The Impact of Multicultural Experience on Leadership Competence and Development

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Abstract

With the deepening of globalization, an increasing number of corporate leaders possess multicultural experiences. Multicultural experiences refer to individuals' direct or indirect interactions with foreign cultural elements or populations. This study aims to comprehensively examine the influence of multicultural experiences on the formation and development of corporate leader capabilities from two perspectives: leader development and leadership development: First, to investigate the impact of multicultural experiences on leader capability development (including individual-level, relational-level, and social-level capabilities) and its underlying mechanisms; Second, to explore the influence of multicultural experiences on leadership development (including leadership emergence, leadership selection, and leadership effectiveness) and its internal mechanisms. The project outcomes will not only enrich organizational management theories related to leader capability formation and development but also provide recommendations for corporate global management practices and international talent development.

Full Text

Preamble

The Effect of Multicultural Experiences on Leader Capabilities and Development

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Abstract: With the deepening of globalization, an increasing number of business leaders possess multicultural experiences. Multicultural experiences refer to individuals' direct or indirect interactions with foreign cultural elements or people. This study comprehensively examines the impact of multicultural experiences on leader capability formation and development from two perspectives: leader development and leadership development. First, we investigate how multicultural experiences influence leader development (including individual-level, relational-level, and collective-level capabilities) and the underlying mechanisms. Second, we explore the effects of multicultural experiences on leadership development (including leadership emergence, leadership selection, and leadership effectiveness) and their internal mechanisms. The findings will not only enrich organizational management theories related to leader capability formation and development but also provide practical recommendations for corporate global management and international talent cultivation.

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1. Problem Statement

"*Future companies need leaders with profound market experience and broad cultural backgrounds. Multicultural individuals can continuously refresh their self-awareness by learning knowledge from different fields in today's information-rich society, then recombine and apply this knowledge to achieve identity transformation at minimal cost. Selecting leaders with a global perspective is one of Huawei's leadership selection principles.*" —Ren Zhengfei

Multicultural experiences refer to all direct and indirect experiences individuals have interacting with foreign cultural elements or people (Leung et al., 2008). Many successful business leaders have benefited from rich multicultural experiences. For instance, Apple founder Steve Jobs traveled extensively to Japan and India and maintained close connections with both cultures throughout his life. During his spiritual journey in India, he experienced an epiphany and resolved to "change the world by creating extraordinary products that convey ideas and values." He also integrated the "minimalist" philosophy from Japanese Zen into Apple's design philosophy, shaping the brand's simple and elegant identity and driving the company's tremendous success. In leadership selection and capability development, organizations increasingly recognize the critical role of multicultural experiences. For example, the renowned Italian luxury company Gucci recently announced it would hire managers with multicultural experience for key functional departments and leadership positions to promote diversity and inclusion across global teams and foster innovation (Liam Freeman, 2019). As a global leader in communications technology, Huawei has consistently adhered to selecting and cultivating managers with a global perspective. Ren

Zhengfei stated that future companies need cadres with deep market experience and broad cultural backgrounds, insisting that managers at all levels receive overseas training, with senior executives required to have long-term overseas work experience before assuming group-level positions.

As the business world gradually recognizes the importance of multicultural experiences (Pelos, 2017), scholars have also begun theoretical research on this topic. Leung et al. (2008) defined multicultural experiences as individuals' direct and indirect interactions with foreign cultural elements or people. Researchers from different fields have examined multicultural experiences from multiple disciplinary perspectives. In psychology, studies have primarily focused on basic psychological processes such as perception and cognition in multicultural environments (e.g., Gelfand et al., 2017; Hofstede et al., 1990; Triandis & Gelfand, 1998). Management research has concentrated mainly on the international business subfield, exploring issues such as cultural adaptation and performance of expatriates in multinational corporations (e.g., Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005; Harvey & Moeller, 2009; Mendenhall & Oddou, 1985).

In recent years, management research has begun examining the role of multicultural experiences in organizational contexts, focusing primarily on employee creativity and innovation (e.g., Chua, 2018; Lee & Kim, 2011; Lu et al., 2017; Perry-Smith & Shalley, 2014; Shipilov et al., 2017), interpersonal trust (Cao et al., 2014), and intergroup bias (Tadmor et al., 2012; Tadmor et al., 2018). However, existing literature lacks attention to multicultural experiences at the leadership level. Research in organizational management remains in its infancy regarding the relationship between multicultural experiences and leader capabilities and development. Therefore, this study will integrate questionnaire survey data, experimental data, and objective secondary data, combining multiple qualitative and quantitative methods to explore the impact, internal mechanisms, and boundary conditions of multicultural experiences on leader capability formation and development.

2.1 Definition and Classification of Multicultural Experiences

Over the past decade, research literature on multicultural experiences has grown rapidly. Scholars from various fields—including social psychology, educational psychology, developmental psychology, industrial psychology, international business, and organizational management—have conducted exploratory research on multicultural experiences within their respective disciplines. In organizational management, Leung et al. (2008) provided the first comprehensive definition: all direct and indirect experiences individuals have interacting with foreign cultural elements or people.

Scholars typically classify multicultural experiences along two dimensions: breadth and depth. Breadth generally refers to the number of foreign cultures

an individual has experienced, while depth typically refers to the duration of foreign cultural experiences or the degree of identification with foreign cultures (Adam et al., 2018; Cao et al., 2014). Existing research generally agrees that depth is more effective than breadth in promoting individual creativity and cognitive capabilities across many dimensions. For example, Maddux and Galinsky (2009) found that the length of time living abroad is a necessary condition for enhancing creativity, whereas short-term tourism has no such effect. Godart et al. (2015) analyzed 11 years of data from 270 fashion brands and found that creative directors' overseas work experience significantly predicted their brands' innovation index. Specifically, the longer creative directors worked abroad, the higher their brands' innovation index, while the number of countries they had worked in showed no relationship with innovation. Lu et al. (2017) found that close intercultural social relationships also enhance creativity, workplace innovation, and entrepreneurship. Cross-cultural friendships and romantic relationships help permeate ideas and values into one's self-concept, thereby promoting creativity, innovation, and cognitive abilities. They also discovered that the closer individuals' post-return contact with foreign friends, the more likely they were to start their own businesses, with each unit increase in contact closeness associated with an 11% increase in entrepreneurship likelihood.

2.2 Effects of Multicultural Experiences on Individual Psychology and Behavior

Early research on multicultural experiences primarily focused on social psychology and international business, examining how expatriate employees' experiences (Cohen, 1977; Harvey, 1983; Harzing, 1995) are influenced by individual (Caligiuri, 2000; Ones & Viswesvaran, 1997), organizational (Mendenhall et al., 1987), and cultural factors (Stahl & Caligiuri, 2005), as well as how expatriates adjust, perform, and manage others (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005; Harvey & Moeller, 2009; Mendenhall & Oddou, 1985). Other literature has examined how basic psychological processes (e.g., cognition, perception) function differently across cultures (范徵 et al., 2018; 李倩 et al., 2019; 李宜菁, 唐宁玉, 2010; 刘璞, 井润田, 2004; 刘燕, 李锐, 2018; 买热巴·买买提, 吴艳红, 2017; 苏涛 et al., 2019; 吴莹 et al., 2014; 杨晓莉 et al., 2010). Since 2008, increasing management research has examined multicultural experiences from an organizational perspective (Leung et al., 2008), explicitly testing how different types of multicultural experiences (e.g., living or traveling abroad, cross-cultural relationships, cross-cultural social networks, multicultural identities) affect employee psychology and organizational outcomes.

Most existing research on multicultural experiences has focused on organizational creativity and innovation. With the development of new technologies such as artificial intelligence and quantum computing, creativity and innovation have become increasingly important in today's dynamic organizational environment. Multicultural experiences can promote creativity and innovation

through several pathways. First, they provide direct exposure to new ideas and perspectives, offering opportunities to encounter different things and learn new ways of thinking. Second, multicultural experiences enhance individual capabilities, enabling people to recognize different meanings underlying similar forms or behaviors (e.g., different cultural interpretations of leftover food). Third, such experiences shake up established mental sets and knowledge structures, making individuals more receptive to other cultures'ideas and perspectives. Fourth, multicultural experiences mentally prepare individuals to absorb viewpoints, norms, and practices from different cultures and to search for novel ideas among diverse resources to apply in innovation processes. Fifth, they promote the integration of different cultural perspectives, synthesizing new viewpoints. Foreign cultures may contain values and perspectives that differ from one's native culture, and these inconsistencies may prompt individuals to explore relationships between cultures. The process of resolving conceptual differences increases cognitive complexity, enabling individuals to retrieve seemingly different ideas across cultures and integrate them innovatively (Leung et al., 2008).

Based on existing literature, research conclusions on multicultural experiences and organizational creativity are highly consistent: multicultural experiences stimulate creativity and innovation at individual, team, and organizational levels. Compared to individuals without such experiences, those who have lived abroad (Maddux & Galinsky, 2009), worked abroad (Godart et al., 2015), or integrated two or more cultures into their identity (Tadmor et al., 2012) demonstrate higher creativity and innovation. Moreover, multicultural experiences affect not only individual creativity but also team-level (Tadmor et al., 2012) and organizational-level creativity and innovation (Godart et al., 2015).

Further research has found that certain types of multicultural experiences can stimulate creativity and innovation without requiring actual travel abroad. For example, having close foreign friends or colleagues, belonging to a multicultural family, mastering multiple languages, working in multicultural teams, having cross-cultural professional networks, or fully integrating bicultural or multicultural identities into one's self-concept all positively affect creativity and innovation (Chang et al., 2014; Cheng et al., 2008; Chua, 2018; Gocłowska & Crisp, 2014; Lee & Kim, 2011; Lu et al., 2017; Mok & Morris, 2010; Perry-Smith & Shalley, 2014; Saad et al., 2013; Shipilov et al., 2017). This emerging research stream demonstrates that specific types of multicultural experiences (domestic or abroad) positively affect creativity and innovation at individual, team, and organizational levels.

As research on multicultural experiences has progressed, organizational scholars have discovered that such experiences also positively affect many other important work outcomes. For instance, foreign cultural experiences help individuals recognize that different people are shaped by different cultural backgrounds and may react differently to similar situations or information, leading to more effective work styles in multicultural organizations (Chua et al., 2012; Morris et al., 2019). Additionally, individuals with multicultural experiences develop clearer

self-concepts, make different types of career decisions, and respond more accurately to feedback from others (Adam et al., 2018). Such individuals also have higher success rates in job interviews (Maddux et al., 2014), enjoy better career reputations, and are promoted more quickly (Tadmor et al., 2012). Finally, multicultural experiences help reduce bias against outgroup members in teams and organizations, a particularly important finding for multinational organizational management (Tadmor et al., 2012, 2018).

Existing research also suggests potential negative effects of multicultural experiences on organizations. Experiences in multiple countries expose individuals to various social and ethical norms, making their moral beliefs more flexible and uncertain, which may lead to more unethical behavior (Lu et al., 2017). Additionally, negative cross-cultural interactions can increase interpersonal bias more than positive interactions reduce it (Barlow et al., 2012). For example, distinctly negative multicultural experiences lead individuals to express more stereotypes and prejudice toward outgroups, both from specific countries where they have lived and from other nations and ethnic groups, creating various direct and indirect negative impacts on organizations (Affinito et al., 2020).

2.3 Leader Capability Formation and Development

As globalization deepens, the world is becoming increasingly "flat" (Friedman, 2006). The global business environment has become more complex, continuously challenging organizational leadership capabilities (Bennis, 2012). Twenty-first-century organizations face complexity brought by globalization and technological revolution. The new competitive landscape is characterized by strategic discontinuities, imbalances, blurred boundaries, shifting competition, and urgent needs for innovation and knowledge sharing. As organizations, workplaces, and global challenges become more interconnected and unpredictable, demands for leadership capability development have grown more complex and diverse (Drath et al., 2008; Martin, 2007; Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). Against this backdrop, academia and industry increasingly recognize the critical role of leader capability development, viewing it as a key strategic resource for gaining competitive advantage in international competition (Day, 2000; Day et al., 2014). Consequently, how to cultivate and develop leadership capabilities in a globalized context has become a shared focus of academic and business communities.

Research on leader capability formation and development originates from developmental psychology's exploration of adult development. Developmental psychology views leader capability formation as a dynamic, long-term process closely related to individuals' career and lifelong development. As careers and life experiences evolve, individuals with leadership potential gradually develop capabilities to handle increasingly complex problems (Day et al., 2008; Day, 2012; Kegan & Lahey, 2010; Knoll & Sternad, 2021; Palus & Drath, 1995). Leader capability development represents an important branch of individual identity

development, inseparable from value development, experiential knowledge understanding, and complexity integration (Baltes & Carstensen, 1991; Chan et al., 2005; Lord & Hall, 2005). Day and Harrison (2007) propose that leader capability formation begins when individuals simply see themselves as leaders and use this belief as a lens to guide their behavior and identity at individual, relational, and collective levels. Thus, leader capability formation emerges and dynamically changes as leader and follower identities surface in complex, chaotic environments and organizations (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007).

Current research on leader capability formation and development primarily includes two aspects: leader development and leadership development (Day, 2000; Day, 2011; Day & Sin, 2011; Day et al., 2014). The former focuses on individual-level capability development (individual/intrapersonal), examining what qualities leaders should possess and develop (Bettin & Kennedy, 1990; Mumford et al., 2000; Reichard & Johnson, 2011; Strang & Kuhnert, 2009). The latter focuses on the development process of leadership in organizational contexts (collective/interpersonal), examining how leaders develop adaptive capabilities and behaviors through interactive practices with others (including subordinates and peers) (Day, 2011; Galli & Müller-Stewens, 2012; McCauley et al., 1998).

Regarding leader development, scholars have reached no absolute consensus on what capabilities leaders should possess and develop. O' Connell (2014) notes that effective twenty-first-century leaders need to develop capabilities adapted to special environments and organizational contexts beyond basic task and technical skills. Therefore, leader capabilities must be developable and adjustable to meet societal and contextual demands on individuals, teams, and organizations. As environmental complexity and dynamism increase, senior leaders must become more context-dependent in their capability development (Osborn et al., 2002; Porter & McLaughlin, 2006; Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). Consequently, different scholars propose different requirements for leader capabilities. For example, Chan et al. (2005) and Lord and Hall (2005), from a developmental paradigm, require leaders to understand and develop leadership capabilities through self-identity and self-schema, possessing skills such as high self-awareness, metacognition, self-regulation, and self-motivation. Kegan and Lahey (2010) argue that leaders need cognitive, emotional, and interpersonal regulation capabilities. Day and Harrison (2007) summarize lifelong leader capabilities across three levels —individual, relational, and collective—including personal strengths, interpersonal influence, relational frameworks, moral reasoning, moral behavior, and perspective-taking. Drath et al. (2008) contend that to work effectively across different organizations, teams, and industries, leaders need to develop shared decision-making and shared experiential learning capabilities, as well as collective task completion abilities such as setting direction, building commitment, and forming alliances. Osborn et al. (2002) propose that when leaders work at higher organizational levels, they need to develop more complex attention patterns, social networks, self-regulation, and cognitive and emotional management capabilities in environments ranging from stable to crisis, balanced to chaotic.

In today' s deepening globalization, global leadership research further emphasizes the importance of leaders' global experiences for leader development. Dinh et al. (2014) found that approximately half of 66 different leadership research topics mentioned leaders' global attributes. Jokinen (2005) and McCall and Hollenbeck (2002) both emphasize the critical role of international experience for becoming global leaders. Goldsmith et al. (2003) propose that global leaders should possess five capabilities: global mindset, appreciation of cultural diversity, technical knowledge development, partnership and alliance building, and shared leadership. Bird et al. (2010) reviewed global leadership and expatriation literature to propose a pyramid model of global leader competencies including five levels: global knowledge, global mindset, systemic skills, interpersonal communication skills, and threshold traits. Kim and McLean (2015) proposed a global leader competency model comprising three levels (core traits, personal character, personal capabilities) and four dimensions (cross-cultural, interpersonal, global business, global organization). Park et al. (2018) synthesized previous models to identify five key qualities scholars generally agree upon: cross-cultural awareness and skills, global mindset and knowledge, interpersonal awareness and skills, leadership and change implementation capabilities, and personal qualities and values. Cross-cultural awareness and skills—defined as leaders' ability to understand cultural differences and make adaptive decisions in cross-cultural business environments—are the most frequently discussed qualities. Global mindset, a highly complex cognitive capability characterized by open and connected cognition toward multiple global cultural realities and the ability to mediate and integrate diverse perspectives, is also widely recognized as important. Both capabilities emphasize that leaders need global experiences and knowledge to understand and respond to environmental complexity, thereby enhancing leadership capabilities.

Regarding leadership development research, scholars focus on both content and dynamic processes. In terms of content, given that leadership development is a multi-level, multi-group social interaction process, scholars particularly emphasize the quality of interactions between leaders and employees, such as leader-member exchange quality and authentic leader-follower relationships (Galli & Müller-Stewens, 2012; Scandura & Lankau, 1996). Regarding dynamic processes, scholars examine factors influencing longitudinal leadership development and evaluation mechanisms. For example, research shows that multi-dimensional feedback significantly promotes leadership development (Facteau et al., 1998; Fleenor et al., 2010; Seifert & Yukl, 2010). For evaluating leadership development processes, scholars have used diverse indicators such as job performance, leadership effectiveness, leader emergence, and transformational leadership (Day & Sin, 2011; Li et al., 2011; Mccauley et al., 2006; Reichard et al., 2011; Strang & Kuhnert, 2009).

2.4 Brief Literature Review

Based on existing research progress and domestic and international trends, we identify several directions worthy of further exploration:

First, research on individual multicultural experiences in organizational management remains limited, particularly regarding how multicultural experiences affect leader capability formation and development. Our review reveals that existing multicultural experience research has concentrated on a few psychological and behavioral indicators, leaving us with limited understanding of how multicultural experiences affect individual work performance in organizational contexts. Since the concept of multicultural experiences was proposed (Leung et al., 2008), most research has focused on psychology, exploring effects on general psychological and behavioral outcomes such as cognitive ability, creativity, trust, and bias (e.g., Maddux & Galinsky, 2009; Tadmor et al., 2012). Although recent scholars have introduced multicultural experiences into organizational contexts (Godart et al., 2015), these studies remain at the macro organizational level, lacking examination of leaders' own psychology and behavior. Therefore, this study will examine the effects of multicultural experiences on leader psychology and behavior within organizational contexts, enriching multicultural experience research in organizational settings.

Second, existing theoretical and empirical research inadequately explores differential effects of different types of multicultural experiences. Current studies show that different types of multicultural experiences produce differential effects on individual psychology and behavior. For example, Maddux and Galinsky (2009) found that living abroad (but not traveling abroad) correlates with higher creativity, while Cao et al. (2014) found that extensive overseas travel experience increases interpersonal trust. Although literature has begun exploring these differential effects, we identify two limitations: (1) the typology of multicultural experiences needs expansion beyond breadth and depth to include dimensions such as positive/negative, learning/work, and physical contact (e.g., travel, study) versus non-physical contact (e.g., language mastery); and (2) the outcome variables examined remain limited. Therefore, this study introduces leader capability formation and development as outcome variables and attempts to compare the differential effects of breadth versus depth of multicultural experiences.

Third, the internal mechanisms and boundary conditions through which multicultural experiences affect individuals in organizations require further investigation. Our literature review reveals multiple psychological driving mechanisms in the relationship between multicultural experiences and individual behavior, such as psychological adaptability (Maddux & Galinsky, 2009) and psychological identification (Maddux et al., 2010), with some mechanisms producing positive effects and others negative. We propose deeper investigation is needed. Therefore, this study introduces the theoretical perspective of integrative complexity to explain the internal mechanisms through which multicultural experiences

affect leader capabilities and development from individual cognition and experiential learning perspectives. Additionally, we propose that individual and environmental factors moderate these effects. For example, research on multicultural experiences and creativity shows that individual openness to experience (Chen et al., 2016; Cho & Morris, 2015; Leung & Chiu, 2010), cultural intelligence (Chua et al., 2012), need for cognitive closure (Leung & Chiu, 2010), and intercultural conflict (Chua, 2013) all moderate this relationship. Therefore, this study proposes that subjective cultural engagement, cultural distance between cultures, and leader-team fit moderate the relationship between multicultural experiences and leader capability formation and development.

Fourth, research on how multicultural experiences affect leader capability formation and development remains limited. Many leadership studies have proposed that "leaders are products of their life experiences" (McCall et al., 1988; Moshman, 2003). Although existing research has examined how leaders' learning and work experiences affect leadership development, studies on how multicultural experiences affect leader capabilities and leadership development remain relatively scarce (Day et al., 2014; Derue et al., 2011; Yukl, 2012). As globalization deepens, global leadership research further emphasizes the importance of global experiences and qualities for leader capability development. Therefore, this study introduces multicultural experiences as an important variable, examining its significant impact mechanisms on leader capabilities and development from both leader development and leadership development perspectives.

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3. Research Framework

This project examines the impact of multicultural experiences on leader capability formation and development in business organizations. Following existing research paradigms, we comprehensively explore this impact from two levels —leader development and leadership development. First, we examine the effect of multicultural experiences on leader development. Day and Harrison (2007) divide leader development into three levels of self-improvement: individual, relational, and collective. Individual-level capabilities refer to distinct personal attributes and characteristics needed in organizations (e.g., problem-solving, creativity, self-regulation, self-motivation). Relational-level capabilities refer to skills needed to manage internal and external interpersonal relationships (e.g., effective communication). Collective-level capabilities refer to the ability to adapt to collective and social norms (e.g., moral reasoning, moral decision-making). Second, we examine the effect of multicultural experiences on leadership development (including leadership emergence, leadership selection, and leadership effectiveness) and underlying mechanisms. Leadership development is a dynamic, multi-level social interaction process focusing on how leaders develop adaptive capabilities and behaviors through interactive practices with others (including subordinates and peers) (Day, 2011; Galli & Müller-Stewens, 2012; McCauley et al., 1998). In this study, we select three representative in-

dicators to measure leadership development: leadership emergence, leadership selection, and leadership effectiveness (Day & Sin, 2011; Li et al., 2011; Mccauley et al., 2006; Reichard et al., 2011; Strang & Kuhnert, 2009).

Based on this background, we propose three research modules: In Module 1, we reveal the mechanisms through which multicultural experiences affect leader capabilities (individual and relational levels) based on integrative complexity theory, and analyze boundary conditions from both individual subjective factors and environmental factors. In Module 2, we examine the differential effects and internal mechanisms of different types of multicultural experiences on leader capabilities (collective level). In Module 3, we explore the effects and internal mechanisms of multicultural experiences on leadership development processes (including leadership emergence, leadership selection, and leadership effectiveness).

3.1 Research Module 1: Mechanisms of Multicultural Experiences on Leader Capability Development (Individual and Relational Levels)

This module' s main objectives are: (1) analyzing the impact of multicultural experiences on leader capabilities (individual and relational levels); (2) distinguishing differential effects of depth versus breadth of multicultural experiences on leader capability development; (3) revealing internal mechanisms from the integrative complexity theoretical perspective; and (4) examining boundary conditions from both individual subjective and environmental perspectives. The specific research framework is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Research Module 1: Mechanisms of Multicultural Experiences on Leader Capability Development

3.1.1 Effects of Multicultural Experiences on Leader Capabilities (Individual and Relational Levels)   Regarding individual-level capabilities, we propose that multicultural experiences positively affect leaders' innovation capability, problem-solving capability, and self-regulation capability. Leader innovation capability—the ability to generate novel and useful ideas—significantly impacts employee and organizational innovation, making it a theoretical focus (Koseoglu et al., 2017). We argue multicultural experiences enhance leader innovation capability through both content and thinking processes. First, regarding innovation content, multicultural experiences expose leaders to new knowledge and information, promoting learning. Experiential learning theory (Kolb & Kolb, 2005) posits that individuals learn by processing new, diverse experiences. In multicultural environments, leaders encounter diverse new information and knowledge (e.g., Jobs' exposure to Zen in Japan), which serve as valuable resources for innovation. This new knowledge also stimulates further learning and exploration through deep information processing to identify innovative solutions. Second, multicultural experiences enhance cognitive flexibility, promot-

ing innovative thinking (Ritter et al., 2012). Leaders immersed in monocultural environments tend to have rigid, constrained thinking, whereas multicultural experiences enable them to break free from single-cultural cognitive limitations and combine thinking styles from different cultures to generate innovative ideas.

Problem-solving and self-regulation capabilities are also important individual-level leader capabilities. Leaders must step forward to solve dilemmas effectively when teams face difficulties or crises. Maddux and Galinsky (2009) found that individuals with better adaptation in multicultural environments performed better in puzzle-solving tasks. We propose that multicultural experiences enhance leader problem-solving capability in two ways. First, leaders with multicultural experiences are more likely to flexibly shift perspectives when solving problems, a key step in problem-solving (Cho & Morris, 2015). In studies using the Duncker candle task, researchers found that multicultural experiences correlate highly with problem-solving performance, as the task requires flexible perspective-shifting to see a pin container as a potential candle holder rather than just a container. Research on bilinguals also indicates that managing two languages and switching between them enhances executive and control capabilities, enabling strong problem-processing skills not only in language but also in broader domains (Bialystok et al., 2009). Therefore, we argue that for leaders with multicultural experiences, switching between cultural paradigms enhances perspective-shifting capabilities that extend to problem-solving processes. Second, multicultural experiences shape leaders with higher stress resistance and autonomy—essential qualities in problem-solving. Leaving one's familiar cultural environment to encounter new cultures involves pressure and challenges. During multicultural experiences, leaders may face social pressure from cultural differences and integration, task pressure from new work environments, and emotional pressure from lost social networks. The process of navigating these pressures undoubtedly shapes higher stress resistance and self-regulation capabilities, thereby enhancing problem-solving capability.

Regarding relational-level capabilities, we propose that multicultural experiences positively affect leaders' interpersonal communication capability. Communication capability refers to the ability to appropriately and effectively express opinions and listen to others in specific contexts (Chen & Starosta, 1996; Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984). Research indicates that "most leaders spend 80% of their time on communication"(Brownell, 1990). Effective leaders convey clear missions, inspire subordinates, and ultimately enhance team and organizational performance (Hogan et al., 1994). We argue that multicultural experiences enhance communication capability by shaping communication skills and personality traits. First, multicultural experiences enrich leaders' communication skills. Most cultural learning processes are implicit (Savani et al., 2022). When immersed in a single native culture, individuals tend to interact with culturally similar others, resulting in relatively fixed communication skills (Leung et al., 2008). In multicultural environments, individuals have more opportunities to communicate with people from different cultural backgrounds, implicitly learning communication styles in different cultural contexts, enriching their skills,

and enhancing communication capability. Second, multicultural experiences shape personality traits more conducive to communication. Research shows that overseas study experiences significantly increase individuals' openness and agreeableness, thereby promoting interpersonal communication capability (Greischel et al., 2016; Zimmermann & Neyer, 2013). Multicultural experiences also shape cognitive flexibility, enabling individuals to break existing cognitive patterns, pay more attention to different needs in interpersonal communication, and improve communication capability (Ritter et al., 2012).

Multicultural experiences also promote leaders' reflection on communication capability, enhancing metacognition. When immersed in a single native culture, most communication is habitual, with less attention to the communication process itself. In multicultural environments, cultural differences become external stimuli that trigger leaders' metacognitive awareness and thinking (Adam et al., 2018; Leung et al., 2008), making them more attentive to different needs in interpersonal communication and enabling them to identify problems and improvement methods, thereby enhancing communication capability.

Furthermore, according to Maddux et al.' s (2021) Structure–Appraisal Model of Multicultural Experiences, depth and breadth of multicultural experiences may differentially affect individual cognition and behavior. Previous research suggests that depth may more significantly affect intrapersonal outcomes (cognition, behavior, general capabilities, performance), while breadth may more significantly affect interpersonal outcomes (interpersonal trust, communication, leadership behavior). Accordingly, we propose that compared to breadth, depth of multicultural experiences will more significantly affect leaders' individual-level innovation, problem-solving, and self-regulation capabilities. Some studies have found that depth more than breadth promotes creativity and cognitive ability. Maddux and Galinsky (2009) and Godart et al. (2015) both found that length of time living or working abroad is necessary for enhancing creativity, while the number of countries visited shows no significant effect. Research also indicates that depth enables deeper understanding of different information types, better stimulating internal cognitive integration processes and facilitating adaptive problem solutions based on environmental characteristics (e.g., Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2013; Tadmor et al., 2012). Therefore, we propose that depth of multicultural experiences will more significantly affect leaders' individual-level innovation, problem-solving, and self-regulation capabilities than breadth.

For leaders' relational-level interpersonal communication capability, we propose that breadth of multicultural experiences will have a more significant effect than depth. When individuals experience relatively fixed cultural environments, their communication skills remain relatively singular. Exposure to diverse cultural environments provides opportunities to learn communication techniques with people from different cultural backgrounds. Research also indicates that broader multicultural experiences establish higher generalized trust, which facilitates interpersonal communication (Cao & Galinsky, 2020). Therefore, we propose that breadth of multicultural experiences will more significantly affect leaders'

relational-level capabilities than depth. Based on this reasoning, we propose:

Hypothesis 1: Multicultural experiences positively affect leaders' individual-level innovation, problem-solving, and self-regulation capabilities.

Hypothesis 1a: Compared to breadth, depth of multicultural experiences has a more significant effect on leaders' individual-level innovation, problem-solving, and self-regulation capabilities.

Hypothesis 2: Multicultural experiences positively affect leaders' relational-level interpersonal communication capability.

Hypothesis 2a: Compared to depth, breadth of multicultural experiences has a more significant effect on leaders' relational-level interpersonal communication capability.

3.1.2 Mediating Role of Integrative Complexity   Integrative complexity is an individual's thinking tendency and capability in processing information, determining whether one can distinguish competing viewpoints on the same issue and establish connections among them (Suedfeld et al., 1992). Integrative complexity theory focuses on evaluating and explaining cognitive and decision-making complexity in information processing, typically comprising two dimensions: differentiation (the ability to tolerate different viewpoints on the same issue) and integration (the ability to establish conceptual connections among different viewpoints) (Suedfeld & Leighton, 2002; Suedfeld & Tetlock, 2014; Tetlock et al., 2014).

Existing integrative complexity research indicates that second-culture exposure is an important factor affecting integrative complexity. Compared to individuals without such exposure, those with second-culture experiences use multidimensional cultural thinking modes to process information more effectively and increase integrative complexity through frequent cultural frame-switching. This enhancement applies not only to culture-related information processing but also radiates to work domain information processing. Therefore, we propose that leaders' multicultural experiences affect leader capabilities by shaping integrative complexity. On one hand, multicultural experiences bring diverse information, knowledge, and perspectives, helping leaders understand differences among ideas and accept their simultaneous validity. For example, when meeting American clients, leaders should shake hands firmly and address them directly by first name, whereas with Korean clients, they should bow and use honorifics. Leaders immersed in single cultures tend to view things through fixed perspectives and habits, resulting in relatively singular thinking. With multicultural experiences, leaders become more open to different viewpoints and information, accepting the coexistence of differentiated perspectives and diversifying their thinking. On the other hand, multicultural experiences prompt deeper thinking about information and ideas from different cultures, establishing connections among different viewpoints and integrating them into suitable frameworks. After accepting differentiated perspectives from different cultural frames, cultural

differences become external stimuli triggering leaders' metacognitive awareness and thinking (Adam et al., 2018; Leung et al., 2008), prompting deeper comparison and selection of various viewpoints. Through deep reflection, leaders can better integrate comprehensive solutions most suitable for themselves.

Hypothesis 3: Integrative complexity mediates the relationship between multicultural experiences and leader capabilities (individual and relational levels).

3.1.3 Moderating Effects of Cultural Engagement and Cultural Distance Cultural engagement refers to individuals' adaptation to and understanding of foreign cultures (Maddux et al., 2014). Research shows that subjective factors significantly moderate the effects of multicultural experiences. For example, studies on multicultural experiences and creativity find that individual openness to experience (Chen et al., 2016; Cho & Morris, 2015; Leung & Chiu, 2010), cultural intelligence (Chua et al., 2012), and need for cognitive closure (Leung & Chiu, 2010) all moderate this relationship. Sam et al. (2008) found that individuals with high bicultural engagement exhibit higher cognitive flexibility, subjective well-being, and creativity. We argue that cultural engagement reflects individuals' subjective attitudes toward foreign cultures. Higher engagement indicates more positive, open attitudes and greater willingness to accept changes new cultural frameworks may bring, while lower engagement indicates more negative, conservative attitudes and resistance to multicultural influences. Accordingly, we propose that leaders' subjective cultural engagement moderates the relationship between multicultural experiences and leader capabilities. The more willing leaders are to adapt to and understand foreign cultures, the stronger the effect of multicultural experiences on capability enhancement. Therefore:

Hypothesis 4: Leaders' multicultural engagement positively moderates the relationship between multicultural experiences and leader capabilities (individual and relational levels), such that higher engagement strengthens the positive effect. Furthermore, multicultural engagement positively moderates the mediating role of integrative complexity in the relationship between multicultural experiences and leader capabilities.

Cultural distance refers to the degree of difference between cultures in values, customs, and other aspects (Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2013). Smaller cultural distance means greater similarity in values and customs, while larger distance indicates greater differences. For example, American and Korean cultures have large cultural distance, while American and British cultures have small distance. Research shows that cultural distance significantly affects psychological processes. Oh et al. (2004) found that larger cultural distance means individuals encounter more heterogeneous information when integrating bicultural identities, promoting individual learning and affecting innovative behavior. Smaller cultural distance means core concepts and information are more similar, providing less heterogeneous information and thus less conducive to innovation. Therefore, we propose that cultural distance between cultures moderates the

relationship between leaders' multicultural experiences and leader capabilities. Larger cultural distance means greater differences in information, knowledge, and perspectives across cultural frameworks, enabling leaders to receive newer information and perspectives and better facilitating deep thinking beyond original cultural frameworks. Therefore:

Hypothesis 5: Cultural distance between cultures positively moderates the relationship between multicultural experiences and leader capabilities (individual and relational levels), such that larger cultural distance strengthens the positive effect. Furthermore, cultural distance positively moderates the mediating role of integrative complexity in the relationship between multicultural experiences and leader capabilities.

3.2 Research Module 2: Effects of Multicultural Experiences on Leader Capability Development (Collective Level)

This module' s main objectives are: (1) examining the effect of multicultural experiences on leader capabilities at the collective level—specifically moral decision-making capability—and its internal mechanisms; and (2) distinguishing different effects of depth versus breadth of multicultural experiences on leaders' moral decision-making capability. The specific research framework is shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Research Module 2: Effects of Multicultural Experiences on Leader Capability Development (Collective Level)

Leaders' moral decision-making has received extensive theoretical attention. Research shows that leaders' moral decisions affect not only subordinates' unethical behavior but also overall company performance (Stenmark & Mumford, 2011). Scholars have actively explored antecedents of leader moral decision-making. This study proposes that leaders' multicultural experiences may affect their moral decision-making capability.

Moral norms constitute an important component of culture, defining standards of "right" and "wrong" in different cultural contexts. Current moral cognition is divided into "moral absolutism" and "moral relativism." Moral absolutism holds that morality is objective and universally prescribed, while moral relativism holds that morality is subjective and related to social and cultural history, making "right" and "wrong" relative (Harman, 1975). Individuals holding moral absolutism have stricter, more fixed standards for right and wrong, while those holding moral relativism have more flexible moral standards and are more tolerant of unethical decisions by themselves and others. Research shows that exposing individuals to more moral relativism perspectives increases their likelihood of making unethical decisions. For example, Rai and Holyoak (2013) found in a laboratory study that participants who read definitions of moral relativism exhibited more deceptive behavior in subsequent tasks.

As previously discussed, multicultural experiences expose leaders to diverse information, values, and social norms from different cultures, including multiple moral concepts and standards. When leaders discover that multiple moral standards can exist for the same issue, they are more likely to develop moral relativism cognition. In single-culture environments, leaders' judgments about whether decisions are moral are constrained by their cultural environment, making them singular and certain, leading to corresponding behaviors. In multicultural environments, leaders discover that moral judgments about the same decision vary flexibly across cultures. For example, leaders might engage in commercial bribery for corporate benefit, but cultures differ in their judgment of this behavior's immorality. Some South American countries have relatively high tolerance, accepting commercial bribery within certain limits, while Nordic countries consider it highly unethical, with severe penalties for individuals and companies. Therefore, when leaders gain multicultural experiences, they may break previous moral absolutism cognition from single-culture environments, develop moral relativism tendencies, and make more unethical decisions.

Furthermore, we propose that not all types of multicultural experiences affect leader moral decision-making equally. Breadth and depth may trigger different pathways. Breadth refers to the number of foreign cultures experienced. When leaders have broader multicultural experiences, they encounter more moral norms across cultures, resulting in more diversified moral concepts. With diversified moral concepts, they believe there shouldn't be only one standard for judging behavior's morality, making moral relativism more likely and unethical behavior more probable. Depth refers to the duration of foreign cultural experiences (Adam et al., 2018; Cao et al., 2014). From the integrative complexity perspective, longer residence in foreign cultures enables clearer recognition of differences between cultures, generating reflection and contemplation. After deep processing of moral information, leaders are more likely to integrate differences among moral concepts and formulate more reasonable moral paradigms, leading to more correct moral decisions.

We therefore propose that breadth and depth of multicultural experiences trigger different psychological mechanisms, producing differential effects on leader moral decision-making. Breadth makes leaders' moral cognition more flexible by exposing them to diverse moral concepts across cultures, generating moral relativism tendencies and 不利于 moral decision-making. Depth prompts leaders to compare and deeply reflect on moral concepts from different cultures, integrate more reasonable moral paradigms, and promote moral decision-making. Based on this reasoning:

Hypothesis 6: Depth of multicultural experiences positively affects leaders' moral decision-making capability, with integration of moral concepts mediating this relationship.

Hypothesis 7: Breadth of multicultural experiences negatively affects leaders' moral decision-making capability, with moral relativism mediating this relationship.

3.3 Research Module 3: Effects of Multicultural Experiences on Leadership Development

This module' s main objectives are: (1) examining the effects of multicultural experiences on leadership development (including leadership emergence, leadership selection, and leadership effectiveness); (2) distinguishing differential effects of depth versus breadth of multicultural experiences on leadership development; and (3) exploring internal mechanisms and boundary conditions. The specific research framework is shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Research Module 3: Effects of Multicultural Experiences on Leadership Development

In current management practice, multicultural experience is widely considered a key factor in leadership enhancement and development. As former GE Chairman Jack Welch stated: "The next Jack Welch cannot be like me. My entire career was in the United States. GE' s next leader will have worked in Mumbai, Hong Kong, and Buenos Aires. We must send our best and brightest overseas to ensure they receive adequate training to become global leaders who can thrive in GE' s future" (Maddux et al., 2014). However, current research on the relationship between multicultural experiences and leadership development remains limited and shows inconsistent conclusions (Hamori & Koyuncu, 2011; Reynolds, 2010). Given these contradictory findings, we argue for using diverse indicators from existing research to dynamically measure leadership development from multiple dimensions for a more comprehensive understanding. Therefore, this module uses three indicators—leadership emergence, leadership selection, and leadership effectiveness—to measure leadership development.

Leadership emergence refers to the perceptual process by which individuals exhibit leadership in others' eyes (Acton et al., 2019; Lord & Maher, 1990; Lord et al., 1984). Leadership emergence is a social information processing process between individuals and groups. Others evaluate whether individuals possess leadership-related traits and meet collective leadership prototypes based on transmitted information and resources, while potential leaders strengthen their identity based on feedback to emerge as leaders (Foti et al., 2008; Lord & Maher, 1991; Lord et al., 2001). We propose that rich multicultural experiences enable individuals to provide richer integrative information and resources, better meeting collective expectations and facilitating leadership emergence. Specifically, multicultural experiences expose individuals to and integrate diverse information and knowledge, providing more resources and perspectives for problem-solving. Cho and Morris (2015) found that overseas experiences enable individuals to learn new concepts and ideas from other cultures, providing cognitive foundations for escaping original cultural constraints and adopting non-traditional solutions. Chua (2018) found that multicultural experiences help individuals build cross-cultural social networks, where each node represents

different information resources. Global social networks provide broader channels for information flow, allowing valuable resource sharing among participants. For example, traditionally, American brand managers can only obtain resources from local networks, but with global networks, they can learn from Chinese managers, gaining new perspectives and methods for innovative problem-solving. Research on leadership emergence indicates that leaders' knowledge, experience, and problem-solving abilities significantly affect leadership emergence (Acton et al., 2019). Therefore, we propose that multicultural experiences affect leadership emergence. When individuals have rich multicultural experiences, others perceive their ability to integrate rich information and resources and solve problems innovatively, matching leadership prototypes and facilitating emergence.

Furthermore, we propose that different types of multicultural experiences differentially affect leadership emergence. Compared to depth, breadth of multicultural experiences makes others perceive higher resource availability, thereby promoting leadership emergence. When individuals broaden their multicultural experiences, they learn knowledge and information from different cultures, enriching cognitive resources and integrating more perspectives in problem-solving. Breadth also means expanding social networks across cultures, providing richer information sources. As Jang (2017) noted, individuals play "cultural broker" roles across cultures, facilitating interaction and exchange across cultural barriers. Therefore, we propose that breadth of multicultural experiences may more significantly affect leadership emergence than depth. Finally, we propose that leader-team fit moderates the relationship between multicultural experiences and leadership emergence. Leader-team fit refers to the degree of value congruence between leaders and team members (Cole et al., 2013). When team members share similar values with leaders, they identify more with leaders, promoting the effect of multicultural experiences on leadership emergence. Therefore:

Hypothesis 8a: Compared to depth, breadth of multicultural experiences has a more significant effect on leadership emergence.

Hypothesis 8b: Perceived resource availability mediates the relationship between multicultural experiences and leadership emergence.

Hypothesis 8c: Leader-team fit moderates the relationship between multicultural experiences and leadership emergence.

Leadership selection refers to whether individuals are chosen as leaders by others (Judge et al., 2002). Leadership selection is essentially an interpersonal interaction process. Research shows that selection depends largely on perceived similarity between selectors and candidates. Many psychological and sociological theories indicate that people prefer those similar to themselves. According to the similarity-attraction paradigm, people are attracted to those with similar characteristics (Byrne, 1971). When individuals' subjective preferences and values are validated by similar others, they feel pleasure and satisfaction (Higgins, 2000). Moreover, when people share similar characteristics, they feel they can

more easily predict others' attitudes and behaviors, reducing subjective uncertainty and increasing security (Hogg & Mullin, 1999; Platow & van Knippenberg, 2001; van Knippenberg & Hogg, 2003). We therefore propose that perceived similarity between individuals and ingroup members significantly affects leadership selection. When individuals have multicultural experiences, perceived cultural similarity with ingroup members is disrupted, 不利于 their selection as leaders. Cultural similarity refers to the degree to which people share similar cultural backgrounds, providing a foundation for interpersonal inclusiveness and cohesion, with similar cultural backgrounds facilitating social bonds (McPherson et al., 2001). Cultural similarity also helps reduce uncertainty and anxiety in interpersonal interactions (Gao & Gudykunst, 1990). Conversely, cultural differences may be perceived as threats to individuals' cultural systems, triggering anxiety. When people experience uncertainty and anxiety, they resist interacting with culturally different individuals and thus will not select them as leaders.

Furthermore, we propose that different types of multicultural experiences differentially affect leadership selection. Compared to breadth, depth of multicultural experiences more likely reduces ingroup perceived similarity, affecting leadership selection. First, regarding objective similarity, deep cultural diversity more significantly changes individuals' concepts and behaviors (Maertz et al., 2016). The longer individuals live abroad, the stronger their motivation and more opportunities they have to adapt to different cultures. As overseas residence lengthens, they adapt more to foreign cultures (Mok et al., 2007), but this also means decreasing similarity with ingroup members (Maddux & Galinsky, 2009; Tadmor et al., 2012). Second, from a social identity perspective, people are more likely to use deep cultural experiences (e.g., living in the U.S. for 3 years) rather than breadth (e.g., visiting ten countries in one month) as signals for judging whether individuals are cultural ingroup members. Research shows that team members evaluate expatriates who stayed overseas shorter and had fewer foreign friends more positively (Adler, 1981). Therefore, we propose that depth of multicultural experiences more likely affects perceived ingroup similarity, thereby affecting leadership selection. Finally, we propose that leader-team fit moderates the relationship between multicultural experiences and leadership selection. Although multicultural experiences reduce perceived ingroup similarity, if leaders and ingroup members share consistent values, team members can identify with leaders' concepts and behaviors, reducing the negative effect of multicultural experiences on leadership selection. Therefore:

Hypothesis 9a: Compared to breadth, depth of multicultural experiences has a more significant effect on leadership selection.

Hypothesis 9b: Perceived ingroup similarity mediates the relationship between multicultural experiences and leadership selection.

Hypothesis 9c: Leader-team fit moderates the relationship between multicultural experiences and leadership selection.

Leadership effectiveness refers to leaders' performance in influencing and guiding others toward common goals (Judge et al., 2002). Leadership' s core is communication—the exercise of interpersonal influence toward specific goals through communication processes (Tannenbaum & Massarik, 1957). DeRue et al. (2011) identified interpersonal competence as a key factor affecting leadership effectiveness, referring to how individuals handle social interactions (Bass & Bass, 2009), including interpersonal traits (e.g., extraversion, agreeableness; Costa & McCrae, 1992) and social function-related skills and abilities (e.g., communication; Klimoski & Hayes, 1980). We propose that multicultural experiences affect perceived interpersonal effectiveness and thus leadership effectiveness in two ways. First, multicultural experiences shape personality traits and cognitive flexibility. Longitudinal studies on adolescent development show that overseas study experiences significantly increase openness and agreeableness (Greischel et al., 2016; Zimmermann & Neyer, 2013). Ritter et al. (2012) found that multicultural experiences shape cognitive flexibility, enabling individuals to break existing cognitive patterns, approach differences with open and curious mindsets, and psychologically adapt to, learn from, integrate, and incorporate these differences. Second, multicultural experiences promote communication skills. Kolb (2001) noted that contextualized learning from different experiences helps individuals navigate and communicate more effectively in social life. Extensive contact with different cultures provides opportunities to interact with people having different communication styles, learning how to interact with those from different cultural backgrounds and enhancing social skills and experience. Conversely, individuals exposed only to culturally homogeneous groups with relatively fixed communication styles develop more singular communication approaches, making effective interaction difficult when encountering people from different cultural backgrounds. Research by Backmann et al. (2020), Jang (2017), and Lu et al. (2021) all found that multicultural experiences improve communication capability. Therefore, we propose that leaders' multicultural experiences shape interpersonal competence through personality traits and communication skills, enhancing perceived interpersonal communication effectiveness and promoting leadership effectiveness.

Furthermore, we propose that different types of multicultural experiences differentially affect leadership effectiveness. Compared to depth, breadth of multicultural experiences may more significantly affect perceived interpersonal effectiveness, thereby affecting leadership effectiveness. According to Maddux et al.' s (2021) Structure–Appraisal Model, breadth more easily affects interpersonal attitudes and behaviors. The more cultural types individuals contact, the more opportunities they have to understand and integrate different people and things, better understanding interpersonal interactions. Richer experiences also increase tolerance for different people and things, enabling more 从容 understanding and integration of complex relationships and situations. Therefore, we propose that breadth of multicultural experiences more significantly affects perceived interpersonal effectiveness, thereby promoting leadership effectiveness. Finally, we propose that leader-team fit moderates the relationship between mul-

ticultural experiences and leadership effectiveness. When team members share similar values with leaders, they more readily approve of leaders' personality traits and social patterns, promoting the effect of multicultural experiences on leadership effectiveness. Therefore:

Hypothesis 10a: Compared to depth, breadth of multicultural experiences has a more significant effect on leadership effectiveness.

Hypothesis 10b: Perceived interpersonal effectiveness mediates the relationship between multicultural experiences and leadership effectiveness.

Hypothesis 10c: Leader-team fit moderates the relationship between multicultural experiences and leadership effectiveness.

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4. Theoretical Framework

As internationalization and globalization deepen, increasing numbers of business leaders have multicultural experiences. Based on theoretical and practical needs, research on multicultural experiences at the leadership level is urgently needed. This project adopts an integrative complexity theoretical perspective to construct a theoretical model examining the effects of multicultural experiences on leader capability formation and development in business organizations (see Figure 4). The model comprehensively addresses both leader and leadership development, examining the effects and boundary conditions of multicultural experiences on leader capabilities (individual, relational, and collective levels) and leadership development (leadership emergence, leadership selection, and leadership effectiveness). Specifically, the theoretical model contains three core elements.

First, based on integrative complexity theory, leaders' multicultural experiences positively affect individual-level capabilities (including innovation, problem-solving, and self-regulation) and relational-level capabilities (interpersonal communication). Existing multicultural experience research has focused primarily on psychology and individual innovation behavior in organizational contexts, with limited attention to leaders' multicultural experiences. However, international business research shows that leaders' multicultural experiences significantly affect individual and organizational development (Godart et al., 2015). Therefore, this study examines leader development across three dimensions. For individual-level capabilities, we propose that multicultural experiences positively affect innovation, problem-solving, and self-regulation, with depth having stronger effects than breadth. For relational-level capabilities, we propose that multicultural experiences positively affect interpersonal communication, with breadth having stronger effects than depth. These positive effects are achieved primarily by shaping leaders' integrative complexity. On one hand, multicultural experiences bring diverse information, knowledge, and perspectives, helping leaders understand differences among ideas and

accept their simultaneous validity. On the other hand, they promote deep reflection on different cultural information and ideas, establishing connections among different viewpoints and integrating them into suitable frameworks.

Second, different types of multicultural experiences differentially affect collective-level capabilities (moral decision-making). Moral decision-making is an important manifestation of leaders' collective-level capabilities. Research shows that leaders' moral decisions affect not only subordinates' unethical behavior but also overall company performance (Stenmark & Mumford, 2011). Multicultural experiences expose leaders to diverse information, values, and moral concepts across cultures. Based on integrative complexity theory, we propose that breadth of multicultural experiences makes leaders more likely to develop moral relativism and make unethical decisions, while depth enables leaders to reflect on and integrate different moral concepts across cultures, formulating more reasonable moral paradigms and making correct moral decisions.

Third, we use diverse indicators to measure the effects of multicultural experiences on leadership development. Existing research and practice show limited and inconsistent findings on the relationship between multicultural experiences and leadership development. On one hand, multicultural experience is considered a key factor in leadership enhancement. On the other hand, data show that more extensive overseas experience may delay leaders' promotion. To address this, we propose using diverse indicators—leadership emergence, leadership selection, and leadership effectiveness—to dynamically measure leadership development. We propose that multicultural experiences affect leadership emergence through perceived resource availability, leadership selection through perceived ingroup similarity, and leadership effectiveness through perceived interpersonal effectiveness.

This study makes three main theoretical contributions. First, it examines the relationship between multicultural experiences and leadership in the globalization context, expanding the scope and content of multicultural experience research in organizational management. Current academic discussions on multicultural experiences focus primarily on social psychology, exploring effects on individual cognitive performance (e.g., Gelfand et al., 2017; Hofstede et al., 1990; Triandis & Gelfand, 1998). In management, international business scholars first examined multicultural experiences from a resource-based view, treating overseas-experienced managers as "valuable, rare" strategic resources for global exchange, cooperation, and resource allocation to drive performance (Carpenter et al., 2001). Since 2008, organizational management has gradually addressed multicultural experiences (Leung et al., 2008), focusing on employee creativity (Chua, 2018; Lee & Kim, 2011; Lu et al., 2017; Perry-Smith & Shalley, 2014; Shipilov et al., 2017), interpersonal trust (Cao et al., 2014), and intergroup bias (Tadmor et al., 2012, 2018), with little research on leadership. This project extends multicultural experience research to the leadership level, comprehensively examining effects on leader and leadership development.

Second, this study introduces multicultural experiences into leadership research, exploring how external environmental changes affect leader capability formation and development, providing new contexts and perspectives for leadership research. In leader capability development research, scholars have focused on antecedents such as personality traits, learning willingness and ability, personal motivation, and organizational environmental factors. Research on how leaders' multicultural experiences affect capability development remains limited. We propose that leaders' multicultural experiences reshape cognitive styles, enabling integrative complexity and promoting communication, innovation, and problem-solving capabilities. Further, we propose dual-pathway effects on moral decision-making: integrative complexity both promotes integration of moral concepts and introduces moral diversity, with effects depending on multicultural experience types. Finally, we examine effects on leadership development. While multicultural experiences positively affect leadership emergence and effectiveness, they may also intensify ingroup bias, potentially affecting leadership selection.

Third, this study uses integrative complexity theory to reveal mechanisms through which multicultural experiences affect leader capability formation and development from individual cognition and experiential learning perspectives. Although multicultural experiences are believed to positively affect leader capability development, theoretical exploration remains limited and findings are inconclusive. Some research on expatriate leaders even found negative career effects (Benson & Pattie, 2008). To address these questions, this project introduces integrative complexity theory from cognitive and developmental psychology—the ability to understand and tolerate different viewpoints on the same issue while establishing conceptual connections among them. We attempt to reveal effects on individual-level capabilities (e.g., creativity, problem-solving), relational-level capabilities (e.g., communication, perspective-taking), and collective-level capabilities (e.g., moral decision-making) by assessing integrative complexity in information processing. Additionally, we examine effects on leadership development (e.g., emergence, effectiveness) using multi-dimensional evaluation indicators from an integrative complexity perspective.

Figure 4. Overall Theoretical Framework of the Project

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