



16 - 18 October 2026

Milan , Italy

Activating Human Capital Through Cross-Cultural Competence: An Organizational Capability Approach to Leadership and Team Effectiveness

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Abstract

In globally interconnected and culturally complex organizations, leadership effectiveness depends not only on leaders' knowledge and judgment, but also on their ability to activate expertise across teams through communication and coordination processes. While human capital theory emphasizes the value of knowledge and skills, it provides limited explanation for why highly skilled teams often fail to consistently produce effective outcomes in culturally complex contexts. This paper advances the argument that cross-cultural competence functions not merely as an individual leadership attribute, but as an organizational capability that is activated through leadership-designed communication and coordination processes. Drawing on human capital theory, cultural intelligence, and knowledge-based perspectives, the paper develops a conceptual model in which cross-cultural competence moderates the relationship between human capital and team-level performance outcomes. The model emphasizes how embedded communication practices and interpretive alignment determine whether tacit expertise becomes visible, integrated, and actionable within teams. A case illustration from a graduate admissions context in higher education demonstrates how implementing a culturally responsive communication channel improved interpretive alignment, increasing applicant response rates by approximately 25% and accelerating document completion timelines without changes in staffing or technical expertise. The findings suggest that leaders can enhance team effectiveness by restructuring communication and coordination processes to reduce interpretive friction. This reframing positions cross-cultural competence as an organizational capability that leaders can cultivate through communication and coordination processes in globally complex environments.

Keywords: Communication Processes; Cultural Intelligence; Interpretive Alignment; Knowledge-

International Conference on Leadership, Culture, and Talent Management



Based Perspectives; Tacit Expertise