

Authentic Leadership in a Context of Cultural Diversity: How Leaders Can Cultivate Inclusion While Staying True to Their Values

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Disclosure Statement :	The authors declare that they have not received any financial support that could have influenced the objectivity of this study. They take full responsibility for any potential plagiarism, the use of artificial intelligence in the writing process, as well as for the results presented in this article.
Conflict of Interest :	The authors report no conflicts of interest.
Cite this article :	ABIROU, K., & ALLOUANI, S. A. (2026). Authentic Leadership in a Context of Cultural Diversity: How Leaders Can Cultivate Inclusion While Staying True to Their Values . <i>International Journal of Accounting, Finance, Auditing, Management and Economics</i> , 6(7), 518–534. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20939591
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Received: 16/05/2026

Accepted: 20/06/2026

International Journal of Accounting, Finance, Auditing, Management and Economics - IJAFAME

ISSN: 2658-8455

Volume 7, Issue 07 (2026)

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Abstract:

In modern organizations, cultural diversity serves as a major strategic asset but also introduces significant operational friction. While academic literature widely supports the benefits of authentic leadership, a critical scientific gap remains regarding how leaders can reconcile personal authenticity with the pragmatic demands of cultural adaptability. Adopting an interpretivist epistemological stance, this paper addresses this limitation through a comprehensive narrative review of the literature. The analysis explores real-world friction points, specifically conflicting communication styles, divergent workplace norms, and clashing value systems. The core argument establishes that authenticity alone is insufficient; leaders must possess high cultural intelligence (CQ) to successfully bridge these gaps. Consequently, this study proposes a new conceptual framework that positions CQ as an essential mediating mechanism. This model formalizes the relationships between the four dimensions of authentic leadership and the cognitive, motivational, and behavioral facets of CQ to drive sustainable inclusive performance. Ultimately, this paper provides concrete, actionable recommendations for managers and human resource practitioners looking to build ethical, adaptive, and culturally responsive leadership frameworks.

Keywords: Authentic Leadership, Cultural Intelligence, Multicultural Teams, Diversity Management, Inclusive Performance.

JEL Classification: M14, M12, M16

Paper type: Theoretical Research

Résumé :

Dans les organisations modernes, la diversité culturelle constitue un atout stratégique majeur bien qu'elle génère parfois des frictions opérationnelles. Si la littérature explore largement les vertus du leadership authentique, il subsiste un vide scientifique concernant les mécanismes pratiques permettant d'articuler l'authenticité d'un dirigeant avec les exigences de l'adaptabilité culturelle. Cet article comble cette lacune en menant une revue narrative de la littérature ancrée dans un positionnement épistémologique interprétatif. L'analyse cible les points de tension concrets tels que les styles de communication opposés, les normes de travail divergentes et les conflits de valeurs. L'argument central démontre que l'authenticité seule est insuffisante et doit être couplée à une forte intelligence culturelle (CQ). À cet effet, l'étude propose un nouveau cadre conceptuel formalisant la CQ comme un mécanisme médiateur indispensable. Ce modèle explicite comment les quatre dimensions du leadership authentique s'articulent avec les capacités cognitives, motivationnelles et comportementales de la CQ pour générer une performance inclusive durable. Enfin, cet article fournit des recommandations pratiques pour les managers et professionnels des ressources humaines désireux de développer un leadership éthique, agile et adapté à la diversité culturelle.

Mots-clés : Leadership authentique, Intelligence culturelle, Équipes multiculturelles, Gestion de la diversité, Performance inclusive.

Classification JEL : M14, M12, M16

Type de papier recherche Théorique

1. Introduction

In the contemporary organizational landscape, the accelerating pace of economic globalization, the proliferation of international strategic alliances, and the intensification of cross-border professional mobility have profoundly transformed the composition of the workforce. Cultural diversity has shifted from being an isolated operational variable to a permanent structural characteristic of modern corporations, transcending traditional geographical boundaries and industry sectors. Within these globalized working environments, the convergence of individuals possessing distinctly different value systems, behavioral codes, communication norms, and underlying cognitive frameworks represents a well-documented source of strategic advantage. Multicultural teams routinely foster heightened collective creativity, stimulate innovation by confronting plural perspectives, and optimize an organization's capacity for complex problem-solving. However, this cultural heterogeneity does not automatically translate into superior collective performance. It frequently introduces substantial operational friction, manifesting as severe communication breakdowns, latent relational conflicts, diminished team cohesion, and ultimately, widespread employee disengagement. Navigating these intricate dynamics places the leadership function at the very center of contemporary managerial concerns, demanding that executives adopt postures capable of simultaneously balancing economic performance with relational equity.

Faced with these challenges, organizational behavior and management literature has focused heavily on leadership styles rooted in ethics and values, among which authentic leadership occupies a preeminent position. Formally conceptualized as a relational model grounded in deep self-awareness, an internalized moral perspective, balanced information processing, and relational transparency, authentic leadership continues to attract significant academic and empirical interest. Prior research consistently demonstrates its capacity to establish a strong climate of trust, reinforce affective organizational commitment, and stimulate discretionary behaviors such as organizational citizenship. However, a critical examination of the current state of the art reveals a profound conceptual tension and a persistent scientific gap. The majority of dominant authentic leadership models rely heavily on universalist, Western-centric assumptions, pre-supposing that the outward expression of a leader's authenticity is received and interpreted homogeneously by all subordinates. Yet, in contexts defined by extensive cultural diversity, the very perception of what constitutes authentic or transparent behavior varies significantly based on a follower's cultural upbringing. A leader who openly expresses operational doubt or vulnerability might be praised as honest and authentic in a low power-distance culture, but misconstrued as weak, incompetent, or structurally unfit in a high power-distance culture.

Consequently, a critical scientific gap remains regarding the precise practical mechanisms through which a leader can reconcile their immutable core authenticity with the pragmatic demands of cross-cultural adaptability. Existing studies describe the isolated virtues of authentic leadership or diversity management, but they omit the formalization of an operational framework that integrates the behavioral flexibility required to pilot heterogeneous teams without alienating or corrupting the leader's core values. To address this limitation, the construct of Cultural Intelligence (CQ), defined as an individual's capability to function and manage effectively in culturally diverse settings, emerges as a vital, missing pivot. While isolated streams of research suggest that cross-cultural competencies are broadly beneficial for international managers, the exact interactive nature between a leader's authenticity, their multidimensional cultural intelligence, and the cultivation of inclusive outcomes within teams has not yet been subjected to a rigorous, integrative conceptualization.

This research positions itself precisely at this theoretical intersection. To formally address this fault line in the literature, this paper formulates the following central research question: *To what*

extent does cultural intelligence constitute an indispensable mediating mechanism between authentic leadership and inclusive outcomes within multicultural teams? To operationalize this overarching problem, three specific sub-questions guide our analytical inquiry:

1. How are the behavioral expressions of the four dimensions of authentic leadership perceived and interpreted through different cultural filters?
2. In what ways do the cognitive, metacognitive, motivational, and behavioral facets of cultural intelligence enable a leader to modulate their style without violating their underlying core authenticity?
3. Through what specific processes does this conceptual synergy drive the emergence of inclusive performance, specifically regarding psychological safety, perceived equity, and creative collaboration?

To resolve these questions, this study delineates explicit boundaries regarding its analytical scope. The field covered by this literature review focuses specifically on formal organizations operating in highly diverse work environments, including multinational corporations, global virtual project teams, and contemporary enterprises exposed to significant internal cultural mixing. Geographically and conceptually, this research deliberately aims to de-center traditional Anglo-Saxon theoretical perspectives by selecting and placing into dialogue empirical and theoretical studies conducted across both Western and non-Western cultural contexts, thereby ensuring a thorough assessment of the generalizability and transferability of the conclusions. Methodologically, the article adopts a transparent, interpretivist approach by executing a critical narrative literature review. This approach relies on the rigorous analysis of a corpus of major peer-reviewed scientific contributions, selected based on their methodological rigor, to synthesize existing knowledge and deduce new conceptual pathways.

The original scientific contribution of this article is threefold and distinguishes itself clearly from established reference frameworks. First, in contrast to early foundational models of authentic leadership, this work provides distinct value-added insight by inserting cultural contingency as an imperative boundary condition for relational effectiveness, thereby breaking the long-standing assumption of universality. Second, the study enriches the conceptualization of cultural intelligence by moving beyond its treatment as a mere isolated technical competency, instead framing it as a dynamic, mediating mechanism that operationalizes and translates a leader's ethical intentions into responsive, inclusive practices. Third, this paper proposes an entirely new, integrative theoretical model, supported by formalized research propositions, providing an analytical grid for scholars and an actionable strategic lever for human resource practitioners managing diversity.

To deploy this argument systematically, the article is structured in a clear progression. First, we outline the methodological framework of the narrative review alongside the scientific criteria used to select the corpus. Second, we present a comprehensive, critical literature review structured around the conceptualization of authentic leadership, the dimensions of cultural intelligence, and the challenges inherent to diversity. Third, we synthesize these theoretical streams to formalize our integrative model and state our research propositions. Finally, we discuss the theoretical and practical implications of this framework, while explicitly detailing the epistemological limitations of the approach and outlining future pathways for empirical research.

1. Litterature Review

1.1. Authentic Leadership

- ***Theoretical Foundations of Authentic Leadership***

Authentic leadership has emerged as a crucial paradigm within contemporary organizational behavior, focusing heavily on a leader's genuine nature, moral grounding, and relational

integrity. Authentic leadership can be thoroughly understood through an integrated literature review as noted by Oh et al. (2018). This concept is primarily examined through four distinct yet deeply interrelated components originally identified by Avolio and Gardner (2005). To systematically track the historical development and diverse operationalizations of this construct, it is necessary to examine how its definitions have expanded over time. Early conceptualizations emphasized personal authenticity and life stories, whereas modern approaches focus heavily on measurable behavioral components and relational dynamics within organizational frameworks. To provide a structured and transparent roadmap of these foundational approaches, a comprehensive synthesis of the key conceptualizations across literature is detailed below.

Table 1: Definitions of Authentic Leadership According to Literature

Conceptualization	Key Details	Author(s)	Year
General Definition	Authentic leadership is characterized as a complex and ethical mechanism between individuals working together to accomplish a shared purpose.	Margaret M. Hopkins	2015
Bill George's Definition	Authentic leaders lead with heart and head, pursue their mission with passion, practice values, establish meaningful relationships with followers, and exhibit self-discipline.	Bill George	2003
Kernis's Dimensions of Authenticity	- Self-Awareness: Understanding one's strengths, weaknesses, core values, emotions, and beliefs. - Unbiased Processing: The ability to process information without bias. - Relational Authenticity: The ability to present one's true self to others. - Authentic Behavior: Acting in accordance with one's true self.	Kernis	2003
Relational Transparency	The ability of leaders to openly express their emotions and thoughts while managing inappropriate displays of emotion.	Gardner et al.	2005
Internal Moral Perspective	Authentic leaders are sensitive to their core values and moral standards, guiding their ethical decision-making.	Coxen et al.	2016
Objective Analysis of Information	The ability and willingness of leaders to consider and evaluate the opinions of others to reach fair conclusions.	Neider and Schriesheim	2011
Comprehensive Definition	Emphasizes the importance of self-awareness and ethical behavior in authentic leadership.	George	2003
Psychological Capacities and Ethical Climate	Focuses on the psychological capacities and ethical environment that foster authentic leadership.	Avolio & Gardner	2005
Process-Oriented Definition	Describes authentic leadership as a process that promotes self-awareness and positive behaviors among leaders and followers.	Walumbwa et al.	2008
Characteristics of Authentic Leaders	Highlights leaders' genuine nature and their ability to foster trust.	Luthans & Avolio	2003
Life Stories Perspective	Emphasizes how leaders' life stories shape their authentic leadership style.	Shamir & Eilam	2005

Source: Compiled by the author based on literature review (2026)

• Core Components and Cross-Cultural Boundary Conditions

Building upon the conceptual evolution illustrated in Table 1, the first core component of this model is self-knowledge. Authentic leadership necessitates a high degree of self-awareness, which is crucial for maintaining authenticity. This self-awareness encompasses a leader's understanding of their strengths, weaknesses, and motivations, as well as their recognition of how others perceive their leadership. This includes both inner and outer capacities, where the inner capacity refers to the leader's awareness of their mental states such as beliefs, desires, and emotions, while the outer capacity reflects how leaders project their self-image to others. Leaders with high self-awareness leverage their self-knowledge and self-image to enhance their leadership effectiveness (Arici et al., 2020).

The second component involves an internalized moral perspective, which dictates self-regulation through three key processes, namely establishing internal moral standards, evaluating discrepancies between these standards and actual or potential outcomes, and identifying intentional actions to resolve any inconsistencies. This internalized moral perspective can also be viewed as the alignment of a leader's values with their intentions and actions (Gardner et al., 2011). In this context, individuals possess the ability to control external influences on their decision-making, ensuring consistency between their moral perspectives, actions, and beliefs (Margiadi & Wibowo, 2020).

The third component is balanced processing, which is defined by Kernis (2003) as unbiased processing. This component signifies the objective evaluation of all relevant information prior to decision-making (Neider & Schriesheim, 2011). Kernis describes it as not denying, distorting, exaggerating, or ignoring private knowledge or external evaluative information. Balanced processing is integral to a leader's integrity and character, significantly influencing their decisions and actions (Luthans & Avolio, 2003).

The final component involves relational transparency, which entails presenting one's authentic self to others and sharing true thoughts and feelings in a clear and honest manner (Avolio et al., 2004). Relational transparency is achieved when individuals openly share their core emotions, ideas, and tendencies with one another (Margiadi & Wibowo, 2020). To build organizational trust, authentic leaders depend on openness and self-disclosure in their close relationships with others (Banks et al., 2016).

Prior empirical work consistently associates these four dimensions with positive organizational outcomes, notably heightened employee performance, elevated affective commitment, and enhanced workplace creativity. Scholars frequently utilize Social Exchange Theory to explain these dynamics, suggesting that when followers witness a leader behaving with high integrity and transparency, they feel a social obligation to reciprocate by exerting extra effort, displaying higher organizational citizenship, and offering innovative solutions. However, as the synthesis of the literature indicates, the external application of these four pillars is not immune to situational limits. A critical gap in early models is the omission of cultural context, a boundary condition that dictates how these dimensions are actually interpreted by multicultural teams.

1.2. Cultural Diversity and Cross-Cultural Frameworks

Cultural diversity in organizational settings is traditionally conceptualized as the representation of people with distinctly different group affiliations of cultural significance within a single social system. This heterogeneity operates across primary dimensions such as race, age, and ethnicity, alongside secondary and tertiary dimensions including thinking styles, underlying values, and deeply embedded group norms. While this diversity is widely celebrated as an intangible asset that drives collective innovation and creative problem-solving, it simultaneously introduces substantial operational friction, communication barriers, and relational conflicts within teams. When individuals from disparate backgrounds collaborate, their deeply socialized assumptions about hierarchy, authority, and task execution inevitably collide.

To systematically navigate and decode these behavioral collisions, leadership scholars must anchor their analyses in established cross-cultural frameworks, most notably Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions and Triandis's Individualism-Collectivism constructs. Hofstede's framework illuminates how core values vary across societies, providing particular insight through dimensions such as power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and individualism versus collectivism. Power distance dictates how less powerful members of an organization expect and accept unequal distributions of authority, which heavily influences employee deference to leadership. Uncertainty avoidance measures the extent to which team members feel threatened

by ambiguity, directly impacting their reliance on rigid rules, clear structures, and explicit communication.

Triandis further expands on the deep social implications of these differences by demonstrating that in individualistic cultures, identity is defined by personal achievements, emotional independence, and individual autonomy. Conversely, in collectivistic cultures, individuals prioritize group harmony, consensus, and loyalty to the collective over personal desires, viewing themselves as interdependent parts of a larger social unit. These cultural variations fundamentally alter how leadership behaviors are perceived, processed, and evaluated by subordinates. An identical leadership action can yield entirely opposite interpretations depending on the cultural lens of the follower. This variation creates a highly complex landscape for managers attempting to lead teams that bridge multiple cultural boundaries, as behavior that signals strength in one culture may signal a lack of control in another.

1.3. The Interplay Between Authenticity and Cultural Contingencies

When authentic leadership is introduced into a culturally diverse workspace, a profound conceptual and practical paradox arises. The core tenets of authentic leadership, which were largely developed within a Western, individualistic academic paradigm, assume that the open display of one's inner values and emotions is universally recognized as a positive trait. However, cross-cultural literature indicates that the very definition of authenticity is contextually contingent and heavily moderated by cultural expectations.

For example, Hofstede's power distance dimension directly challenges the universal application of relational transparency. In low power distance, individualistic cultures, a leader who practices relational transparency by openly admitting mistakes or sharing operational uncertainties is viewed as honest, egalitarian, and authentic. In sharp contrast, within high power distance and collectivistic settings, employees often expect their leaders to serve as decisive, infallible authority figures. In such contexts, a leader displaying the exact same transparency might be misconstrued as weak, incompetent, or lacking structural control, which severely undermines their institutional credibility.

Similarly, the practice of balanced processing, which encourages open debate and the inclusion of divergent viewpoints, can run contrary to high collectivist norms. Followers from deeply collectivist backgrounds may perceive public disagreement or open feedback sessions as a direct threat to group harmony and a violation of face-saving protocols. Therefore, a rigid, unyielding application of authentic leadership behaviors without considering these cultural contingencies can inadvertently trigger alienation, psychological unsafety, and structurally misaligned expectations within multicultural teams.

1.4. Cultural Intelligence as an Adaptive Capability

To reconcile the tension between staying true to one's moral core and adjusting to diverse cultural expectations, leaders must possess Cultural Intelligence, commonly abbreviated as CQ. First defined by Earley and Ang (2003), cultural intelligence represents an individual's capability to function and manage effectively in culturally diverse settings. Building upon the structural models established by Ang and Van Dyne (2008), CQ is recognized not as a rigid personality trait, but as an adaptable, multi-dimensional capability consisting of four distinct facets, which are cognitive, metacognitive, motivational, and behavioral CQ.

Cognitive CQ involves a structural knowledge of cultural norms, values, practices, and conventions in different societies, allowing leaders to understand the macro-level differences in communication styles and organizational systems. Metacognitive CQ reflects a leader's conscious awareness and ability to adjust their cultural knowledge during active cross-cultural interactions, enabling them to map out alternative perspectives and question their own ethnocentric assumptions. Motivational CQ measures the leader's drive, interest, and self-

efficacy to direct attention and energy toward adapting across cultural boundaries, which provides the internal emotional resilience needed to endure intercultural stress and potential setbacks. Finally, behavioral CQ is the pragmatic capability to exhibit culturally appropriate verbal and non-verbal actions, adjusting speech rates, linguistic tones, gestures, and facial expressions to match local expectations.

Within global leadership discourse, CQ is recognized as a vital competency that prevents leaders from becoming cultural chameleons who completely abandon their identity. Instead, high cultural intelligence equips a manager with the cognitive complexity and behavioral agility required to translate their unchanging, authentic moral intentions into culturally responsive and highly respectful workplace behaviors.

2. Methodology

2.1. Research Design and PRISMA Framework Alignment

To address the intersection of authentic leadership and cultural intelligence within diverse teams, this study utilizes a qualitative literature synthesis governed by a structured search protocol. Rather than providing a purely descriptive or informal narrative summary of past works, this review adopts the rigorous reporting steps outlined in the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses framework, commonly known as the PRISMA statement. While this paper does not perform statistical meta-analyses due to its qualitative and conceptual objectives, aligning the document selection process with PRISMA protocols ensures complete transparency, scientific replication, and an objective, auditable trail of literature selection.

2.2. Search Strategy and Information Sources

The identification of relevant literature was executed through systematic electronic database queries across three primary academic indexing services, namely Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar. These information sources were prioritized because they index the highest-impact journals specializing in organizational behavior, international management, and human resource management.

To capture the full conceptual scope of the research question, specific search strings were developed using Boolean operators to bridge the independent and dependent variables. The precise keyword strings utilized during the database query phase were structured as follows.

- For database queries targeting leadership dynamics, the exact search string was ("authentic leadership" OR "ethical leadership") AND ("cultural intelligence" OR "CQ").
- For database queries targeting team outcomes, the exact search string was ("authentic leadership") AND ("multicultural teams" OR "cultural diversity" OR "inclusive performance").

The initial search parameters were restricted to peer-reviewed academic journal articles published in English, ensuring that the filtered data met established international scientific quality thresholds.

2.3. Study Selection and Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria

To ensure an unbiased and objective filtering of the retrieved literature, explicit eligibility benchmarks were established prior to reviewing the titles, abstracts, and full texts of the papers. These clear screening boundaries are organized and detailed in the comparative framework below.

Table 2: Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria for Literature Selection

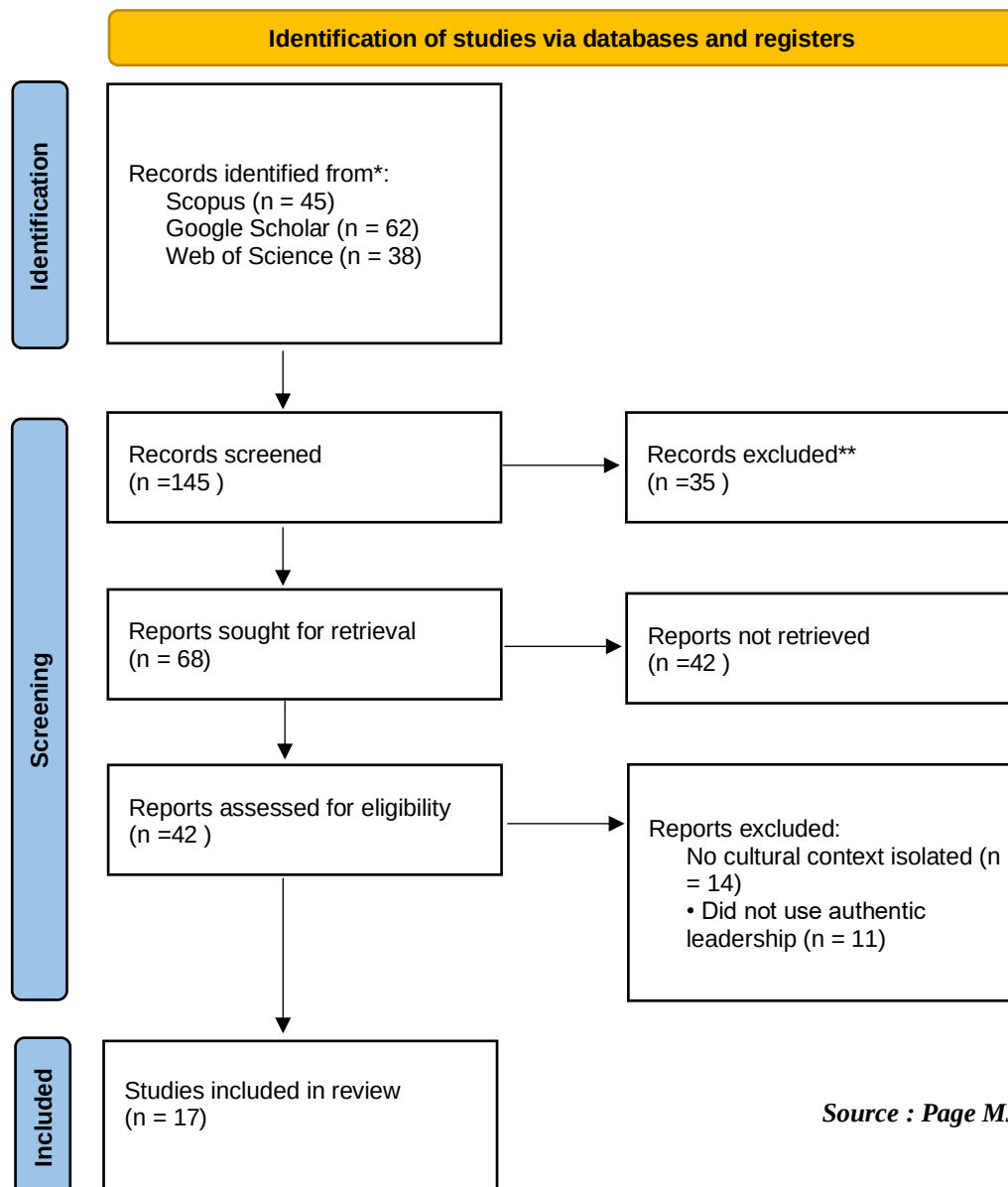
Selection Dimension	Explicit Inclusion Criteria	Explicit Exclusion Criteria
Document Type	Peer-reviewed articles, conceptual papers, and empirical studies	Conference abstracts, non-peer-reviewed working papers, and book reviews
Core Concepts	Direct focus on authentic leadership, cultural intelligence, or multicultural team dynamics	General leadership frameworks without cultural context or non-organizational diversity studies
Language	Articles published in English	Articles published other languages than English
Methodology	Rigorous qualitative, quantitative, mixed-methods, or foundational conceptual designs	Studies lacking transparent methodologies or clear analytical frameworks

Source: Authors

2.4. The Literature Filtering Process (PRISMA Flow Diagram)

The systematic tracking of records via the screening process is modeled after the standardized PRISMA study flow template. This transparent filtering process records the exact numerical progression from initial database discovery to final study integration, detailing how the final refined corpus of highly relevant articles was systematically isolated.

Figure 1. PRISMA flow diagram depicting the identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and inclusion of studies in the qualitative synthesis.



Source : Page MJ, et al. BMJ 202

2.5. Data Extraction and Synthesis Protocol

The finalized corpus of selected literature was subjected to a rigorous qualitative content analysis using a thematic coding approach. This systematic process involved reading the articles line by line to extract key data points, which included author names, publication years, core definitions of authentic leadership, dimensions of cultural intelligence, and reported outcomes in diverse settings.

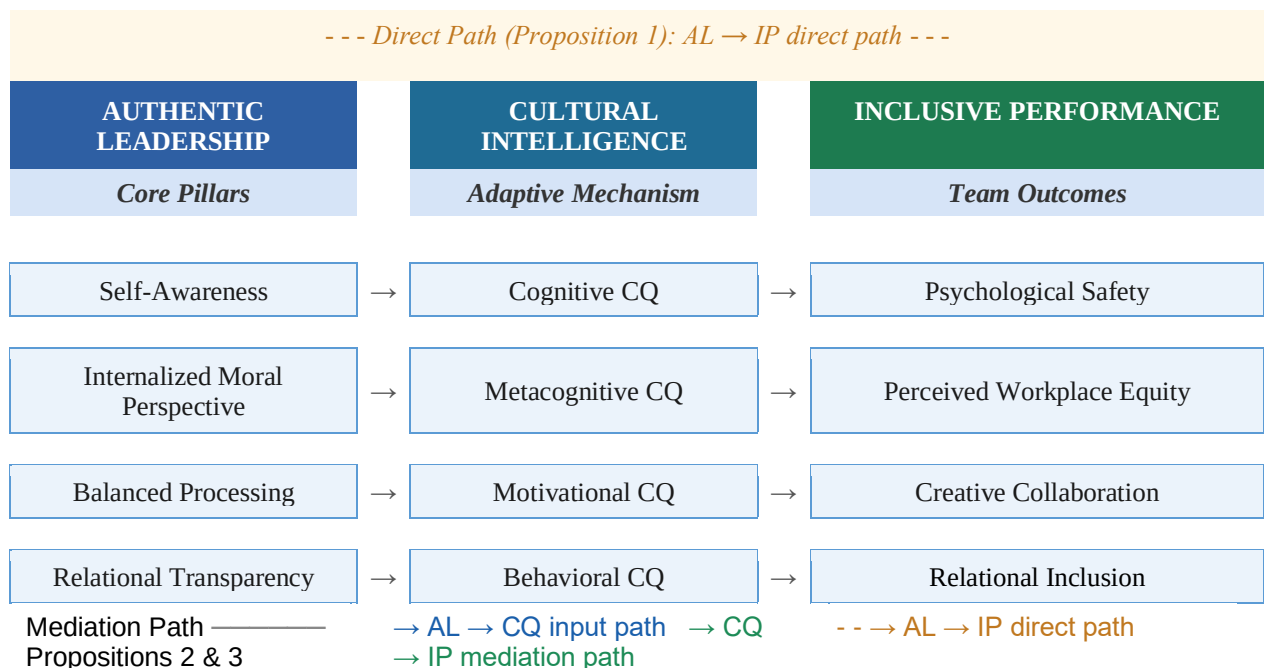
Following data extraction, a conceptual coding process was executed to organize the findings into three distinct analytical themes. The first theme mapped the direct relationships and performance outcomes of authentic leadership within traditional, homogeneous environments. The second theme clustered the specific instances where cultural differences clapped against or disrupted authentic leadership dimensions, utilizing Hofstede's and Triandis's models as decoding filters. The third theme tracked the operationalization of cultural intelligence as an adaptive capability that helps bridge these behavioral gaps. This thematic organization directly facilitated the synthesis of existing knowledge and provided the empirical grounding necessary to formalize the original conceptual model and research propositions presented in the following section.

3. Results and Findings

3.1. Formalization of the Conceptual Framework

The systematic synthesis of the selected literature reveals that the traditional, direct relationship between authentic leadership and positive team outcomes is fundamentally disrupted when introduced into culturally diverse environments. To resolve these cross-cultural frictions, this study formalizes an integrated conceptual model that positions Cultural Intelligence (CQ) as a vital mediating mechanism.

Figure 2. Conceptual framework depicting the relationships between authentic leadership, cultural intelligence (mediator), and inclusive performance outcomes.



Source: Developed by the authors (2026)

Rather than treating a leader's authenticity and their adaptive capabilities as competing traits, the model demonstrates that they function in tandem. A leader's core authentic values provide the ethical anchor, while their cultural intelligence serves as the execution tool that translates

those values into culturally appropriate behaviors. This structured interaction systematically drives the emergence of inclusive performance within multicultural teams.

To synthesize these theoretical links visually, this study maps out a testable path model. Figure 2 above provides a conceptual illustration of how a leader's underlying authenticity interacts with adaptive capabilities to produce inclusive outcomes.

3.2. Formulation of Core Research Propositions

To operationalize this conceptual model and provide future empirical researchers with a testable framework, three distinct research propositions are developed below, moving from independent inputs to the mediating and dependent variables.

3.2.1. The Vulnerability of Unmediated Authenticity

The baseline components of authentic leadership, including relational transparency and an internalized moral perspective, rely on shared behavioral expectations between leaders and followers (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). However, cross-cultural management frameworks indicate that behaviors signaling honesty or transparency in individualistic settings are frequently misinterpreted in collectivistic or high power-distance cultures. Without an adaptive capability, a leader who strictly enforces a singular, ethnocentric expression of authenticity will inadvertently trigger misunderstandings, reduce team cohesion, and lower overall collaboration. This leads to the formulation of the first proposition.

Proposition 1: In culturally diverse teams, the direct relationship between a leader's authentic leadership behaviors and team performance is negatively moderated by the cultural distance between the leader and the team members, such that higher cultural distance reduces direct leadership effectiveness when adaptive competencies are absent.

3.2.2. Cultural Intelligence as an Indispensable Mediator

To overcome the limitations of unmediated authenticity, leaders must leverage the multi-dimensional facets of cultural intelligence (Earley & Ang, 2003). Cognitive and metacognitive CQ allow a leader to structurally map out the differing expectations of their team, while motivational and behavioral CQ provide the drive and behavioral flexibility required to alter their outward communication style (Walumbwa et al., 2008). High CQ allows a leader to practice balanced processing and relational transparency in a way that respects local cultural protocols without compromising their underlying, internal moral standards. This interaction positions CQ not as an independent variable, but as a crucial bridge, leading to the second proposition.

Proposition 2: Cultural intelligence acts as a significant mediating variable between authentic leadership and team outcomes, serving as the psychological and behavioral mechanism that translates a leader's authentic intentions into culturally responsive managerial actions.

3.2.3. Driving Inclusive Performance Outcomes

The ultimate goal of combining authentic leadership with cultural intelligence is the generation of inclusive performance, which manifests practically through psychological safety, perceived workplace equity, and creative collaboration. When team members observe that an authentic leader actively adapts to their cultural norms through high behavioral CQ, they experience a stronger sense of value and structural respect. This behavior satisfies the expectations of Social Exchange Theory, encouraging employees from minority cultural backgrounds to speak up, share innovative ideas, and engage in risk-taking without fear of rejection. This cumulative process leads to the final proposition.

Proposition 3: The synergy between authentic leadership and cultural intelligence positively influences inclusive performance within multicultural teams by systematically enhancing individual psychological safety and cultivating a climate of perceived relational equity.

4. Conclusion and implications

This study marks a significant conceptual advancement in the field of organizational behavior by critically unpacking the boundary conditions of authentic leadership within culturally diverse environments. By moving beyond the traditional, Western-centric paradigm that treats authenticity as a universally understood virtue, this paper addresses a critical gap in early models formalized by Walumbwa et al. (2008). The primary theoretical contribution of this work lies in the structural integration of authentic leadership and cultural intelligence into a single, cohesive framework.

Rather than viewing a leader's core values and their behavioral adaptation as contradictory concepts, this framework positions them as deeply complementary forces. This study demonstrates that while a leader's authentic conviction provides an unchanging ethical anchor, their cultural intelligence acts as the cognitive and behavioral mechanism required to express those values effectively across cultural boundaries. By framing cultural intelligence as an indispensable mediator, the study provides a nuanced, context-sensitive model that explains why unmediated authenticity often fails in multicultural settings, thereby laying a robust foundation for more culturally inclusive leadership theories.

Beyond its theoretical insights, the integrated framework offers highly actionable strategies for global organizations, particularly for human resource professionals' task-managed with talent acquisition, executive training, and leadership succession planning. Traditional recruitment protocols that evaluate candidates based solely on standard leadership competencies are increasingly insufficient for multinational teams. Instead, selection panels should utilize multi-dimensional assessment tools designed by Earley and Ang (2003) to measure cognitive, metacognitive, motivational, and behavioral cultural intelligence alongside standard authenticity metrics.

Furthermore, corporate training programs must be fundamentally restructured to move away from rigid, one-size-fits-all leadership modules. HR departments should implement experiential, cross-cultural simulation workshops that explicitly teach leaders how to practice relational transparency and balanced processing without violating local communication protocols or face-saving norms. By actively developing a corporate culture that pairs internal moral standards with high behavioral agility, global organizations can systematically reduce operational friction, cultivate psychological safety, and unlock the full innovative potential of their diverse workforces.

While this review establishes a rigorous conceptual bridge between authenticity and cultural agility, certain limitations must be acknowledged, which simultaneously offer exciting pathways for future empirical inquiry. Because this study relies on a qualitative synthesis of existing literature through a PRISMA-guided protocol, the proposed model remains conceptual and requires empirical validation across diverse organizational sectors.

Future researchers should operationalize the three core propositions formulated in this paper by launching quantitative, longitudinal studies that collect multi-source data from both managers and their subordinates. Specifically, researchers could deploy hierarchical linear modeling to track how a leader's self-reported cultural intelligence mediates the relationship between their authentic behaviors and the team-reported levels of psychological safety over time. Additionally, comparative studies across distinct geographic regions could investigate whether specific cultural dimensions, such as high uncertainty avoidance or high institutional collectivism, exert a stronger moderating pressure on certain components of authentic

leadership. Such empirical efforts will critically refine the boundaries of our framework and continue to advance the global discourse on inclusive organizational performance.

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