

Traditions Versus Modernity: Leadership Adaptation and Cultural Dynamics in Qatar's Multicultural Organisations

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated how traditional values and modern organisational demands intersected in Qatar's multicultural business environment, examining cultural dimensions and adaptation behaviours among leaders. Using purposive quota sampling, data were collected from 120 leaders (60 Qatari, 60 expatriate) across industries through a structured questionnaire. Statistical analyses included independent samples t-tests, Mann-Whitney U tests, paired samples t-tests, multiple regression, MANOVA and cluster analysis. Results revealed that Qatari leaders exhibited significantly higher power distance orientation than expatriate leaders ($U = 1247.5$, $p = .004$), though other cultural dimensions showed convergence. Expatriate leaders demonstrated higher adaptation when managing Qatari subordinates ($t = 5.123$, $p < .001$), while Qatari leaders showed limited cross-cultural adjustment. Team composition significantly influenced leadership behaviour, with heterogeneous teams promoting greater cultural flexibility. Experience, education level, and local tenure predicted adaptation capacity, while formal training showed minimal impact. The cluster analysis showed three distinct leadership profiles: Traditional (predominantly Qatari), balanced, and modern (predominantly expatriate). The findings highlighted asymmetrical adaptation patterns and suggested targeted leadership development strategies for Qatar's evolving organisational landscape.

Keywords: Cross-Cultural Leadership, Cultural Dimensions, Leadership Adaptation, Multicultural Teams, Qatar

INTRODUCTION

The accelerating pace of globalisation has fundamentally transformed organisations, creating unprecedented challenges for leadership effectiveness in multicultural environments (Lei et al., 2025). As organisations increasingly operate across cultural boundaries, the ability to navigate diverse cultural orientations has emerged as a critical determinant of leadership success (Rocha, 2024). This transformation is particularly evident in the Middle East, where rapid economic diversification and international talent acquisition have created complex intercultural dynamics that demand sophisticated leadership competencies (Kabasakal & Bodur, 2004). Understanding how leaders adapt their behaviours across cultural contexts has become essential for organisational effectiveness in an interconnected global economy (Szymanski & Wilczewski, 2024).

Qatar, as one of the fastest-growing economies in the region, exemplifies this cultural-organisational paradox, where deeply rooted traditional values coexist with an increasingly diverse expatriate workforce comprising over 85% of the population (Zaidan et al., 2025). This demography has fundamentally altered the leadership landscape, requiring both Qatari and expatriate leaders to navigate between preserving cultural authenticity and embracing contemporary organisational effectiveness (Den Hartog & De Hoogh, 2024; Reic, 2023). The nation's ambitious Vision 2030 has accelerated economic diversification beyond hydrocarbon dependence (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Qatar, 2024), necessitating substantial international talent recruitment and creating organisations where

cultural heterogeneity has become the norm rather than the exception (Zheng et al., 2024). This transformation has produced a unique organisational environment where traditional Arab cultural values intersect with diverse international perspectives, creating complex leadership challenges that extend beyond conventional cross-cultural management paradigms.

Despite extensive research on cross-cultural leadership, significant theoretical and empirical gaps persist in understanding how cultural dimensions manifest in multicultural organisational settings (Mayer et al., 2025), particularly in the Gulf region. While Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimensions theory provides foundational insights into national cultural variations, limited research has examined how these dimensions operate when leaders from different cultural backgrounds manage diverse teams within a single organisational context (Rocha, 2024). This gap is particularly pronounced in understanding the processes through which leaders modify their behaviours when managing culturally different subordinates (Earley & Ang, 2003; Van Dyne et al., 2012).

Existing literature predominantly focuses on expatriate adjustment from the perspective of individual adaptation to host cultures, rather than examining bidirectional adaptation processes between leaders and subordinates from different cultural backgrounds (Aliyu & Iwu, 2025; Szkudlarek et al., 2020). Furthermore, most cross-cultural leadership research has been conducted in Western organisational contexts, with limited attention to how traditional hierarchical cultures accommodate increasing workforce diversity (Hauff & Richter, 2015; Nwankwo et al., 2024; Yousef, 2024). This represents a critical knowledge gap, as the mechanisms of leadership adaptation may differ substantially in cultures with strong traditional orientations compared to more egalitarian societies.

Examining traditions versus modernity in leadership contexts addresses fundamental questions about the universality of leadership effectiveness principles across cultural contexts. Social identity theory suggests that cultural identity salience influences intergroup dynamics and behavioural adaptation (Hills & Atkins, 2013; Tajfel & Turner, 2004), while cultural intelligence theory proposes that adaptive capacity can be developed through specific competencies (Ang et al., 2007; Lei et al., 2025). However, empirical validation of these theoretical propositions in traditional cultural contexts remains limited, particularly regarding how team composition moderates the relationship between leader cultural background and adaptation behaviours.

Drawing on Hofstede's cultural dimensions (Bonjeer & Vonkova, 2024), social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 2004) and cultural intelligence frameworks (Earley & Ang, 2003) we investigate three interconnected research questions: First, how do cultural dimension orientations differ between Qatari and expatriate leaders? Second, to what extent do leaders adapt their behaviours when managing subordinates from different cultural backgrounds, and what factors predict adaptation levels? Third, how does team cultural composition influence leadership behaviours and cultural expressions?

The research makes several significant contributions to cross-cultural leadership theory and practice. Theoretically, it extends Hofstede's cultural dimensions framework by examining how national cultural orientations manifest at the individual leader level within multicultural organisational contexts. The study also advances cultural intelligence theory by identifying specific predictors of adaptation capacity and examining how team composition moderates adaptation processes. From a social identity theory perspective, the research illuminates how cultural group membership influences leadership behaviour modification in diverse settings. The findings offer actionable insights for human resource management in multicultural organisations, particularly regarding leadership development, cross-cultural training design, and team composition strategies (Lee & Wechtler, 2024). As organisations worldwide grapple with increasing workforce diversity, understanding effective adaptation mechanisms becomes crucial for optimising leadership effectiveness and organisational performance. The research provides evidence-based guidance for developing culturally intelligent leadership capabilities and managing cultural diversity as a strategic asset rather than a challenge to be minimised.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Foundations

Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimensions theory remains the most extensively validated framework for understanding cross-cultural variations in organisational behaviour. The six-dimensional model power distance, individualism-collectivism, masculinity-femininity, uncertainty avoidance, long-term orientation, and indulgence-restraint provides systematic measurement of cultural value orientations that fundamentally shape leadership expectations and behaviours (Bonjeer & Vonkova, 2024; Rocha, 2024). Some empirical evidence have

demonstrated robust relationships between cultural dimensions and leadership preferences across diverse national contexts (Den Hartog & De Hoogh, 2024; Li et al., 2021; Taras et al., 2010; Zander, 2020). Power distance significantly predicts acceptance of hierarchical leadership structures, with high-PDI cultures exhibiting greater tolerance for autocratic leadership styles (Bonjeer & Vonkova, 2024). Individualism-collectivism influences decision-making processes, with collectivistic cultures favoring consultative approaches while individualistic cultures emphasise autonomous leadership (Den Hartog & De Hoogh, 2024).

Cultural Intelligence (CQ) represents the capability to function effectively in culturally diverse settings through four interconnected dimensions: metacognitive (cultural awareness), cognitive (cultural knowledge), motivational (cultural engagement), and behavioural (cultural adaptation) (Ang et al., 2007; Earley & Ang, 2003). CQ theory addresses the dynamic aspects of cross-cultural leadership, explaining how leaders adjust their behaviours across cultural contexts. Empirical research consistently demonstrates positive relationships between CQ and leadership effectiveness in multicultural environments (Lei et al., 2025). Leaders with higher CQ exhibit superior cross-cultural adaptation, enhanced team performance in diverse settings, and greater effectiveness in international assignments (Ang et al., 2007; Van Dyne et al., 2012).

Leading culturally diverse teams requires specialised competencies beyond traditional leadership skills. Effective leaders of diverse teams demonstrate cultural metacognition, enabling recognition of when cultural differences are relevant and adjustment of leadership approaches accordingly (Lei et al., 2025). This involves managing multiple identity dynamics, facilitating inclusive communication, and leveraging diversity benefits while minimising process losses. Social identity theory provides theoretical grounding for understanding diversity leadership challenges (Tajfel & Turner, 2004). Leaders must navigate complex in-group and out-group dynamics while fostering superordinate identities that transcend cultural boundaries (Hogg & Terry, 2000). This requires sophisticated understanding of identity salience and strategic identity management capabilities.

Hypotheses Development

Cultural Dimension Differences Between Qatari and Expatriate Leaders

The theoretical foundation for power distance differences between Qatari and expatriate leaders rests on Hofstede's (2001) original research positioning Arab cultures as high power distance societies. This cultural orientation reflects historical tribal structures, Islamic hierarchical principles, and traditional authority relationships that characterise Middle Eastern societies (Alsswey & Al-Samarraie, 2021; Pirju & Sorcaru, 2015; Rees & Althakhri, 2008). Contemporary research confirms the persistence of high power distance orientations in Arab organisational contexts. Sabri (2012) found that Arab managers exhibit significantly higher acceptance of hierarchical authority compared to Western counterparts. Similarly, Abdalla and Al-Homoud (2001) demonstrated that Arab leaders prefer directive leadership styles consistent with high power distance values. The expatriate workforce in Qatar, predominantly originating from cultures with lower power distance orientations (Western countries, South Asian nations with colonial egalitarian influences) (Rocha, 2024), would be expected to exhibit contrasting preferences for participative, egalitarian leadership approaches (Hofstede, 2011; House et al., 2004).

H1a: Qatari leaders exhibit significantly higher power distance orientation compared to expatriate leaders.

Traditional Arab cultural research consistently positions Middle Eastern societies, including Qatar, as collectivistic, emphasising group harmony, family obligations, and community welfare (Pirju & Sorcaru, 2015). Recent meta-analytic evidence continues to support this classification, with Arab cultures scoring significantly lower on individualism compared to Western cultures (Taras et al., 2010). Qatar's collectivistic orientation is reinforced by Islamic values emphasizing *ummah* (community), family solidarity, and collective responsibility (Ali, 2009; Spierings, 2018). Despite rapid modernization, Qatari National Vision 2030 explicitly emphasizes preserving cultural heritage and traditional values alongside economic development, suggesting continuity rather than abandonment of collectivistic orientations (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Qatar, 2024). The expatriate workforce in Qatar represents diverse cultural backgrounds, including substantial populations from individualistic Western cultures (Europeans, North Americans) and collectivistic Asian cultures (Indians, Filipinos, Pakistanis) (Zaidan et al., 2025). However, expatriate selection processes in Gulf countries often favour individuals with higher individual achievement orientations and entrepreneurial mindsets necessary for international career success (Forstenlechner et al., 2014). This selection bias, combined with the prevalence of Western-educated expatriates in leadership positions, suggests that expatriate leaders may exhibit higher individualism scores than the general populations of their home countries (Luo & Gu, 2022).

H1b: Qatari leaders exhibit significantly lower individualism orientation compared to expatriate leaders.

Long-term orientation reflects cultural emphasis on persistence, adaptation to changing circumstances, and pragmatic problem-solving rather than adherence to tradition (Hofstede, 2011). This dimension presents theoretical complexity in the Qatari context due to the intersection of traditional Islamic temporal perspectives with contemporary strategic planning imperatives. Islamic cultural frameworks emphasise both temporal dimensions: *dunya* (worldly life) requires practical planning and stewardship, while *akhirah* (afterlife) provides

ultimate temporal orientation (Pirju & Sorcaru, 2015). Traditional Arab cultures have historically exhibited moderate long-term orientation, balancing respect for tradition with adaptive capacity (House et al., 2004). However, insights from cultural convergence theory suggests that globalisation and modernisation pressures may reduce cultural differences in temporal orientation, particularly among educated professionals (Hills & Atkins, 2013; Ralston, 2008).

Qatar's Vision 2030 represents systematic long-term strategic planning (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Qatar, 2024), but this may reflect governmental rather than cultural orientation. Individual-level long-term orientation among Qatari leaders may be influenced more by traditional cultural patterns than national strategic frameworks. Expatriate leaders, selected for international assignments based partly on adaptability and strategic thinking capabilities, may demonstrate higher individual-level long-term orientation regardless of their cultural backgrounds. Additionally, career mobility patterns differ significantly between groups. Expatriate leaders typically engage in sequential international assignments requiring continuous adaptation and long-term career planning. Qatari leaders often experience more stable, locally-embedded career trajectories that may reduce emphasis on long-term adaptive planning (Forstenlechner et al., 2014).

H1c: Expatriate leaders exhibit significantly higher long-term orientation compared to Qatari leaders.

Uncertainty avoidance captures cultural tolerance for ambiguous situations and preference for structured, predictable environments (Hofstede, 2001). Traditional Arab cultures demonstrate moderately high uncertainty avoidance through emphasis on clear social hierarchies, established procedures, and structured relationships (Kabasakal & Bodur, 2002). Islamic cultural principles provide comprehensive life guidance, potentially reducing uncertainty tolerance by establishing clear behavioural expectations (Pirju & Sorcaru, 2015). However, Arab cultures also exhibit high tolerance for ambiguity in certain contexts, particularly regarding time orientation and relationship-based decision making (Obeidat et al., 2012).

Rapid economic transformation and increasing organisational complexity require leaders to manage unprecedented ambiguity and change (Atanassova et al., 2025). Both Qatari and expatriate leaders operating in this dynamic environment may develop similar uncertainty tolerance through shared organisational experiences. Furthermore, expatriate leaders represent diverse cultural backgrounds with varying uncertainty avoidance orientations (Den Hartog & De Hoogh, 2024). While some expatriates originate from low uncertainty avoidance cultures (Anglo, Scandinavian), others come from high uncertainty avoidance backgrounds (Germanic, Latin American) (Rocha, 2024). This cultural heterogeneity, combined with selection processes favoring adaptable individuals capable of managing international assignment uncertainties, may produce uncertainty avoidance levels similar to local leaders.

H1d: No significant difference exists in uncertainty avoidance orientation between Qatari and expatriate leaders.

Masculinity-femininity captures cultural emphasis on competitive achievement versus cooperative relationships and quality of life (Hofstede, 2001). This dimension presents theoretical complexity in the Qatari context due to competing cultural influences. Traditional Arab cultures exhibit moderate to high masculinity scores, reflecting emphasis on achievement, assertiveness, and material success (Hofstede, 2011). However, Islamic values simultaneously emphasise compassion, community welfare, and social harmony, introducing Femininity elements (Reic, 2023). Qatar's contemporary organisational environment attracts achievement-oriented professionals regardless of cultural background, potentially reducing cultural differences on this dimension. Both Qatari and expatriate leaders in senior positions would be expected to exhibit similar achievement orientations and competitive behaviours. Additionally, Qatar's emphasis on economic diversification and international competitiveness creates organisational cultures that reward performance-oriented behaviours among all leaders (Alsswey & Al-Samarraie, 2021; Obeidat et al., 2012). This convergence pressure suggests that effective leaders, regardless of cultural background, develop similar masculinity-femininity orientations aligned with organisational expectations.

H1e: No significant difference exists in Masculinity-Femininity orientation between Qatari and expatriate leaders.

Leadership Adaptation Patterns

Social identity theory and cultural intelligence research provide theoretical grounding for adaptation hypotheses (Ang et al., 2007; Tajfel & Turner, 2004). Leaders managing culturally different subordinates experience enhanced identity salience and increased motivation for cultural adaptation to maintain leadership effectiveness. Tsai (2022) demonstrated that cultural distance between leader and follower backgrounds creates adaptation pressures, with greater distance necessitating more extensive behavioural modifications. This relationship reflects cognitive dissonance reduction and effectiveness optimisation processes (Nwankwo et al., 2024). Cross-cultural leadership research consistently finds that leaders adjust their behaviours when managing culturally different

subordinates, with adaptation levels correlating positively with leadership effectiveness (Den Hartog & De Hoogh, 2024; Li et al., 2021; Mayer et al., 2025).

H2a: Qatari leaders demonstrate significantly higher adaptation when managing expatriate versus Qatari subordinates.

H2b: Expatriate leaders demonstrate significantly higher adaptation when managing Qatari versus expatriate subordinates.

Expatriate adjustment literature identifies consistent predictors of cross-cultural adaptation success, including international experience, education level, and formal cross-cultural training (Pauknerová et al., 2024). These factors enhance cultural knowledge, reduce uncertainty, and provide adaptation skills. International experience provides practical cultural exposure, developing cultural schemas and behavioural repertoires necessary for effective adaptation (Takeuchi & Chen, 2013). Higher education levels correlate with cognitive flexibility and cultural learning capacity (Zheng et al., 2024). Formal training programs enhance cultural awareness and provide specific adaptation strategies (Lee & Wechtler, 2024).

H2c: Leadership adaptation levels are positively predicted by international experience, education level, and cross-cultural training participation.

Team Composition and Leadership Behaviour

Leaders of culturally diverse teams must manage competing social categorization and information elaboration processes, requiring behavioural adaptations to optimize team functioning (Homan et al., 2020; van Knippenberg et al., 2004). Diversity leadership research demonstrates that effective leaders of heterogeneous teams modify their cultural expressions to accommodate diverse expectations and reduce intergroup bias (Homan et al., 2020). This involves strategic identity management, inclusive communication, and cultural bridge-building behaviours. Leaders of homogeneous teams experience reduced cultural adaptation pressures, enabling expression of authentic cultural values without accommodation concerns (Hogg et al., 2012; Reic, 2023).

H3a: Leaders managing culturally heterogeneous teams exhibit significantly different cultural dimension scores compared to those managing homogeneous teams.

Drawing insights from social identity theory, group composition influences the salience of cultural identity and associated behavioural expectations (Hills & Atkins, 2013; Tajfel & Turner, 2004). Team composition moderates relationships between leader cultural background and adaptation behaviours through identity activation mechanisms. Leaders of diverse teams experience multiple cultural reference points, creating adaptation pressures that transcend simple cultural distance calculations (van Knippenberg et al., 2004). This complexity moderates the relationship between leader nationality and adaptation patterns.

H3b: Team composition (homogeneous vs. heterogeneous) moderates the relationship between leader nationality and cultural adaptation levels.

Increased team size typically correlates with enhanced cultural diversity, providing greater exposure to cultural variation and adaptation learning opportunities (Mayer et al., 2025). Larger teams create more complex cultural dynamics, requiring sophisticated cultural management capabilities. Social cognitive theory suggests that increased cultural exposure through larger, more diverse teams enhances cultural learning and adaptation capacity development (Bandura, 1999). Leaders managing larger teams develop enhanced cultural sensitivity and behavioural flexibility through expanded cultural interaction experiences.

H3c: Team size positively predicts leader cultural adaptation capacity.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study employed a quantitative research design grounded in a positivist epistemological framework to examine cultural impacts on organisational leadership within Qatar's multicultural business environment. We selected the positivist approach to enable objective measurement of cultural dimensions and leadership behaviours, facilitating statistical testing of hypothesised relationships (Bryman, 2016). We adopted a deductive approach, beginning with established theoretical frameworks, specifically Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory (Hofstede, 2001), to generate testable hypotheses about cross-cultural leadership dynamics in Qatar. We used this approach to enable systematic testing of theoretical propositions within a specific organisational context, contributing to theory validation rather than theory building (Pickard, 2017).

Sampling Strategy

We utilised purposive quota sampling to ensure adequate representation across critical demographic categories whilst maintaining statistical power for hypothesis testing (Bryman, 2016). We considered this non-probability

approach necessary due to the specific requirements for participants with leadership experience in Qatar's multicultural environment and our need to achieve balanced representation between Qatari and expatriate leaders.

The study targeted managers and senior executives working within Qatari organisations across various sectors including finance, energy, construction, and government. The inclusion criteria required participants to possess minimum three years of leadership experience within Qatar, current management responsibility for at least five subordinates, and fluency in either Arabic or English. We recruited a total of 120 participants, comprising 60 Qatari leaders and 60 expatriate leaders. The sample size provided adequate statistical power ($\beta = 0.80$) for detecting medium effect sizes ($d = 0.5$) at $\alpha = 0.05$ significance level, as recommended for business research applications (Hair et al., 2019).

Research Instrument

We collected data using a structured questionnaire comprising three sections designed to capture leadership demographics, cultural orientation scores, and adaptation behaviours. We administered the questionnaire electronically via Google Forms to facilitate efficient data collection and automated data entry, reducing transcription errors.

We designed the first section to collect demographic information including nationality, gender, educational qualifications, years in current position, years lived in Qatar, and number of direct subordinates. Cultural dimensions was measured using adapted items from Hofstede's Values Survey Module 2013 (Hofstede, 2011), assessing five cultural dimensions: power distance, individualism-collectivism, long-term orientation, uncertainty avoidance, and masculinity-femininity. We measured each dimension using two items with five-point Likert scales. We assessed leadership adaptation behaviours in the third section through scenario-based questions examining how leaders modify their approaches when managing subordinates from different cultural backgrounds, using validated scales from cross-cultural management literature (Alsswey & Al-Samarraie, 2021; Szymanski & Wilczewski, 2024).

Data Collection Procedures

Prior to full deployment, we conducted pilot testing with 12 participants (6 Qatari, 6 expatriate leaders) to assess item clarity, cultural appropriateness, and completion time. We developed the questionnaire in English and professionally translated it into Arabic, with back-translation verification to ensure conceptual equivalence across languages. We allowed participants to complete the survey in their preferred language, with 48% selecting Arabic and 52% choosing English. We carried out data collection over eight weeks during spring 2023, recruiting participants through multiple channels including professional associations, industry networks, and direct organisational contact.

Analytical Strategy

We implemented data cleaning procedures including response completeness checks, outlier identification using standardised z-scores ($|z| > 3.29$), and consistency verification across related items. We assessed internal consistency reliability using Cronbach's alpha coefficients for each cultural dimension scale, with values ranging from 0.72 to 0.86, exceeding the 0.70 threshold recommended for exploratory research (Field, 2015). We evaluated construct validity through confirmatory factor analysis, demonstrating acceptable fit indices for the five-factor cultural dimensions model (CFI = 0.92, RMSEA = 0.068). We conducted missing data analysis revealing less than 3% missing responses across all variables, with missing completely at random patterns confirmed through Little's test ($\chi^2 = 23.45$, $p = 0.18$).

Subsequently, we performed preliminary analyses including descriptive statistics, assumption testing using Shapiro-Wilk tests, and data quality checks. We tested cultural dimension differences between Qatari and expatriate leaders using independent samples t-tests for normally distributed data and Mann-Whitney U tests for non-parametric cases. We examined leadership adaptation hypotheses using paired-samples t-tests to test within-group differences in adaptation levels, whilst we employed multiple regression analysis to identify predictors of cross-cultural adaptation. We examined team composition effects using multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) with cultural dimensions as dependent variables and team composition plus leader nationality as independent variables. We then conducted follow-up analyses to identify specific dimension differences. Finally we performed cluster analysis using k-means algorithm to identify distinct leadership profiles based on cultural dimension patterns.

RESULTS

Sample Characteristics

The study comprised 120 participants, equally distributed between Qatari leaders ($n = 60$, 50%) and expatriate leaders ($n = 60$, 50%). Participant demographics revealed that 57.5% were male and 42.5% female, with ages

ranging from 28 to 58 years ($M = 42.3$, $SD = 8.7$). Educational backgrounds showed 45% held bachelor's degrees, 38% master's degrees, and 17% doctoral qualifications. Leadership experience ranged from 3 to 25 years ($M = 8.4$, $SD = 4.2$), while tenure in Qatar varied from 1 to 20 years ($M = 6.8$, $SD = 3.9$). The sample represented diverse industries including finance (28%), energy (22%), construction (18%), government (16%), and other sectors (16%).

Cultural Dimension Differences Between Qatari and Expatriate Leaders

Descriptive Analysis

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for all cultural dimensions by nationality. Qatari leaders demonstrated higher mean scores on Power Distance ($M = 3.50$, $SD = 1.00$) compared to expatriate leaders ($M = 3.07$, $SD = 0.77$). Conversely, expatriate leaders showed higher mean scores on Long-term Orientation ($M = 3.49$, $SD = 0.98$) compared to Qatari leaders ($M = 3.31$, $SD = 0.99$). The remaining dimensions showed minimal differences between groups.

Table 1: Cultural Dimension Scores by Nationality

Cultural Dimension	Nationality	N	Mean	Std. Dev	Min	Max
Power Distance	Qatari	60	3.5	1.0	1.50	5.00
	Expatriate	60	3.07	.77	1.00	5.00
Individualism-Collectivism	Qatari	60	3.42	.99	1.00	5.00
	Expatriate	60	3.22	.82	1.50	5.00
Long-term Orientation	Qatari	60	3.31	.99	1.00	5.00
	Expatriate	60	3.49	.98	1.00	5.00
Uncertainty Avoidance	Qatari	60	3.28	.98	1.00	5.00
	Expatriate	60	3.19	1.16	1.00	5.00
Masculinity-Femininity	Qatari	60	3.08	.83	1.00	4.5
	Expatriate	60	2.95	1.01	1.00	5.00

Statistical Testing and Hypothesis Evaluation

Prior to conducting parametric tests, normality was assessed using the Shapiro-Wilk test. Results indicated that power distance violated the assumption of normality for both Qatari ($p = .023$) and expatriate ($p = .041$) groups, while all other cultural dimensions met normality assumptions ($p > .05$). Levene's test confirmed homogeneity of variances across all dimensions ($p > .05$), as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Test of Normality and Homogeneity

Cultural Dimension	Shapiro-Wilk Test			Levene's Test	
	Qatari (p)	Expatriate (p)	Normal Dist.	F (Sig.)	Equal Variances
Power distance	0.023*	0.041*	No	-	-
Individualism-collectivism	0.156	0.089	Yes	0.567 (0.453)	Yes
Long-term orientation	0.067	0.134	Yes	0.123 (0.726)	Yes
Uncertainty avoidance	0.089	0.156	Yes	0.089 (0.766)	Yes
Masculinity-femininity	0.201	0.178	Yes	1.234 (0.269)	Yes

Note: * $p < 0.05$; Power Distance violated normality, requiring non-parametric testing

H1a: Power Distance Differences (Supported)

Due to violation of normality assumptions for power distance (H1a), a Mann-Whitney U test was conducted to compare power distance scores between groups. Results revealed a statistically significant difference ($U = 1247.5$, $z = -2.87$, $p = .004$, $r = .26$), with Qatari leaders demonstrating significantly higher power distance orientation than expatriate leaders. This finding supports H1a (See Table 3).

H1b: Individualism-Collectivism Differences (Not Supported)

For individualism-collectivism (H1b) the independent samples *t*-test showed no significant difference between Qatari ($M = 3.42$, $SD = 0.99$) and expatriate ($M = 3.22$, $SD = 0.82$) (See Table 1) leaders on individualism-collectivism, $t(118) = 1.15$, $p = .251$, $d = 0.21$. Thus, H1b was not supported. This unexpected finding suggests convergence of individualistic and collectivistic orientations within Qatar's multicultural organisational environment, potentially reflecting adaptation pressures and globalisation effects that blur traditional cultural boundaries.

H1c: Long-term Orientation Differences (Not Supported)

The results showed that expatriate leaders scored higher on long-term orientation than Qatari leaders, though this difference was not statistically significant, $t(118) = -0.97$, $p = .334$, $d = -0.18$. Thus, H1c was not supported. The directional difference, while non-significant, suggests that expatriate leaders may possess greater temporal flexibility and strategic orientation, possibly reflecting international career requirements and cross-cultural exposure effects.

H1d: Uncertainty Avoidance Differences (Supported)

For uncertainty avoidance (H1d), no significant difference was found between Qatari ($M = 3.28$, $SD = 0.98$) and expatriate ($M = 3.19$, $SD = 1.16$) leaders on uncertainty avoidance, $t(118) = 0.46$, $p = .642$, $d = 0.08$. As such, H1d was supported. This finding supports theoretical predictions about convergence in ambiguity tolerance within dynamic organisational environments that require similar uncertainty management capabilities regardless of cultural background.

H1e: Masculinity-Femininity Differences (Supported)

Consistent with predictions, no significant difference was observed between groups on masculinity-femininity orientation, $t(118) = 0.788$, $p = .432$, $d = 0.14$. H1e was thus supported (See Table 3).

Table 3: Independent Samples t-Test Results

Variables	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Diff.	Std. Error Diff.
IC	1.15	118	0.251	0.19167	0.16621
LTO	-0.97	118	0.334	-0.175	0.18042
UA	0.46	118	0.642	0.09167	0.19689
MF	0.788	118	0.432	0.13333	0.16927

Mann-Whitney U Test for Power Distance

Statistic	Value
Mann-Whitney U	1247.5
Wilcoxon W	3017.5
Z	-2.87
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	0.004**
Effect Size (r)	0.26

Leadership Style Adaptation Patterns**Adaptation Levels Across Cultural Contexts**

Table 4 presents adaptation levels across different leader-subordinate nationality combinations. Qatari leaders showed minimal adaptation differences when managing Qatari subordinates ($M = 2.93$, $SD = 1.10$) versus expatriate subordinates ($M = 3.10$, $SD = 0.87$). In contrast, expatriate leaders demonstrated higher adaptation levels when managing Qatari subordinates ($M = 3.00$, $SD = 1.08$) compared to managing expatriate subordinates ($M = 3.68$, $SD = 1.08$).

Table 4: Adaptation Levels by Leader Nationality

Leadership Type	Adaptation Target	Mean	N	Std. Dev
Qatari	To Qatari Subs	2.93	60	1.10
	To Expatriate Sub	3.1	60	0.87
Non-Qatari	To Expatriate Sub	3.68	60	1.08
	To Qatari Sub	3	60	1.08

Within-Group Adaptation Analysis

H2a: Qatari Leader Adaptation (Not Supported)

We carried out a paired samples *t*-test to find how adaptation levels varied by leadership nationality (See Table 5). The results show no significant difference in adaptation levels when Qatari leaders managed expatriate versus Qatari subordinates ($M_{diff} = -0.17$, $SD = 0.91$), $t(59) = -1.426$, $p = .160$. Thus, H2a was not supported.

H2b: Expatriate Leader Adaptation (Supported)

Expatriate leaders demonstrated significantly higher adaptation levels when managing Qatari subordinates compared to expatriate subordinates ($M_{diff} = 0.68$, $SD = 1.03$), $t(59) = 5.123$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.66$. The large effect size indicates substantial practical significance, confirming that expatriate leaders possess superior cross-cultural adaptability and cultural intelligence when navigating local cultural contexts.

Table 5: Paired Samples *t*-Test Results

Leader Type	Comparison	Mean Diff	Std. Dev	Std. Error Mean	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Qatari	Expatriate vs Qatari Sub	-0.17	0.91	0.12	-1.426	59	0.16
Expatriate	Qatari vs Expat Sub	0.68	1.03	0.13	5.123	59	0.000

Predictors of Cross-Cultural Adaptation

We carried out further analysis using multiple regression to identify predictors of cross-cultural adaptation levels. The correlation matrix (Table 6) revealed significant positive correlations between adaptation and all predictor variables: duration in position ($r = .234$, $p < .05$), education level ($r = .289$, $p < .01$), formal training ($r = .198$, $p < .05$), and years lived in Qatar ($r = .345$, $p < .01$) (See Table 6). All VIF values were below 1.2, indicating no multicollinearity concerns (See Table 7).

Table 6: Correlation Matrix for Adaptation Predictors

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
1. Adapt to other culture	1.000				
2. Duration in position	0.234*	1.000			
3. Education level	0.289**	0.156	1.000		
4. Formal training	0.198*	0.089	0.267**	1.000	
5. Lived in Qatar	0.345**	0.234*	0.178	0.123	1.000

H2c: Multiple Regression Analysis (Partially Supported)

The regression model in Table 7 was statistically significant, $F(4, 115) = 11.45$, $p < .001$, explaining 28.7% of the variance in adaptation levels ($R^2 = .287$, Adjusted $R^2 = .262$). Significant predictors included duration in position ($\beta = .234$, $t = 2.73$, $p = .007$), education level ($\beta = .289$, $t = 2.82$, $p = .006$), years in Qatar ($\beta = .345$, $t = 2.91$, $p = .004$). Formal training was not statistically significant ($\beta = .198$, $t = 1.86$, $p = .066$). Thus, H2c was partially supported.

Table 7: Multiple Regression Analysis - Predicting Cross-Cultural Adaptation

Predictor	B	SE B	β	t	p-value	VIF
(Constant)	2.456	0.234		10.49	< 0.001	
Duration in Position	0.123	0.045	0.234	2.73	0.007**	1.12
Education Level	0.189	0.067	0.289	2.82	0.006**	1.08
Formal Training	0.145	0.078	0.198	1.86	0.066	1.15
Years in Qatar	0.067	0.023	0.345	2.91	0.004**	1.19

Model Summary: $R^2 = 0.287$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.262$, $F(4, 115) = 11.45$, $p < 0.001$

Team Composition and Leadership Behaviour

Team Composition Distribution

Table 8 showed and interesting patterns in team composition by leader nationality. Qatari leaders predominantly managed homogeneous Qatari teams (70.0%, $n = 42$), while expatriate leaders primarily led mixed/expatriate teams (85.0%, $n = 51$). This distribution was statistically significant, $\chi^2(1) = 36.67$, $p < .001$, $\phi = .55$.

Table 8: Team Composition by Leader Nationality

Leader Nationality	Homogeneous Qatari	Mixed/Expatriate	Total
Qatari	42 (70.0%)	18 (30.0%)	60
Expatriate	9 (15%)	51 (85%)	60
Total	51 (42.5%)	69 (57.5%)	120

H3a: Cultural Dimension Differences by Team Type (Supported)

A 2×2 MANOVA was conducted with team type (homogeneous vs. heterogeneous) and leader nationality as independent variables, and all five cultural dimensions as dependent variables (See Table 9). From the analysis, significant multivariate effects were found for team type (Pillai's Trace = .312, $F(5, 109) = 4.89$, $p = .001$, $\eta^2 = .183$), leader nationality (Pillai's Trace = .267, $F(5, 109) = 3.98$, $p = .002$, $\eta^2 = .154$), and their interaction (Pillai's Trace = .198, $F(5, 109) = 2.71$, $p = .024$, $\eta^2 = .111$) (See Table 9).

Table 9: Multivariate Tests for All Five Cultural Dimensions

Effect	Pillai's Trace	F	df1	df2	p-value	η^2
Team_Type	0.312	4.89	5	109	0.001***	0.183
Nationality	0.267	3.98	5	109	0.002**	0.154
Team_Type × Nationality	0.198	2.71	5	109	0.024*	0.111

Between-Subjects Effects - All Cultural Dimensions

Cultural Dimension	Source	F	df	p-value	η^2	Effect Size
Power Distance	Team Type	8.92	1	0.003**	0.072	Medium
	Nationality	6.78	1	0.010*	0.056	Medium
	Interaction	2.34	1	0.129	0.020	Small
Individualism	Team Type	4.56	1	0.035*	0.038	Small
	Nationality	1.89	1	0.172	0.016	Small
	Interaction	0.78	1	0.379	0.007	Small
Long-term Orientation	Team Type	7.23	1	0.008**	0.059	Medium
	Nationality	5.41	1	0.022*	0.045	Small
	Interaction	3.12	1	0.080	0.026	Small
Uncertainty Avoidance	Team Type	6.84	1	0.010*	0.056	Medium
	Nationality	4.67	1	0.033*	0.039	Small
	Interaction	1.89	1	0.172	0.016	Small
Masculinity/Femininity	Team Type	3.78	1	0.054	0.032	Small
	Nationality	8.34	1	0.005**	0.068	Medium
	Interaction	2.67	1	0.105	0.023	Small

Follow-up univariate analyses revealed significant team type effects for power distance: $F(1, 113) = 8.92$, $p = .003$, $\eta^2 = .072$, individualism-collectivism: $F(1, 113) = 4.56$, $p = .035$, $\eta^2 = .038$, long-term orientation: $F(1, 113) = 7.23$, $p = .008$, $\eta^2 = .059$, uncertainty avoidance: $F(1, 113) = 6.84$, $p = .010$, $\eta^2 = .056$, and masculinity-femininity approached significance: $F(1, 113) = 3.78$, $p = .054$, $\eta^2 = .032$ (See Table 9). Based on the results, H3a was supported, as leaders managing culturally heterogeneous teams exhibited significantly different cultural dimension scores across multiple dimensions.

H3b & H3c: Team Composition Moderation Effects

Logistic regression was performed to predict leadership style consistency, with team cultural composition, leader nationality, number of subordinates, and cultural dimension scores as predictors. The model was statistically significant, $\chi^2(8) = 34.67$, $p < .001$, Nagelkerke $R^2 = .321$ (See Table 10). Significant predictors included team type (mixed vs. homogeneous): $B = -1.456$, $p = .005$, OR = 0.233, 95% CI [0.084, 0.645], leader nationality: $B = 0.934$, $p = .041$, OR = 2.544, 95% CI [1.041, 6.217], number of subordinates: $B = -0.623$, $p = .020$, OR = 0.537, 95% CI [0.318, 0.905], and long-term orientation: $B = 0.445$, $p = .025$, OR = 1.560, 95% CI [1.059, 2.299].

Table 10: Logistic Regression Results - Leadership Style Consistency

Predictor	B	SE	Wald	df	p-value	Exp(B)	95% CI
Team Type (Mixed vs Homogeneous)	-1.456	0.523	7.75	1	0.005**	0.233	0.084-0.645
Nationality (Expat vs Qatari)	0.934	0.456	4.19	1	0.041*	2.544	1.041-6.217
Z_Subordinates	-0.623	0.267	5.45	1	0.020*	0.537	0.318-0.905
Power Distance Score	0.298	0.203	2.16	1	0.142	1.347	0.905-2.003

Individualism Score	-0.234	0.215	1.18	1	0.277	0.791	0.519-1.206
Long-term Orientation Score	0.445	0.198	5.05	1	0.025*	1.560	1.059-2.299
Uncertainty Avoidance Score	-0.367	0.189	3.77	1	0.052	0.693	0.478-1.003
Masculinity/Femininity Score	0.289	0.176	2.70	1	0.100	1.335	0.946-1.884

Model Summary: $\chi^2 = 34.67$, $df = 8$, $p < 0.001$, Nagelkerke $R^2 = 0.321$

Note: *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$

These results indicate that leaders of mixed teams were 77% less likely to maintain consistent leadership styles, while having more subordinates decreased style consistency. H3b was supported, and H3c was partially supported, though in the opposite direction than hypothesised (See Table 12).

Cluster Analysis

K-means cluster analysis was conducted to identify distinct leadership profiles based on cultural dimension patterns. The analysis yielded a three-cluster solution, with an average silhouette width of 0.47, indicating a reasonably strong structure (See Figure 1).

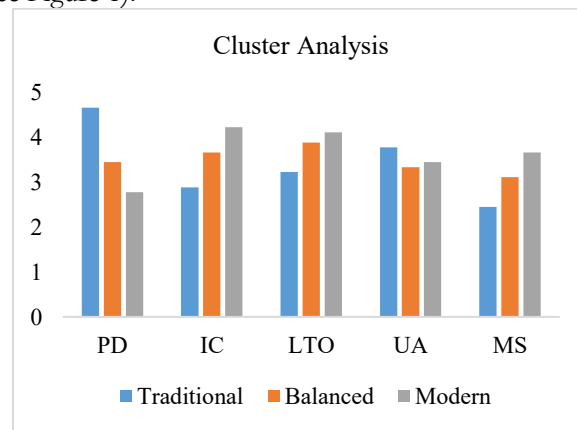


Figure 1: K-Means Cluster Analysis

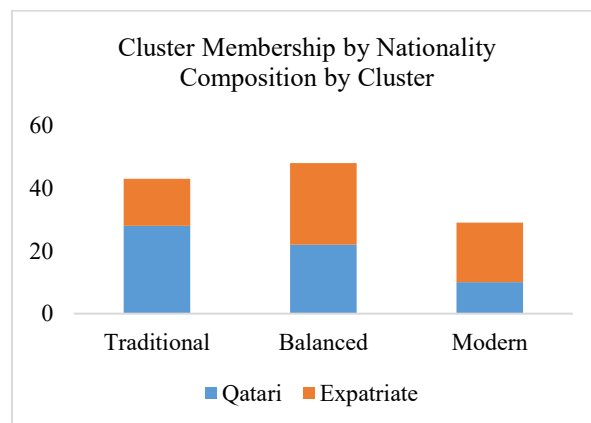


Figure 2: Cluster membership by Nationality

Cluster 1 (Traditional Profile) comprised 35% of participants ($n=42$) and was characterized by high Power Distance ($M=4.67$, $SD=0.58$), low Individualism ($M=2.89$, $SD=0.72$), moderate long-term orientation ($M=3.23$, $SD=0.89$), high uncertainty avoidance ($M=3.78$, $SD=0.65$), and low masculinity ($M=2.45$, $SD=0.71$) (See Table 11).

Cluster 2 (Balanced Profile) included 40% of the sample ($n=48$) and exhibited moderate levels on most dimensions, with moderate power distance ($M=3.45$, $SD=0.67$), moderate individualism ($M=3.67$, $SD=0.58$), high long-term orientation ($M=3.89$, $SD=0.74$), moderate uncertainty avoidance ($M=3.34$, $SD=0.82$), and moderate masculinity ($M=3.12$, $SD=0.69$) (See Table 11).

Cluster 3 (Modern Profile) comprised 25% of participants ($n=29$), characterized by low power distance ($M=2.78$, $SD=0.81$), high individualism ($M=4.23$, $SD=0.63$), high long-term orientation ($M=4.12$, $SD=0.59$), moderate uncertainty avoidance ($M=3.45$, $SD=0.91$), and high masculinity ($M=3.67$, $SD=0.78$) (See Table 11).

Table 11: K-Means Cluster Analysis (3 Clusters)

Variable	Cluster 1: Traditional (35%, n=42)	Cluster 2: Balanced (40%, n=48)	Cluster 3: Modern (25%, n=29)
Power Distance	4.67 (0.58)	3.45 (0.67)	2.78 (0.81)
Individualism	2.89 (0.72)	3.67 (0.58)	4.23 (0.63)
Long-term Orientation	3.23 (0.89)	3.89 (0.74)	4.12 (0.59)
Uncertainty Avoidance	3.78 (0.65)	3.34 (0.82)	3.45 (0.91)
Masculinity	2.45 (0.71)	3.12 (0.69)	3.67 (0.78)

Cluster Membership by Nationality

Cluster	Qatari	Expatriate	χ^2	p-value
Traditional	28 (66.7%)	15 (33.3%)	12.45	0.002**
Balanced	22 (45.8%)	26 (54.2%)		
Modern	10 (34.5%)	19 (65.5%)		

Note: ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$

Chi-square analysis revealed significant associations between cluster membership and nationality, $\chi^2(2) = 12.45, p = .002$ (See Table 11 and Figure 2). Qatari leaders were overrepresented in the Traditional cluster (66.7%), while expatriate leaders were more prevalent in the Modern cluster (65.5%).

Table 12: Summary of Hypotheses Testing

Hypothesis	Statistical Test	Results	Decision
H1a	Mann-Whitney U	$U = 1247.5, z = -2.87, p = .004^{**}$	Supported
H1b	Independent t-test	$t(118) = 1.15, p = .251$	Not Supported
H1c	Independent t-test	$t(118) = -0.97, p = .334$	Not Supported
H1d	Independent t-test	$t(118) = 0.46, p = .642$	Supported
H1e	Independent t-test	$t(118) = 0.788, p = .432$	Supported
H2a	Paired t-test	$t(59) = -1.426, p = .160$	Not Supported
H2b	Paired t-test	$t(59) = 5.123, p < .001^{**}$	Supported
H2c	Regression	$F(4,115) = 11.45, p < .001, R^2 = .287$	Partially Supported
H3a	2×2 MANOVA	Pillai's Trace = .312, $F(5,109) = 4.89, p = .001^*$	Supported
H3b	Log. Regression	$B = -1.456, OR = 0.233, p = 0.005^{**}$	Supported
H3c	Log. Regression	$B = -0.623, OR = 0.537, p = .020^*$	Supported

Note: ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study examined cross-cultural leadership dynamics in Qatar, focusing on cultural dimension differences between Qatari and expatriate leaders, leadership adaptation in multicultural teams, and the moderating influence of team composition. Integrating Hofstede's cultural dimensions, Cultural Intelligence (CQ) theory, and Social Identity Theory (SIT), the findings offer both theoretical and practical insights into leadership adaptation in highly diverse organisational contexts.

One of the most prominent findings was the significantly higher power distance orientation among Qatari leaders compared to expatriates, consistent with previous research identifying Arab societies as high power distance cultures (Hofstede, 2001; Kabasakal & Bodur, 2004). This pattern reflects the persistence of hierarchical norms rooted in socialisation, religious teachings, and governance traditions that emphasise respect for authority (Pirju & Sorcaru, 2015). Islamic leadership principles, which promote consultation (*shura*) within a hierarchical framework rather than egalitarian decision-making, reinforce this orientation. Nonetheless, the moderate effect size ($r = .26$) indicates that practical differences may be subtler than cultural stereotypes suggest, supporting Ralston's (2008) view of nuanced cultural evolution within globalised contexts.

Surprisingly, no significant differences emerged in individualism–collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, or masculinity–femininity. This challenges conventional East–West cultural dichotomies and supports emerging scholarship suggesting cultural convergence in globalised work environments (Atanassova et al., 2025; House et al., 2004). Particularly, the individualism–collectivism convergence implies that global leadership norms and organisational practices in Qatar are fostering hybrid cultural orientations. Although not statistically significant, expatriate leaders exhibited a higher long-term orientation, possibly reflecting career-driven strategic thinking and cross-cultural learning through international mobility (Szkudlarek et al., 2020).

These findings reaffirm Hofstede's (2001) contention that cultural values influence leadership expectations but also reveal how globalisation and professional exposure foster convergence in leadership orientations. The co-existence of traditional and modern leadership tendencies within both national groups underscores the dynamic interplay between enduring cultural legacies and adaptive global competencies.

The asymmetrical adaptation pattern—where expatriate leaders demonstrated higher adaptation managing Qatari subordinates, while Qatari leaders showed minimal adaptation across subordinate groups—is one of the study's most significant findings. From a CQ perspective (Ang et al., 2007; Earley & Ang, 2003), expatriate leaders' higher adaptability likely stems from stronger metacognitive, cognitive, motivational, and behavioural CQ developed through international exposure. Their outsider status increases the motivation to adapt due to higher social and career risks associated with cultural missteps (Tajfel & Turner, 2004; Lei et al., 2025). In contrast, Qatari leaders, operating within familiar cultural and institutional norms, experience less pressure or opportunity to adapt, aligning with Van Dyne et al.'s (2012) assertion that CQ development requires both motivation and contextual exposure.

Regression analysis further revealed that adaptation levels were significantly predicted by duration in position, education level, and years lived in Qatar, but not by formal cross-cultural training. These findings underscore that real-world exposure and experience-based learning are more influential in developing behavioural and metacognitive CQ than formal instruction alone. Longer tenure and local experience facilitate deeper cultural schema development, while higher education enhances analytical and perspective-taking skills supportive of cultural adaptation (Pauknerová et al., 2024). The non-significance of formal training raises concerns about the efficacy of existing cross-cultural programs, suggesting a need for experiential and immersive designs that foster behavioural adaptability rather than mere cognitive awareness.

Cluster analysis identified three leadership orientation profiles—Traditional, Balanced, and Modern—reflecting intra-cultural diversity within Qatar's leadership landscape. The Traditional cluster (35%) was characterised by high power distance and collectivism and comprised mostly Qatari but also expatriate leaders, indicating that traditional orientations transcend nationality. The Modern cluster (25%) displayed low power distance and high individualism and included a notable proportion of Qatari leaders, suggesting growing local adoption of globalised leadership values. The Balanced cluster (40%), evenly distributed between both groups, represented integrated leadership styles balancing tradition and modernity—potentially the most adaptive approach in multicultural settings. This typology illustrates that leadership orientations in Qatar are not static but reflect generational change, educational exposure, and intercultural learning.

The MANOVA results revealed that team cultural composition significantly influenced leaders' cultural orientations and behaviours. Leaders managing culturally heterogeneous teams exhibited lower power distance, higher individualism, stronger long-term orientation, and greater uncertainty avoidance. This supports social-cognitive theories of leadership (Bandura, 1999), suggesting reciprocal adaptation between leaders and their contexts. Cultural diversity within teams compels leaders to engage in broader perspective-taking and behavioural flexibility to maintain legitimacy and cohesion across diverse cultural expectations (Hogg et al., 2012).

Logistic regression results showed that leaders of mixed teams were 77% less likely to maintain consistent leadership styles ($OR = 0.233$, $p = .005$). Rather than indicating instability, this variability signifies adaptive leadership, aligning with CQ theory's emphasis on behavioural flexibility as a marker of cross-cultural effectiveness (Ang et al., 2007). Effective multicultural leaders are those who adjust their approach based on situational cues and cultural expectations rather than adhering rigidly to a single style (Mayer et al., 2025). However, such constant adaptation may also generate cognitive strain, uncertainty, and identity tension, underscoring the complex balance between adaptability and authenticity in multicultural leadership. Moreover, larger team sizes were associated with reduced leadership style consistency, likely due to increased cultural heterogeneity and communication complexity. Managing diverse and larger teams amplifies the need for flexible leadership strategies but also demands organisational support to prevent adaptation fatigue and maintain leader authenticity.

The study contributes to theory in three key ways. First, it reaffirms Hofstede's (2001) model as a relevant lens for understanding leadership behaviour in multicultural settings while illustrating how globalisation induces partial cultural convergence. Power distance remains a robust differentiator in leadership style, yet convergence in other dimensions suggests that global professional environments promote hybrid cultural orientations. Second, through the lens of SIT (Tajfel & Turner, 2004), the study reveals that adaptation barriers among Qatari leaders may stem from strong in-group identification and perceived cultural centrality. This highlights that leadership adaptation is not solely a cognitive process but also an identity negotiation shaped by social belonging and perceived legitimacy.

Third, applying CQ theory (Ang et al., 2007) underscores that cultural intelligence—particularly behavioural and metacognitive dimensions—predicts effective adaptation. However, experiential learning and contextual exposure appear more effective for CQ development than traditional training formats.

These theoretical insights contribute to cross-cultural leadership scholarship by integrating structural (Hofstede), psychological (SIT), and behavioural (CQ) perspectives. They collectively demonstrate that leadership in multicultural environments is a dynamic process of balancing cultural authenticity with adaptive flexibility—a process mediated by identity, cognition, and experiential learning.

From a practical standpoint, the findings offer several implications for organisational leadership and human resource development in Qatar and similar multicultural contexts. The strong power distance orientation among Qatari leaders suggests that organisations should emphasise participative and inclusive leadership development, especially when managing expatriate subordinates who may expect egalitarian interactions. Leadership programs should encourage local leaders to balance authority with approachability, fostering trust and collaboration across cultural divides.

Conversely, expatriate leaders' higher adaptive behaviour highlights the importance of targeted cultural onboarding focusing on local norms, values, and communication patterns. Such preparation enhances relational effectiveness and integration within host-country contexts. However, Qatari leaders' limited adaptation underscores a developmental blind spot that organisations can address through reverse mentoring, intercultural coaching, and exchange initiatives, allowing local managers to gain first-hand exposure to diverse perspectives and expectations.

Team composition emerged as a critical contextual factor. Organisations should strategically design teams to maximise diversity's developmental potential, as heterogeneous teams appear to stimulate leaders' adaptive capacity. Structured reflection and coaching can help leaders manage the tension between adaptation and authenticity, preventing cultural fatigue.

Given that experience, education, and local exposure predicted higher adaptation, HR departments should prioritise candidates with demonstrated intercultural experience or extended tenure in Qatar. While formal training alone showed limited predictive power, its redesign toward experiential methods—such as simulations, shadowing, and cross-cultural projects—could enhance its effectiveness by promoting behavioural flexibility rather than abstract knowledge.

Finally, organisations should institutionalise CQ as a core leadership competency within talent management frameworks. This includes assessing CQ in recruitment, integrating it into leadership evaluations, and embedding cross-cultural exposure into career development pathways. By promoting experiential learning, cultural mentoring, and team diversity, organisations can cultivate leaders capable of balancing traditional cultural expectations with the demands of a globalised workforce.

CONCLUSION

This study provides important insights into cross-cultural leadership dynamics in Qatar's multicultural organisational environment, revealing complex patterns of cultural convergence and divergence that challenge traditional assumptions about culture and leadership. The findings demonstrate that while certain cultural orientations persist (power distance), others converge under multicultural organisational conditions, and that leadership adaptation is influenced by individual experience, team composition, and cultural intelligence development. The asymmetrical adaptation patterns between Qatari and expatriate leaders highlight both opportunities and challenges for developing effective cross-cultural leadership capabilities. The superior adaptation of expatriate leaders suggests successful strategies that could be applied more broadly, while the limited adaptation of local leaders indicates development needs and opportunities.

The influence of team composition on leadership behaviour underscores the importance of viewing cultural diversity as a contextual factor that shapes leadership requirements and development opportunities. Organisations that effectively leverage cultural diversity can enhance leadership development while improving organisational effectiveness. These findings contribute to theoretical understanding of cross-cultural leadership while providing practical guidance for organisations operating in multicultural contexts. As global business continues to evolve and cultural diversity becomes increasingly common in organisational settings, understanding effective approaches to cross-cultural leadership becomes ever more critical for organisational success.

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