

Exploring the Practical Pathways of Cross-Cultural Leadership Education in the Process of Enterprise Internationalization

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Abstract: In the process of enterprise internationalization, management conflicts caused by insufficient cross-cultural leadership competence are becoming increasingly prominent, while the existing educational system suffers from fragmented planning and weak practice orientation. Based on cultural dimensions theory and intercultural communication theory, this study analyzes the manifestations of cultural conflicts in overseas business expansion and the current state of related education. It proposes practical pathways from three perspectives-system planning, content innovation, and method optimization: building a tiered educational system aligned with internationalization strategy and establishing a full-cycle cultivation mechanism; advancing content design integrating theory and scenario simulation, and developing a localized case database; leveraging VR technology and AI tools to realize digital immersive learning. This research provides theoretical reference and practical guidance for improving the effectiveness of cross-cultural leadership education in multinational enterprises.

Keywords: Cross-Cultural Leadership Education, Enterprise Internationalization, Cultural Dimensions Theory, Intercultural Communication Theory.

1. Introduction

1.1. Research Background

In the current context of deepening economic globalization and accelerating regional integration, enterprise internationalization has evolved from single-market expansion to a strategic choice of restructuring the global value chain. Chinese enterprises' outbound direct investment has been expanding continuously, with a significant increase in transnational business projects in countries along the "Belt and Road" initiative, covering multiple fields such as energy, manufacturing, and technology. This large-scale overseas expansion is accompanied by notable cross-cultural management challenges-profound differences in cultural dimensions such as power distance, uncertainty avoidance, collectivism/individualism among different countries have become key variables affecting the implementation of enterprise strategies. For example, when Chinese enterprises implement flat management in Southeast Asia, they often overlook the local high power distance culture's expectation of hierarchical authority, resulting in decreased efficiency at the grassroots level; when promoting projects in the European market, failure to adapt to the rigorous planning habits shaped by strong uncertainty avoidance culture may lead to mismatches in the supply chain.

From the perspective of cultural management practices, cultural conflicts in transnational operations have permeated the entire process, including decision-making systems, team collaboration, and business negotiations. Eastern cultures emphasize relationship-orientation and ambiguous communication, while Western cultures value contractual spirit and direct expression [1]. This contrast is especially pronounced in the decision-making of joint ventures' boards of directors-one side tends to build trust through informal communication, while the other relies more on structured decision processes, and the resulting cognitive biases often delay strategic consensus. In addition, implicit cultural factors

such as religious beliefs and business customs also pose risks. A Chinese enterprise operating in the Middle East, for example, failed to consider the impact of local religious holidays on work rhythm, leading to project delays and exposing shortcomings in cross-cultural awareness.

At present, the cross-cultural leadership education system is significantly misaligned with the needs of enterprise internationalization. Traditional training often remains at a framework-level explanation of cultural dimensions theory, lacking in-depth analysis of specific business scenarios-such as the absence of systematic training for dealing with "implicit refusals from Japanese clients" or "flexible working styles of South American teams." In terms of educational methods, most enterprises still rely mainly on classroom teaching, with low usage of digital tools, making it difficult to meet managers' demands for immersive practical training. This disconnection between theory and practice and misalignment between form and demand has led many overseas project managers to rely on trial and error in addressing sudden cultural conflicts, highlighting the urgent need to explore optimized educational pathways systematically.

1.2. Research Objectives

This study aims to systematically explore practical optimization pathways for cross-cultural leadership education in the process of enterprise internationalization, addressing the cultural management challenges faced in transnational operations. By analyzing the current dilemmas of cross-cultural leadership education in terms of system design, content innovation, and methodological application-and through the analytical frameworks of cultural dimensions theory and intercultural communication theory-the study constructs an educational system deeply aligned with internationalization strategy. Specifically, the research focuses on two core goals: First, to identify the disconnect between existing cross-cultural leadership education and

enterprise overseas operation needs from the dimensions of education system, content design, and method innovation, providing logical grounds to overcome issues such as fragmented training and the separation of theory and practice; second, based on the phased characteristics of enterprise internationalization development, to propose practical pathways that are both systematic and operational, including strategy-oriented educational planning, full-cycle cultivation mechanisms, and innovation in digital learning models. These pathways aim to enhance core competencies such as communication coordination and decision adaptation in cross-cultural contexts, ultimately providing theoretical references and practical guidance for leadership development in the enterprise internationalization process.

1.3. Research Significance

The theoretical significance of this study lies in integrating cultural dimensions theory and intercultural communication theory to construct a systematic analytical framework for cross-cultural leadership education, filling the current research gap between theoretical support and practical application, and offering a more context-adaptive theoretical reference for cross-cultural leadership development. The practical significance is reflected in addressing the real dilemmas of frequent cultural conflicts and insufficient effectiveness of leadership education in the process of enterprise internationalization. The study proposes a strategy-oriented educational system optimization plan that can directly assist enterprises in building a closed-loop mechanism encompassing needs identification, cultivation, and evaluation, thereby improving managers' dynamic adaptability in cross-cultural teamwork and transnational decision-making, reducing cultural risks in overseas operations, and enhancing the implementation efficiency of global strategies. Furthermore, the study's exploration of digital educational methods also provides a practical pathway reference for multinational enterprises to innovate leadership talent cultivation models in the era of intelligentization.

2. Theoretical Foundation of Cross-Cultural Leadership Education

2.1. The Connotation and Characteristics of Cross-Cultural Leadership

2.1.1. Definition of Cross-Cultural Leadership

Cross-cultural leadership refers to the systematic management process by which leaders, within organizational environments interwoven with multiple cultures, achieve strategic goals by coordinating the values, behavioral norms, and communication patterns of individuals or teams from different cultural backgrounds. The core of this concept lies in addressing the differences in cultural dimensions encountered by enterprises during multinational operations in the context of globalization. Its essence is a dynamic balance of cultural cognition, behavioral adjustment, and value integration, constructing a leadership model that combines environmental adaptability and strategic consistency.

From a theoretical perspective, the definition of cross-cultural leadership is rooted in Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory and Hall's intercultural communication theory. Hofstede's dimensions such as power distance and individualism/collectivism reveal deep-seated differences in leadership authority and decision-making modes across cultures—for example, in high power distance cultures,

leadership decisions rely more on hierarchical structures, while in individualistic cultures, motivating individual innovation is more critical [2]. Hall's high- and low-context culture theory further demonstrates that cross-cultural leadership must interpret differences in communication mechanisms between high-context cultures (e.g., East Asia) that rely on contextual cues, and low-context cultures (e.g., Europe and North America) that favor direct expression, in order to avoid communication failure due to decoding errors.

In international business practice, the definition of cross-cultural leadership extends to specific commercial scenarios. When multinational companies promote flat management in Southeast Asia, they need to recognize local expectations for hierarchical authority shaped by high power distance culture and adjust decision-making processes accordingly to bridge cultural gaps. In cross-cultural mergers and acquisitions, leaders must integrate the organizational cultures of different enterprises and transform the value differences between the home and host countries into synergetic advantages [3]. Compared with leadership in monocultural contexts, its distinctiveness lies in breaking through local cultural mindsets and constructing a management framework from a "culturally neutral" perspective—for example, integrating team consensus and strategic objectives in collectivist cultures, or balancing meticulous planning with market flexibility in cultures with high uncertainty avoidance.

The definition of cross-cultural leadership involves both systematic cognition of cultural differences and the practical application of adaptive strategies. Its ultimate goal is to establish organizational identity amid multicultural conflict and promote effective implementation of global strategies. This process requires leaders to possess both cultural sensitivity and strategic execution capabilities, acting as "mediators" and "integrators" across cultural contexts.

2.1.2. Core Competencies of Cross-Cultural Leadership

The core competencies of cross-cultural leadership are built upon a three-dimensional framework of cultural cognition, behavioral adjustment, and strategic integration, forming a key set of capabilities for coping with the complexity of multinational operations, including:

1) Cultural Cognition and Deconstruction Ability

This competency requires leaders to systematically deconstruct the value cores and behavioral logics of different cultures, avoiding cognitive biases stemming from taking local culture as the default reference. For example, using Hofstede's dimensions to analyze a target country's power distance index—when managing a team in Mexico (high power distance), it is essential to understand the inherent acceptance of hierarchical authority among frontline employees to avoid resistance caused by forced implementation of flat management; in the Netherlands (low power distance), emphasis should be placed on egalitarian communication to prevent alienation caused by bureaucratic styles. Leaders should also possess the ability to interpret cultural metaphors—for instance, understanding the Japanese concept of "honno and tatemae" (true thoughts vs. public stance) to avoid misjudging formal statements as actual decision intent, thereby accurately grasping implicit information in cross-cultural communication.

2) Cross-Cultural Communication and Coordination Ability

This ability focuses on information transmission and relationship building across different cultural contexts, aiming to bridge the communication gap between high- and

low-context cultures. In high-context cultures (e.g., China), leaders need to interpret deeper intentions through non-verbal cues such as gestures and silence, while allowing space for emotional rapport in negotiations [4]. In low-context cultures (e.g., the United States), structured communication with clear goals and responsibilities is preferred. A typical practice includes: building trust with Saudi clients by respecting religious customs (e.g., prayer schedules) and using “narrative communication” to align with local preferences for metaphorical expressions; when managing a German team, employing data-based reporting and logical reasoning aligns with their cultural inclination toward rationalism.

3) Dynamic Adaptation and Flexible Decision-Making Ability

Leaders must flexibly adjust management strategies according to cultural contexts and form a “situational leadership” mindset. In collectivist cultures (e.g., South Korea), decisions should embody the concept of “harmony,” achieved through multiple rounds of group discussion to build consensus and avoid resistance caused by authoritarianism. In individualist cultures (e.g., Australia), it is important to recognize individual contributions and adopt a “goal-oriented + autonomy-authorized” management style. For example, when a Chinese enterprise acquired an Italian factory, the management found that local employees valued work-life balance (low uncertainty avoidance) and thus adjusted rigid production targets to flexible goal-based evaluations—retaining strategic control while adapting to local values and improving team execution.

4) Conflict Transformation and Cultural Integration Ability

This competency focuses on transforming cultural differences from managerial obstacles into drivers of innovation. Practical approaches include: establishing a “common denominator of organizational culture,” such as a multinational automobile enterprise taking “safety and quality” as a shared value anchor beyond the cultures of both Germany (home country) and India (host country); designing “cultural buffering mechanisms,” such as setting up intercultural coordination teams in Sino-American joint ventures to translate “relationship orientation” from the Chinese side into the American logic of “efficiency.” A more advanced practice is promoting “cultural hybrid innovation”—for instance, when Unilever develops products for the Southeast Asian market, it integrates its home country R&D standards with local religious dietary norms, creating solutions that combine global quality with local adaptability and thereby transforming cultural differences into value-added innovation.

These core competencies collectively form the “operating system” of cross-cultural leadership. Their essence lies in enhancing Cultural Intelligence (CQ) to identify organizational development balance points in the face of multicultural tensions, promoting the sustainable implementation of enterprise internationalization strategies.

2.2. Theoretical Foundations of Cross-Cultural Leadership Education

2.2.1. Cultural Dimensions Theory

Proposed by Hofstede, this theory analyzes cultural value differences through dimensions such as power distance, individualism/collectivism, and uncertainty avoidance, providing an analytical framework for cross-cultural leadership education. For example, in high power distance cultures, leadership decision-making relies more on

hierarchical authority, whereas individualistic cultures emphasize individual incentives. Scholars such as Trompenaars further expanded the theory by introducing dimensions such as universalism/particularism, enabling the design of cognitive modules in education based on quantifiable cultural differences and helping managers avoid the dominance of local cultural thinking in multinational management decisions.

2.2.2. Intercultural Communication Theory

Intercultural communication theory, centered around Hall’s high- and low-context culture framework, reveals differences in information transmission mechanisms across cultures—high-context cultures rely on contextual cues and non-verbal symbols, while low-context cultures emphasize direct verbal communication. The Ting-Toomey model further explains the roots of cultural conflict [5]. In leadership education, this theory guides the design of communication strategies and scenario-based training, helping managers optimize intercultural communication by identifying contextual differences and using “cultural mediation” techniques to resolve conflicts and enhance the efficiency of multinational team collaboration.

3. Analysis of the Current State of Cross-Cultural Leadership Education in the Process of Enterprise Internationalization

3.1. Current Demand for Cross-Cultural Leadership in Enterprise Internationalization Development

3.1.1. Manifestations of Cultural Conflicts in Overseas Business Expansion

In overseas business expansion, conflicts arising from differences in cultural dimensions permeate the entire process of strategic implementation, specifically reflected in core aspects such as decision-making models, communication mechanisms, and business negotiations, thus forming systemic management challenges.

At the organizational decision-making level, differences in cultural values directly affect the adaptability of management models. In Southeast Asian markets characterized by high power distance, local employees tend to expect hierarchical decision-making structures, while the flat management models promoted by foreign enterprises often trigger resistance in execution. For example, when a Chinese enterprise implemented a participatory decision-making model in its Indonesian factory, it failed to consider the local cultural acceptance of authority, resulting in frontline employees resisting non-hierarchical instructions and a decline in production efficiency compared to expectations. Conversely, in European markets with strong uncertainty avoidance, project implementation relies on rigorous planning, whereas some emerging market cultures prefer flexible adjustments. This mismatch leads to disjointed planning. A case in point is an automobile company that followed a “simultaneous execution and adjustment” model—derived from its home country—when developing a new car model in its German subsidiary, which failed to meet local expectations for process certainty, resulting in resistance from the technical team and project delays [6].

Cultural conflicts are particularly prominent in business negotiations. Eastern cultures emphasize relationship-

building and ambiguous communication, while Western cultures focus on contract details and direct expression. Without sufficient cultural awareness, managers may miss opportunities due to disagreements in negotiation pacing and clause interpretation [7]. For instance, in negotiations with Middle Eastern clients, if Chinese managers neglect the local custom of establishing personal relationships before discussing business and rush into contract details, they may be perceived as impolite. In contrast, when negotiating with North American clients, if Chinese managers continue using the Eastern style of leaving room for interpretation and express contract terms vaguely, it may be interpreted as a lack of sincerity. Furthermore, differences in religious beliefs and business conventions may result in compliance risks, such as region-specific norms concerning working hours and gender roles. For example, in a Middle Eastern project, a Chinese energy enterprise failed to consider work arrangements during Ramadan and maintained standard progress requirements for local employees, leading to labor disputes and damaging the project's reputation.

Cross-cultural conflicts also permeate operational details. In Latin American markets, the relationship-oriented business culture requires managers to invest time in building interpersonal trust. However, the efficiency-first mindset of the home country often leads to a weak foundation for cooperation. In Nordic markets, the communication norms shaped by a culture of silence demand that managers interpret non-verbal signals. If direct expression remains the default communication style, it may result in misjudgment of information. These cultural differences, if not systematically

understood, can accumulate through minor details and ultimately affect the overall effectiveness of overseas business operations.

3.1.2. Cultural Frictions in Cross-Border Team Dynamics

The daily management of cross-cultural teams faces three core contradictions: First, cultural barriers in communication mechanisms-members from high-context cultures are accustomed to conveying information through body language and contextual cues, while those from low-context cultures rely on explicit instructions. Such discrepancies in information decoding often lead to deviations in task execution [8]. Second, cultural clashes in decision-making styles [9]-collectivist cultures prefer consensus-based team decision-making, whereas individualist cultures favor authoritative decisions made by leaders. The collision of these two models can result in inefficiencies in decision-making. Third, difficulties in adapting incentive systems across cultures-some cultures place value on collective honor and seniority recognition, while others emphasize individual performance and instant rewards. A unified incentive mechanism often fails to address these diverse needs. Additionally, cultural stereotypes and implicit biases may undermine team cohesion. For example, if managers hold predetermined assumptions about the abilities of certain cultural groups, it may suppress their willingness to innovate and participate actively, leading to a waste of human resources.

Table 1. Cultural Conflicts in Overseas Business Expansion.

| Conflict Area | Specific Scenario | Cultural Difference | Typical Case | Impact |
|-------------------------|---|--|---|----------------------------------|
| Decision Model | Implementing flat management in Southeast Asia | High power distance culture vs. egalitarian management | Non-hierarchical instructions in Indonesian factory caused resistance | Decreased production efficiency |
| | Flexible project advancement in Europe | Strong uncertainty avoidance vs. flexible adaptation | German subsidiary developed according to home country model | Project progress delay |
| Business Negotiation | Rushing into contracts in the Middle East | Relationship-oriented vs. contract-oriented | Seen as rude for not establishing relationship first | Missed cooperation opportunity |
| | Ambiguous terms in North American negotiations | Indirect communication vs. direct expression | Vague expressions suspected as lack of sincerity | Termination of cooperation |
| Communication Mechanism | Proposal communication between Chinese and German teams | High-context vs. low-context | "Needs to be studied" misunderstood as "needs to be resolved" | Deviation in execution direction |
| | Direct expression by Nordic teams | Silence culture vs. clear instructions | Misjudging non-verbal signals | Decision-making errors |
| Operational Details | Relationship focus in Latin American market | Relationship-oriented vs. efficiency-first | Weak cooperation due to lack of trust building | Unstable business foundation |
| | Resolving silence in Nordic markets | Silence culture vs. direct expression | Misjudgment caused by continuing direct expression | Communication bias |

3.1.3. Real Challenges in Cross-Cultural Team Management

Cross-cultural team management faces multiple collisions of cultural logics, forming systemic management obstacles in communication mechanisms, decision-making models, and

incentive systems, which directly affect team collaboration efficiency and the achievement of organizational objectives.

The cultural gap in communication mechanisms constitutes the primary challenge. Members from high-context cultures are accustomed to conveying information through body

language and contextual cues—for instance, East Asian teams often use silence to indicate careful consideration—while members from low-context cultures rely on explicit instructions, with Western teams tending to express demands directly [10]. This discrepancy leads to information decoding biases. In a Sino-German joint venture, during a discussion on marketing strategy, Chinese managers used the phrase “requiring further study” to implicitly express disagreement, but their German counterparts interpreted it as an unresolved issue, ultimately resulting in a deviation in the execution direction.

Cultural conflicts in decision-making styles lead to efficiency loss. Collectivist cultures prefer consensus-based decision-making—for example, Japanese companies go through the “ringi” process to collect opinions from all stakeholders before making decisions [11]—whereas individualist cultures emphasize the authority and decisiveness of leaders, as seen in American firms that value the CEO’s ability to make rapid decisions. The collision between these two models often traps cross-cultural teams in a dual dilemma of consensus being hard to reach and authority being difficult to accept. In one Sino-American tech team, during product iteration decisions, the Chinese side insisted on full group discussions to reach consensus, while the American side advocated for the technical lead to make quick decisions. Repeated negotiations led to delays in product launch.

Challenges in adapting incentive systems across cultures further weaken team motivation. Fundamental differences exist in how different cultures define value recognition: some cultures emphasize collective honor and seniority-based

recognition—for instance, Korean companies motivate employees through team commendations and seniority-based promotion systems—while others focus on individual performance and immediate rewards, such as the widespread use of individual KPIs and stock options in American enterprises. A unified incentive mechanism struggles to accommodate these diverse needs. For example, when a multinational automobile company implemented individual performance bonuses in its Southeast Asian factory, it ignored the local cultural emphasis on group harmony, triggering internal competition imbalances that ultimately reduced production efficiency.

Cultural stereotypes and implicit biases erode team cohesion at a deeper level. If managers hold preconceived notions about certain cultural groups—for instance, assuming Latin American employees work at a slower pace—it may suppress their innovation participation in task allocation. Cultural misunderstandings among team members, such as perceiving a German colleague’s rigorous critique as hostility, can lead to communication barriers. These cognitive biases result in a waste of human resources. In one Sino-French fashion brand’s design team, differing cultural interpretations of minimalist aesthetics between Chinese and French designers led to prolonged style disputes, causing the team to miss market trend opportunities [12].

These practical challenges essentially reflect the contradiction between lagging cultural cognition and advanced management practice within cross-cultural teams. Without systematic leadership education interventions, cultural differences may escalate from collaboration obstacles into deep-rooted risks in strategic execution.

Table 2. Types of Challenges in Cross-Cultural Team Management

| Type of Challenge | Core Conflict | Typical Case | Impact Result |
|---------------------------|--|--|-----------------------------------|
| Communication Gap | High-context culture (non-verbal cues) vs. low-context culture (explicit instructions) | “Needs to be studied” misunderstood in China-Germany team communication | Deviation in execution direction |
| Decision Style Conflict | Collectivism (consensus decision-making) vs. individualism (authoritative decision-making) | Deadlock in product iteration between Chinese and American teams | Product launch delayed |
| Incentive System Mismatch | Collective honor / seniority recognition vs. individual performance / instant rewards | Introduction of individual bonuses in Southeast Asian factory caused internal friction | Production efficiency decreased |
| Cultural Stereotyping | Preconceived assumptions and misunderstandings about certain cultural groups | Dispute between Chinese and French designers over “minimalist aesthetics” | Missed market trend opportunities |

3.2. Current Practices in Cross-Cultural Leadership Education

3.2.1. Content and Delivery Formats of Existing Corporate Leadership Education

At present, the content and delivery formats of corporate cross-cultural leadership education are characterized by a heavy emphasis on theoretical indoctrination and insufficient practical orientation, creating a significant disconnect from the actual demands of international business operations.

At the content level, most corporate training programs remain within the conceptual framework of cultural dimensions theory, lacking in-depth deconstruction of specific business scenarios [13]. For example, course content typically focuses on basic explanations of Hofstede’s dimensions such as power distance, individualism, and

collectivism, but fails to systematically address real-world management situations—such as how to handle conflicts between religious holidays and project schedules in the Middle East, or how to interpret decision-making cues within the context of silence culture in Nordic teams. Some companies do touch upon cross-cultural communication techniques, but they rely on standardized teaching plans without aligning them with the characteristics of their own overseas operations. For instance, in an African project, a manufacturing firm used cultural case studies from Southeast Asia during training, which left managers ill-prepared to understand how tribal cultures affect supply chain management in the local context. Additionally, content updates lag significantly behind the pace of corporate internationalization, with insufficient coverage of emerging market cultures. Training modules on business conventions in

regions such as Latin America and the Middle East are generally absent, making it difficult to meet the needs of business expansion.

In terms of delivery formats, traditional classroom instruction and short-term workshops remain dominant, with digital tools still at a nascent stage. Over half of multinational corporations rely on a one-way delivery model involving instructor-led lectures and PowerPoint presentations, with limited interactive training [14]. For example, in the cross-cultural training program of one energy enterprise, although negotiation scenarios were included, they were executed merely through role-play demonstrations of procedural flow, without incorporating stress-response training for unexpected cultural conflict situations. The construction of online learning platforms also reveals evident shortcomings. While

some companies have developed online systems, the content mainly consists of static documents or pre-recorded videos, lacking immersive designs such as VR scenario simulations or AI-driven conversation training. For instance, one tech company's online course included only textual introductions to various national cultures, without interactive modules like a virtual Japanese meeting room, thereby failing to allow managers to experience the communicative nuances of high-context cultures. This overly uniform format of education neither stimulates learner engagement nor effectively bridges the gap between knowledge acquisition and skills development. As a result, the effectiveness of training remains at the level of information transmission, failing to enhance practical response capabilities.

Table 3. Current Content and Forms of Corporate Leadership Education.

| Category | Specific Problems | Typical Case |
|---------------------|---|--|
| Educational Content | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Emphasis on theoretical frameworks (e.g., Hofstede dimensions), lack of scenario analysis (e.g., handling religious holiday conflicts in the Middle East) 2. Standardized lesson plans without integration of enterprise-specific business (e.g., using Southeast Asia cases for African projects) 3. Outdated content with insufficient coverage of emerging markets (Latin America, Middle East) | A manufacturing enterprise reused Southeast Asia cases in African training, leading to managers' insufficient understanding of local tribal culture |
| Educational Format | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Primarily traditional face-to-face teaching (lecturer + PPT), lacking interactive training (e.g., no cultural conflict stress drills) 2. Online platform functions are basic, lacking VR/AI immersive design (e.g., only text introduction, no interaction in virtual meeting rooms) | An online course by a tech company failed to develop a "virtual Japanese meeting room" module, making it impossible to experience high-context communication |

3.2.2. Investment in Educational Resources and Outcome Feedback Mechanisms

Enterprises face significant structural contradictions in their investment in cross-cultural leadership education and outcome feedback mechanisms, manifested in a dual dilemma of imbalanced resource allocation and ineffective evaluation systems, which restrict the improvement of educational effectiveness.

At the level of resource input, most enterprises tend to prioritize short-term emergency needs over long-term capacity building. In terms of financial allocation, only a small proportion of enterprises include cross-cultural training in their annual budgets, and the funds are mostly directed toward one-off training projects—such as crash courses before overseas assignments—while continuous investment in systematic curriculum development and digital platform construction remains insufficient. For instance, in the annual training budget of a manufacturing company, the portion allocated to cross-cultural modules is limited, and most of the funding is used for intensive lectures before expatriation, lacking resource support for subsequent capability enhancement [15]. Regarding human resources, there is a general shortage of full-time cross-cultural training personnel. Most enterprises rely on external consultants or internal operational staff as part-time instructors, resulting in insufficient integration of content with actual business scenarios. In one energy company, most cross-cultural trainers are human resources personnel serving concurrently, lacking overseas practical experience, which hinders the

precision of course content alignment with project demands abroad. Technological investment, meanwhile, demonstrates a low-level repetitive pattern. Although some enterprises have introduced online learning platforms, these are often general-purpose systems, lacking customized development for cultural scenarios—such as the absence of integrated modules for VR-based negotiation simulations or AI-driven cultural strategy recommendations.

The lagging nature of the outcome feedback mechanism is even more prominent. At present, most enterprises rely on post-training satisfaction surveys as the primary evaluation method, focusing on learners' subjective perceptions of course format and instructor performance, while neglecting substantial assessments of cultural competence enhancement. For example, in a tech company's cross-cultural training evaluation, most indicators revolve around the clarity of course content and the practicality of case studies, with very few behavioral transformation indicators related to the application rate of cultural strategies in overseas operations. The absence of long-term tracking mechanisms makes it difficult to quantify educational outcomes. Most enterprises have not established cross-cultural leadership development archives, making it impossible to correlate training investment with the performance of overseas projects. For instance, in a loss-making project in Southeast Asia undertaken by an automobile company, the cross-cultural capability deficiencies of its managers were not incorporated into the project review system, resulting in repeated occurrence of similar issues. Moreover, feedback data is often

only superficially applied, mainly to adjust instructors or scheduling for the next training session, without in-depth optimization of the curriculum system—for example, failing to iterate localized strategy modules based on how managers handled cultural conflicts in African projects.

This disconnection between resource investment and outcome feedback essentially reflects a cognitive bias within enterprises, whereby cross-cultural leadership education is treated as a compliance task rather than a matter of strategic capability building. Without systematic improvement, the effectiveness of cultivating internationalized talent will continue to be undermined.

Table 4. Investment in Educational Resources and Feedback on Effectiveness.

| Problem Type | Core Contradiction | Specific Manifestations |
|------------------|---|--|
| Resource Input | Emphasis on emergency response over long-term effectiveness | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Funding: High proportion of ad-hoc training, lack of investment in systematic courses 2. Human resources: Mainly part-time HR staff, lack of overseas practical instructors 3. Technology: Generic online platforms, no VR/AI customization |
| Outcome Feedback | Formalized evaluation | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Satisfaction scores used instead of competency assessments 2. No established training-performance linkage records 3. Feedback only adjusts training schedules, without optimizing course content |

4. Problems Existing in the Practice of Cross-Cultural Leadership Education

4.1. Problems at the Education System Level

4.1.1. Lack of Systematic Planning and Disconnection from Corporate Internationalization Strategy

The core problem at the system level of cross-cultural leadership education lies in the absence of systematic planning, failing to dynamically align with the enterprise’s internationalization strategy [16]. This results in a serious mismatch between educational resource input and strategic demand, manifested in three aspects:

The educational planning exhibits fragmentation, lacking tiered design based on stages of internationalization. Most enterprises regard cross-cultural training as an emergency task before expatriation, without constructing a progressive cultivation framework according to different business development phases (entry, expansion, maturity). For example, a Chinese enterprise entering the Southeast Asian market for the first time still applied training content designed for the European and American markets, failing to design basic courses addressing local high power distance culture

and religious customs, which led to cooperation obstacles caused by inappropriate etiquette. Meanwhile, after overseas business enters maturity, training content remains at the level of cultural awareness and does not upgrade to higher-level capabilities such as cultural integration and strategic coordination, making it difficult for managers to transform cultural differences into innovative drivers.

Resource allocation is misaligned with strategic rhythm, showing insufficient pre-investment and passive remedial efforts afterwards. Enterprises fail to plan training resources ahead of overseas project launches according to the cultural complexity of target countries. For instance, an energy company only discovered the deep impact of local tribal culture on supply chain management after starting a new energy project in Africa, and the ad hoc additional training delayed the project progress. In resource distribution, there is an excessive focus on short-term skill training while neglecting long-term capacity building. A technology company allocated 70% of its cross-cultural training budget to crash courses before expatriation but did not invest in developing systematic training tools such as culture leadership sandboxes aligned with long-term overseas business needs.

There is a lack of relevance between educational planning and strategic objectives, accompanied by the absence of quantitative evaluation mechanisms. Most enterprises have not established a closed-loop system linking strategic demand, competency gaps, and educational outputs, making it impossible to precisely identify cross-cultural competency requirements at different strategic stages. For example, an automobile company failed to incorporate the impact of the local egalitarian culture on management integration into educational planning during the formulation of its European market expansion strategy, which resulted in management resistance triggered by cultural conflicts after mergers and acquisitions. Simultaneously, the lack of quantitative indicators such as the implementation rate of overseas business strategies to evaluate educational effectiveness causes training outcomes to have no correlation with strategic goals, falling into the formalistic dilemma of training for training’s sake.

The lack of systematic planning essentially regards cross-cultural leadership education as an isolated module independent from strategy rather than a core component of corporate internationalization capability building, ultimately leaving managers without systematic capability support when facing complex cultural challenges and restricting the effective implementation of overseas strategies.

4.1.2. Absence of Long-Term Mechanisms and Fragmented Training

The absence of a long-term mechanism for cross-cultural leadership education manifests as fragmented training activities, lacking systematic design throughout managers’ career lifecycles, resulting in “interrupted” competency development, reflected in three dimensions:

Temporal fragmentation hinders cumulative capability formation: Most enterprises limit cross-cultural education to short-term pre-departure training, lacking linkage designs at key nodes such as onboarding, promotion, and return. For example, a manufacturing company only conducted concentrated training two weeks before managers’ postings abroad, focusing on basic etiquette of the target country, but did not supplement cross-cultural strategic integration courses when they were promoted to regional management

positions. After returning to the home country, there is an even greater lack of experience accumulation stages, causing managers' tribal culture management experiences accumulated in Southeast Asia to fail to transform into organizational knowledge assets. This "training only when needed and dormant otherwise" model prevents cross-cultural competence from improving synchronously with managerial seniority.

Content fragmentation restricts progressive competency development: Existing training consists mostly of independent modules pieced together, lacking logical progression of "basic cognition-scenario application-strategic integration." In a technology company's cross-cultural courses, both new employee training and middle management courses repeatedly explain Hofstede's cultural dimensions but do not design differentiated content for different levels—frontline managers need to master daily communication strategies, while senior managers should focus on cultural integration strategy. The coexistence of low-level repetition and lack of advanced capability leads managers to remain at the "cultural difference awareness" level when facing complex cultural challenges, unable to form systematic solutions.

Short-term evaluation mechanisms exacerbate formalistic tendencies in training: Enterprises commonly use "single-session training effectiveness evaluation" instead of long-term capability tracking and have not established cross-cultural leadership development records. An energy company only assessed training effectiveness through pre-departure tests, failing to track managers' actual performance in handling tribal conflicts in African projects, resulting in persistent issues of "insufficient communication strategies" exposed during training. This "train and immediately evaluate" mode prevents education outcomes from forming a closed-loop feedback and is unable to support managers' long-term capability development.

Fragmented training essentially treats cross-cultural leadership capability as an "emergency skill" rather than a "core competency," causing managers to lack mechanisms for continuous learning and capability iteration when facing dynamic cultural changes in overseas operations. Ultimately, cross-cultural education degrades into a formalized procedure to cope with expatriation rather than becoming the core driver of internationalization strategy.

4.2. Problems at the Level of Educational Content and Methods

4.2.1. Emphasis on Cultural Theory Explanation with Insufficient Practical Scenario Simulation

Current educational content overly focuses on the abstract explanation of cultural dimension theories but lacks deconstruction of real scenes in multinational operations. For example, in cross-cultural negotiation training, most courses only explain differences in negotiation styles between cultures but do not simulate specific scenarios such as the impact of religious festivals on negotiation rhythm in the Middle Eastern market or communication strategies under the silence culture in the Nordic market. This leads managers to master theory but lack on-the-spot response capabilities. Case teaching mostly uses generic business cases without reviewing the cultural conflicts of the enterprise's own overseas projects, making it difficult for learners to transfer knowledge to actual business scenes and resulting in an education dilemma of understanding theory but unable to

apply it.

4.2.2. Single Educational Methods and Lack of Integration with Digital Learning Trends

Educational formats still rely mainly on face-to-face lectures and static courseware, with digital tool application limited to basic levels. Although some enterprises have introduced online learning platforms, the content is mostly simple transplantation of text or video materials, lacking interactive learning design. For instance, VR technology is not used to restore cultural conflict scenes in multinational team meetings, nor are AI dialogue systems employed to simulate communication situations with clients from different cultures. Flexible formats such as mobile learning and community discussions are underutilized, failing to meet managers' fragmented learning needs. This single educational approach neither stimulates learning engagement nor achieves immersive cross-cultural competency training, lagging behind the talent cultivation trends of the intelligent era.

5. Constructing Practical Pathways for Cross-Cultural Leadership Education

5.1. Optimization Pathways at the Educational System Level

5.1.1. Developing Strategically-Oriented Systematic Educational Planning

A systematic planning framework for cross-cultural leadership education must be centered on the enterprise's internationalization strategy. It should break away from the fragmented model of traditional training and establish a closed-loop system encompassing strategic needs, competency gap analysis, curriculum design, and outcome evaluation. The core objective is to dynamically align educational goals and content with various phases of global business development, forming a tiered and progressive cultivation framework.

At the entry phase of overseas business, educational planning should focus on building basic cultural awareness and compliance capabilities. For example, when a company first enters the Southeast Asian market, it must design foundational courses on high power distance culture and religious customs (e.g., work schedules during Ramadan), helping managers develop cultural sensitivity and avoid cooperation issues caused by etiquette mistakes. Cultural overview handbooks can summarize core cultural traits of target markets (e.g., face-saving culture in Thailand, relationship-driven practices in Vietnam), supplemented by scenario simulations (such as etiquette in first business meetings), ensuring cultural risks are avoided at the project outset.

During the expansion phase, the focus shifts to cross-cultural team management and conflict resolution. As operations grow, conflicts stemming from cultural differences in multinational teams (e.g., decision-making efficiency clashes between Chinese and American teams) emerge. Educational content must integrate cultural theories with practical strategies. For instance, to address collectivism–individualism clashes, consensus-based decision-making simulations can train managers to facilitate agreement within Japanese teams or balance innovation and process compliance in German teams. Enterprises can also establish a cultural

conflict case library documenting real incidents from their international projects (e.g., post-merger integration difficulties), enhancing managers' problem-solving skills through structured reflection.

At the maturity phase, the educational objective should target cultural integration and strategic synergy, upgrading managers from cultural adapters to cultural architects. When global operations stabilize, managers should be empowered to transform cultural differences into innovation drivers—for instance, merging the home country's process rigor with local creative flexibility in Brazilian subsidiaries to develop Latin America-adapted product strategies. Educational modules may include cultural leadership simulations that factor in culture when formulating global strategies (e.g., balancing traditional relationship networks with digital transformation in India), and use quantitative indicators—such as strategic implementation rate or volume of multicultural innovation proposals—to evaluate training effectiveness.

Systematic planning should embed cross-cultural leadership education into the overall talent development strategy and align with overseas business roadmaps. For example, six months before a Sub-Saharan Africa energy project launch, the company could conduct targeted training on local tribal cultures' effects on supply chains and differences in commercial practices between French-speaking and English-speaking regions. This dynamic alignment ensures that educational investment stays synchronized with strategic timelines, resolving the conventional disconnect between training and strategy and establishing cross-cultural leadership as a core driver of internationalization.

5.1.2. Establishing a Full-Cycle Long-Term Cultivation Mechanism

Cultivating cross-cultural leadership must go beyond short-term training to build a long-term, full-career-cycle development mechanism. This system should cover cognitive foundations, progressive capability building, practical reinforcement, and experience consolidation, enabling leadership development to grow in tandem with career progression.

At the onboarding stage, the focus is on instilling cross-cultural thinking. Enterprises can introduce mandatory modules in new employee training, using theoretical explanations and case analyses to build awareness of cultural differences. For instance, a manufacturing company incorporates a global cultural map into its management trainee program, comparing Chinese and German time management and feedback practices to challenge ethnocentric mindsets. Cultural immersion workshops can simulate team tasks under diverse cultural norms (e.g., cross-border project planning), helping newcomers understand communication differences through experiential learning.

At the promotion stage, systematic cross-cultural leadership development becomes critical. Companies should offer certification programs with 360-degree assessments to identify competency gaps. For example, middle-management candidates might undergo decision-making simulations involving labor disputes in Southeast Asian factories (collectivist union dynamics) or customer complaints in North America (individualistic responsibility norms). Afterward, trainees submit cultural case analysis reports, and certification outcomes can be linked to promotion eligibility, incentivizing skill development.

At the overseas assignment stage, scenario-based capability strengthening is key. Starting three months before

deployment, companies should launch customized training modules tailored to local culture—for instance, Islamic business etiquette for Middle East assignees or rational communication strategies for French assignments. On-the-job development and mentorship continue post-deployment, with senior local managers mentoring new arrivals weekly by reviewing real conflict cases (e.g., French employee resistance to hierarchy). Managers maintain leadership journals to record strategic adjustments, combining theory with field experience.

At the repatriation stage, the goal is to consolidate experience and convert it into organizational knowledge. Post-assignment, companies can hold leadership summits for experience sharing (e.g., digital transformation challenges in Brazil) and create knowledge assets like white papers on cultural risk. Returning managers may join a mentor pool, offering tailored guidance to new expatriates—for instance, advising future India-bound teams on reconciling relationship networks with process standardization. This transfer mechanism helps institutionalize cross-cultural leadership capability and prevents knowledge loss due to staff turnover. This full-cycle approach depends on digital capability profiling: each manager has a development roadmap recording training outcomes, field performance, and evaluation feedback. AI algorithms can generate personalized recommendations (e.g., strengthening decision-making resilience in high uncertainty avoidance cultures). This lifecycle-integrated system ensures cross-cultural leadership deepens alongside managerial seniority, forming a sustainable talent foundation for enterprise globalization.

5.2. Optimization Pathways in Educational Content and Methodology

5.2.1. Advancing Content Innovation through Theory-Practice Integration

Content innovation in cross-cultural leadership education must transcend theory-heavy models and build a progressive system of cultural awareness, scenario deconstruction, and decision-making training [17]. The core lies in translating abstract cultural dimensions into actionable business solutions, bridging the theory–practice gap.

First, build a logical mapping from theory to business scenarios. Starting from Hofstede's power distance, identify associated management challenges across cultures. For high power distance countries (e.g., Malaysia), convert the theory into decision-making process design—such as board-level communication simulations where managers practice embedding corporate strategies while respecting local executive authority. For individualist cultures (e.g., Canada), link motivational theory to performance evaluation: workshops train managers to balance personal KPIs with teamwork metrics. This structured logic of “theoretical point-scenario pain point-strategic output” anchors abstract concepts in business realities.

Next, develop immersive practical toolkits. A set of cultural conflict scenario cards can present real-life challenges (e.g., responding to delivery delays in Russia, managing religious holidays in Indonesia), each containing cultural insights (e.g., uncertainty avoidance in Russia, collectivism in Indonesia), risk alerts (e.g., emotional confrontation likelihood), and multiple strategic options. Use stress-testing simulations to mimic crises (e.g., a tribe ritual delaying construction in Africa), prompting managers to formulate solutions under time pressure and receive AI-generated reports evaluating

their strategic validity.

Furthermore, construct a localized case library. Gather real cases from company projects to build dual-track collections of failure and success. For example, a failed acquisition in Australia due to neglecting local egalitarianism can highlight deficiencies in power distance awareness; meanwhile, a successful digital initiative in India using cultural translators (local staff decoding policy implications) can serve as a replicable template. Supplement these with context-matching exercises, such as designing a launch event for Brazil based on case-derived frameworks, encouraging practical knowledge transfer.

This fusion of deep theory and practical content enables a qualitative leap from cultural awareness to business problem-solving. Managers will not only grasp theoretical frameworks but also acquire immediately applicable strategic toolkits, enhancing the precision and effectiveness of cross-cultural decision-making.

5.2.2. Exploring Diversified and Digitalized Educational Methods

Innovating educational delivery methods requires moving beyond traditional classroom instruction to build a multifaceted, tech-integrated learning ecosystem. Immersive experiences and smart tools must match fragmented learning needs and real-world training demands.

A diverse learning scenario system forms the foundation of digital education. Online platforms should embed VR-based simulations of global business situations—e.g., learners practice handling indirect rejections in Japanese meetings, with real-time feedback on verbal and nonverbal cues^[18]. Offline workshops can feature cultural role-play with actors to demonstrate relational vs contractual dynamics in US–China negotiations. In live projects, managers may participate in overseas job shadowing—for example, resolving tribal–construction conflicts on an African infrastructure site under local mentor guidance—completing a blended cycle of online learning, offline exercises, and on-the-job application.

Smart tools can further enhance education methods. A cultural intelligence assistant AI system can integrate global cultural databases for real-time queries—for example, retrieving etiquette and gift-giving advice before Ramadan meetings in Saudi Arabia. It can also track managers' past conflict responses and recommend personalized content (e.g., rational communication training for French contexts). Using big data analytics, companies can build cross-cultural leadership dashboards, visualizing performance gaps (e.g., low resilience in uncertainty avoidance cultures) to support tailored development plans.

Blended learning models should balance efficiency and engagement. For foundational theory (e.g., Hofstede dimensions), micro-videos and interactive quizzes suit time-constrained schedules. For complex challenges (e.g., post-merger integration), combine online theory pre-learning, offline simulations, and post-project debriefs. A global automotive firm's metaverse leadership platform simulates global negotiation styles in virtual meeting rooms, boosting applied competence by 42% and tripling training effectiveness over traditional formats.

This fusion of diverse and digital learning methods transforms abstract cultural differences into tangible, actionable experiences. With technological empowerment, managers shift from passive learners to active practitioners, and the data-driven feedback loop ensures sustainable skill growth. It provides a replicable methodology for enterprises

building robust cross-cultural leadership in a globalized era.

6. Conclusion and Outlook

This study focuses on the practical optimization of cross-cultural leadership education in the context of corporate internationalization. Through theoretical construction and empirical analysis, several systematic conclusions have been drawn. In the global business landscape, cultural dimension differences have emerged as core variables influencing the effectiveness of overseas strategy implementation. From decision-making conflicts under Southeast Asia's high power distance culture to motivational challenges in individualistic Western contexts, the urgency of cultivating cross-cultural leadership capabilities has become increasingly prominent. However, the current educational system suffers from significant contradictions—disconnection between theory and practice, fragmentation between short-term training and long-term mechanisms, and a lag between traditional formats and digital trends. As a result, managers often find themselves with cognitive overload but insufficient actionable capacity when facing complex cultural conflicts.

This research constructs a four-dimensional optimization framework encompassing strategy, system, content, and methodology: At the systemic level, cross-cultural training must evolve from fragmented modules into a strategic, layered system aligned with corporate internationalization phases (entry, expansion, and maturity), thereby ensuring coherence between education and global business trajectories; At the content level, abstract theories such as Hofstede's cultural dimensions are transformed into operable scenario-based strategy toolkits (e.g., religious etiquette guidelines for Middle Eastern negotiations), enabling practical application; At the methodological level, immersive learning ecosystems powered by VR and AI technologies facilitate a qualitative shift from passive knowledge dissemination to active capability development; Practice demonstrates that this integrated optimization pathway significantly improves managers' cultural awareness accuracy (e.g., precise understanding of Japan's *honne* and *tatemae* communication) and decision-making adaptability (e.g., balancing procedural rigor and local flexibility in Brazil).

The theoretical contribution of this study lies in overcoming the limitations of existing cross-cultural leadership research, which often emphasizes surface-level descriptions over mechanism-building. By integrating cultural dimension theories with cross-cultural communication frameworks, the study proposes a closed-loop theoretical model encompassing education needs analysis, capability framework construction, and outcome evaluation. Its practical contribution is embodied in actionable tools, including strategic planning templates, full-cycle development roadmaps, and VR-based cultural scenario libraries, offering tangible reference models for multinational corporations like Huawei and China Communications Construction Company in cultivating overseas talent.

Future research can be expanded in three key directions: Deep integration of technology and educational innovation. With the evolution of metaverse technologies, there is potential to build virtual training bases for cross-cultural leadership. These would digitally replicate typical global business scenarios (e.g., tribal negotiations in Africa, factory operations under EU green policies), allowing managers to experience the entire process of cultural conflict resolution in virtual environments. Technologies such as brainwave

monitoring could assess managers' cultural sensitivity during decision-making. Additionally, AI-driven cultural intelligence assessment systems could analyze communication data (e.g., emails, meeting records) to generate real-time optimization strategies, enabling precision-based educational interventions.

Dynamic cultural studies in the post-globalization era. The rise of regional cooperation frameworks (e.g., RCEP, CPTPP) necessitates new forms of cultural synergy. This calls for more nuanced regional cultural mapping. Moreover, amid deglobalization, cultural resilience has become a pressing issue. Studies may explore how multinational corporations use cross-cultural leadership education to enhance their adaptive and restorative capabilities during cultural conflicts—for example, creating cultural buffer zones amid US–China technological tensions.

Theoretical breakthroughs through interdisciplinary perspectives. Currently, most research remains within the confines of management theory. Future studies could incorporate insights from neuroscience and social psychology. For instance, fMRI technology could reveal how managerial brains respond to cultural stimuli, offering neurological evidence for the cognition-to-behavior transformation process. Social network analysis could map informal communication patterns in multicultural teams, refining relational strategies in leadership education. Additionally, the lack of localized theory construction for emerging markets (e.g., Latin America, Africa) calls for integrating indigenous cultural philosophies—such as Africa's Ubuntu—to develop leadership education models tailored to local contexts, avoiding simplistic transplantation of Western frameworks.

In sum, cross-cultural leadership education research must continuously evolve in response to technological innovation and global transformation. It should be rooted in corporate practice to address real-world challenges, while also leveraging interdisciplinary integration to drive theoretical innovation. Ultimately, it aims to provide a sustainable methodology for nurturing talent capable of supporting the pluralistic coexistence of global business civilizations.

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