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How leadership and team derived inclusion influence team trust consensus in multicultural hybrid team.

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Recursos Humanos e Comportamento Organizacional

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consensus in multicultural hybrid teams: A moderated mediation model**

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Resumo

Esta dissertação explora a forma como a liderança inclusiva pode promover o consenso da confiança da equipa em equipas híbridas e multiculturais, através do sentimento partilhado pelos membros de que a sua singularidade é vista e valorizada (i.e., inclusão derivada da equipa). Com base numa amostra de 117 colaboradores e 31 líderes de equipa, o estudo investigou dois comportamentos de liderança: encorajar todos os membros da equipa a expressarem a sua singularidade (colher os benefícios da diversidade) e promover crenças partilhadas sobre o valor da diversidade (cultivar crenças de valor na diversidade). Embora o modelo de investigação proposto não tenha sido apoiado, os resultados realçam a complexidade da liderança inclusiva no contexto das equipas híbridas. Especificamente, os resultados sugerem que a relação entre liderança, inclusão e consenso de confiança pode ser mais complexa do que o previsto anteriormente. Em última análise, este estudo oferece uma orientação para a investigação futura sobre o desenvolvimento da confiança em equipas virtuais e diversificadas.

Palavras-chave: diversidade; trabalho híbrido; inclusão; liderança inclusiva; confiança na equipa; consenso

JEL Classification code: M14 Corporate Culture - Diversity - Social Responsibility, Y40 Dissertations (unclassified)

Abstract

This dissertation explores how inclusive leadership may foster team trust consensus in hybrid, multicultural teams through members' shared sense that their uniqueness is seen and valued (i.e., team-derived inclusion). Drawing on a sample of 117 employees and 31 team leaders, the study investigated two leadership behaviours: encouraging all team members to express their uniqueness (harvesting the benefits of diversity) and promoting shared beliefs about the value of diversity (cultivating value-in-diversity beliefs). Although the proposed research model was not supported, the findings highlight the complexity of inclusive leadership in the context of hybrid teams. Specifically, results suggest that the relationship between leadership, inclusion and trust consensus may be more nuanced than previously anticipated. Ultimately, this study offers direction for future research on trust development in diverse, virtual teams.

Keywords: diversity; hybrid work; inclusion; inclusive leadership; team trust consensus

JEL Classification code: M14 Corporate Culture - Diversity - Social Responsibility, Y40 Dissertations (unclassified)

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1. Introduction

Imagine a project team spread across four time zones. Half the members meet in the office two days a week, the rest log in remotely. One day, a critical miscommunication threatens to miss the deadline. What went wrong? Mistakes happen, but this is a fairly common occurrence in hybrid environments, reflecting a deeper underlying problem of mutual trust (Breuer et al., 2016; Mokline, 2017). However, at a time when globalisation seems to be erasing geographical distance and technological advances are blurring the lines between offline and online, diverse virtual teams need to trust each other more than ever. It has become obvious that hybrid work¹ is here to stay (Dowling et al., 2022), changing not only the way people work in general but also the way they work in teams. Employees are now enabled to collaborate from dispersed locations via electronic means to work on shared objectives (Gilson et al., 2015; O'Leary & Mortensen, 2010,).

The newfound flexibility has the potential to have a significant positive impact on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts, by empowering traditionally underrepresented groups (Dowling et al., 2022). It is therefore not surprising that employees from these groups show an even greater preference for hybrid work as well as a greater willingness to leave a workplace that is less accommodating in this sense. One study, for example, found that black employees were 14% more likely to quit their jobs than their white counterparts if there was no hybrid working option (Dowling et al., 2022). This emphasises the need for organisations to promote a hybrid and inclusive work environment. However, in the absence of shared trust, hybrid structures deepen divides rather than bridge them. Achieving cohesion requires a foundation of trust among team members. Trust describes the expectation or the belief that one can rely on the actions and words of another person, and that the person has good intentions to deliver on their promises (Bligh, 2017). But, building this trust in a multinational hybrid team is complex due to the high likelihood for subgroups to form, which hinders trust building. Furthermore, subgroup formation not only reduces inclusiveness but also reduces overall team performance, turning the benefits of hybrid work into liabilities. In practice, this could result in individuals being more favourable towards members of the same subgroup and more negative and less trusting of others (Hogg & Turner, 1985).

As today's workforces have become more culturally diverse and organisations increasingly adopt remote working options, team leaders must adapt their behaviours to meet the demands of this new reality (Larson & DeChruch 2020). This fundamental shift in how teams operate has raised a critical question: how can teams continue to collaborate efficiently

¹ In the following, hybrid work is defined as including all types of working models that do not require a full-time, on-site presence and have implications for an inclusive workplace with less or no face-to-face interaction.

and effectively despite the complexities introduced by diverse compositions and hybrid structures? In this context, leaders play a pivotal role in fostering trust. One emerging perspective suggests that leaders who both “harvest the benefits of diversity” and “cultivate value-in-diversity beliefs” may be key to embracing team-derived inclusion – a shared sense among team members that their uniqueness is recognised and valued (Leroy et al., 2021; Randel et al., 2018). Although trust has been a longstanding focus in leadership and teamwork literature (e.g., Bligh, 2017; Peñarroja et al., 2015), there remains a knowledge gap in understanding how team trust consensus can be achieved in multicultural, hybrid teams and what specific leadership behaviours are most effective in doing so (Brix et al., 2022; Sherbin & Rashid, 2017). Specifically, how do leader behaviours and team-derived inclusion influence the development of trust consensus in hybrid teams? And how does diversity influence trust consensus within teams?

To address these questions and to contribute to the ongoing research, the present study is dedicated to analysing how the two different leadership behaviours – harvesting the benefits of diversity and cultivating value-in-diversity beliefs – can promote team-derived inclusion as well as team trust consensus in diverse hybrid teams. In doing so, it aims to shed light on leadership strategies that may ultimately improve the overall team performance.

2. Literature review

Diversity in teams has long been recognised as presenting both opportunities and challenges. While diverse teams bring together a wide range of perspectives, skills and experiences, they can also struggle with cohesion, trust and effective collaboration (Van Knippenberg et al., 2004). One of the key mechanisms through which diversity can affect team dynamics is subgroup formation, a process by which team members categorise themselves on the basis of shared characteristics such as age, gender or national identity (O’Leary & Mortensen, 2010). Without a strong sense of inclusion, diverse teams risk becoming fragmented as individuals may struggle to integrate into the broader team structure and instead identify more strongly with smaller subgroups.

In order to understand the moderating role of leadership in this context, it is important to first define the concepts of subgroup formation and team-derived inclusion and then relate these concepts to team trust consensus. This chapter explores how subgroup formation occurs in diverse teams and its impact on the level of trust within the team. It then examines the role of team-derived inclusion in mitigating the negative consequences of subgroup formation by fostering trust consensus across the team. Finally, it highlights the critical role of leadership in shaping an inclusive team climate that supports both diversity and cohesion, before synthesising the developed hypothesis into a conceptual model.

2.1 Subgroup formation

The idea of subgroup formation is often based on Tajfel and Turner's (1979) social identity approach, which describes how individuals categorise themselves and others into different social groups, favouring and identifying more with members of the same social group (in-group favouritism), while differentiating themselves from those of others (out-group discrimination). Within work teams, this manifests as the emergence of smaller subgroups. These divisions can form along lines such as gender, cultural background, or geographic location and are particularly likely in hybrid settings where informal interactions are limited (O'Leary & Mortensen, 2010). As a result, subgroup formation can weaken trust, reduce cooperation and hinder knowledge sharing across the broader team, affecting the overall performance.

Hybrid teams, that combine virtual and in-office work, are especially susceptible to this dynamic (Carton & Cummings, 2012). Physical proximity often influences identification, making those sharing a workspace more likely to bond and form subgroups. With fewer face-to-face interactions than those always working in the same location at the same time, even partially virtual teams can exhibit dispersed characteristics (Cramton & Webber, 2005). Team members may therefore identify more with local colleagues than with the full team, leading to a fragmentation of the team as a whole (Carton & Cummings, 2012). Authors such as O'Leary and Mortensen (2010) or Polzer et al. (2006) state that geographic subgroups negatively affect not only the overall team identification but also the levels of trust, conflict and coordination. This fragmentation can be further exacerbated by configurations that vary in both space and time. Although, hybrid teams may have the option of sharing office space with some team members, unlike fully co-located teams, not all team members may always use this shared office space at the same time having different in-office days. As Methot et al. (2018) argue, when location is no longer the sole basis for identification, relationships and interpersonal connections become stronger determinants of subgroups. Individuals may identify with multiple subgroups to varying degrees.

Cultural diversity adds yet another layer of complexity. Research shows that culturally diverse teams are more prone to miscommunication, reduced group commitment and heightened relational conflict (Hibbert & Hibbert, 2017; Krebs et al., 2006; Mokline, 2017). Individuals from the same cultural background may feel more connected to each other than to their colleagues from different cultures (Brown et al., 2008). Cultural differences can have an impact on the process of building trust, as team members may have different expectations and ideals when interacting with each other.

In sum, when teams are affected by geographical, temporal or cultural dispersion, members tend to retreat into smaller, more familiar in-groups. This fragmentation undermines the shared trust which is an essential component of effective collaboration.

2.2 Team-derived inclusion

Team-derived inclusion refers to the extent to which individuals feel both a sense of belonging and safety to express their uniqueness within a team (Leroy et al., 2021). To achieve this, it is essential to understand that diversity and inclusion are separate, yet complementary goals, and that diversity alone is insufficient to create an inclusive team dynamic (Sherbin & Rashid, 2017).

Hypothesis 1 (H1): Diversity alone does not predict positive team outcomes.

In the context of the workplace, diversity is often seen simply as a matter of representation, encompassing visible characteristics, such as age, gender, and ethnicity, as well as less visible traits like cultural or educational background, and technical expertise (Kochan et al., 2003; McGrath et al., 1995; Miliken & Martins, 1996). Inclusion, however, goes beyond representation and includes the quality of engagement and participation in a team. More specifically, inclusion refers to the degree to which the individuals of a team have equal access to resources, are integrated into work groups, and can actively participate in decision-making processes (Mor Barak & Cherin, 1998).

An inclusive work environment is achieved when individuals feel connected to their team (Shore et al., 2011) and believe that their uniqueness is not merely encouraged but also valued (Catalyst 2014, 2018). This simultaneous experience of belonging and uniqueness is captured by Brewer's (1991) theory of optimal distinctiveness, which states that individuals seek to balance their need for inclusion with the need to maintain individuality. In this way, team-derived inclusion goes beyond surface-level diversity to actively foster an environment where differences are respected, shared and promoted for collective success (Hung et al., 2021).

To fully leverage the benefits of a diverse workforce, strong interpersonal bonds and team identification are necessary (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Without this shared sense of belonging, members may struggle to accept and integrate contributions of others, especially if those are not perceived as valuable members of their in-group (Shore et al., 2011). At the same time, members must feel empowered freely express their unique insights and respected in their individuality.

In this way, team-derived inclusion can mitigate potential tensions between in-groups and out-groups in hybrid work environments, where physical and social distance can fuel subgroup formation (Brewer, 1991). Rather than merely representing diversity, inclusive teams actively embrace it, potentially preventing fragmentation and helping to align around shared goals. When inclusion is high, it lays the groundwork for mutual trust and team cohesion, which are particularly vital in multicultural, hybrid teams.

2.3 Team-derived inclusion and team trust consensus

While trust in teams is often understood as a shared group construct, measured by the average level of trust, team trust consensus describes the degree to which team members hold similar levels of trust in one another (de Jong et al., 2021). Trust consensus is key in fostering reciprocal social exchange, enhancing resource sharing, and reducing relational uncertainty. Conversely, the lack of trust consensus can have a negative impact on the overall team performance (Krebs et al., 2006).

Trust dispersion can be one of the consequences of subgroup formation, where trust is unevenly distributed within the subordinate team (Krebs et al., 2006). In such cases, trust tends to be more concentrated within subgroups, leading to an imbalance in resources sharing and collaborative processes across the broader team. This internal fragmentation disrupts coordination and can hinder the team's ability to function cohesively.

Several studies suggest that diversity introduces an additional complexity into the development of team trust consensus. Doney et al. (1998) found out that cultural diversity can negatively impact trust-building, as individuals from different cultures often operate with divergent assumptions about how trust should be established. For instance, Yuki et al. (2005) highlight that in Western cultures, people mainly base their trust on whether they perceive the other person to be part of their social group. Whereas individuals from eastern cultures are more likely to form trust through established relationship networks, even beyond the belongingness to a common in-group. Similarly, Brown et al. (2008) observed that individualistic cultures tend to base trust performance-related capabilities, while collectivist cultures are less self-serving motivated and value behavioural alignment and cohesion more. As a result, trust often develops more slowly in culturally diverse teams, with team members initially gravitating toward those who share their cultural background.

Nevertheless, such challenges can be mitigated by an inclusive climate that facilitates mutual understanding, reduces out-group discrimination and promotes shared trust across the whole team. Van Knippenberg et al. (2004) suggest that successful virtual teams, which acknowledge and adapt to differences in nationality, gender, ethnicity, values, and thinking styles are more likely to foster collective learning, thereby improving productivity and innovation. Accordingly, it is proposed that team-derived inclusion plays a key role in enabling diversity to enhance, rather than hinder, team trust consensus.

Hypothesis 2 (H2): Team-derived inclusion positively relates to team trust consensus.

Hypothesis 3 (H3): Team-derived inclusion mediates the effect of diversity on trust consensus.

2.4 The role of leadership in promoting team-derived inclusion

Leaders play a key role in facilitating team-derived inclusion (Randel et al., 2018). By building inclusive team dynamics, leaders ensure that all members feel valued, engaged and empowered to contribute to the team efforts. One way leaders can foster inclusion is by encouraging team members to represent their unique strengths and perspectives (Carmeli et al. 2010; Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006), a practice Leroy et al. (2021) refer to as “harvesting the benefits of diversity”. At the same time, leaders must also actively promote positive attitudes towards diversity across the overarching team (Homan et al., 2007; Van Knippenberg et al., 2007), which can be summarised as “cultivating value-in-diversity beliefs” (Leroy et al., 2021).

According to Leroy et al. (2021), these two leader behaviours need to be treated as interdependent strategies in order to promote team-derived inclusiveness. Encouraging diversity alone without fostering the right mindset could backfire, diminishing feelings of inclusion. Therefore, leaders need to promote both a sense of belonging and uniqueness to strengthen team-derived inclusion. Only when team members perceive that their differences are appreciated and that these differences contribute positively to the team will shared trust begin to emerge. Team leaders must therefore shape the collective belief that the team benefits from diverse contributions and perspectives of its members (Janssen & Huang, 2008; Van Knippenberg et al., 2013).

If a team leader uses these strategies, they can help create a more inclusive workplace, which especially benefits workers from under-represented groups (Shore et al., 2021). By reducing their concerns of rejection and fostering a sense of community, leaders can mitigate the risk of exclusion. Leaders that actively practise inclusivity lessen the likelihood that marginalised workers would suffer exclusion, differentiation, or assimilation. By acting as advocates and allies, they contribute to the development of a more inclusive workplace that recognises and resolves the particular difficulties these workers experience. It is therefore the role of the leader to create a culture based on the values and norms that define the desired behaviour within the team, as the processes people use to develop trust will be a product of that culture. Leaders are key to building a foundation of trust that enhances team performance and innovation, by increasing the level of trust within the team across cultural boundaries. To promote team-derived inclusion, leaders must not only see the benefits of a diverse team but also promote the overall value of diversity within the team.

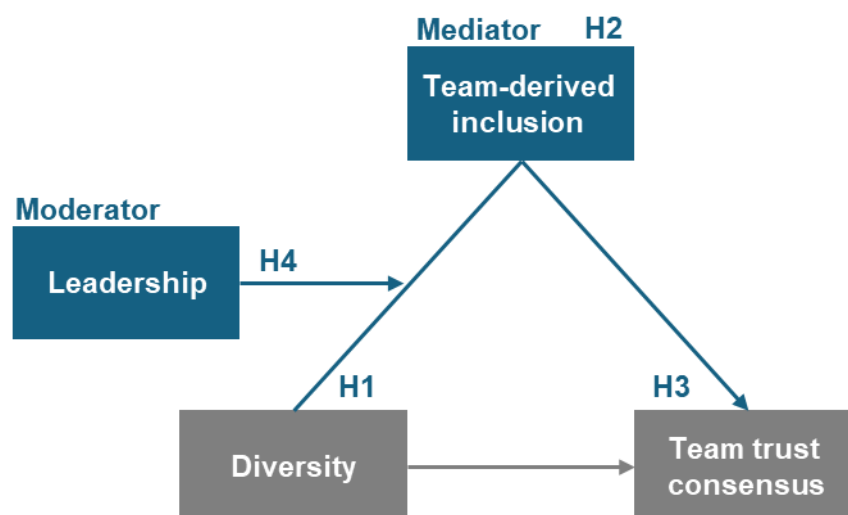
Hypothesis 4 (H4): The two leadership behaviours – harvesting the benefits of diversity and cultivating value-in-diversity beliefs – combined moderate the relationship between diversity and team trust consensus.

Recommendations for inclusion initiatives that promote a sense of belonging and recognise unique contributions will be further developed in the discussion of this study, following the representation of the findings in Chapter 4.

2.5 Conceptual model

The proposed research model (Figure 1) builds on the key theoretical concepts and relationships discussed, forming the foundation for the hypotheses to be tested. Specifically, it explores the impact of diversity within a team on trust consensus, with team-derived inclusion as a mediator. Additionally, the model examines how the combination of the two leadership behaviours – harvesting the benefits of diversity and cultivating value-in-diversity beliefs – moderate the relationship between diversity and team-derived inclusion, forming a moderated mediation model.

Figure 1
Conceptual model



3. Methodology

3.1 Sample

The final study sample (n = 148) consists of 117 individual team members and 31 team leaders, representing a total of 31 distinct teams. The average team size, excluding the leader, was 9 members (range: 3-80). To account for potential contextual factors, in addition to the research-related questions, participants were also asked to provide basic demographic information as well as their self-reported nationality and whether their team follows a hybrid working model.

Team members

The team members were 33,05 years old on average ($SD = 8.66$) and 53.9% of them identified as female. In terms of tenure, the cumulative majority of the sample reported having been with the company for a relatively short period of time, with less than one year of tenure (21.7%) or 1 to 3 years (40.9%). 14.8% of team members were within the 3 to 5 year range, while another 14.8% had been employed for more than seven years. The smallest group in the sample (7.8%) reported a tenure of 5 to 7 years.

An analysis of the nationalities of the team members reveals a diverse cultural composition. The largest groups identified as German (35.9%) – with one additional person reporting German/Turkish identity – followed by Portuguese (30.8%). Smaller segments included British (3.4%), Austrian (1.7%), Russian (1.7%), and Spanish (1.7%). Other individual respondents identified themselves as Brazilian, Chinese, Danish, Filipino, Kazakh, Middle Eastern, or Ukrainian, while 4.3% did not specify their nationality. In total, 96.5% of the team members indicated following a hybrid working model.

Team leaders

The average age of the team leaders was 40.48 years ($SD = 8.50$), with 51.6% of them identifying as female. A significant proportion had long-standing tenure, with 45.2% of the team leaders having been with the organisation for more than seven years, while another 25.8% reported having been there for 5 to 7 years. In contrast, 22.6% had a tenure of 1 to 3 years. The smallest group, comprising 6.5% of team leaders, had been with the organisation for 3 to 5 years.

The nationality distribution among team leaders was similarly diverse. As with the team members, the largest group, comprising 32.3% identified as German, while another quarter (25.8%) identified as Portuguese. Followed by Dutch (16.1%) and British (9.7%). Individual leaders identified as Australian, Belgian, Mexican, Polish, or Swiss.

3.2 Procedure

To test the developed hypotheses and explore how the two leader behaviours – harvesting the benefits of diversity and cultivating value-in-diversity beliefs – influence team trust consensus through their impact on team-derived inclusion, a correlational quantitative research design was employed using an online survey. This approach allowed for the identification of patterns and relationships without claiming direct causality.

Given the applied nature of the research, non-probability convenience sampling was adopted. Teams were eligible to participate if they consisted of at least three individuals, including the team leader, ensuring adequate group size for statistical analysis. The study specifically targeted multicultural hybrid teams, defined as teams comprising members from

at least two distinct cultural backgrounds and working in some form of hybrid setting. This sample focus reflects the increasing prevalence of hybrid collaboration in modern organisations and aligns with the research aim of exploring inclusion and trust within diverse teams. The intended sample size was a minimum of 30 distinct teams, drawn from a variety of companies, to enhance generalisability and enable exploration of pattern across different organisational settings.

Since this study investigates trust as a collectively perceived team-level construct, it was important to collect data from both team members and leaders to ensure valid aggregation and enable multi-source analysis. To reduce common method bias, two separate but linked questionnaires were developed – one for team members and one for team leaders – allowing key variables to be measured from different sources. Each team received a unique link to the questionnaire, allowing responses to be accurately grouped and analysed at the team level while maintaining confidentiality through anonymisation. This approach also minimised social desirability bias and response bias. Participants were instructed to complete the survey independently, further reducing the risk of peer influence on responses.

3.3 Measures

All survey items were scored using a seven-point Likert scale, ranging, from “Totally disagree” (1) to “Totally agree” (7), unless otherwise noted. To ensure validity and reliability, all items were adapted from conceptual frameworks.

Diversity

In addition to asking all participants to self-report the nationality with which they most identify, the individual team members were also asked how diverse they perceived their teams to be in general. The perception of diversity was operationalised based on the following two items, as outlined in the studies of Harrison et al. (1998) and Van Dick et al. (2008): “My team is globally very diverse” and “I am very aware of the differences among my colleagues”. The combined result of the perceived level of diversity within the team serves as a predictor in the research model and initiates the causal process examined. As Cronbach’s alpha tends to underestimate the reliability of two-item scales (Eisinga et al., 2013), a relatively low value of $\alpha = .59$ was to be expected. Therefore, the Spearman-Brown split-half reliability coefficient was computed, which was found to be more appropriate for two-item scales. Although the coefficient value of .615, still does not reach the conventional threshold of high reliability ($>.70$), it is within the range commonly observed in two-item psychological and organisational measures (Gardner et al., 2005). Two-item measures often show lower internal consistency simply due to their brevity. However, given the theoretical coherence of the items and their empirical relationship, the two were retained as a combined measure of diversity.

Team-derived inclusion

The mediating variable, team-derived inclusion, was measured using five items reflecting on the individual perception of uniqueness and belonging, an adapted version of Leroy et al.'s (2021) scale, ensuring alignment with contemporary research in the field. Following prior research, these sub-scores are also combined into an overall score, as team-derived inclusion is conceptualised as the interplay between high levels of uniqueness and belongingness. Research items include "In this team, I can be my unique self" (uniqueness) and "In this team, I feel that I belong" (belongingness). Hereby the focus lays on the individual perception of inclusion of each participant. To reduce response bias an item with reverse wording was included ("In this team, I feel like an outsider."). This enhances the scale validity and reliability by ensuring that responses are not solely driven by the phrasing of questions or inattentive responding. With a Cronbach's alpha of .86 among the team members the measure showed high reliability.

Leadership

Leadership, the moderating variable in this study, was assessed using two five-item measurement scales by Leroy et al.'s (2021). One, to measure the leader behaviour "harvesting the benefits of diversity" (harvesting), which describes the leader's ability to leverage diversity within the team by encouraging employees to present ideas and perspectives based on their unique background. Hereby it is important to distinguish that these measures focus on the team as a whole rather than individual team members. A sample item for team members is: "Our team leader makes sure that everyone's unique strengths are leveraged". The interitem reliability for this measure was significant, with Cronbach's alpha values .91 for team members.

The second scale assesses the leader behaviour "cultivating value-in-diversity beliefs" (cultivating), which summarises the leader's role in fostering a shared understanding of the advantages of diversity. A sample item is: "Our team leader enables us to see differences as an advantage rather than as a disadvantage". The reliability analysis showed a high interitem reliability among team members ($\alpha = 0.91$). The data of the two scales were then combined into one (inclusive) leadership variable by averaging all the items. This approach was justified by the interdependence of the two leadership behaviours and resulted in an alpha of .95.

Team trust consensus

Team trust consensus was examined by using De Jong and Elfring's (2010) five-item measure. This variable captures the extent to which team members share a similar perception of trust within their team and was measured with the standard deviation (SD) instead of the mean.

This approach follows Biemann and Kearney's (2010) recommendation to better capture how aligned or dispersed these perceptions are across team members. An example item is: "I am confident that my teammates will take my interests into account when making work-related decisions". With a strong interitem reliability ($\alpha = .93$) these items provide a robust foundation for understanding team trust dynamics.

In line with previous research and best practice (e.g., Biemann & Kearney, 2010), team trust consensus was operationalised as the within-team standard deviation. To ensure that higher values represent greater consensus (rather than greater dispersion), the SD was multiplied by -1. This inversion allows for more intuitive interpretation, with higher scores indicating stronger agreement within the team.

Team performance

In order to include the leaders' perspective and to consider an alternative outcome variable, the leader's perception of the team's overall performance was also investigated by using the following two items, which are commonly used in assessments of team performance and effectiveness: "This team has a good performance" and "This team is effective".

Similar to the two-item scale measuring diversity, the coefficient value for these measures was .616. However, as the items were theoretically grounded, clearly worded and showed validity, their use in this study was supported.

4. Results

4.1 Aggregation

As this study focuses on team-level dynamics, particularly the interplay between leader behaviours and collective team outcomes, individual responses from team members were aggregated (Costa et al., 2013). The aggregation was justified computing $r_{wg(j)}$, and index of within-group agreement suitable for multi-items scales (James et al., 1993). Theoretical and empirical literature suggest a mean $r_{wg(j)}$ value of .70 or above as acceptable for aggregation.

For diversity, the $r_{wg(j)}$ mean value was .79, for team derived inclusion, the $r_{wg(j)}$ mean value was .83, for the harvesting the benefits of diversity, the $r_{wg(j)}$ mean value was .85 and for cultivating value-in-diversity beliefs, the $r_{wg(j)}$ mean value was .81. In contrast, the combined leadership variable yielded a lower $r_{wg(j)}$ mean value of .35. As team trust consensus, was measured with the standard deviation (SD) instead of the mean. no $r_{wg(j)}$ was computed for this variable.

4.2 Hypothesis testing

Table 1 presents the mean, standard deviation and correlation for the team-level variables diversity, team-derived inclusion, leadership, and team trust consensus as well as the variable team performance, which was assessed by team leaders.

Overall, team members reported high levels of perceived inclusion ($M = 5.59$, $SD = .58$) and inclusive leadership behaviour ($M = 5.34$, $SD = .68$). Diversity was rated moderately high ($M = 5.10$), although its relatively high standard deviation ($SD = .87$) suggests varied perceptions across the different teams or members. The leaders generally assessed their team's performance overall as high ($M = 5.68$, $SD = .67$).

Contrary to expectations, only a few variables show significant correlations. Significant positive correlations were found solely between inclusion and leadership ($r = .56$, $p < .01$) and between inclusion and team trust consensus ($r = .41$, $p < .05$). The strong positive correlation between the two leadership behaviours ($r = .91$, $p < .01$) justifies their combination into a single inclusive leadership variable.

Table 1
Descriptive statistics and correlations among all variables

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Diversity	5.10	.87						
2. Team-derived inclusion	5.60	.58	.04					
3. Leadership behaviour (harvesting)	5.49	.78	-.21	.59**				
4. Leadership behaviour (cultivating)	5.19	.61	-.10	.48**	.91**			
5. Leadership (combined)	5.34	.68	-.17	.56**	.98**	.97**		
6. Team trust consensus	0.24	.41	-.31	.41*	.41*	.34	.39*	
7. Team performance	5.68	.67	-.04	.36*	.41*	.27	.35	.31

Note. $n = 31$ teams / team leaders.

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

Hypothesis 1 suggests that diversity alone cannot predict positive team outcomes. As shown in Table 1, diversity was not significantly correlated with any other variable. This indicates that diversity alone is not a predictor of inclusion, team trust consensus or team performance, supporting H1.

Hypothesis 2 put forward that team derived inclusion is positively related to team trust consensus. A moderate positive correlation ($r = .41$, $p < .05$) between inclusion and team trust consensus was found (Table 1). This suggests that higher perceptions of inclusion lead to greater alignment in trust levels among team members, moderately supporting H2.

Hypothesis 3 states that team-derived inclusion mediates the relationship between diversity and team trust consensus. Hence, before looking at the full model, a simple mediation analysis was conducted using 5,000 bootstrap samples and 95% confidence intervals (CI) (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). However, the initial screening of all the variables already showed that there was no significant direct relationship between diversity and either inclusion or team trust consensus. The analysis of the mediation model (Figure 2) further confirmed that inclusion did not significantly mediate the relationship between diversity and team trust consensus, due to the non-significant of the overall model ($R^2 = .0967$, $F(1,27) = 2.8916$, $p = .1005$, see Table 2). Thus, H3 was not supported.

Figure 2
Mediation model

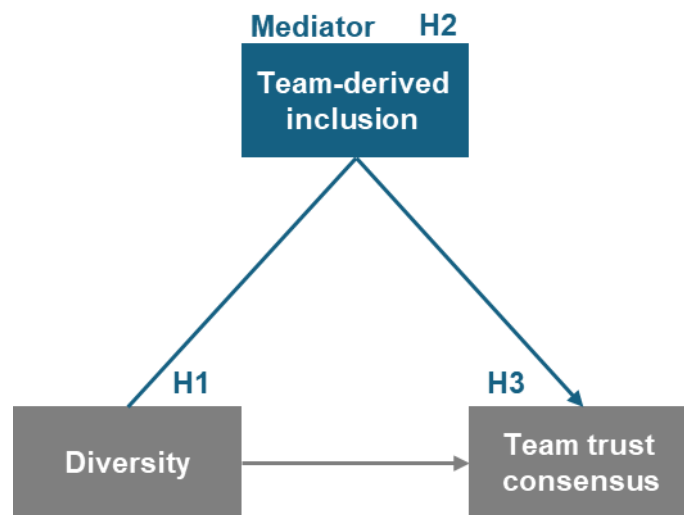


Table 2
Results of mediation analysis (hypothesis 3)

Steps	b	SE	t(df)	p
Total effect $R^2 = .0967$; $p = .1005$				
Team trust consensus regressed on diversity (c path)	-.1544	.0908	-1.7005	.1005
Team-derived inclusion regressed on diversity (a path)	.0507	.1383	.3367	.7167
Team trust consensus regressed on team-derived inclusion (b path)	.3004	.1146	2.6214	.0144
Team trust consensus regressed on diversity controlled for team-derived inclusion (c' path)	-.1696	.0825	-2.0562	.0499

	Unstand. value	SE	LL95% CI	UL 95% CI
Bootstrap result for indirect effect				
Effect	.0152	.0508	-.0556	.1438

Note. $n = 29$ teams.

LL = lower limit; CI = confidence interval; UL = upper limit.

All predictor variables were mean-centred.

Hypothesis 4 proposed that harvesting the benefits of diversity and cultivating the value-in-diversity beliefs combined have a moderating effect on the relationship between diversity and team trust consensus. To test this hypothesis the moderation model (Figure 3) was explored indirectly with a moderated mediation analysis based on the proposed research model (Figure 1). Although the overall model is significant ($R^2 = .3481$, $F(4,24) = 2.8736$, $p = .0446$), none of the individual paths, including the interaction between diversity and leadership reached significance. Therefore, there is no evidence that leadership moderates the effect of diversity on inclusion. Thus, H4 was not supported.

Figure 3
Moderation model

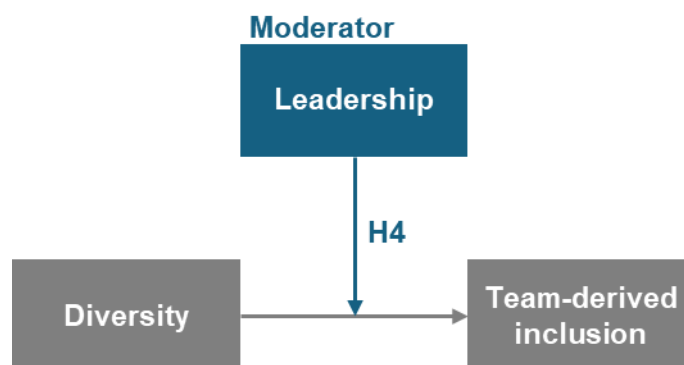


Table 3
Results of moderated mediation analysis (hypothesis 4)

Steps	b	SE	t(df)	p
Model summary $R^2 = .3481$; $p = .0446$				
Diversity	-.1952	.1249	-1.5623	.1313
Team-derived inclusion	-1.2807	1.2981	-.9866	.3337
Leadership	-1.5176	1.5016	-1.0106	.3223
Interaction (team-derived inclusion x leadership)	.2845	.2542	1.1191	.2742

	R ² -chng	F	range	p
Interaction effects		.2687	1, 23	.6091
Test of interaction	.0487	1.2524	1, 24	.2742
Test of highest order unconditional interaction				
	Index	SE	LL95% CI	UL95% CI
Index of moderated mediation	.0144	.0612	-.1035	.1571

Results of the moderated mediation analysis of diversity on team trust consensus through team-derived inclusion. Note. n = 29 teams.

LL = lower limit; CI = confidence interval; UL = upper limit.

All predictor variables were mean-centred.

Exploratory analysis

As leadership showed moderate positive correlation with both team trust consensus ($r = .39^*$) and team performance ($r = .35^*$), an adapted moderated mediation model (Figure 4) was tested. This model explored whether team performance, rather than trust consensus, might serve as a more significant outcome. While the revised model showed a slightly stronger fit ($R^2 = .3280$, $F(3,27) = 3.771$, $p = .0221$), diversity again failed to predict inclusion at any level of leadership. The mediation and moderated mediations paths also remained non-significant. Inclusion was moderately associated with both team trust consensus and team performance, indicating its central role in shaping outcomes. Additionally, leadership was strongly associated with inclusion, supporting the idea that inclusive leadership is a key driver of inclusive climates. The key difference between both versions of the moderated mediation model lies in the direct and mediator-to-outcome links. For the first one (Figure 1), inclusion significantly predicted team trust consensus and diversity had a slightly negative direct effect when inclusion is controlled. For the second one (Figure 4), inclusion showed only a marginal positive effect on the team performance and diversity had no direct effect. These findings suggest that while diversity alone may not drive team trust consensus or performance, but inclusive leadership and team-derived inclusion can foster alignment and effectiveness within multicultural teams.

Figure 4
Adapted moderated mediation model

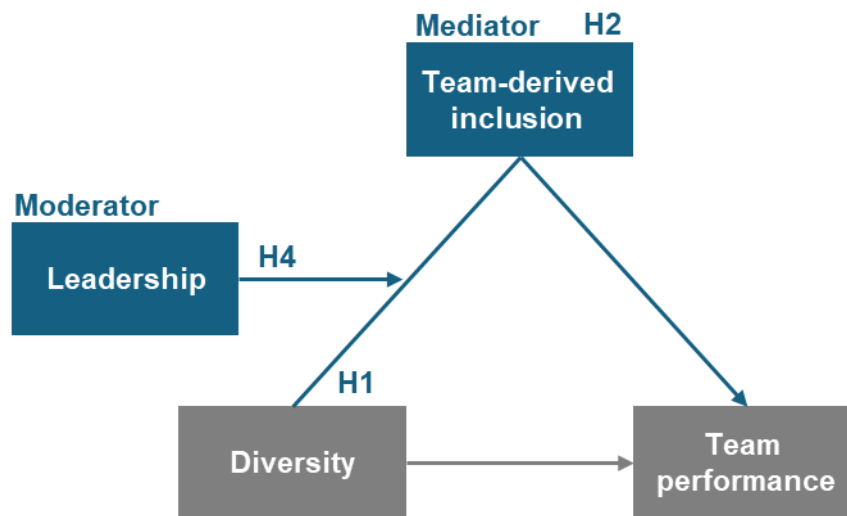


Table 4
Results of moderated mediation analysis (adapted model)

Steps	b	SE	t(df)	p
Model summary $R^2 = .2649$; $p = .0786$				
Diversity	-.0920	.1421	-.6472	.5232
Team-derived inclusion	-3.4313	1.9024	-1.8037	.0829
Leadership	-3.6614	2.0373	-1.7972	.0839
Interaction (team-derived inclusion x leadership)	.6881	.3554	1.9362	.0638*
	R^2 -chng	F	range	p
Interaction effects				
Test of interaction		.6130	1,25	.4410
Test of highest order unconditional interaction	.1020	3.7488	1,26	.0638
	Index	SE	LL95% CI	UL95% CI
Index of moderated mediation	.0164	.0928	-.2213	.1583

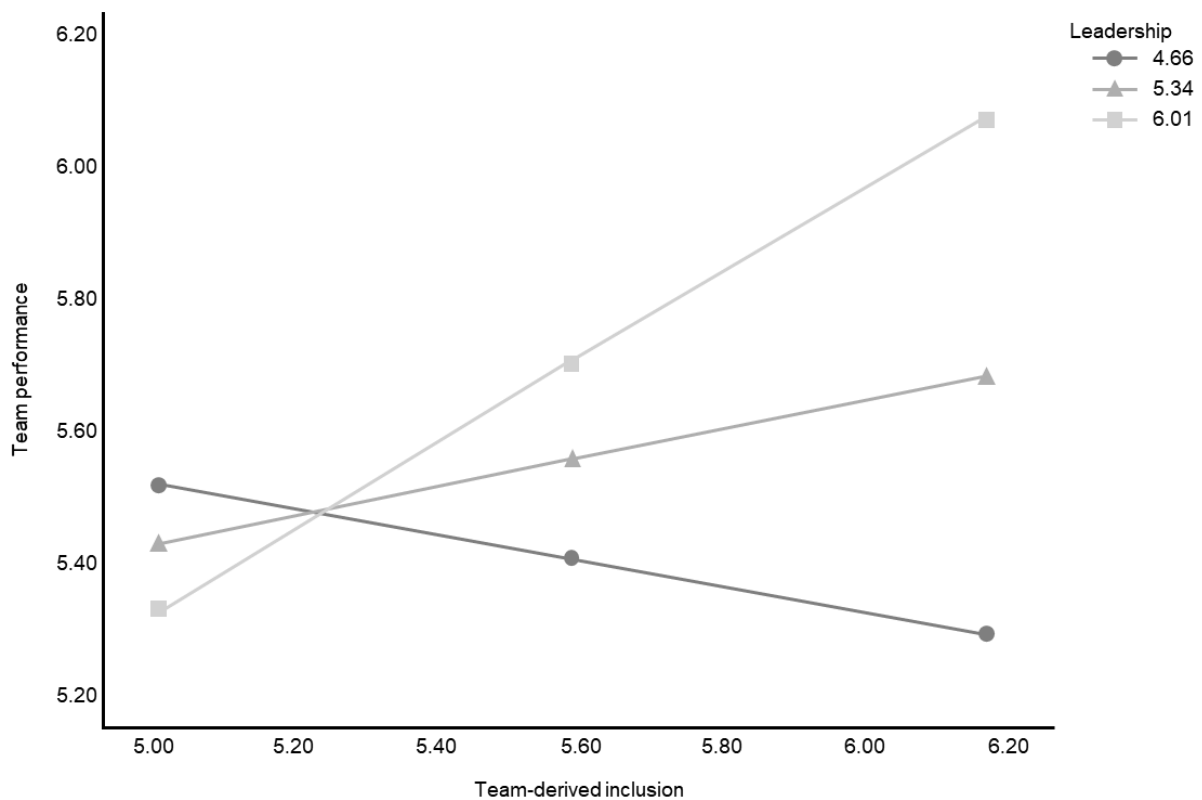
Results of the moderated mediation analysis of diversity on team trust consensus through team-derived inclusion. Note. $n = 31$ teams.

LL = lower limit; CI = confidence interval; UL = upper limit.

All predictor variables were mean-centred.

** Further illustrated in Figure 5*

Figure 5
Graph for interaction between team-derived inclusion and leadership



Note. The graph shows the outcome variable team performance at low, average and high levels of team-derived inclusion and low, average and high levels of leadership.

Figure 5 illustrates the interaction pattern that provides further insight into the relationship between team-derived inclusion, leadership and team performance. Team performance reaches its highest level when both inclusion and leadership are high. Conversely, when inclusion is high, but leadership is low, team performance remains relatively low. When both inclusion and leadership are low, team performance is at its lowest. This suggests that inclusion alone is insufficient to optimise team performance, the positive effects of inclusion can only be leveraged when combined with inclusive leadership. However, the interaction has not reached statistical significance, so further research is required.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study, summarised in Table 2, open up a new discussion about how inclusion, leadership, and team dynamics interact within diverse teams. They contribute to the overall research on inclusive leadership and team dynamics in multicultural team and reaffirm the complexity of diversity's role in team settings.

The suggestion that the mere presence of diversity does not guarantee an inclusive team climate (H1) aligns with prior research indicating that diversity must be accompanied by

intentional inclusion practices to be beneficial (Shore et al., 2011). Although the mediating role of inclusion (H3) was statistically not supported due to the absence of a direct relationship between diversity and inclusion, the theoretical logic remains sound. It is plausible that team-derived inclusion mediates such relationship in a larger sample, warranting future research. The fact that this impact was not seen in this study does not invalidate the conceptual model yet but emphasises how variable and contextual the inclusion process is. Furthermore, the study found empirical support for the positive association between inclusion and trust consensus. This suggests that inclusion plays a critical role in shaping shared perceptions of trust within diverse teams. When individuals are included, they are more likely to feel aligned, engaged and contribute to a cohesive group dynamic (Hung et al., 2021).

Although the moderation model was not supported statistically (H4), leadership emerged as a key factor in shaping team dynamics beyond the examination of the hypotheses. The correlation between leadership and both team trust consensus and the perceived team performance suggests that leadership may act as a catalyst for turning diversity and inclusion into actionable team outcomes. In this sense, inclusive leadership behaviours appear to foster alignment and trust, reinforcing the need for the moderation model to be researched on its own. Especially, as this is in line with previous research, suggesting that leadership can mitigate the coordination and communication challenges often associated with heterogeneous teams (Leroy et al., 2021). By intentionally cultivating inclusive work environments, leaders help bridge differences, prevent subgroup formation and promote knowledge sharing, all of which contribute to a better integration of diverse perspectives.

Looking at both moderated mediation models, inclusion was a stronger predictor of trust consensus than performance. This suggests that interventions aimed at fostering inclusion may be more effective at improving trust-related outcome than directly boosting the performance. It may be that trust consensus serves as an antecedent to performance outcomes, especially in hybrid diverse team where alignment and mutual understanding are necessary before full productivity can be achieved.

Taken together, these findings suggest that leaders who actively promote an inclusive work environment play a crucial role in transforming the liabilities of diversity into team strengths. Although the hypothesised pathways were not all supported, the observed patterns point to important dynamics worth further exploration, particularly the role of inclusion as a foundation for trust in diverse team environments. Moreover, the negative direct effect of diversity on team trust consensus in the absence of inclusion highlights the risk of poorly managed diversity and the importance of interventions that build shared trust. By promoting inclusive behaviours, leaders may enhance the effectiveness of team-derived inclusion in building trust consensus, ultimately reducing subgroup-related tensions within diverse teams.

Table 5
Synthesis of findings

Hypothesis	Supported or not
H1 Diversity alone does not predict positive team outcomes.	✓
H2 Team-derived inclusion positively relates to team trust consensus.	(✓)
H3 Team-derived inclusion mediates the effect of the perceived level of diversity of a team on trust consensus.	X
H4 The two leadership behaviours – harvesting the benefits of diversity and cultivating value-in-diversity beliefs – combined moderate the relationship between diversity and team trust consensus.	X

5.1 Scientific limitations and directions for future research

As this study undermines the complexity of the research on diversity, inclusive leadership and team dynamics in hybrid work settings, its scientific limitations show the importance to contextualise the findings and point to the opportunities to refining future research.

While this study provides a theoretically grounded model, the complexity of team trust consensus, especially in diverse and hybrid environments, may require a more nuanced model. Future research should therefore begin with finding a working mediation model first to explore the moderating effect more robustly. It is possible that alternative mediators (or moderators), may be a better fit to explore the interaction between diversity and team outcomes, such a team trust consensus or team performance. Tenure could also be used as a control variable due to its potential influence on team trust consensus. Employees with longer tenure tend to have, deeper organisational knowledge, more established networks and stronger relationships with their colleagues, which can enhance trust consensus (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002). Conversely, employees with shorter tenure may have a lower level of trust due to more limited exposure to team norms, fewer shared experiences and weaker interpersonal bonds (Breuer et al., 2016). In this study, a large proportion of employees were still in the early stages of trust-building within their teams. Leaders with longer tenure might be more experienced in navigating team challenges, whereas those with shorter tenure may be less adept at fostering inclusive practices.

The study's sample size ($n = 31$ teams) is sufficient for initial observation but may limits the generalisability and statistical power of the findings. Although the models were tested using robust techniques, smaller samples are inherently more prone to Type II errors, where potentially meaningful effects fail to reach statistical significance (Maxwell, 2004). Despite the fact that efforts were made to sample a heterogeneous range of teams, the study acknowledges the inherent limitations of its convenience sampling approach. By incorporating

a variety of teams, the aim was to assess the consistency of results across diverse contexts. Future studies should take this approach up and replicate the proposed model with larger samples to enhance the external validity of the findings. This would allow for greater control over external factors that might influence results.

Furthermore, while the two leadership variables – harvesting the benefits of diversity and cultivating value-in-diversity beliefs – each showed acceptable within group agreement ($r_{wg(j)}$ mean values of .85 and .81, respectively), the combined leadership construct yielded a substantial lower $r_{wg(j)}$ mean value of .35. This suggests that aggregating the two leader behaviours into a single measure may have obscured meaningful distinctions. Further research should therefore examine these leadership dimensions separately to capture their potentially distinct effects on team dynamics.

Another limiting factor is the study's cross-sectional design, which restricts the ability to draw casual inferences. Although a moderated mediation model tests indirect and conditional relationships, the temporal sequencing of effects remains ambiguous. Future studies would benefit from longitudinal or experimental designs to better assess how inclusion and leadership behaviours develop over time and how they influence team trust consensus.

A study by O'Leary and Mortensen (2010) found that the effects of subgroup formation are amplified by asymmetries in subgroup size. Numerical minorities within subgroups reported significantly lower levels of team identification and higher levels of conflict and coordination problems. Additionally, unequal distribution can lead to perceptions of marginalisation and trigger competitive or coalitional behaviour. Future research could incorporate this perspective, studying how subgroup asymmetries interact with leadership practices to influence perceptions of inclusion. Examining whether leaders can mitigate negative effects of minority status through targeted inclusion efforts would offer valuable insights into managing power dynamics and identity threats in diverse teams.

Further, the conceptualisation of diversity in this study was primarily based on the general perception of the team members and the cultural backgrounds of those within hybrid teams. While this aligns with the initial scope of the study, it does not fully incorporate the multiple layers of diversity, narrowing the applicability of findings. Going forward, research could consider a multidimensional approach to diversity, distinguishing further between surface-level and deep-level differences, examining how these interact with leadership and inclusion over time. In this context, it could also be beneficial to provide questionnaires in the team members' mother tongue. While relaying on one questionnaire in a shared language like English makes the data more comparable, it bears the risk that questions are understood slightly different based on cultural nuances.

Nonetheless, this study provides a meaningful first step toward understanding the relationship among leader behaviours, inclusion and trust in multicultural hybrid teams. While limitations are acknowledged, the study's findings outline directions for future research.

5.2 Practical implications and limitations

Beyond its scientific contributions the present study points at a number of implications for team leaders, in particular, for those managing diverse hybrid teams. Researching the moderating role of leadership in a multicultural hybrid team contributes to the understanding of the critical role of leadership in creating an inclusive team climate that fosters a sense of both belonging and uniqueness. This is especially vital in hybrid work environments, where cues of inclusion or exclusion are more easily missed. Leaders, therefore, must be intentional in creating and establishing social norms that enhance team cohesion, trust and communication.

To strengthen team trust consensus, which this study found to be more strongly linked to inclusion than to performance outcomes, leaders must address the direct challenges that posed by diversity, particularly in the context of heterogeneity. Multicultural teams may perceive and show trust differently, which can result in misalignment among members (Breuer et al., 2019; O'Leary & Mortensen, 2010). Heterogeneous cultural perspectives can lead to low trust consensus, with the formation of subgroups and their unequal sizes further enhancing feelings of marginalisation and conflict (de Jong et al., 2020). Future practice should therefore include trust-building interventions, conflict management training and the explicit establishment of team norms to address these issues (Adham, 2023).

In hybrid teams, physical proximity continues to be a significant driver of informal interactions, relationship strength and shared understanding (Charpignon et al., 2023; Van Knippenberg et al., 2004). Team members who share physical spaces are more likely to develop trust through frequent spontaneous conversations, shared experiences, and mutual visibility. In contrast, geographically distributed teams are at greater risk of geographic subgrouping. To mitigate these dynamics, leaders could implement rotating in-office schedules to ensure that hybrid teams have opportunities for co-presence and bonding (de Jong et al., 2020). Regular rituals such as virtual check-ins, camera-on meetings, and informal chat time can further reinforce interpersonal ties and reduce emotional distance between distributed team members (Windeler et al., 2017; Zhang et al., 2012).

However, it is important to note that inclusion is not merely the result of implementing formal policies, it is cultivated through consistent, everyday leadership behaviours (Mor Barak et al., 2021). Inclusion must be practised and modelled daily through accessible, attentive, and equitable leadership. Leaders who actively listen, demonstrate empathy, and remain approachable set the tone for team interactions and help bridge the gap between organisational diversity goals and lived experience of employees (Shore et al. 2021). In this

context, leaders, who act as advocates and allies not only address the challenges faced by underrepresented groups, but also signal that everyone is seen and heard. By so, leaders establish the social norms and values that shape the team's culture. Through their attitudes and daily practices, leaders lay the groundwork for trust development across cultural or demographic boundaries.

Nevertheless, practical limitations must also be acknowledged. Efforts to promote inclusion often encounter resistance to change. Employees but also leaders themselves may be reluctant to adopt new norms or communication routines, particularly if they are perceived as performative or unnatural. Given the complexity of multicultural, hybrid teams, there is no one-size-fits-all solution. Inclusion practices must be context-sensitive; what works in one cultural or organisational context may not be effective elsewhere. Therefore, leadership development should also cover topics such as cultural intelligence (Larson, 2020). Additionally, leaders need to be aware of individual factors that may affect inclusion, such as language proficiency or previous international experience (Shaffer et al., 1999).

In summary, this study highlights the central role of leadership in promoting inclusion within diverse teams. Leaders must understand the structural challenges that diversity brings and act as daily facilitators of inclusion and trust. By adopting culturally sensitive, proximity-aware and habitually inclusive practices, leaders can help their team overcome divides and transform diversity from a liability to a strategic asset.

6. Conclusion

So, at time when globalisation seems to be erasing geographical distance and technological advances are blurring the line between offline and online, leaders play a pivotal role in fostering trust. Hybrid work environments, that combine in-person and remote collaboration, have become the standard of the modern organisational reality and offer a realistic context for studying team dynamics and leader behaviours. This study therefore aimed to investigate the intricate interplay between inclusion, leadership behaviours and trust building within the evolving context of multicultural hybrid teams. The theoretical framework proposed in this research sought to explore how leadership and team-derived inclusion influence team trust consensus by bridging divides.

While not all hypotheses were confirmed, the findings reinforced the idea that diversity is a complex input whose effect needs to be studied while taking contextual and relational factors into account. With a more nuanced understanding that recognises the conditional nature of it, this study calls for a deeper focus on factors that could influence the relationship between diversity and team outcomes, such a trust consensus or performance.

The positive relationship between team-derived inclusion and team trust consensus underscores the argument that inclusion plays a key role in establishing shared norms, mutual respect and trust within diverse teams. Inclusive organisations that involve diverse individuals and consider everyone's perspective tend to be more learning-centred (Golja & Požega, 2012). The findings of this study are also consistent with research suggesting that leaders can mitigate the challenges of diverse teams and foster positive team outcomes (Leroy et al., 2021). However, this seems only to be possible if the inclusion efforts go beyond formal policies and intervention, by modelling the desired behaviour on a daily basis. As this study investigated the non-spatial proximity factors affecting the trust development of diverse, hybrid teams, it suggests that inclusion efforts should not be immediately evaluated through productivity metrics alone. Rather, trust may serve as a mediating condition that enhances effective performance. By cultivating an inclusive environment, leaders help establish the conditions necessary for high performance to emerge over time.

While the sample size limits the statistical power of generalisability of the findings, it offers a valuable initial testing ground for future research. The cross-sectional design provides a snapshot of team dynamics that can inform the design of longitudinal and experimental studies. Nevertheless, by using perceptual measures of inclusion and diversity, the study captures the subjective experience of team members, which is necessary to understand lived realities.

At its core, this study lays a foundation for future research and offers actionable guidance for leaders seeking to transform diverse team into trusting, and therefore, well performing units. In an increasingly diverse and virtually connected world, leadership must respond accordingly.

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Annex A – Overview of Measures

Diversity

- My team is globally very diverse.
- I am very aware of the differences among my colleagues.

Team-derived inclusion

- In this team, I can be my unique self.
- In this team, I can be open about my personal opinions and beliefs.
- In this team, I can use my unique skills and abilities.
- In this team, I feel that I belong.
- In this team, I feel connected with the other team members.
- In this team, I feel like an outsider (reversed wording).

Leadership

Harvesting the benefits of diversity

- Our team leader encourages all of us to voice our opinions.
- Our team leader ensures that all team members are valued for their contributions.
- Our team leader makes sure that everyone's unique strengths are leveraged.
- Our team leader creates an environment in which we can be ourselves.
- Our team leader encourages everyone to be unique.

Cultivating value-in-diversity beliefs

- Our team leader enables us to see differences as an advantage rather than as a disadvantage.
- Our team leader helps us to see how differences among us can be an added value for the team.
- Our team leader helps us to solve disagreements to make better decisions for the team.
- Our team leader encourages us to listen to perspectives that are different than our own.
- Our team leader helps us to understand that different views are needed to understand the bigger picture.

Team trust consensus

- I am able to count on my team members for help if I have difficulties with my job.
- I am confident that my team members will take my interests into account when making work-related decisions.

- I am confident that my team members will keep me informed about issues that concern my work.
- I can rely on my team members to keep their word.
- I trust my team members.

Team performance

- This team has a good performance.
- This team is effective.