptability. Individuals not within the specified age range, not actively engaged in multicultural teams, or who did not provide consent were excluded from the study.

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Measures

The Cultural Intelligence Scale (CQS), introduced by Ang and Van Dyne (2008) evaluates a person's capability to navigate and perform in diverse environments. It measures 4 core aspect: CQ Drive which reflects a person's interest along with confidence in adjusting to new contexts; CQ Knowledge (Cognitive), assessing understanding of cultural norms, values, and practices; CQ Strategy (Meta-Cognitive), focusing on awareness and planning in intercultural interactions; and CQ Action (Behavioural), capturing the ability to adjust verbal and non-verbal behaviours in diverse settings. The scale is both reliable, with Cronbach's alpha exceeding 0.70 for all dimensions, and valid, showing strong convergent, discriminant, and incremental validity. The CQS has been found to predict outcomes such as team cohesion, sociocultural adaptation, job performance, and effectiveness in multicultural teams, making it a valuable tool for assessing intercultural competence.

The Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS), constructed by Chen et al. (2000), is a twenty four-item instrument designed to measure individuals' readiness and attitudes for effective and respectful intercultural communication. It evaluates five key dimensions: Interaction Engagement, reflecting interest and involvement in intercultural exchanges; Respect for Cultural Differences, assessing appreciation of diversity in cultural norms; Interaction Confidence, gauging confidence in interacting with culturally diverse individuals; Interaction Enjoyment, capturing positive emotions during intercultural interactions; and Interaction Attentiveness, highlighting mindfulness and effort in understanding others. Using a 5-point Likert scale, ISS demonstrates strong reliability, having a Cronbach's alpha of 0.86 for the overall scale. Validity is supported through significant correlations with constructs like self-esteem and perspective-taking, as well as its ability to predict intercultural effectiveness. The ISS is widely utilized in educational and organizational research to assess and develop intercultural competence.

The Adaptability in Multinational Teams Scale (AMTS) was developed to assess individuals' adaptability in multicultural or multinational team settings across three dimensions: Behavioural, Cognitive, and Emotional Adaptability. The initial version of the scale consisted of 18 items designed to comprehensively capture adaptability in diverse team environments. To ensure the scale's validity and relevance, five experts in organizational psychology and intercultural communication critically evaluated the items. Through iterative feedback and refinement, unnecessary or redundant items were removed, and ambiguous wording was clarified. This process reduced the scale to its final version of 9 items, ensuring that it effectively measures the construct without redundancy.

The final AMTS includes three items for each dimension. Behavioral Adaptability assesses adjustments in communication and behavior, Cognitive Adaptability measures openness to cultural perspectives and norms, and Emotional Adaptability evaluates stress management and conflict resolution in cross-cultural settings. This refinement process ensured the scale's reliability, clarity, and practical utility in measuring adaptability within multinational teams.

Procedure

To gather data for this research, a Google Form was created specifically for the study. The participants, aged 21 to 60, were professionals working in culturally diverse team environments. Form included detailed instructions for three assessment tools. The Cultural Intelligence Scale (CQS) measured four aspects—Meta-Cognitive, Cognitive, Motivational, and Behavioural CQ. The Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS) evaluated five dimensions of

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sensitivity toward cultural differences using a 5-point Likert scale. Lastly, Adaptability in Multinational Teams Scale (AMTS), developed for this research, assessed adaptability across three domains—Behavioural, Cognitive, and Emotional—on a 5-point Likert scale. 167 responses were collected and analysed. The correlation between Cultural Intellect, Sensitivity, as well as Adaptability were examined using Pearson’s correlation analysis, providing meaningful insights into intercultural competencies within diverse team environments.

RESULTS

The study invited participation from professionals working in multicultural team environments across various industries, ensuring a diverse and representative sample. Participants, aged between 21 to 60 years, were asked to specify their gender as male, female, or prefer not to say. The sample included individuals from diverse job roles and organizational levels, providing insights into a wide range of professional experiences. Collecting demographic details, including age, gender, and professional background, enriched the analysis by offering a comprehensive understanding of the participants’ contexts and their potential impact on Cultural Intelligence, Intercultural Sensitivity, and Adaptability.

Table 1 Demographic details of the sample

Demographic	Value	Percentage
Total Sample	167	100%
Gender	Male	85
	Female	82
		50.9%
		49.10%

The gender distribution in the surveyed group of 167 professionals reflects a nearly equal representation, with 85 males (50.90%) and 82 females (49.10%).

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics for Cultural Intelligence (CQ), Intercultural Sensitivity (ISS), and Adaptability (AMTS)

Variable	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Scale
Cultural Intelligence (CQ)	112	16.0	20-140
Intercultural Sensitivity (ISS)	103.2	14.4	24-120
Adaptability (AMTS)	36.9	6.3	9-45

The descriptive statistics provide valuable insights into the participants' levels of Cultural Intelligence (CQ), Intercultural Sensitivity (ISS), and Adaptability (AMTS) within multicultural teams. The average score for CQ (M = 5.6, SD = 0.8) indicates that participants generally possess strong abilities to navigate and interact effectively in culturally diverse environments. The relatively small standard deviation suggests moderate consistency in CQ across the sample.

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Table 3 Correlation Matrix Among Cultural Intelligence (CQ), Intercultural Sensitivity (ISS), and Adaptability (AMTS)

Correlation Matrix								
			CQ		ISS		AMTS	
CQ	Pearson's r		—					
	df		—					
	p-value		—					
ISS	Pearson's r		0.528		—			
	df		165		—			
	p-value		< .001		—			
AMTS	Pearson's r		0.587		0.459		—	
	df		165		165		—	
	p-value		< .001		< .001		—	

The results of relationship analysis amongst Cultural Intellect (CQ), Sensitivity (ISS), and Adaptability (AMTS) offer significant insights into intercultural effectiveness in multicultural teams.

A moderate positive relation between Cultural Intellect and Sensitivity ($r = 0.528$) implies that employees with higher CQ also exhibit greater sensitivity toward cultural differences. This suggests that employees with strong cultural intellect are better capable to respect, comprehend, and engage with diversity, which enhances interpersonal interactions in diverse team settings.

The relationship between Cultural Intelligence and Adaptability is even stronger, with a significant positive correlation ($r = 0.587$, $p < 0.001$). This demonstrates that individuals who possess higher CQ are more capable of adapting to the demands of multicultural team environments. Their ability to interpret and manage cultural nuances enhances their behavioral, cognitive, and emotional flexibility, making them more effective in diverse work contexts.

Lastly, a significant positive correlation is also found between Intercultural Sensitivity and Adaptability ($r = 0.459$, $p < 0.001$). This highlights the role of emotional and attitudinal preparedness in fostering adaptability. Individuals who are more open and respectful toward cultural differences are better positioned to adjust their actions and strategies to fit various cultural contexts, leading to more effective collaboration.

For ISS, the mean score ($M = 4.3$, $SD = 0.6$) reflects positive attitudes and openness toward cultural differences, indicating that participants are generally sensitive and respectful in intercultural contexts. The low variability further emphasizes uniformity in their attitudes.

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Adaptability (AMTS), with a mean score of 4.1 (SD = 0.7), highlights that participants are highly adaptable to changes in multicultural team environments. While the scores show slightly greater variability than ISS, the results suggest that most participants are flexible in adjusting their behaviors, emotions, and cognitive approaches to diverse situations.

Overall, these results demonstrate that the sample comprises individuals with relatively high intercultural competencies, making them suitable for examining relationships between CQ, ISS, and Adaptability. The consistency in scores across variables also supports the reliability of the sample for this study.

DISCUSSION

This study focused on investigating the correlation amongst Cultural Intelligence (CQ), Sensitivity (ISS), as well as Adaptability (AMTS) in the context of multicultural team dynamics. The objective was to uncover insights into essential intercultural skills required for effective collaboration in diverse workplace environments. Data were collected from a sample of 167 professionals, aged 21 to 60, who were actively involved in culturally diverse teams. A Google Form was used to administer well-established scales for CQ and ISS, as well as an AMTS scale. A Pearson statistical correlation analysis was conducted to evaluate the associations among the variables, and descriptive statistics were utilized to summarize participants' intercultural competencies.

The demographic details presented in Table 1 indicate an almost equal gender distribution, with 85 males (50.90%) and 82 females (49.10%). This balanced representation ensures that perspectives from both genders are adequately reflected in the context of multicultural teams. Participants were selected from various industries and professional roles, offering a diverse range of experiences that enhance the depth and reliability of the study's findings. The age range of 21–60 years includes individuals at various career stages, which helps explain the variation in intercultural competencies within the sample.

The descriptive statistics presented in this table provide an overview of the total summed scores for Cultural Intelligence (CQS), Intercultural Sensitivity (ISS), and Adaptability (AMTS), reflecting participants' overall responses across all items for each scale. These scores offer insights into the levels of intercultural competencies within the sample.

Cultural Intelligence (CQS) demonstrates a high average score of 112.0 (SD = 16.0). This indicates that participants generally exhibit strong abilities to navigate, understand, and function effectively in culturally diverse environments. The standard deviation suggests some variability in participants' Cultural Intelligence, likely influenced by differences in their experiences or exposure to multicultural settings.

Intercultural Sensitivity (ISS) has an average summed score of 103.2 (SD = 14.4). This high score reflects participants' openness, respect, and positive attitudes toward cultural diversity, which are essential for fostering inclusion and understanding in multicultural teams. The standard deviation indicates a consistent but slightly varied level of sensitivity among participants, suggesting a generally homogeneous sample in this competency.

Adaptability (AMTS) has an average summed score of 36.9 (SD = 6.3). This result highlights a strong overall capacity for behavioural, cognitive, and emotional flexibility in adjusting to dynamic multicultural team environments. The slightly lower standard deviation

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suggests relatively uniform adaptability skills across participants, with most scoring toward the higher end of the scale.

In summary, these descriptive statistics indicate that participants generally exhibit high levels of Cultural Intelligence, Intercultural Sensitivity, and Adaptability. The variability observed across the scales aligns with the diverse professional experiences and cultural exposures of the sample. These findings reinforce the interconnectedness of these competencies in supporting effective collaboration and performance within multicultural teams.

The correlation analysis results presented in Table 3 highlight significant positive correlation between Cultural Intelligence (CQ), Intercultural Sensitivity (ISS), along with Adaptability (AMTS), providing valuable insights into the interplay of these intercultural competencies. Relationship amid Cultural Intelligence and Sensitivity was moderate and ascending ($r = 0.528$), indicating the employees with greater CQ are more prone to display greater sensitivity to cultural differences. This suggests that understanding and navigating cultural contexts effectively enhances individuals' openness, respect, and emotional engagement with diverse cultures, fostering improved interpersonal relationships.

The relationship between Cultural Intelligence and Adaptability is strong and positive ($r = 0.587$, $p < 0.001$). It demonstrates that team members having higher Cultural Intelligence are more equipped to regulate their actions, thoughts, and emotions in dynamic, multicultural team environments. The ability to interpret cultural nuances appears to directly support behavioural and cognitive flexibility, making CQ a key driver of adaptability in diverse settings.

The correlation between Intercultural Sensitivity and Adaptability was moderate and positive ($r = 0.459$, $p < 0.001$). This emphasizes the role of emotional readiness and attitudinal openness in facilitating adaptability. Individuals who are sensitive to cultural differences tend to be more willing and able to modify their approaches to align with the expectations of diverse cultural contexts, enhancing their effectiveness in multicultural teams.

In conclusion, the findings of this study highlight the strong interplay among Cultural Intelligence (CQ), Intercultural Sensitivity (ISS), and Adaptability (AMTS) in multicultural team settings. The descriptive statistics reveal that the participants demonstrated consistently high levels of these competencies, underscoring their ability to navigate, respect, and adapt to cultural differences. The significant positive correlations among CQ, ISS, and AMTS reinforce the theoretical framework that these skills are interconnected and critical for fostering effective collaboration and inclusivity in diverse workplaces.

Limitations and Suggestions

Being cross-sectional research, it restricts its ability to infer causative relationships among Cultural Intelligence, Intercultural Sensitivity, and Adaptability. Additionally, self-reported measures are susceptible to social desirability bias, potentially leading to inflated assessments of intercultural competencies. The study's focus on professionals in multicultural teams further narrows its scope, excluding other groups such as students or expatriates, while the sample's geographic and professional concentration limits broader applicability. Mixed-methods approaches incorporating qualitative techniques, such as

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interviews, could provide deeper insights into intercultural interactions, while intervention studies could assess the impact of training programs on enhancing these competencies. These steps would enhance the robustness and practical applicability of future research.

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Conflict of Interest

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