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## Understanding Success and Failure of Multicultural Teams: A Qualitative Study on Managerial Perspectives

### *Abstract*

**RESEARCH OBJECTIVE:** The aim of this article is to present and compare the opinions of managers from different European countries on the factors contributing to success and failure of multicultural teams, based on in-depth interviews conducted in 2024.

**THE RESEARCH PROBLEM AND METHODS:** The research problem is formulated as follows: Which factors, in managers' views, influence the successes and failures of the multicultural teams they lead? The study combines a review of relevant literature with the analysis of 24 in-depth individual interviews.

**THE PROCESS OF ARGUMENTATION:** The theoretical section outlines the potential of multicultural teams, with emphasis on their strengths. The empirical section presents the findings of the qualitative study (in-depth interviews with managers from Poland, France, Italy, Spain, the Czech Republic, and Portugal).

**RESEARCH RESULTS:** The analysis of managers' opinions revealed strong convergence in their assessment of success and failure factors of multicultural teams. Key success conditions included managerial competences, preparation, cultural intelligence, effective communication, clear objectives, and an inclusive organizational culture supported by company policy. Managers also highlighted employee attitudes such as openness, acceptance of differences, and collaboration. Failures primarily stemmed from lack of systemic support, communication problems, cultural conflicts, and unfair treatment. Cross-country differences appeared mainly in the emphasis on integration, motivation, training, and clarification of objectives.

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**CONCLUSIONS, INNOVATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS:**

The success of multicultural teams requires synergy among managerial competences, employee attitudes, and organizational support. Critical factors include managers' cultural intelligence, effective communication, clear goals, an inclusive culture, and team openness to diversity. To enhance team effectiveness, recommended measures are systematic managerial training, integration policies, inclusive culture promotion, precise task definition, and transparent motivational and monitoring mechanisms. These reduce intercultural conflicts and strongly support high team and organizational performance in culturally diverse environments.

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**KEYWORDS:**

multicultural teams, success and failure factors, cultural differences, managers, in-depth interviews

**INTRODUCTION**

Multicultural teams are increasingly viewed as a vital source of innovation, creativity, and organizational flexibility, enabling diverse perspectives in decision-making and problem-solving processes (Bodla et al., 2018; Stahl et al., 2021; Zander et al., 2010). Research emphasizes that the effectiveness of such teams depends largely on leadership style and on the ability of leaders and team members to manage diversity (Guzmán-Rodríguez et al., 2023). At the same time, the literature highlights that managing multicultural teams involves numerous challenges. Differences in values, norms, communication styles, and approaches to work can generate conflict and hinder collaboration (Meyer, 2014; Sundari et al., 2025).

Studies on multicultural teams have primarily focused on effectiveness and performance outcomes, while fewer qualitative studies have explored the experiences and perspectives of managers responsible for leading such teams. Consequently, a knowledge gap remains regarding the factors that determine the successes and failures of multicultural teams from the standpoint of practitioners (Ors & Soğancılar, 2018).

The purpose of this article is to examine which factors managers from Poland, France, Italy, Spain, the Czech Republic, and Portugal consider crucial for the success and failure of multicultural teams. Drawing on qualitative research in the form of in-depth individual

interviews, the article presents both the positive factors that foster effective collaboration and the obstacles that limit the full potential of cultural diversity in organizations. The findings have significant practical implications for managing multicultural teams and for developing initiatives that promote integration and effectiveness in culturally diverse organizational settings.

### THE POTENTIAL OF MULTICULTURAL TEAMS

Contemporary organizations operate in increasingly globalized and complex environments, which fosters the formation of multicultural teams composed of employees with diverse nationalities, cultures, and professional experiences.

Multicultural teams are groups of individuals from different national and cultural backgrounds who share the common goal of accomplishing organizational tasks (Stahl et al., 2010). Members of such teams typically spend significant portions of their lives in different countries and cultures. Consequently, they bring distinct values, attitudes, and behaviors characteristic of their cultural backgrounds (Balogun & Johnson, 2004).

Interest in multicultural teams has grown steadily, driven by recognition of their potential. Researchers have examined various aspects of their functioning (e.g., Backmann et al., 2020; Crotty & Brett, 2012; Eyiah et al., 2025; Karadencheva, 2025; Kopertyńska, 2018; Mehta & Saxena, 2025; Morris, 2023) and their impact on organizations.

Today, multicultural teams are an integral part of organizations developing under conditions of globalization, internationalization, and increasing workforce mobility. Cultural diversity fosters innovative solutions, creative approaches to problem-solving, and organizational flexibility. Multiple perspectives and varied experiences allow for more accurate decision-making and enhance organizational competitiveness. As a result, multicultural teams are increasingly regarded as a key driver of organizational success and performance (Stahl & Maznevski, 2021; Zaki et al., 2019).

Organizations employing multicultural teams demonstrate considerable developmental potential, stemming from greater organizational flexibility and the ability to adapt quickly in dynamic markets.

Cultural diversity enables effective use of employees' competences, knowledge, and unique experiences, thereby strengthening an organization's capacity to identify and analyze problems from multiple perspectives and to generate innovative solutions.

The literature highlights that one of the major advantages of culturally diverse teams is their ability to accumulate and diffuse knowledge from different cultural contexts, with direct application to business project implementation (Bodla et al., 2018; Lubart, 2010; Osaghae & Olatunji, 2023). Cognitive heterogeneity among team members enhances problem-solving effectiveness by integrating diverse interpretive frameworks and perspectives on the surrounding world (Stahl et al., 2021). Multicultural teams also show greater resilience to uncertainty and organizational complexity, which fosters adaptive capacity and communicative flexibility (Lisak & Erez, 2015).

Studies further confirm that multicultural teams improve organizational processes, strengthen learning capacity, initiate positive organizational changes, increase employee satisfaction, and boost overall efficiency (Ely & Thomas, 2001; Stahl et al., 2021).

Operating within organizational structures, multicultural teams also reinforce internal organizational culture shared by managers and employees alike. Cultural diversity contributes to an organizational climate based on openness, trust, and mutual respect, which translates into greater employee engagement and improved teamwork effectiveness.

The diverse cultural experiences of team members serve as an important catalyst for creativity, stimulating the generation of innovative solutions and supporting the development of new, competitive ideas. However, managers leading multicultural teams must cultivate cultural intelligence, adopt flexible leadership styles, and foster inclusive work environments that reduce communication barriers and support integration (Knap-Stefaniuk, 2024; Shittu, 2022).

Multicultural teams thus represent a crucial resource for contemporary organizations, offering unique opportunities rooted in employees' diverse experiences, knowledge, and perspectives. Their potential lies in enhancing innovation, creativity, and flexibility in the face of dynamic change. Fully realizing this potential, however, requires effective management aimed at developing intercultural competences, building an inclusive organizational culture, and minimizing communication barriers.

Summing up, when effectively managed, multicultural teams can significantly strengthen organizational innovation and competitiveness. Cultural diversity promotes creativity, particularly when team members possess high levels of cultural intelligence and openness to difference (Arman et al., 2024; Liao & Thomas, 2025; Presbitero et al., 2025). Moreover, sound management of cultural diversity enhances employee engagement and retention.

### METHODOLOGY

In 2024, the author conducted 36 interviews with managers from six European countries: Poland, France, Italy, Spain, the Czech Republic, and Portugal (six interviews in each country). The respondents included 11 women (three from Poland; two each from Italy, Spain, and the Czech Republic; and one each from France and Portugal) and 25 men (five each from France and Portugal; four each from Italy, Spain, and the Czech Republic; and three from Poland). The managers were between 41 and 55 years old and had 6 to 12 years of managerial experience. They led teams of 12–25 members representing 5–8 different cultural backgrounds.

This article reports only the findings concerning factors of success and failure of multicultural teams (the complete study results are presented in a monograph). The sampling strategy was based on shared characteristics: all respondents were managers in international companies with at least three years of experience managing multicultural teams (with a minimum of three cultures represented per team). Variation occurred in age, gender, nationality, length of service, and the number of cultures within the team.

The interviews were conducted using non-random sampling, specifically purposive sampling combined with the snowball method (Szreder, 2004, p. 45; Miszczak & Walasek, 2013, p. 103), which enabled access to a hard-to-reach group of managers meeting the required criteria. The initial respondents were contacted by the author through professional and social networks, and they then recommended additional participants.

The interview scenario was prepared in English (for foreign managers) and Polish (for Polish managers). Qualitative data were

analyzed using content analysis, which involves systematic coding and categorization, identification of themes, and frequency analysis. NVivo software facilitated data management, code assignment, creation of category hierarchies, visualization of relationships between codes, and comparison of responses, thereby supporting inference and enhancing the reliability of the analysis (Bazeley & Jackson, 2019; Castleberry & Nolen, 2018).

Before each interview, participants were informed about the study's purpose, methods, and techniques, as well as the principles of anonymity and confidentiality and how their responses would be used in the analysis.

## DETERMINANTS OF SUCCESS AND FAILURE OF MULTICULTURAL TEAMS – FINDINGS FROM MANAGERIAL INTERVIEWS

The aim of this article is to present and compare the views of managers from six European countries on the factors contributing to the success and failure of multicultural teams, based on in-depth individual interviews conducted in 2024. The research question is: Which factors, in managers' views, influence the successes and failures in the multicultural teams they lead?

Tables 1–6 present the responses of managers from Poland, France, Italy, Spain, the Czech Republic, and Portugal concerning success and failure factors of multicultural teams. All factors mentioned by the interviewed managers are included in the tables.

The Polish managers emphasize that the success of multicultural teams depends on the adequate preparation of management staff to work in culturally diverse environments. Crucial factors include an inclusive work climate grounded in openness, mutual respect, and equal treatment of employees; effective intercultural communication; and high cultural intelligence among both leaders and team members. Success is further reinforced by a coherent company diversity policy and an organizational culture that fosters acceptance of differences, collaboration, and knowledge sharing.

## Understanding Success and Failure of Multicultural Teams

Table 1. Responses of the Polish managers regarding success and failure factors of multicultural teams

Success factors of multicultural teams	Failure factors of multicultural teams
Adequate preparation of management staff for leading multicultural teams; An inclusive work environment (openness, equal and fair treatment of representatives of all cultures); Effective intercultural communication; High levels of cultural intelligence among both managers and employees; Company policies on managing cultural diversity; Employee attitudes and behaviors (awareness and acceptance of cultural differences); An organizational culture that supports cultural diversity; Effective resolution of cultural conflicts	Excessive cultural differences within teams; Inadequate preparation of management staff for leading multicultural teams; Lack of workshops and training on cultural differences and multicultural team management; Absence of company programs addressing cultural diversity management; Ineffective intercultural communication; Cultural conflicts; Poor task and duty allocation within teams (misunderstanding employee needs and capacities); Divergent management styles; Lack of integration policies

Source: own elaboration based on interviews conducted in 2024.

The main causes of failure include insufficient managerial preparation and lack of intercultural training, absence of integration policies, ineffective communication, cultural conflicts, inappropriate task allocation, mismatched management styles, and inadequate organizational support. These shortcomings undermine trust, collaboration, engagement, and overall team effectiveness.

Table 2. Responses of the French managers regarding success and failure factors of multicultural teams

Success factors of multicultural teams	Failure factors of multicultural teams
Managers' knowledge and experience in managing cultural differences (adequate preparation); High levels of cultural intelligence among managers; Effective communication within teams; Promotion of inclusivity and equal treatment for all cultures within the company; HR policies addressing cultural diversity management; Employees' attitudes and beliefs regarding cultural diversity; Timely resolution of conflicts arising from cultural differences; Willingness to engage in intercultural collaboration (knowledge and experience sharing); Cultural integration initiatives within the company (meetings, joint outings, team-building trips); Analysis and assessment of cultural barriers within the company (incorporating this knowledge into team management)	Lack of managerial knowledge and experience; Low cultural intelligence among managers; Inadequate motivation of employees from different cultures (misidentification of their needs and expectations); Significant cultural differences within teams; Communication problems among employees from different cultures; Cultural conflicts; Divergent uses of authority by managers; Unfair division of work; Lack of employee understanding of team goals; Absence of company-level solutions for managing cultural diversity; Lack of integration within multicultural teams

Source: own elaboration based on interviews conducted in 2024.

The French managers stress that the success of multicultural teams depends on the preparation of management staff, prior experience in working with diversity, and the high cultural intelligence of leaders, which enables them to respond effectively to different behavioral patterns and employee needs. Other crucial factors include effective communication, an inclusive approach, fair allocation of responsibilities, and a coherent human resources policy that supports integration. Employee attitudes are also essential – openness, willingness to collaborate, knowledge sharing, and participation in integrative practices that build trust and strengthen team cohesion.

The main causes of failure identified by managers include inadequate managerial preparation, low levels of cultural intelligence, communication difficulties and cultural conflicts, ineffective motivation, unequal task allocation, unclear objectives, and the absence of diversity management policies. According to managers, these factors weaken cohesion, diminish the sense of belonging, and reduce overall team effectiveness.

Table 3. Responses of the Italian managers regarding success and failure factors of multicultural teams

<b>Success factors of multicultural teams</b>	<b>Failure factors of multicultural teams</b>
Employee attitudes (awareness and acceptance of cultural differences); Company initiatives for managing cultural diversity (e.g., training programs); Competent management staff (managers' knowledge and experience in leading multicultural teams); Effective communication within teams; Successful resolution of difficult situations (e.g., conflicts); Effective employee motivation (good understanding of their needs); Employee training on cultural differences tailored to their needs and expectations	Ineffective communication across different cultures; Cultural conflicts within teams; Poor or inadequate managerial preparation for leading multicultural teams; Unfair treatment of employees from different cultural backgrounds; Absence of company-level initiatives for managing multicultural teams; Significant cultural differences within teams; Lack of acceptance among employees of other cultures (poor cooperation within teams)

Source: own elaboration based on interviews conducted in 2024.

According to the Italian managers, the success of multicultural teams results from the synergy of employee attitudes, managerial competences, effective communication, and appropriate training. Key factors include awareness and acceptance of cultural differences, competent management staff with experience in diversity management, efficient communication mechanisms, and training programs

that develop intercultural competences and strengthen the sense of belonging. Equally important are motivation strategies tailored to employee needs and the promotion of an organizational culture that fosters collaboration.

The main causes of failure identified by these managers include communication problems, cultural conflicts, lack of acceptance of diversity, inadequate managerial preparation, absence of systemic policies, and unfair treatment of employees. These factors weaken cohesion, cooperation, engagement, and overall team effectiveness, underscoring the need to develop competences, implement integration procedures, and foster a culture grounded in trust and mutual respect.

Table 4. Responses of the Spanish managers regarding success and failure factors of multicultural teams

Success factors of multicultural teams	Failure factors of multicultural teams
Employees' social and intercultural competences; Managers' knowledge and experience in managing cultural diversity; Company policies and solutions for managing multicultural teams; Clear and thorough explanation of team goals, ensuring that all employees understand them; Efficient and effective communication; High managerial competences for leading multicultural teams (high cultural intelligence); Employee attitudes (openness to cultural differences, willingness to learn about other cultures); Effective resolution of cultural conflicts	Managers without adequate preparation; Deficiencies in interpersonal and intercultural competences among management staff; Significant cultural differences within the team; Communication problems; Conflicts between representatives of different cultures; Deficiencies in employees' social competences (lack of cooperation within teams); Absence of company-level solutions for managing multicultural teams

Source: own elaboration based on interviews conducted in 2024.

According to the Spanish managers, the success of multicultural teams derives from the synergy of employee competences, managerial skills, and organizational support. Key factors include team members' intercultural and social competences, openness, willingness to cooperate, flexibility, and attitudes that foster integration. Equally important are managerial competences, expertise in diversity management, experience, and high cultural intelligence. Success is further supported by clearly defined objectives, effective communication, conflict resolution, and diversity-oriented policies.

The main causes of failure identified by managers include inadequate managerial preparation, insufficient interpersonal and

intercultural competences, communication difficulties, pronounced cultural differences, and the absence of systemic measures to support integration. These factors lead to conflicts, divisions, limited cooperation, and reduced effectiveness, underscoring the need for competence development, training, and the promotion of an inclusive organizational culture.

Table 5. Responses of the Czech managers regarding success and failure factors of multicultural teams

<b>Success factors of multicultural teams</b>	<b>Failure factors of multicultural teams</b>
Strong managerial preparation for leading multicultural teams; Prior experience of both managers and employees with cultural differences in the workplace; Intercultural competences of managers and employees; Employees' openness to cultural differences and acceptance of diversity (employee attitudes); An organizational culture in which cultural differences are valued and promoted; Joint problem-solving within teams when issues arise from cultural differences; Appropriate allocation of tasks and responsibilities within teams; Company policies and solutions addressing cultural diversity	Lack of organizational support (absence of programs and solutions for managing multicultural teams); Ineffective intercultural communication; Cultural conflicts within teams; Significant cultural diversity within teams; Inadequate managerial preparation for effectively leading multicultural teams; Unequal and unfair treatment of employees of different nationalities or cultures (including favoritism toward certain groups)

Source: own elaboration based on interviews conducted in 2024.

The Czech managers noted that the success of multicultural teams depends on the preparation of management staff and employees' experience in working with cultural diversity. Key factors include team members' intercultural competences, openness, acceptance of different values, and willingness to learn from other cultures, all of which foster collaboration, integration, trust, and creativity. Equally important are joint problem-solving, transparent task allocation, a culture that supports diversity, and systemic policies and procedures that enable teams to operate effectively.

The main causes of failure identified by the Czech managers include lack of organizational support, inadequate managerial preparation, difficulties in intercultural communication, conflicts stemming from cultural differences, and unequal treatment of employees. These factors result in tensions, divisions, reduced engagement, and lower effectiveness, underscoring the need to strengthen managerial competences and provide consistent organizational support.

Table 6. Responses of the Portuguese managers regarding success and failure factors of multicultural teams

<b>Success factors of multicultural teams</b>	<b>Failure factors of multicultural teams</b>
Preparation of management staff for leading culturally diverse teams; Effective programs and solutions for managing cultural diversity and multicultural teams; Equal treatment of employees from all cultures and recognition of their contributions; Attention to talent management (leveraging employees' knowledge and experience); Fast and efficient communication within teams; Goals and working methods that are clear and understandable to all team members; Awareness, understanding, and acceptance of cultural differences among all employees; Openness of both managers and employees to learning about and accepting new cultures within the team	Insufficient managerial knowledge and experience in managing under conditions of cultural diversity; Significant cultural differences within teams; Lack of understanding of employees' needs across cultures (ineffective motivation); Ineffective communication between different cultures; Conflicts arising from cultural differences; Unfair distribution of tasks, responsibilities, and duties; Absence of company-level solutions or programs addressing cultural diversity

Source: own elaboration based on interviews conducted in 2024.

In the view of the Portuguese managers, the success of multicultural teams depends on well-prepared management staff and organizational support in the form of diversity-related programs and policies. Key factors include equal treatment of employees, recognition of their contributions and skills, talent management, efficient and open communication, clearly defined goals, and attitudes that foster integration and acceptance of cultural differences. Such an approach strengthens trust, a sense of belonging, and overall team effectiveness.

The reported causes of failure include insufficient managerial preparation, lack of knowledge and experience among managers, significant cultural differences, poor understanding of employee needs, ineffective communication, cultural conflicts, unequal task distribution, and the absence of systemic solutions. These factors reduce engagement, erode trust, and diminish effectiveness, underscoring the need for competence development and stronger organizational support.

## DISCUSSION

Research conducted by various scholars indicates that the success and failure of multicultural teams are shaped by the interaction of

individual, team, and organizational factors. Critical elements include leaders' cultural intelligence, team cohesion, member adaptability, and communication effectiveness. Differences in communication styles, cultural conflicts, and prejudices can significantly undermine the effectiveness of multicultural teams (Sundari et al., 2025). Conversely, high levels of cultural intelligence and cultural sensitivity among leaders positively influence organizational performance in culturally diverse environments, making them essential success factors (Nosratabadi et al., 2020).

The analysis of opinions of the managers from Poland, France, Spain, Italy, the Czech Republic, and Portugal reveals broad agreement on the factors driving success and failure of multicultural teams. Success was commonly attributed to managerial preparation and competence, cultural intelligence, effective communication, clearly defined goals, and an inclusive organizational culture supported by company policies. Managers also emphasized the importance of employee attitudes – openness, acceptance of cultural differences, and willingness to cooperate.

Failures, by contrast, were most often linked to inadequate managerial preparation, lack of organizational programs, communication problems, cultural conflicts, and unfair treatment. Cross-country differences also emerged: the Polish and Czech managers more frequently highlighted the absence of integration policies and systemic support; the French and Portuguese managers emphasized ineffective motivation and unequal task distribution; the Italian managers stressed the importance of training and fairness in employee treatment; while the Spanish managers underscored the need for clear goal-setting and high levels of managerial cultural intelligence.

The interviews with the managers from six European countries suggest that, in respondents' view, the success of multicultural teams requires a synergy of managerial competences, employee attitudes, and organizational support. The absence of these factors leads to significant challenges in managing multicultural teams.

## LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The interviews conducted were qualitative in nature and involved 36 managers from six European countries, which limits the extent to which the findings can be generalized to a broader population. The data were based on the subjective accounts of participants (managers), which may affect the consistency of the conclusions. Future research should therefore increase both the size and diversity of the sample, for example, by including managers from additional European countries.

It is also recommended that future studies employ multiple research methods, such as combining in-depth interviews with document analysis and participant observation. This approach could strengthen data reliability and provide deeper insight into the mechanisms underlying the successes and failures of multicultural teams. Including additional perspectives, particularly those of employees, could also yield a more balanced understanding of the factors shaping team effectiveness, both in terms of success and failure.

## CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of opinions of the managers from various countries highlights the key success and failure factors of multicultural teams. According to the managers, success is supported by high cultural intelligence among team members, competent leadership, effective communication, and organizational support, including coherent diversity policies and procedures. These elements enable effective management of cultural differences, promote integration, build trust, and allow organizations to capitalize on the diverse experiences of team members. Employee attitudes – such as openness, acceptance of different values, and willingness to collaborate – are also crucial for creating an inclusive work environment. The reported causes of failure include inadequate managerial preparation, lack of experience, low cultural intelligence among leaders, cultural conflicts, communication difficulties, absence of procedures, and unequal task distribution. These factors undermine team cohesion, engagement, and performance.

The potential of multicultural teams lies in their ability to draw on diverse perspectives of their members. Realizing this potential requires deliberate diversity management, including cultural intelligence training, development of communication competences, promotion of an inclusive organizational culture, and implementation of policies that support integration. In the absence of such measures, organizations risk miscommunication, reduced effectiveness, and higher employee turnover.

In the context of globalization and workforce mobility, managing cultural diversity has become a critical element of organizational strategy. Organizations that successfully integrate cultural diversity and invest in developing the intercultural competences of managers and employees achieve greater innovation, improved financial performance, and stronger team engagement. The findings suggest that the success of multicultural teams stems from the synergy of managerial competences, employee attitudes, and organizational support, while the absence of these factors increases the risk of failure.

Based on the interview results, the author recommends: strengthening managerial competences through training in diversity management and cultural intelligence; implementing integration policies with transparent procedures, fair task allocation, and systemic support; fostering an inclusive organizational culture that promotes openness, collaboration, and acceptance of diversity; ensuring clear communication and precise goal-setting; monitoring team progress and applying transparent motivational systems.

The mechanisms of success and failure of multicultural teams depend, in the author's view, on organizational and cultural contexts, which limits the direct transferability of solutions across settings. Nonetheless, the findings contribute to both theoretical and practical knowledge on managing multicultural teams and provide a foundation for further research in different industries (organizations) and cultural settings.

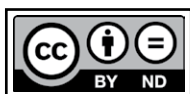
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