

# Cultural Diversity and Labor Productivity: A Case Study of Multiculturalism in the Construction of EastVillage Town Center, Austin, Texas

## Diversidad cultural y productividad laboral: un estudio de caso sobre el multiculturalismo en la construcción del EastVillage Town Center, Austin, Texas

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### ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the influence of multiculturalism on labor productivity during the construction of the EastVillage Town Center in Austin, Texas, through the lens of the complexity paradigm. It posits that multiculturalism, when fostered by inclusive leadership, effective intercultural communication, and diversity-oriented policies, can enhance productivity by optimizing task coordination, strengthening team cohesion, and elevating construction quality. Employing a qualitative ethnographic design, the research integrates document analysis with interviews involving managers, contractors, and workers from diverse cultural backgrounds. Findings indicate that cultural diversity emerges as a strategic advantage when coupled with transparent communication and robust inclusion mechanisms, while challenges persist in addressing stereotypes and divergent work styles. Insights contribute to more sophisticated diversity management strategies in globalized urban construction contexts.

**Key words:** multiculturalism, complexity paradigm, intercultural communication, EastVillage Town Center, Cadence McShane Construction Company, construction industry.

### RESUMEN

Este estudio analiza la influencia del multiculturalismo en la productividad laboral durante la construcción del EastVillage Town Center en Austin, Texas, desde la perspectiva del paradigma de la complejidad. Plantea que el multiculturalismo, cuando fomenta un liderazgo inclusivo, una comunicación intercultural eficaz y políticas orientadas a la diversidad, puede mejorar la productividad al optimizar la coordinación de tareas, fortalecer la cohesión del equipo y elevar la calidad de la construcción. Mediante un diseño etnográfico cualitativo, la investigación integra el análisis de documentos con entrevistas a gerentes, contratistas y trabajadores de diversos orígenes culturales. Los resultados indican que la diversidad cultural se convierte en

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una ventaja estratégica cuando se combina con una comunicación transparente y mecanismos de inclusión sólidos, mientras que persisten los retos al abordar los estereotipos y los estilos de trabajo divergentes. Las conclusiones contribuyen a desarrollar estrategias más sofisticadas para la gestión de la diversidad en entornos de construcción urbana globalizados.

**Palabras clave:** multiculturalismo, paradigma de la complejidad, comunicación intercultural, EastVillage Town Center, Cadence McShane Construction Company, industria de la construcción.

## INTRODUCTION

Contemporary research draws on multiple epistemological approaches to analyze complex social phenomena from diverse angles. In sociocultural studies, understanding multiculturalism, pluriculturalism, and interculturalism is crucial for interpreting social and productive dynamics in globalized contexts (Kymlicka, 1995; Alsina, 2001; Chen and Starosta, 1998). This plurality of paradigms is particularly relevant to the construction industry—a sector that unites workers from varied backgrounds in shared workspaces, generating synergies, tensions, and innovative forms of productive organization (Loosemore and Al Muslmani, 1999; Fellows and Liu, 2012).

According to Morin (2005), complexity theory provides a suitable framework for examining heterogeneous human systems, such as multicultural construction teams. In these environments, interactions between cultural and organizational subsystems demand adaptable integration mechanisms and effective communication strategies. This study investigates how multiculturalism affects labor productivity in the EastVillage Town Center, a mixed-use multifamily development in Austin’s northeast technology corridor. Managed by Cadence McShane Construction Company, the project exemplifies the migratory and multicultural dynamics that define Austin, a city recognized for its demographic, cultural, and economic diversity (Lacomba, 2023).

The central research question guiding this study is: “To what extent does multiculturalism shape labor productivity during the construction of the EastVillage Town Center in Austin, Texas?” The working hypothesis maintains that multiculturalism, when effectively managed through inclusive leadership, robust intercultural communication, and diversity-oriented organizational policies, exerts a positive influence on productivity by facilitating task coordination, strengthening crew cohesion, and ensuring construction quality. This assumption is consistent with prior evidence demonstrating that well-managed diverse teams enhance innovation, reinforce organizational resilience, and improve overall process quality (Thomas and Ely, 1996; Gudykunst, 2014).

Texas provides an ideal setting for this inquiry. As one of the United States' most economically dynamic states, it has experienced notable population growth driven by domestic and international migration (Silva, 2023). Austin, in particular, has emerged as a technological and cultural hub, attracting workers from multiple nationalities who contribute to flagship projects like the EastVillage Town Center, spanning approximately 172 hectares and comprising over 2,400 residential units, hotels, commercial spaces, and extensive green areas.

Methodologically, this study adopts a qualitative ethnographic design, integrating an extensive literature review with fieldwork to ensure both theoretical depth and empirical grounding. Data collection involved structured and semi-structured interviews with managers, contractors, and workers representing diverse cultural backgrounds. Participants were deliberately selected to capture the ethnic heterogeneity of the site and to reflect multiple organizational levels, thereby providing a comprehensive perspective on intercultural dynamics within the workplace.

The structure of the article unfolds as follows: it first delineates the theoretical and conceptual foundations, engaging with seminal contributions such as Will Kymlicka (1995) on culture and multicultural citizenship, Rodrigo Alsina (2001) on intercultural communication, and Edgar Morin (2005) on complexity. It then situates the study within Austin's socioeconomic landscape and describes the principal characteristics of the EastVillage Town Center. The results section presents empirical findings from the fieldwork, demonstrating the ways in which multiculturalism shapes productivity, conflict resolution, and organizational cohesion. The paper concludes with a discussion of practical implications for the construction industry, advancing recommendations for strengthening cultural diversity management in multinational projects. In doing so, this study contributes to both academic and professional debates on multiculturalism as a strategic dimension of complex organizational environments, emphasizing its potential to enhance productivity when supported by inclusive policies and effective intercultural communication.

## METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The methodological framework of this study is grounded in a qualitative, ethnographic approach, complemented by descriptive and analytical-synthetic methods to interpret the collected data. As emphasized by Velázquez (2024), Mballa et al. (2024), Hernández et al. (2014), the qualitative method is designed to explore social and cultural phenomena in depth, prioritizing the contextualized interpretation of meaning. Ethnography, in this context, serves as an effective strategy for analyzing

cultural practices and social interactions within multicultural work environments (Flick, 2015; Sampaio and Coelho, 2022).

According to Sandoval (1996) and Quecedo and Castaño (2002), ethnography goes beyond reviewing documentary sources; it requires direct, sustained, and reflective engagement with the people involved. In this study, direct observations were conducted at the EastVillage Town Center construction site, including participation in coordination meetings and visits to various work areas to record interactions among workers, supervisors, and contractors from different national backgrounds. This immersive approach enabled the identification of coexistence patterns, conflict resolution processes, and spontaneous intercultural mediation strategies.

Additionally, in-depth structured and semi-structured interviews were conducted between November 2023 and February 2024 with a purposive sample of key informants: managerial and administrative staff from Cadence McShane Construction Company, leading external contractors, and operational workers from countries such as Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Colombia, Cuba, U.S., Cameroon, and others. This diversity of perspectives provided a comprehensive understanding of how multiculturalism influences productivity and team cohesion on-site.

To enrich these insights, focus groups were held with teams of bricklayers, masons, finishing specialists, and members of the Composite Clean-Up Crew. These collective discussions enabled the “comparison of viewpoints, exchange of shared experiences, and validation of preliminary findings” (Morgan, 1997). Such sessions were instrumental in uncovering how cultural norms are negotiated, tacit agreements are formed, and tensions are managed within everyday work dynamics.

To organize and analyze the information, thematic matrices were developed based on the literature review and fieldwork notes, following Flick’s (2015) content analysis methodology. This approach facilitated the identification of connections among variables such as nationality, occupational role, perceptions of cultural conflict, and communication strategies employed. The triangulation of data from observations, interviews, and focus groups further reinforced the study’s internal validity and ensured coherence between the theoretical framework and empirical results (Hernández et al., 2014).

With regard to ethical considerations, this study ensured adherence to the principle of “informed consent of participants” (Brinkmann, 2022: 115-28). All participants agreed to have their names mentioned in the presentation of results without any objection, as their involvement was based entirely on free will. As such, the methodological trajectory adopted in this research combines the rigor of classical ethnography with contemporary tools of qualitative analysis, aiming to provide a detailed description and an in-depth understanding of how multiculturalism shapes both productive dynamics and workplace interactions within a large-scale multicultural construction

project such as the EastVillage Town Center in Austin, Texas. The general structure of the interviews conducted with these participants is as follows:

FIGURE 1  
GUIDELINE FOR CONDUCTING FIELD INTERVIEWS

**Interview Guide**

**Title:** COMPLEXITY IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF EASTVILLAGE TOWN CENTER IN AUSTIN, TEXAS:  
THE IMPACT OF MULTICULTURALISM ON LABOR PRODUCTIVITY

The objective of this research is to analyze the way in which multiculturalism affects the achievement of the organizational goals of the company Cadence McShane Construction, in the execution of the project Eastvillage Town Center Construction in Austin.

To carry out this project, it is essential to apply semi-structured interviews to different protagonists of the project.

Please answer the following questions without any inconvenience.

Full name (Optional) \_\_\_\_\_  
Role in the project \_\_\_\_\_

- 1) What is your general opinion of the construction industry in Austin?
- 2) In what sense have you realized that, in this project, people from different sociocultural backgrounds work?
- 3) In your opinion, how many nationalities are working on this project?
- 4) Can you give me an approximate percentage?
- 5) Based on your experience in this construction project, what are the reference points for a multicultural convergence of workers? (language, race, habits...)
- 6) What are the elements that can indicate the strength of multiculturalism in the realization of this construction project?
- 7) For you, is having people of different nationalities a strength or a weakness in terms of production?
- 8) What elements can be factors of conflict between workers due to their cultural origin?
- 9) Does the company have any type of protocol to address issues related to intercultural differences or conflicts? (racism, discrimination, lack of respect etc.)
- 10) Do you think that the nationality of the workers affects their remuneration?
- 11) I have heard in the hallways that people of certain nationalities (Caribbean, Central American, American... do not like to work. What can you tell me about it?
- 12) In very personal terms, what suggestions do you have to enhance and take greater advantage of the multicultural variable in construction works?

I thank you infinitely for your availability and your contribution to this academic work.

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**Source:** Developed by the author as part of the methodological framework.

## Culture, Multiculturality, Multiculturalism, and Nationalism: A Complexity-Based Approach

*A Brief Conceptual Exploration.* Understanding cultural dynamism as a complex system requires expanding our perspective to grasp societies more comprehensively, following what Rorty (1996) describes as “a systemic approach to inter- and trans-social relations.” Today, research on multiculturalism and its influence on social dynamics is extensive. Hernández (2007) points out that since the mid-20th century, multiculturalism as an identity expression and multiculturalism as a political framework have emerged in countries like Canada and the United States, reflecting the demands of ethnic and cultural minorities.

Analyzing multiculturalism within organizations necessitates a clear definition of culture—a broad yet essential concept for studying human interaction. The concept of culture, inherently dynamic, remains contested and highly polysemic, often giving the misleading impression that it is self-evident and requires no further reflection. Passeron (1991) and Poplin (1972) argue that, like any foundational notion in the social sciences, culture must always be situated within a specific spatial, temporal, and institutional context. Moreover, its polysemic character should not be seen as a limitation but rather as an asset—a sign of its capacity to adapt continually to the realities it seeks to describe and explain. This diversity of meanings does not indicate a conceptual weakness but instead reflects the richness and complexity of the social and organizational phenomena it encompasses. Ultimately, speaking of culture means engaging with forms of human interaction that have been extensively theorized within the main paradigms of the social and human sciences.

According to Rodrigo Alsina (1999, 2001), culture encompasses practices, values, symbols, and meanings shared by a group, shaping their worldview and communication patterns. This view aligns with the anthropological tradition that defines culture as a socially learned and transmitted system of symbols (Geertz, 1973). In the current global context, culture has become increasingly complex and cannot be treated as static or homogeneous. Migration, the regionalization of exchanges, corporate transnationalization, and the global circulation of information have intensified intercultural interactions within shared workspaces, fostering hybridization, conflict, and ongoing negotiation (Hannerz, 1992; Kymlicka, 1995).

Authors such as Quilaqueo and Torres (2013), Banks (2009), Perrenoud (2005), and Costa-Lascoux (1999) concur that *multiculturalism* denotes the coexistence of multiple cultures within a shared territory, upholding both the right to cultural distinctiveness and the right to active participation in shaping society. This coexistence may manifest at the level of a region, nation, or even an entire continent, with boundaries

defined by historical and geographical circumstances. This perspective emerged largely in response to mid-20th-century social movements demanding recognition and rights for ethnic, linguistic, and religious minorities (Taylor, 1992; Banks, 2009). In the workplace, multiculturalism becomes visible when individuals from varied backgrounds collaborate, contributing diverse viewpoints and experiences (Hofstede et al., 2010). However, Quilaqueo and Torres (2013) caution that multiculturalism alone does not ensure equity or social integration; in the absence of supportive policies and organizational strategies, it may instead foster segregation and perpetuate inequality.

At this juncture, multiculturalism intersects with *multiculturalism*, which is best understood as a political project that legitimizes the presence of diverse cultural groups and seeks to safeguard their rights within the framework of the nation-state (Kymlicka, 1995; Taylor, 1992). According to Kymlicka (1995), contemporary multiculturalism advances a model of citizenship that recognizes the collective rights of minority groups and encourages their full participation in social and economic life.

An important related concept is the relationship between nationalism and multiculturalism or multiculturalism, with the State serving as the key frame of reference. In this sense, the *nation* denotes “a sense of belonging to a specific space and time, a community bound by shared historical and cultural ties” (Mballa, 2022). Individuals with a national identity feel connected through common characteristics, which typically include a shared territory and language. *Nationalism*, in turn, refers to the ideology and political actions aimed at constructing or safeguarding a nation. As Acosta (1992) notes, the coexistence of multiple nations within a single state can be seen as a marker of freedom: theoretically, the nation precedes nationalism, but historically, nationalism often paves the way for nation-building.

In contrast to multiculturalism, *pluriculturalism* describes the mere presence of multiple cultures within a given space, without necessarily encouraging meaningful interaction or integration (UNESCO, 2009). Kymlicka (1995) points out that in Latin America, pluriculturalism can be seen, for example, in the coexistence of Indigenous communities alongside urban society, with limited active engagement between them.

By comparison, *interculturality* entails respectful, equitable interaction among cultures, fostering collaboration and peaceful conflict resolution (Alsina, 1999; De Sousa Santos, 2006). Chen and Starosta (1998) define *intercultural communicative competence* as the capacity to engage effectively with people from different cultural backgrounds, overcoming linguistic and perceptual barriers. Within organizations, this competence is critical for transforming cultural diversity into a driver of innovation and efficiency (Spitzberg and Changnon, 2009). Gudykunst (2014) further emphasizes that a lack of intercultural skills can lead to conflicts, misunderstandings, and reduced productivity.

In the construction sector, these conceptual frameworks converge to shape a multinational reality in which ethnic and cultural diversity (while sometimes a source of tension) also brings flexibility, resilience, and creative problem-solving to projects. Loosemore and Al Muslmani (1999) showed that the presence of diverse teams in construction projects in migrant-receiving countries directly impacts task coordination, compliance with safety standards, and overall project efficiency.

*Beyond the Concept: The Complex Realities of Multiculturalism.* Velasco (2004) distinguishes two key dimensions of multiculturalism: first, a factual meaning, which recognizes that every nation-state encompasses a plurality of cultural groups; and second, an evaluative meaning, which ethically and politically justifies multiculturalist claims by arguing that the cultures shaping individual and collective identities deserve respect and recognition. These cultural frameworks give meaning to people's lives and establish standards for rationality, justice, aesthetics, and spirituality within communities.

The struggle for recognition and inclusion is not merely a social battle but rests on a robust historical and theoretical foundation. Quilaqueo and Torres (2013) point out that Canada's *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (1982), reinforced by the 1988 *Multiculturalism Act*, institutionalizes a model of multicultural citizenship. In the United States, multiculturalism typically refers to the integration of immigrant groups into a "melting pot" society. In Europe, it concerns the challenge of integrating immigrants into nation-states with deep-rooted cultural traditions. In Latin America, multiculturalism reflects the coexistence and interaction between Indigenous minorities and the broader non-Indigenous society, shaped by each country's political framework. In Africa, multiculturalism is grounded in ethno-cultural identity, whereby cultural markers are defined by a community's self-identification and place, encapsulating the principle of "unity in diversity" within a shared linguistic, cultural, and political heritage (Mballa, 2022).

Viewed through the lens of complexity theory, authors like Mier (2002), Morin (2005), and Milagros (2019) argue that multiculturalism should be understood as a dynamic system rather than a static condition. In organizational contexts such as the construction industry, intercultural relations function as interdependent subsystems that adapt and reconfigure themselves in response to operational and social challenges. This perspective recognizes multiculturalism as self-organizing and recursive, with interactions among diverse actors continuously producing new modes of coexistence and collaboration. In the case of the EastVillage Town Center, this complexity is reflected in the diverse mix of nationalities, languages, values, and work expectations converging on-site. As Chen and Starosta (1996) assert, intercultural

competence is crucial for managing this diversity, overcoming language barriers, minimizing misunderstandings, and fostering cohesive teams.

In today's increasingly globalized and interconnected world, patterns of human interaction have evolved significantly. Motivations such as the search for better employment, mobility, education, advances in information and communication technologies, and complex migration flows make cross-cultural encounters both more frequent and enriching, though not without friction (Hernández, 2024). Multiculturalist demands primarily center on recognizing the identities, practices, institutions, and rights of minority groups within the context of a dominant national culture that is often promoted or imposed by state power.

Therefore, analyzing multiculturalism alongside nationalism in projects like EastVillage requires a holistic perspective that integrates rigorous theoretical frameworks with context-specific empirical interpretation. This approach reinforces the central hypothesis that multiculturalism, rather than posing an obstacle, can serve as a strategic resource—provided it is supported by effective intercultural communication and inclusive policies that drive labor productivity.

## LABOR PRODUCTIVITY IN MULTICULTURAL CONTEXTS

Labor productivity is a cornerstone of organizational competitiveness and long-term sustainability, particularly in labor-intensive sectors such as construction (Fellows and Liu, 2012). Extensively studied in management and organizational psychology, labor productivity refers to the efficiency with which employees convert inputs (time, skills, and materials) into high-quality outputs within defined schedules and budgets (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007; Sumanth, 1998).

However, managing productivity extends far beyond technical oversight; it is deeply influenced by human, cultural, and social factors. As Robbins and Judge (2017) highlight, motivation, job satisfaction, and group cohesion are critical determinants of both individual and collective performance. In multicultural contexts, these factors become more complex due to varying values, communication styles, and expectations regarding work roles and responsibilities (Hofstede et al., 2010).

Evidence from Thomas and Ely (1996) and Cox and Blake (1991) demonstrates that when managed strategically, cultural diversity can foster innovation and creative problem-solving, ultimately enhancing productivity. Diverse teams tend to generate a wider range of solutions and adapt more effectively to unforeseen challenges, an asset for large-scale construction projects that operate under tight timelines (Loosemore and Al Muslmani, 1999).

Nonetheless, diversity can also pose challenges. The coexistence of multiple languages and cultural norms can impede task coordination, lead to misunderstandings, and create conflicts that hinder project progress (Gudykunst, 2014; Fellows and Liu, 2012). Thus, transforming multiculturalism into a genuine organizational advantage requires the implementation of inclusive policies, comprehensive intercultural training, and leadership that is capable of mediating and resolving conflicts constructively (Spitzberg and Changnon, 2009; Fitzsimmons et al., 2011).

Bakker and Demerouti's (2007) "Demands-Resources Model" provides a robust theoretical framework for analyzing the interaction between cultural diversity and productivity. This model posits that job resources (such as effective communication channels, clear supervision, and strong organizational support) act as buffers against job demands, enhancing employee motivation and performance.

Empirical studies within the construction industry support this view. For example, Loosemore and Al Muslmani (1999) and Garnett et al. (2008) found that projects incorporating multilingual communication protocols, intercultural competence training, and inclusive leadership consistently achieve higher productivity and lower employee turnover rates. These findings underscore the importance of embedding diversity management into the core of construction project planning and execution.

The EastVillage Town Center project in Austin exemplifies this dynamic. Here, multiculturalism extends beyond the simple presence of workers from different countries; it creates a dynamic mosaic of work practices, values, and expectations that directly influence scheduling, crew coordination, and construction quality. Field observations confirm that productivity is enhanced when clear communication is prioritized, cultural differences are respected, and a collaborative and inclusive work environment is nurtured.

Robbins and Judge (2017) further emphasize that organizational culture serves as a catalyst for productivity. A corporate culture that embraces diversity, fosters equity, and creates development opportunities for all employees strengthens intrinsic motivation and loyalty—both of which are critical in highly competitive, large-scale construction projects.

In conclusion, achieving high labor productivity in multicultural contexts requires a systemic perspective that acknowledges both the inherent challenges and the strategic opportunities of cultural diversity. The case of the EastVillage Town Center demonstrates that when multiculturalism is supported by inclusive leadership, intercultural competence, and a diversity-oriented corporate culture, it functions as a strategic asset that enhances operational efficiency and project sustainability, thereby affirming this study's central hypothesis.

## KEY FEATURES OF EASTVILLAGE TOWN CENTER

EastVillage Town Center is among the largest urban developments underway in Austin, Texas. Located on Parmer Lane in the northeast technology corridor, it reflects the city's rapid urban growth and evolving economic landscape (Austin Chamber of Commerce, 2023). Covering roughly 172 hectares (425 acres), the project combines residential, commercial, and recreational areas. The master plan by Reger Holdings LLC includes over 2,400 multifamily units, 466 single-family lots, three hotels, offices, retail stores, restaurants, and extensive green spaces and walkways (Reger Holdings, 2023). This aligns with sustainable, transit-oriented development principles that promote walkability and reduce car dependence.

Its strategic proximity to major employers (including Samsung, Dell, Amazon, and General Motors) positions EastVillage as a pivotal hub for residential and service infrastructure tailored to Austin's expanding technology workforce (City of Austin, 2024). Sustainability forms a core pillar of its development, with integrated storm-water management systems, interconnected green corridors, and LEED-certified buildings aligning with and advancing Austin's long-term environmental objectives (Reger Holdings, 2023; City of Austin, 2024).

Demographically, EastVillage reflects Austin's increasing diversity. The city's population grew by 33 percent over the past decade, driven by migration that has expanded its multicultural profile (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023). This diversity is evident among the project's workforce, which includes laborers and contractors from Latin America, the Caribbean, Africa, and North America. Together, these urban, environmental, and social features make EastVillage Town Center an ideal setting for analyzing how multiculturalism affects labor productivity—directly linking to this study's main research question and hypothesis.

## RESULTS

This section summarizes the main findings from the EastVillage Town Center fieldwork, based on structured and semi-structured interviews and direct site observations. The results are organized by core themes that show how multiculturalism shapes productivity, affects task coordination, and generates communication challenges. The analysis, framed by the study's theoretical background, highlights shared trends and differing perspectives across roles and nationalities.

## Dynamics of the Construction Industry in Austin and Project Context

The U.S. construction industry, segmented by end-user type, is valued at USD 171.26 billion for 2024 and is expected to reach USD 203.5 billion by 2029, growing at an annual rate of 3.51 percent (Mordor Intelligence, 2024). While residential construction drove record spending in 2021, the non-residential sector declined for the second year in a row, amid labor shortages and supply chain delays that pushed material costs sharply higher. By November 2021, spending had hit USD 1.46 trillion, a historic peak. Growth is further supported by the USD 1.2 trillion *Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act*.

During the pandemic, expansion was uneven: warehouse and data center construction surged, while offices and hotels lagged. To counter inflation from rising material costs (e.g., lumber up 264 percent), the Federal Reserve raised interest rates four times in 2022. Meanwhile, cities like Houston, Austin, and Dallas have seen a 30 percent rise in property purchases by Latin American investors over the past three years, boosting demand in both residential and commercial sectors. Foreign direct investment continues to drive Austin's construction and real estate growth, strengthening the local economy (Silva, 2023).

Despite inflation and labor shortages, Austin's strong real estate demand continues to fuel construction across diverse infrastructure types. Ryland Hutson, Assistant Superintendent at Cadence McShane Construction Company, observed: "In Austin, the construction industry is booming with numerous commercial, infrastructure, and multifamily projects; growth has surged unpredictably, I hadn't seen anything like this fifteen years ago. It's encouraging for residents witnessing the city's rapid development" (interview, January 2024).

Echoing this, Joseph DiMiceli and John Morris, both superintendents at Cadence McShane, added: "There is a wide range of projects underway (multifamily, commercial, residential, industrial) across all of Austin. This construction boom naturally drives population growth, increasing the demand for infrastructure, schools, and essentials like food, water, and energy" (interview, January 2024). This aligns with Mordor Intelligence (2024), which notes that by March 2022, Austin had 10 million square feet of office space under construction (11.5 percent of its current stock) with planned projects reaching 25.3 percent, the highest among major U.S. cities.

Sustainability is also central to the city's vision. Mexican contractors Rodolfo and Benhur Leyva highlighted in a focus group that Austin aims to be a model green city; since the 1980s, civic groups have opposed nuclear projects, favoring sustainable developments instead. Supporting this, Mauricio Figueroa, a Honduran assistant

contractor, remarked: “This sustainability focus in Austin’s construction benefits many spaces and greatly improves residents’ quality of life, from broad municipal policies to targeted projects that address specific challenges” (interview, February 2024).

### **The Multinational and Multicultural Workforce and Commitment to Labor Productivity at EastVillage Town Center**

The EastVillage Town Center project exemplifies the complexity of managing a multinational and multicultural workforce under high performance standards. The team spans senior managers to subcontracted crews and cleaning staff, all working toward strict quality, schedule, and budget targets. Field data show that 64 percent of workers come from Latin America (Mexico, Honduras, Nicaragua, Guatemala, Cuba, El Salvador, Colombia, and Venezuela), 15 percent are Afro-descendants from the Caribbean and Africa, and the rest are Americans and second-generation immigrants who, though fluent in English, keep close cultural ties to their roots.

This diversity shapes work relations, task allocation, and on-site discipline. Supervisors like Joseph DiMiceli and John Morris note that while diversity ensures ample labor for long shifts, it demands closer oversight to prevent misunderstandings: “Multiculturalism helps because there are more hands available, but if you don’t supervise carefully, instructions can get lost or misunderstood” (DiMiceli, interview, January 2024).

To address this, the company uses multi-level supervision and appoints bilingual crew leaders as cultural and linguistic mediators, reducing errors and aligning with Loosemore and Al Muslmani’s (1999) view that clear communication is vital for productivity and cohesion.

A tiered subcontracting system further illustrates this complexity: crews handle cleaning, finishes, electrical work, carpentry, and more. While specialization increases efficiency, it also challenges quality control and schedule coordination.

On-site observations show that each crew works semi-autonomously, reflecting their home-country work culture. Rodolfo Leyva explained: “We, as Mexicans, are accustomed to a foreman issuing clear and strict directives that are promptly followed; in contrast, other cultural groups adopt a more relaxed approach, which can occasionally slow the pace of work” (Leyva, interview, December 2023); so, poor coordination can thus lead to friction over priorities and shared resources.

Still, interviewees agree that multiculturalism, if managed well, boosts rather than hinders results. Inclusive leadership, daily planning, and open feedback turn diversity into an asset: “Having crews from different countries helps because there’s

always someone willing to work extra hours; that saves us when there are delays” (Morris, interview, January 2024).

Supervisors add that stable jobs and better pay than informal work increase motivation and loyalty, keeping absenteeism and turnover low, key for productivity. In short, EastVillage’s workforce shows how clear policies and intercultural leadership make diversity a driver of productivity and commitment, supporting this study’s central hypothesis.

## Convergence Dynamics and Intercultural Communication

Scholars widely agree that intercultural communication is a critical organizational competence for operational success in multicultural environments (Alsina, 2001; Chen and Starosta, 1998). Chen and Starosta (1996) emphasize that it is not just about language proficiency but also about understanding cultural norms, gestures, and implicit meanings, essential for coordinating diverse crews, ensuring safety, and meeting deadlines in construction.

*Cultural Convergence and Operational Cohesion.* Daily interaction among workers from different countries fosters shared practices that unify the team. First, a common economic motivation prevails: most workers prioritize steady income to cover basic needs and send remittances. As Joseph DiMiceli explains: “Even though they come from different countries, they all share the idea of working hard to secure steady pay and send money back home; that makes them responsible and productive” (DiMiceli, interview, January 2024). This shared goal strengthens discipline and reduces absenteeism.

Second, a clear hierarchy with bilingual supervisors ensures tasks are well defined. Rodolfo Leyva notes: “Here, everyone knows what they have to do; if there’s any doubt, you ask immediately because nobody wants to hold up the crew” (Leyva, interview, December 2023) This supports Velasco’s (2004) idea of a “tacit cultural contract,” where unwritten rules maintain order. Third, ethnic solidarity is evident: workers from the same country often cluster to share skills and help each other meet standards. This informal trust network compensates for gaps in formal supervision (Loosemore and Al Muslmani, 1999).

In the dining area, cafeteria manager José Antonio Carrera illustrates how food bridges cultures: “To simplify cultural differences, we came up with a Tex-Mex food concept, a kind of culinary syncretism mixing Mexican and Texan flavors, like ham

and egg sandwiches, American burgers with Latin beans, and Mexican salsa” (interview, February 2024). This fusion encourages interaction and acceptance.

Ryland Hutson highlights that fighting ethnocentrism is vital: it means avoiding the bias of judging others solely by one’s own cultural lens (Cruz et al., 2018; Mballa, 2022). Finally, working on a prominent project strengthens collective identity. Many workers feel proud to contribute to a site “everyone in Austin knows,” reinforcing commitment and transcending cultural divides. This demonstrates that shared goals and inclusive practices turn multiculturalism into a source of cohesion and productivity, supporting this study’s main hypothesis.

*Intercultural Communication Strategies and Conflict Mediation.* Beyond convergence factors, deliberate intercultural communication and conflict mediation are vital for sustaining efficiency amid linguistic and cultural diversity. As Ryland Hutson warns: “Without a clear channel of communication, everything becomes slower and more expensive” (interview, January 2024) This is evident in daily tasks like coordinating material deliveries, allocating crews, and enforcing safety rules, areas where misunderstandings can cause delays, extra costs, or accidents. Here, communication is not just about giving orders but about building mutual understanding that lowers uncertainty and fosters trust (Chen and Starosta, 1998; Gudykunst, 2014).

To manage this, the company relies on structured practices valued at all levels. Morning planning meetings clarify goals, assign tasks, and allow for questions, improving transparency and reducing role confusion (Garnett et al., 2008). Visual guides, clear blueprints, and multilingual signs complement spoken instructions, helping workers with limited English grasp key procedures.

However, stereotypes can hinder this process. Benhur Leyva explains: “People from certain countries arrive in Austin already burdened with negative stereotypes: ‘Mexicans are shady,’ ‘Cubans and Puertoricans are lazy,’ ‘Colombians, Venezuelans, and Hondurans are opportunistic,’ ‘Americans and Europeans avoid hard labor’” (interview, February 2024). Such biases can lead supervisors to monitor some workers more strictly, undermining trust. Carlos Mendoza, head of risk and safety, highlights the challenge of ensuring compliance: “While workforce diversity brings clear benefits, some workers from certain countries are more prone to ignoring safety rules (some, especially Mexicans), often forgo harnesses when working on roofs and get upset when corrected. To address this, we hold daily focus groups and reinforce guidelines in weekly meetings” (interview, February 2024).

Bilingual foremen are essential to this strategy. Joseph DiMiceli notes: “Bilingual leaders keep the project on track; they explain instructions clearly, leaving no room for misunderstandings” (interview, January 2024). These leaders do more than

translate; they adapt instructions culturally and defuse conflicts early, supporting Spitzberg and Changnon's (2009) idea that effective mediation enhances clarity and nurtures empathy. Informal social spaces also matter. Break areas help workers share experiences, dispel rumors, and build trust. As Rodolfo Leyva puts it: "When the atmosphere during breaks is positive, people work better and are more willing to help each other" (interview, December 2023). This shows that trust built through everyday interactions turns diversity into a driver of teamwork and innovation (Thomas and Ely, 1996).

In sum, productivity and safety at EastVillage depend on robust intercultural communication that counters stereotypes, reinforces training, and ensures fair discipline. Formal and informal mechanisms work together as an adaptive system, reducing conflicts and optimizing resources, confirming this study's hypothesis that well-managed multiculturalism boosts performance in complex construction projects.

### *The Challenges of Multiculturalism at EastVillage Town Center*

Multiculturalism at EastVillage Town Center brings both clear advantages and daily challenges. While workers from various countries provide flexibility and resilience, this diversity also generates tensions, misunderstandings, and constant adjustments on site. One frequent challenge is the variation in work styles and speeds. Joseph DiMiceli observes: "Some crews work very fast, while others are slower and more relaxed; so you have to balance it so no one falls behind or gets ahead of the project" (interview, January 2024). This requires crew leaders to adapt schedules and resources, echoing Loosemore and Al Muslmani's (1999) findings in global projects.

Interpreting instructions and accepting close supervision is another issue. Ryland Hutson explains: "Some workers, especially new ones, aren't used to having every detail checked; sometimes that bothers them, but it's necessary to avoid duplicated tasks that waste time and money" (interview, January 2024). This supports Chen and Starosta's (1996) point that cultural differences in hierarchy and authority can cause conflict if not handled with intercultural awareness.

Adapting to standardized safety and quality protocols is also a challenge. John Morris notes: "Each country has its own way of doing things, but here everyone must follow the same protocol; if it's not done the same way, it won't pass inspection" (interview, January 2024). This highlights the need for thorough training and strong corporate procedures, especially in large urban projects. Despite such frictions, most see diversity as an asset for learning. Rodolfo Leyva says: "You pick up new habits and tricks; sometimes a technique from another country solves a problem faster"

(interview, December 2023). This aligns with Thomas and Ely's (1996) view that diversity fuels innovation when differences are respected.

Beyond the worksite, multiculturalism influences daily life. Many workers share housing with compatriots, building solidarity and easing cultural adjustment. This informal support reinforces team morale, consistent with Hofstede et al.'s (2010) ideas on cultural cohesion. Supervisors like DiMiceli and Morris stress that the goal is not to erase diversity but to bridge differences through inclusive leadership, regular feedback, and mutual respect. As DiMiceli sums up: "It's not about everyone thinking the same, but about everyone understanding there's a shared goal and that each person contributes their experience" (interview, January 2024).

In short, the challenges of multiculturalism at EastVillage show that diversity—when managed with strong leadership and open communication—becomes an operational strength rather than an obstacle. These insights support the study's main hypothesis and offer lessons for managing multicultural teams in future global projects.

#### *Enhancing Multiculturalism: Recommendations for the Construction Industry*

To conclude, this study gathered key perspectives and practical suggestions for maximizing the benefits of multiculturalism on construction sites. Testimonies reveal that one of the main barriers is tackling ethnocentrism, stereotypes, and discriminatory or homophobic attitudes.

Despite its advantages, multiculturalism still faces challenges such as language barriers, cultural differences in work styles and problem-solving, and persistent biases that may hinder collaboration. To counter these, Cadence McShane Construction Company has enforced strict anti-discrimination protocols that ban any form of harassment based on nationality or ethnicity. At EastVillage Town Center, this commitment aims to ensure a respectful and inclusive environment for all workers.

John Morris stresses this principle: "We do not discriminate; there is zero tolerance for any form of discrimination. The penalty is immediate dismissal because we aim to include all cultures to create a diverse and universal work environment. The United States is one of the freest nations in the world, offering everyone the chance to succeed and grow if they have the drive to do so" (interview, January 2024).

Likewise, Joseph DiMiceli adds: "Racist or derogatory remarks are not tolerated. All nationalities are welcome and have the potential to grow through hard work and commitment. The convergence of cultures in a major project like EastVillage

Town is the product of a capitalist environment. The U.S. provides a favorable setting to turn dreams into reality” (interview, January 2024).

Managers agree that tolerating discrimination would fuel cultural conflict. As González and Noreña (2011) argue, cultural clashes arise from misinterpretations and can escalate into distrust, anxiety, or even violence. Overcoming this requires effective and empathetic intercultural communication based on contextual awareness and respect for others’ beliefs and values. Therefore, contractors and managers propose reinforcing an inclusion policy paired with robust intercultural communication. This includes promoting daily respectful coexistence, encouraging awareness activities, and hosting multicultural events to reduce biases and foster teamwork.

These measures align with Dearnorff (2020) recommendations for managing multicultural teams:

1. Build cultural self-awareness to recognize and manage personal biases.
2. Practice active listening beyond words—observe gestures and tone.
3. Avoid assumptions; ask questions and show genuine interest.
4. Adapt communication styles to improve clarity and prevent misunderstandings.
5. Learn basic local phrases to demonstrate respect and strengthen rapport.
6. Exercise empathy to better understand colleagues’ perspectives.
7. Promote mutual learning and collaboration to enrich work relationships.

EastVillage Town illustrates how multicultural coexistence creates room for growth and innovation but also highlights the need for strong policies and attitudes that champion respect for cultural differences. Embracing multiculturalism ultimately boosts creativity, productivity, and employees’ sense of belonging when their backgrounds are recognized and valued.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS AND EMERGING CHALLENGES

This last section offers concluding reflections on the findings of the study and highlights the future challenges that multicultural construction projects are likely to face. It synthesizes the theoretical, methodological, and empirical contributions of the research, while also outlining directions for further inquiry and practical implications for the industry.

I wish to extend my sincere appreciation to all those who contributed to this research, including Cadence McShane Construction Company, its leadership team, managers, supervisors, the bricklayer focus groups, the Composite Clean-Up Crew,

contractors, safety personnel, and dining staff, whose participation and support were invaluable to the completion of this study.

This study affirms that multiculturalism can be a distinctive asset when embedded within an integrative framework supported by clear strategies, action plans, and evaluation criteria for fostering cultural coexistence. Findings from the EastVillage Town Center confirm that multiculturalism is a structural element of modern construction productivity, especially in fast-growing urban contexts like Austin. Rather than an obstacle, cultural diversity becomes a strategic condition for efficiency and innovation when guided by inclusive practices and effective intercultural communication.

The evidence validates this study's central hypothesis: diverse labor profiles strengthen competitive advantage when intentionally integrated into daily planning and supervision. Furthermore, multiculturalism revitalizes the public dimension of intercultural communication, creating an implicit socio-cultural contract between diverse workers and employers—mitigating prejudice and conflict while clarifying expectations and balancing cultural interests.

Two main considerations and challenges emerge for managing multicultural construction projects:

- a) Structural inconsistencies. It is vital to strengthen intercultural training across all levels. Supervisors' ability to act as cultural and linguistic mediators is key to ensuring smooth operations and preventing misunderstandings. Workers value leaders who understand their backgrounds and clearly communicate technical standards, aligning with Chen and Starosta (1996) and Thomas and Ely (1996) on the centrality of intercultural competence in global workplaces.
- b) Multiculturalism as an instrumental and intercultural communication space. Organizations must reinforce policies that build social cohesion and a sense of belonging among multicultural crews. While hierarchy and supervision standardize tasks, trust and peer solidarity are equally crucial for productivity and retention. Practices such as informal gatherings, group performance incentives, and ongoing feedback strengthen morale and soften tensions stemming from diverse work styles.

The findings of this study demonstrate that multiculturalism, when supported by inclusive leadership and robust intercultural communication, operates as a strategic resource rather than a liability in large-scale construction projects. In the case of EastVillage Town Center, cultural diversity contributed not only to workforce flexibility and problem-solving capacity but also to organizational cohesion, provided

that it was managed through clear policies and daily supervisory practices. These insights reaffirm the central hypothesis: productivity and quality in complex work environments are significantly enhanced when cultural pluralism is acknowledged and intentionally integrated into organizational routines.

Looking ahead, future research should expand beyond this case study to examine how multiculturalism affects productivity in Texas's broader construction industry, particularly in the current political climate marked by ongoing debates over migration in the United States. As demographic shifts accelerate and controversies surrounding migrant labor intensify, it becomes increasingly important to investigate how companies reconcile efficiency and competitiveness with social inclusion and respect for cultural diversity. Comparative studies across different sectors and regions of Texas could shed light on the extent to which multiculturalism not only sustains economic growth but also reshapes organizational cultures in ways that respond to (and perhaps even mitigate) the tensions inherent in polarized debates about immigration.

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