

DIVERSITY AND GLOBAL LEADERSHIP EFFECTIVENESS:

A Qualitative Case Study of Cross-Cultural Collaboration
Between Gabon Oil Company
(GOC) and Tullow Oil UK



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction and background	4
Problem statement	4
Objectives of the project	4
Literature review	5
Methodology (Qualitative case study)	5
Results / Findings	6
Discussion	6
Recommendations	7
Conclusion	7
References	7
Appendix	9

Abstract

This research project explores how diversity—specifically cultural, generational, and professional diversity—affects global leadership effectiveness through a qualitative case study of the collaboration between Gabon Oil Company (GOC) and Tullow Oil UK. The setting involves a major financial and operational data migration project in which miscommunication, cultural norms, leadership differences, and resistance to change undermined project execution. The paper identifies the leadership challenges that emerged, analyzes their causes using established leadership and cross-cultural frameworks, and evaluates how leadership style impacts team effectiveness in multicultural environments. Findings reveal that ineffective leadership and rigid adherence to national norms hindered collaboration and delayed project outcomes. The study proposes integrating transformational, adaptive, coaching, strategic, and cross-cultural leadership approaches to leverage diversity as a strategic advantage. Recommendations include structured cultural intelligence development, leadership alignment workshops, multilingual communication protocols, and inclusive governance models. The study concludes that diversity can significantly enhance global leadership effectiveness when leaders intentionally apply culturally intelligent, adaptive, and relational leadership styles.

Keywords: global leadership, diversity, multicultural teams, cross-cultural communication, adaptive leadership, transformational leadership



Introduction and background

The increasing globalization of operations within the oil and gas sector demands leadership capable of effectively managing diverse teams, navigating cultural norms, and ensuring smooth cross border collaboration (House et al., 2004). In this context, Gabon Oil Company's (GOC) partnership with Tullow Oil UK during a high stakes data migration project presented both an opportunity for modernization and a challenge for leadership alignment. The project involved employees from multiple cultural, generational, and professional backgrounds working across different organizational systems and leadership philosophies. As diversity became more visible in communication behaviors, decision-making processes, and resistance to digital transformation, the project exposed critical gaps in global leadership competence, cultural intelligence, and preparedness for change management (Earley & Ang, 2003; Kotter, 2012). Understanding these dynamics is essential for improving leadership effectiveness in international collaborative environments.

Problem statement

The GOC–Tullow Oil UK data migration encountered persistent breakdowns in communication and coordination driven by cross cultural differences, leadership misalignment, and resistance to digital process change. Divergent norms around hierarchy and communication (e.g., direct vs. indirect styles) reduced psychological safety and impeded joint problem solving, while a directive, transactional approach clashed with expectations for participative engagement and empowerment (House et al., 2004; Schein & Schein, 2017). These dynamics were compounded by generational disparities in technology adoption and a lack of structured change management, leading to delays, role ambiguity, and declining morale despite strong technical capabilities (Earley & Ang, 2003; Kotter, 2012).

Objectives of the project

This project seeks to analyze how diversity—particularly cultural, generational, and professional—shapes global leadership effectiveness in the GOC–Tullow context by identifying the root causes of miscommunication, leadership conflict, and change resistance, and by evaluating their effects on execution quality and team climate (House et al., 2004; Schein & Schein, 2017). The study further aims to assess how leadership styles influence collaboration and outcomes, and to derive evidence based practices—grounded in transformational, adaptive, and culturally intelligent leadership—for leveraging diversity to improve performance in multinational IT enabled transformations (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Earley & Ang, 2003).

Literature review

Research on global leadership emphasizes that effective cross cultural collaboration relies heavily on leaders' ability to adapt behavior, interpret cultural cues, and foster inclusive team climates (House et al., 2004). Cultural Intelligence (CQ), defined as the capacity to function across cultural contexts, has been shown to enhance communication accuracy and reduce conflict in multicultural teams (Earley & Ang, 2003). Transformational leadership supports collaborative innovation by motivating followers, promoting shared vision, and strengthening relational dynamics—qualities that are particularly useful in diverse work environments (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Adaptive leadership provides another relevant framework, focusing on diagnosing system-level issues and mobilizing teams through complex change (Heifetz, 1994). Meanwhile, studies on organizational culture highlight how misalignment between national and corporate cultural expectations can impede collaboration, create conflict, and undermine project execution (Schein & Schein, 2017). Together, these perspectives underscore the need for leaders who can navigate diversity effectively to sustain performance in global organizations.

Methodology (Qualitative case study)

This study utilized a qualitative case study design to examine leadership effectiveness in a real cross cultural project between GOC and Tullow Oil UK. Qualitative case studies are well suited for exploring complex social dynamics, particularly in organizational settings characterized by cultural diversity and leadership interaction (Yin, 2018). Data for the analysis were drawn from direct observations, informal interviews, project documentation, and reflective notes collected during the data migration initiative. These sources enabled triangulation and a deeper understanding of how communication patterns, leadership behaviors, and cultural norms influenced project outcomes. Thematic coding procedures were applied to identify recurring patterns related to miscommunication, leadership conflict, resistance to change, and generational differences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This approach provided a robust foundation for interpreting how diversity and leadership style shaped team dynamics and project performance.

Results / Findings

As documented in Appendix A, the analysis revealed several interconnected findings demonstrating how diversity influenced leadership effectiveness during the GOC–Tullow collaboration. First, communication breakdowns emerged as a result of differing cultural norms regarding directness, hierarchy, and information sharing expectations, consistent with cross cultural communication research (House et al., 2004). Second, leadership misalignment became apparent when the UK project manager’s transactional, directive approach conflicted with GOC employees’ expectations of participative, relational engagement, thereby reducing collaboration and psychological safety (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Third, generational differences significantly shaped adaptation to new digital workflows, with senior staff expressing higher levels of resistance and uncertainty than younger colleagues, reflecting broader patterns in organizational change literature (Kotter, 2012). These factors collectively created role ambiguity, slowed decision making, and weakened team morale, ultimately delaying the data migration schedule.

Discussion

The findings underscore the importance of culturally aware and adaptive leadership in global collaborative settings. The cultural and generational tensions observed in this case demonstrate that traditional leadership styles—particularly rigid, transactional approaches—are insufficient for managing diverse international teams effectively (Bass & Riggio, 2006; House et al., 2004). Instead, leaders must cultivate cultural intelligence, flexibility, and the ability to interpret behavioral cues across different cultural frameworks (Earley & Ang, 2003). The resistance to change among senior staff further underscores the need for structured change management and inclusive communication to build buy-in for technological transformation (Kotter, 2012). Ultimately, the results reinforce that leadership effectiveness in diverse settings depends not only on technical expertise but also on relational competence, adaptability, and cross cultural sensitivity.



Recommendations

To enhance future collaborations, leaders should institutionalize cross cultural capability building and multilingual communication protocols, clarify decision rights and role boundaries, and adopt a hybrid leadership approach that combines transformational empowerment with situational structure for operational reliability (Bass & Riggio, 2006; House et al., 2004). These measures should be embedded within a formal change framework to address barriers to generational adoption and sustain behavior change, while coaching oriented practices reinforce inclusion, continuous feedback, and psychological safety across teams (Kotter, 2012; Schein & Schein, 2017).

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that diversity can either enhance or undermine the effectiveness of global leadership, depending on how leaders interpret and respond to cultural, generational, and professional differences. The GOC–Tullow Oil UK migration project revealed how misaligned leadership styles, communication gaps, and unaddressed resistance to change negatively impacted collaboration and performance. As global organizations increasingly depend on multicultural teams, leaders must integrate transformational, adaptive, and culturally intelligent behaviors to navigate complexity and promote inclusive coordination (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Earley & Ang, 2003). Strengthening global leadership competencies is therefore essential for successful cross border operations and sustained organizational resilience.

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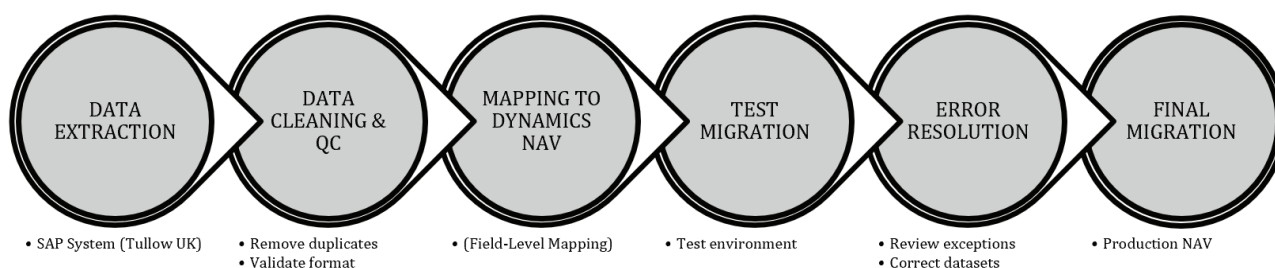
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Appendix

Appendix A: Observational Notes from GOC–Tullow Oil UK Data Migration Project

Date	Context	Observation	Leadership / Diversity Insight
12 Sept 2025	Virtual Data Migration Workshop (Teams)	Tullow UK consultant used a very direct, task-oriented tone. Several GOC employees appeared uncomfortable, avoided speaking, and did not ask clarifying questions.	Cultural differences in power distance and communication style created psychological safety issues.
15 Sept 2025	Internal GOC Pre-Workshop Briefing	Older employees expressed frustration with the migration plan, suggesting “SAP has worked for years; why change now?”	Generational resistance to change; low digital confidence among senior staff.
19 Sept 2025	Cross-Functional Meeting (IT & Finance)	GOC analyst proposed an idea but was shut down by UK project manager: “We don’t have time for that discussion.” Analyst disengaged afterward.	Leadership conflict: transactional vs. collaborative styles.
21 Sept 2025	Review of Documentation Process	Younger technicians updated cloud folders; older employees continued using printed binders.	Preferred workflow tied to generational identity and comfort levels.
26 Sept 2025	Migration Progress Review	Two teams duplicated the same extraction task due to unclear responsibility.	Lack of role clarity; breakdown in cross-team communication.
2 Oct 2025	End-of-Week Debrief	Team morale low. Several employees expressed confusion about decision-making authority and contradictory instructions.	Leadership misalignment weakened trust and execution.

Appendix B: Migration Workflow Diagram: GOC–Tullow Oil UK Migration Workflow (Simplified)



Appendix C: Sample Interview/Reflection Notes: Interview and Reflection Excerpts (Qualitative Data)

1. Excerpt from informal interview with GOC Analyst

“Sometimes I don’t know whether I should follow what the UK consultant says or what my manager expects. Both give different instructions. I want to contribute, but I don’t feel heard.”

Interpretation:

Conflicting leadership styles reduced engagement and trust.

2. Excerpt from conversation with senior GOC employee (Finance)

“I’ve worked with SAP for over fifteen years. This Microsoft system feels unfamiliar. Nobody explained why we need to change.”

Interpretation:

Unmanaged change led to resistance; lack of communication on rationale for transformation.

3. Excerpt from Tullow Oil UK consultant

“I assumed the GOC team would speak up if they didn’t understand something. I didn’t realize silence meant discomfort.”

Interpretation:

Low cultural awareness of indirect communication norms in Central African business culture.

4. Personal reflective note (your perspective as a leader)

“Looking back, I would have begun the collaboration with cross-cultural alignment sessions and established clear communication norms. The leadership gap between directive and participative styles created unnecessary friction.”

Interpretation:

Transformational and adaptive leadership could have reduced tension and improved collaboration.

5. Excerpt from younger IT technician

“I love the new system. SAP is more modern, but the environment feels tense because senior staff refuse to adapt.”

Interpretation:

Generational diversity influenced innovation adoption rates.