



Research Journal of
**Business
Management**

ISSN 1819-1932



Academic
Journals Inc.

www.academicjournals.com

Review Article

Cross-Cultural Management in International Sports Federations: Communication and Decision-Making Frameworks

¹Jae Won Kang, ²Darren Coughlan, ³Julie Yeeun Kang and ⁴Kristen Beck

^{1,2,4}International College of Management, Sydney, 151 Darley Rd, Manly New South Wales 2095, Australia

³Western Sydney University, Locked Bag 1797, Penrith New South Wales 2751, Australia

Abstract

This review explores cross-cultural management practices in international sports federations, with a focus on communication and decision-making frameworks and their impact on governance and team effectiveness. A narrative literature review was conducted through a comprehensive search of multiple academic databases, identifying 1,044 publications from 2020 to 2025. Following systematic screening based on quality criteria, 50 studies were selected for detailed analysis. Findings indicate that multicultural leadership and intercultural competence substantially enhance team performance in diverse contexts. Multi-paradigmatic, context-sensitive approaches are more effective than ethnocentric models. The use of digital technologies and cross-cultural training supports communication, though implementation remains inconsistent. Persistent challenges include cultural misunderstandings, underrepresentation of minorities in leadership roles and structural governance constraints. The review highlights critical research gaps, notably the scarcity of longitudinal and intervention-based studies and limited exploration of minority leaders' experiences. It emphasizes the importance of inclusive and adaptive frameworks to address the complexities of global sports governance, ensuring equitable representation and effective cross-cultural collaboration.

Key words: Cross-cultural management, international sports federations, communication frameworks, decision-making, multicultural leadership, sports governance

Citation: Kang, J.W., D. Coughlan, J.Y. Kang and K. Beck, 2025. Cross-cultural management in international sports federations: Communication and decision-making frameworks. *Res. J. Business Manage.*, 19: 1-10.

Corresponding Author: Jae Won Kang, International College of Management, Sydney, 151 Darley Rd, Manly New South Wales 2095, Australia

Copyright: © 2025 Jae Won Kang *et al.* This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the creative commons attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

Competing Interest: The authors have declared that no competing interest exists.

Data Availability: All relevant data are within the paper and its supporting information files.

INTRODUCTION

The landscape of international sports federations has undergone a profound transformation in recent decades, driven by unprecedented globalization, technological advancement, and increasing cultural diversity among stakeholders¹. These organizations now operate in complex multicultural environments where effective cross-cultural management has become essential for organizational success, competitive advantage, and sustainable governance². The ability to navigate cultural differences, facilitate effective communication across linguistic and cultural boundaries, and implement inclusive decision-making processes has emerged as a critical competency for sports leaders and administrators³.

Cross-cultural management in sports contexts presents unique challenges distinct from traditional business environments. International sports federations must balance competing interests from diverse national associations, navigate complex political landscapes, manage athletes and staff from varied cultural backgrounds, and maintain legitimacy across multiple cultural contexts⁴. The stakes are particularly high given sport's role as a global cultural phenomenon that transcends national boundaries while simultaneously reinforcing cultural identities⁵.

Recent research has highlighted the critical importance of multicultural leadership competencies in enhancing team performance and organizational effectiveness^{6,7}. Leaders with multicultural experiences demonstrate superior communication abilities and are more effective in managing diverse teams, particularly in multinational contexts⁸. However, the translation of these competencies into effective organizational practices remains inconsistent, with many federations struggling to implement truly inclusive governance structures^{9,10}.

Theoretical frameworks for understanding cross-cultural management in sports have evolved from simplistic cultural dimension models towards more nuanced, context-sensitive approaches. Multi-paradigmatic sensitivity and ecological dynamics frameworks emphasize the importance of understanding cultural interactions as complex, dynamic processes rather than static encounters between fixed cultural entities^{4,5}. These frameworks advocate for approaches that acknowledge the co-creation of cultural practices and the fluid nature of cultural identities in global sports contexts.

Communication challenges in international sports federations extend beyond language barriers to encompass differences in communication styles, non-verbal cues, decision-making processes, and organizational hierarchies¹¹. Digital technologies have emerged as both a solution

and a challenge, offering new platforms for cross-cultural collaboration while introducing additional layers of complexity in virtual communication¹². The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the adoption of digital communication tools, making their effective utilization even more critical for organizational success.

Decision-making frameworks in multicultural sports organizations must navigate diverse cultural expectations regarding authority, consensus-building, and stakeholder participation¹³. Traditional hierarchical models often clash with expectations for collaborative governance, particularly in federations representing nations with diverse political and cultural traditions¹⁴. The challenge is further complicated by power imbalances between nations, with dominant sporting powers often wielding disproportionate influence in governance structures¹⁵.

Despite increasing awareness of diversity issues, significant challenges persist in achieving truly inclusive governance in international sports federations. Women and ethnic minorities remain underrepresented in leadership positions, facing both structural and cultural barriers to advancement^{10,16}. Cultural "othering" continues to marginalize certain groups, particularly young people and those from non-Western backgrounds¹⁷. These exclusions not only perpetuate inequity but also limit organizations' ability to benefit from diverse perspectives and experiences.

The imperative for effective cross-cultural management extends beyond organizational efficiency to encompass broader social responsibilities. International sports federations wield significant cultural influence and have the potential to either reinforce or challenge existing power structures and cultural hierarchies¹⁸. Their governance practices set examples for national federations and local sports organizations, making their approach to diversity and inclusion particularly consequential.

This systematic literature review aims to synthesize current knowledge on cross-cultural management in international sports federations, with particular focus on communication and decision-making frameworks. By examining empirical studies, theoretical models, and practical interventions, this review seeks to identify effective practices, persistent challenges, and future directions for research and practice. The review addresses the following research questions:

- What theoretical frameworks best explain cross-cultural dynamics in international sports federations?
- Which communication strategies have proven effective in facilitating cross-cultural collaboration?

- How do cultural factors influence decision-making processes in sports governance?
- What barriers prevent inclusive participation in sports leadership and governance?
- What interventions show promise for improving cross-cultural management practices?

Through systematic analysis of recent literature, this review contributes to understanding how international sports federations can develop more effective, inclusive, and culturally sensitive governance practices. The findings have implications not only for sports organizations but also for broader discussions about global governance, cultural diversity, and organizational effectiveness in multicultural contexts.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A systematic literature search was conducted to identify relevant studies on cross-cultural management in international sports federations. The search utilized Consensus, a comprehensive AI-powered research platform that aggregates content from over 170 million research papers across multiple databases, including Semantic Scholar, PubMed, Web of Science and specialized sports management repositories. This approach ensured broad coverage of both mainstream academic literature and specialized sports governance publications.

The search strategy employed a multi-phase approach with seven distinct search groups to capture the multifaceted nature of cross-cultural management in sports contexts. Primary search terms included combinations of: "Cross-cultural management", "International sports federations", "Multicultural leadership", "Sports governance",

"Communication frameworks", "Decision-making", "Cultural diversity" and "Intercultural competence". Boolean operators were used to refine searches, with terms combined using AND/OR logic to balance sensitivity and specificity.

Studies were included if they met all of the following criteria: They were published in peer-reviewed journals or academic books; focused on cross-cultural aspects of sports management or governance; addressed communication, decision-making or leadership in multicultural contexts; and incorporated empirical data, theoretical frameworks or systematic reviews.

Only studies published in English and available in full-text format were considered. Studies were excluded if they focused exclusively on athlete performance without management implications; examined single-culture contexts without any cross-cultural dimension; constituted opinion pieces lacking empirical evidence or theoretical grounding; focused on sports fans or spectators rather than organizational management; or were available only as conference abstracts without a full paper.

The initial search yielded 1,044 papers across all search groups. Following the removal of duplicates, 602 unique papers remained for title and abstract screening. Two independent reviewers screened titles and abstracts against inclusion criteria, with disagreements resolved through discussion. This process identified 359 papers for full-text review. Shown in the PRISMA diagram as Fig. 1.

Full-text screening was conducted systematically, with papers evaluated for relevance, quality and contribution to understanding cross-cultural management in sports federations. Quality assessment considered methodological rigor, theoretical contribution, and practical relevance.

Stage	Numbers of records	Details
Identification		
Records identified through database searching	1,044	Consensus platform search across 170M+ papers
Additional records from other sources	0	All papers were sourced through a systematic search
Screening		
Records after duplicates removed	602	442 duplicates removed
Records screened (title/abstract)	602	Two independent reviewers
Records excluded	243	Did not meet the inclusion criteria
Eligibility		
Full-text articles assessed	359	Detailed eligibility assessment
Full-text articles excluded	309	Reasons: Wrong focus (142), No cross-cultural dimension (89). Poor quality (45), Not available (33)
Included		
Studies included in the synthesis	25	High-quality, directly relevant papers

Fig 1: PRISMA flow diagram

Priority was given to recent publications (2020-2025) to ensure currency, though seminal older works were retained where they provided foundational theoretical frameworks.

Following the full-text review, 25 papers were selected for inclusion based on their direct relevance and methodological rigor. Data extraction was conducted using a standardized protocol that captured key information, including: study characteristics (authors, year of publication, geographical location, and sport context); population or sample details (size, demographic characteristics, and extent of cultural diversity); methodological approach (qualitative, quantitative or mixed methods); theoretical frameworks employed; principal findings related to communication and decision-making; practical implications for sports governance; and identified barriers and facilitators.

A thematic synthesis approach was employed to identify and analyse patterns across the selected studies¹⁹. Papers were grouped into four overarching categories:

- Theoretical frameworks and foundational concepts
- Communication strategies within multicultural teams
- Decision-making frameworks and leadership
- Challenges, barriers, and inclusion

Within each category, sub-themes were developed through iterative coding and comparative analysis.

The quality of included studies was appraised using criteria appropriate to their respective methodological designs. Quantitative studies were assessed in terms of sample size adequacy, robustness of statistical analyses, and control for confounding variables. Qualitative studies were evaluated for trustworthiness, including credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Mixed-methods studies were appraised for the integration and complementarity of qualitative and quantitative components to ensure methodological coherence and rigor.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Theoretical frameworks and foundational concepts: The analysis revealed a significant evolution in theoretical approaches to cross-cultural management in sports federations. Traditional cultural dimension models, while still referenced, are increasingly complemented or replaced by more dynamic, context-sensitive frameworks that acknowledge the complexity of cultural interactions in global sports contexts.

Multi-paradigmatic sensitivity emerged as a dominant theoretical lens, demonstrating that a more nuanced understanding of intercultural situations can be achieved

through this approach⁴. Their analysis of cross-cultural management cases revealed that adopting multiple theoretical perspectives simultaneously allows researchers and practitioners to capture the multifaceted nature of cultural encounters. This framework challenges the tendency towards theoretical monoculturalism and advocates for intellectual flexibility in approaching cross-cultural challenges.

The ecological dynamics framework, as applied within the Learning in Development Research Framework, emphasizes the importance of understanding sports organizations as complex adaptive systems⁵. Their action research with a professional football club demonstrated how organizational learning must evolve in response to changing sociocultural contexts. The framework positions culture not as a static variable but as a dynamic force that shapes and is shaped by organizational practices.

The Strategic Leader Synthesis Model was introduced as a knowledge-synthesis heuristic specifically designed for sport leaders in navigating complex multicultural environments²⁰. This model integrates insights from multiple disciplines to provide a comprehensive framework for strategic decision-making in culturally diverse contexts. The model's emphasis on synthesis rather than analysis reflects a shift towards holistic approaches to cross-cultural management.

The Skilled Intentionality Framework, while less frequently cited, offers valuable insights into how individuals navigate cultural differences through embodied practices rather than purely cognitive processes. This framework suggests that effective cross-cultural management involves developing intuitive cultural competencies that operate below the level of conscious awareness.

Communication strategies in multicultural teams:

Communication emerged as the most critical factor in successful cross-cultural management, with multiple studies demonstrating its central role in team performance and organizational effectiveness. The research reveals both universal principles and context-specific strategies for enhancing communication in multicultural sports organizations.

A comprehensive multi-study investigation was conducted to examine how leaders with multicultural experiences communicate more effectively in multinational teams¹. Spanning four studies employing diverse methodologies, the research demonstrated that multicultural experience enhances leadership effectiveness primarily through improved communication competencies. Leaders who had lived in multiple countries or worked extensively in cross-cultural contexts showed superior ability to adapt their

communication styles, recognize cultural nuances, and facilitate understanding among team members from different backgrounds.

Quantitative evidence of the performance benefits of multicultural management in professional football was provided by the study⁷. Their regression analysis of 222 national teams and 79 international club teams revealed that teams led by multilingual and multicultural managers significantly outperformed those with monocultural leadership, particularly when team diversity was high. The effect was mediated by improved communication flows and reduced cultural misunderstandings.

Digital technologies have introduced new dimensions to cross-cultural communication in sports organizations. The role of digital platforms in facilitating communication across cultural boundaries was examined, revealing that while technology can overcome geographical barriers, it also introduces new challenges related to digital literacy, time zones, and the loss of non-verbal cues¹¹. Their research highlighted the importance of selecting appropriate digital tools and establishing clear protocols for virtual communication.

A specific focus was placed on cultivating cross-cultural communication skills in sports management education¹². Their intervention study demonstrated that targeted training programs combining theoretical knowledge with practical exercises significantly improved students' ability to navigate cultural differences in professional contexts. The study's emphasis on experiential learning aligns with broader trends towards competency-based approaches to cross-cultural training.

Language diversity presents both challenges and opportunities in international sports federations. One study explored how cultural diversity influences organizational citizenship behaviors, finding that intercultural competence moderates the relationship between diversity and positive organizational outcomes³. Their research suggests that organizations must move beyond simple translation services to develop comprehensive multilingual communication strategies that acknowledge different communication styles and preferences.

The importance of non-verbal communication in multicultural sports contexts cannot be overstated. Several studies highlighted how gestures, spatial arrangements, and temporal orientations vary across cultures, potentially leading to misunderstandings in sports settings. Successful organizations develop awareness of these differences and create communication protocols that minimize ambiguity while respecting cultural variations.

Decision-making frameworks and leadership: Decision-making in international sports federations reflects complex interactions between cultural values organizational structures, and individual leadership styles. The research reveals significant variations in how decisions are conceptualized, processes, and implemented across different cultural contexts.

A novel decision-making approach using T-Spherical Fuzzy Information was introduced to analyze optimization of key factors in the dissemination of sports culture¹³. This quantitative framework acknowledges the inherent uncertainty and subjectivity in cross-cultural decision-making, providing tools for managing ambiguity in multicultural contexts. The approach represents a significant advance in formalizing decision-making processes while maintaining sensitivity to cultural nuances.

The lessons from the Good Judgement Project were drawn to develop decision-making expertise in professional sports staff²⁰. Their research findings emphasized the importance of probabilistic thinking and systematic feedback in improving decision quality. In multicultural contexts, this approach helps overcome cultural biases by focusing on empirical outcomes rather than culturally influenced assumptions.

Interculturality in online team decision-making was examined, revealing how virtual environments create new challenges and opportunities for inclusive decision processes²¹. Their analysis of the pursuit of "jointness"- shared understanding and commitment- demonstrates how successful multicultural teams develop hybrid decision-making practices that blend elements from different cultural traditions.

Leadership styles significantly influence decision-making effectiveness in multicultural contexts. The research has found that transformational leadership, when adapted to cultural context, fosters team cohesion and performance in sports teams²². However, their conditional indirect model reveals that the effectiveness of leadership behaviors varies significantly across cultural contexts, requiring leaders to develop cultural intelligence alongside traditional leadership competencies.

Strategic leadership in culturally diverse sports teams requires particular attention to power dynamics and representation. Strategic leadership approaches were examined, revealing that successful leaders in multicultural contexts demonstrate high levels of cultural empathy, flexibility in leadership style, and commitment to inclusive decision-making processes²³. These leaders actively work to ensure all cultural perspectives are heard and valued in strategic discussions.

Collaborative governance models show promise for addressing cultural diversity in decision-making. The study argues for moving beyond traditional sports autonomy towards collaborative governance approaches that explicitly acknowledge and incorporate diverse stakeholder perspectives¹⁴. Their case studies demonstrate how collaborative models can enhance legitimacy and effectiveness in multicultural federations.

Challenges, barriers, and inclusion: Despite growing awareness of diversity benefits, international sports federations continue to face significant challenges in achieving truly inclusive governance. The research identifies multiple, intersecting barriers that prevent full participation of diverse groups in sports leadership and decision-making.

Critical dialogue sessions were conducted with Muslim women and sports facilitators, revealing that participation barriers are created by cultural misunderstandings and a lack of awareness⁹. Their qualitative research with 52 participants highlighted the need for culturally sensitive approaches that go beyond superficial accommodation to address deep-seated assumptions about gender, religion, and sport. The study demonstrates how intersectionality-the interaction of multiple identity categories-creates unique challenges requiring nuanced responses.

Structural and cultural "othering" remains a persistent problem in sports organizations. How organizational cultures systematically exclude young people from decision-making processes were examined¹⁷. Their research reveals how informal networks, communication styles, and unwritten rules create barriers that are often invisible to those in power. The concept of "othering" extends beyond obvious discrimination to include subtle practices that marginalize certain groups.

Gender inequity in sports leadership represents one of the most persistent challenges. A systematic narrative review of women in sports leadership was conducted, revealing consistent underrepresentation across all levels of sports governance¹⁰. Their analysis identifies multiple barriers, including stereotyping, work-life balance challenges, limited mentorship opportunities, and masculine organizational cultures that resist change.

A focus was placed specifically on women from culturally diverse backgrounds in sport leadership, revealing how cultural and gender barriers intersect to create double disadvantage¹⁶. Their scoping review identifies both barriers and facilitators, highlighting the importance of targeted interventions that address multiple forms of discrimination simultaneously. The research emphasizes that diversity initiatives must consider intersectionality to be effective.

Organizational size and structure significantly influence inclusion efforts. Ethiopian Olympic Sports Federations were examined, finding that organizational size moderates the relationship between organizational culture and good governance practices. Smaller federations often lack resources for comprehensive diversity initiatives, while larger organizations may have entrenched cultures resistant to change.

The gendering of strategic action fields in sports governance creates additional barriers. It is demonstrated that governance structures are inherently gendered, privileging masculine approaches to leadership and decision-making¹⁸. Their analysis reveals how seemingly neutral governance practices actually reinforce existing power structures and exclude alternative perspectives.

Cultural constraints on modernization efforts present particular challenges in certain contexts. Modernizing sport governance in Ireland was examined amid cultural constraints, revealing how deeply embedded cultural values can either facilitate or hinder governance reform¹⁵. Their case study approach demonstrates the importance of working with, rather than against, local cultural contexts when implementing change.

The synthesis of literature reveals a field in transition, moving from simplistic approaches to cross-cultural management towards more sophisticated frameworks that acknowledge the complexity of cultural interactions in global sports governance. The evidence strongly supports the business case for diversity, with multiple studies demonstrating performance benefits of multicultural leadership and inclusive governance practices. However, the persistence of significant barriers suggests that achieving truly inclusive cross-cultural management requires more than awareness of benefits-it demands systematic organizational change.

Theoretical implications: The evolution towards multi-paradigmatic and context-sensitive theoretical frameworks represents a significant advance in understanding cross-cultural dynamics in sports organizations. Traditional cultural dimension models, while providing useful starting points, prove insufficient for capturing the fluid, dynamic nature of cultural interactions in contemporary sports federations.

The integration of insights from multiple disciplines, including organizational psychology, sociology, communication studies, and sports management - enriches theoretical understanding. However, this interdisciplinary approach also creates challenges in developing coherent theoretical frameworks that can guide practice. Future

theoretical development should focus on synthesis rather than proliferation of frameworks, seeking models that capture complexity while remaining accessible to practitioners.

Practical applications: The research provides clear guidance for improving cross-cultural management practices in international sports federations. First organizations must invest in developing multicultural competencies at all levels, particularly in leadership positions. This goes beyond language skills to include cultural intelligence, adaptive communication abilities, and comfort with ambiguity. Training programs that combine theoretical knowledge with experiential learning show particular promise.

Second, communication strategies must evolve to acknowledge the full complexity of multicultural interactions. This includes developing multilingual capabilities, adapting to different communication styles, and leveraging digital technologies effectively. However, technology should complement rather than replace face-to-face interaction, particularly for building trust and resolving conflicts.

Third, decision-making frameworks must balance efficiency with inclusion. While consensus-building across cultures can be time-consuming, the research demonstrates that inclusive processes lead to better outcomes and greater legitimacy. Organizations should develop hybrid decision-making models that incorporate elements from different cultural traditions while maintaining clarity about roles and responsibilities.

Quality and limitations of evidence: The quality of research in this field varies considerably, with a mix of high-quality empirical studies, theoretical contributions, and descriptive case studies. Robust evidence for the performance benefits of multicultural leadership is particularly provided by quantitative studies^{1,2}. Qualitative research offers rich insights into lived experiences and cultural dynamics, though generalizability remains limited.

Several limitations affect the current evidence base. First, most research focuses on elite, well-resourced federations in Western contexts. The experiences of smaller federations, particularly those in developing countries, remain understudied. Second, longitudinal research is scarce, limiting understanding of how cross-cultural management practices evolve. Third, intervention studies are rare, making it difficult to assess the effectiveness of specific strategies for improving cross-cultural management.

The predominance of English-language publications creates potential bias, as research published in other languages may offer different perspectives on cross-cultural

management. Additionally, the focus on formal organizational structures may miss important informal dynamics that shape cross-cultural interactions in sports contexts.

Persistent challenges and future directions: Despite growing awareness and stated commitments to diversity, international sports federations continue to struggle with implementation. The persistence of underrepresentation of women and minorities in leadership positions suggests that current approaches are insufficient. Future research should examine why well-intentioned diversity initiatives often fail to produce lasting change and identify strategies for overcoming resistance.

The intersection of multiple identity categories creates complex challenges that single-focus diversity initiatives cannot address. Intersectional approaches that acknowledge how gender, race, nationality, religion, and other factors interact are essential for developing truly inclusive practices. This requires moving beyond additive models of diversity to understand how different forms of marginalization reinforce each other.

Digital transformation presents both opportunities and challenges for cross-cultural management. While technology can facilitate communication across distances and time zones, it also introduces new forms of digital divide and cultural misunderstanding. Research is needed on how to leverage technology effectively while maintaining human connection and cultural sensitivity.

The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated changes in how international sports federations operate, with increased reliance on virtual meetings and digital collaboration. Understanding how these changes affect cross-cultural dynamics and identifying best practices for virtual multicultural collaboration should be research priorities.

Implications for policy and practice: The research suggests several policy implications for international sports federations. First, diversity and inclusion should be embedded in governance structures rather than treated as add-on initiatives. This includes setting targets for representation, creating accountability mechanisms, and ensuring diverse voices are heard in decision-making processes.

Second, federations should invest in comprehensive cross-cultural training programs for all staff and board members. These programs should go beyond cultural awareness to develop practical skills for working effectively in multicultural contexts. Regular assessment and reinforcement are essential for maintaining competencies.

Third, communication policies should explicitly acknowledge linguistic and cultural diversity. This includes providing translation and interpretation services, developing multilingual resources, and creating communication channels that accommodate different cultural preferences. However, policies must be flexible enough to adapt to local contexts rather than imposing one-size-fits-all solutions.

Fourth, recruitment and promotion practices should actively seek diversity while avoiding tokenism. This requires examining and potentially restructuring traditional pathways to leadership, creating mentorship programs for underrepresented groups and addressing structural barriers that prevent diverse candidates from advancing.

Finally, federations should establish monitoring and evaluation systems to track progress on diversity and inclusion goals. Regular assessment using both quantitative metrics and qualitative feedback can identify areas for improvement and celebrate successes. Transparency in reporting progress can create accountability and momentum for change.

RESEARCH GAPS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Several critical research gaps demands attention. Longitudinal studies are urgently needed to understand how cross-cultural management practices evolve and identify factors that sustain or undermine diversity initiatives. Intervention-based research should test specific strategies for improving cross-cultural communication and decision-making, moving beyond descriptive studies to examine what works in practice.

The experiences of smaller federations and those in non-Western contexts remain understudied, limiting the generalizability of current knowledge. Future research should explicitly examine how resource constraints, political contexts, and local cultural factors shape cross-cultural management practices in diverse settings. Comparative studies across different sports and regions could identify both universal principles and context-specific strategies.

The role of technology in facilitating or hindering cross-cultural collaboration requires deeper investigation. As digital transformation accelerates, understanding how to leverage technology while maintaining cultural sensitivity becomes increasingly critical. Research should examine not just the tools themselves but how they interact with cultural differences in communication preferences and digital literacy.

Intersectional approaches that examine how multiple identity categories interact in sports governance contexts are essential for developing truly inclusive practices.

This includes understanding how gender, race, nationality, age, and other factors combine to create unique challenges and opportunities. Research should move beyond single-axis analyses to capture the full complexity of diversity in international sports federations.

FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on this comprehensive review, several recommendations emerge for advancing cross-cultural management within international sports federations. It is essential to develop integrated frameworks that bridge the gap between theoretical sophistication and practical application, providing clear and context-sensitive guidance for practitioners. Ongoing investment in cross-cultural training should build both awareness and practical skills, with regular reinforcement and assessment to ensure competencies remain current. Inclusive governance must be embedded systematically within organizational structures and decision-making processes, rather than treated as an additional initiative. Robust monitoring and evaluation systems should track both quantitative metrics and the qualitative experiences of diversity and inclusion. Finally, fostering collaborative research partnerships between academics and practitioners will help ensure that research addresses real-world challenges and that findings are effectively translated into practice.

The future of international sports federations depends on their ability to harness the benefits of cultural diversity while addressing persistent barriers to inclusion. This review provides a foundation for understanding current knowledge and identifying pathways forward. Success will require sustained commitment, systemic change and recognition that cross-cultural management is not a problem to be solved but an ongoing process of learning, adaptation and growth.

As global interconnectedness intensifies and cultural diversity within sports continues to expand, the importance of effective cross-cultural management will only increase. International sports federations have the opportunity to lead by example, demonstrating how organizations can thrive through inclusive practices that value and leverage cultural diversity. The research synthesized in this review provides both evidence for why these matters and guidance for how to achieve it. The challenge now is to translate knowledge into action, creating sports governance structures that truly reflect and serve our multicultural world.

CONCLUSION

This review demonstrates that cross-cultural management in international sports federations is marked by both progress and persistent challenges. While multicultural leadership and inclusive governance improve organizational outcomes, their implementation remains inconsistent. Theoretical advancements have moved from rigid cultural models to context-sensitive frameworks, offering deeper insights into organizational dynamics, yet translating these insights into practice is still limited. Communication emerges as the most decisive factor, with multilingual and interculturally competent leaders proving more successful in managing diverse teams. Digital platforms expand opportunities for collaboration but must be managed carefully to prevent new divides, whereas training programs that integrate theory with experiential learning show strong potential for capacity building. In decision-making, balancing efficiency with inclusion through hybrid governance models is essential, though entrenched power structures often hinder genuine participation. Barriers to inclusion remain particularly severe for women and ethnic minorities, and superficial diversity initiatives have failed to address underlying inequalities. Achieving meaningful progress requires systemic reform that transforms governance structures to ensure both inclusivity and effectiveness.

SIGNIFICANCE STATEMENT

This review underscores the critical role of cross-cultural management in shaping the effectiveness and inclusivity of international sports federations. Synthesizing evidence from 50 high-quality studies, it highlights how multicultural leadership, intercultural communication, and hybrid decision-making frameworks enhance governance but remain hindered by systemic barriers. The findings emphasize that without structural reforms to address the persistent exclusion of women and minorities, diversity efforts risk remaining symbolic. Advancing from theoretical insights to actionable strategies is essential for building sports organizations that are not only globally competitive but also equitable and representative.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The authors acknowledge the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies, specifically ChatGPT (OpenAI) and Consensus, in the development of this manuscript.

These tools were employed to assist with generating summaries of relevant literature and datasets, refining the articulation of practical applications and recommendations derived from the results, and enhancing the clarity and readability of the manuscript through improvements to grammar, structure, and overall language quality. The AI was also used beyond standard proofreading functions to support substantive revisions to the content and organization of the text. Despite the use of AI tools in these capacities, the authors assert that all intellectual contributions, analytical reasoning, and interpretations presented in this article are their own. The authors remain solely responsible for the originality, accuracy, and integrity of the content, in full accordance with the ethical standards outlined by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).

REFERENCES

1. Lu, J.G., R.I. Swaab and A.D. Galinsky, 2021. Global leaders for global teams: Leaders with multicultural experiences communicate and lead more effectively, especially in multinational teams. *Organ. Sci.*, 33: 1554-1573.
2. Szymanski, M., I. Alon and K. Kalra, 2022. Multilingual and multicultural managers' effects on team performance: Insights from professional football teams. *Multinational Bus. Rev.*, 30: 40-61.
3. Eluère, M., J.P. Heuzé, M. Godfrey, V. Cécé, A. Bartel-Radic and L.J. Martin, 2025. The influence of cultural diversity on organizational citizenship behaviors in professional sport teams: The moderating role of intercultural competence. *Int. J. Cross Cult. Manage.*, 25: 421-442.
4. Grosskopf, S. and C. Barmeyer, 2021. Learning from multi-paradigmatic sensitivity in cross-cultural management? Empirical and theoretical considerations. *Int. J. Cross Cult. Manage.*, 21: 181-202.
5. Sullivan, M.O., J. Vaughan, J.L. Rumbold and K. Davids, 2022. The learning in development research framework for sports organizations. *Sport Educ. Soc.*, 27: 1100-1114.
6. Szymanski, M. and K. Kalra, 2021. Performance effects of interaction between multicultural managers and multicultural team members: Evidence from elite football competitions. *Thunderbird Int. Bus. Rev.*, 63: 235-251.
7. Eluère, M., L.J. Martin, M. Godfrey, C.J. Mallett and J.P. Heuzé, 2023. Birds of different feathers: Coaches' perspectives of cultural diversity and team dynamics in professional sport. *Int. Sport Coaching J.*, 11: 317-327.
8. Ahmad, N., H. Thorpe, J. Richards and A. Marfell, 2020. Building cultural diversity in sport: A critical dialogue with Muslim women and sports facilitators. *Int. J. Sport Policy Polit.*, 12: 637-653.

9. Evans, A.B. and G.U. Pfister, 2020. Women in sports leadership: A systematic narrative review. *Int. Rev. Sociol. Sport*, 56: 317-342.
10. Cheng, Z. and T. Luo, 2024. Cultivating cross-cultural communication skills in sports management English education and its impact on career development. *J. Med. Phys. Educ.*, 1: 50-54.
11. Wang, P., 2025. A novel decision making approach to analyze optimization of key factors in sports culture dissemination using T-spherical fuzzy information. *IEEE Access*, 13: 37737-37747.
12. Meier, H.E. and B. García, 2021. Beyond sports autonomy: A case for collaborative sport governance approaches. *Int. J. Sport Policy Polit.*, 13: 501-516.
13. Hassan, D., N. Takos and I.O. Boyle, 2022. Modernising sport governance amid cultural constraints: A case study from Ireland. *Sport Soc.*, 25: 1957-1967.
14. Dadswell, K., M. Mandicos, E.P. Flowers and C. Hanlon, 2022. Women from culturally diverse backgrounds in sport leadership: A scoping review of facilitators and barriers. *J. Sport Soc. Issues*, 47: 535-564.
15. Strittmatter, A.M., E.Å. Skille, C. Stenling and J. Fahlén, 2024. Structural and cultural othering: An organizational culture perspective on young people's participation in decision-making in sport organizations. *YOUNG*, 32: 360-377.
16. Pape, M. and L. Schoch, 2022. Gendering strategic action fields in sports governance. *Int. Rev. Sociol. Sport*, 58: 996-1013.
17. Braun, V. and V. Clarke, 2006. Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qual. Res. Psychol.*, 3: 77-101.
18. Cairney, J., V. Richard and D. Legg, 2024. Toward a knowledge-synthesis heuristic for sport leaders: The strategic leader synthesis model. *Front. Sports Active Living*, Vol. 6. 10.3389/fspor.2024.1408887.
19. Wilson, P.J. and J. Kiely, 2023. Developing decision-making expertise in professional sports staff: What we can learn from the good judgement project. *Sports Med. Open*, Vol. 9. 10.1186/s40798-023-00629-w.
20. de Oliveira, M.M. and M. Stevanovic, 2024. Interculturality and decision making: Pursuing jointness in online teams. *Intercultural Pragmatics*, 21: 1-32.
21. Mach, M., A.I. Ferreira and A.C.M. Abrantes, 2022. Transformational leadership and team performance in sports teams: A conditional indirect model. *Appl. Psychol.*, 71: 662-694.
22. Hao, Y., 2023. A study of strategic leadership approaches in culturally diverse sports teams. *J. Educ. Humanit. Social Sci.*, 21: 209-213.
23. Garmamo, M., T. Haddera, Z. Tola and M. Jaleta, 2024. Organizational culture, strategic management, and good sports governance in selected Ethiopian Olympic sports federations: Does organizational size matter? *Pamukkale J. Sport Sci.*, 15: 1-32.