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Managerial Perceptions and Lived Experiences in International Joint Ventures: A Qualitative Case Study from the UAE Construction Sector

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ABSTRACT

An international joint venture (IJV) is a standard entry mode in emerging economies, yet the performance of such ventures is volatile, especially in project-based economic activities such as construction. As much as Culture, trust, control, and host-country conditions are identified as predictors of IJV success, most studies are quantitative and present these dimensions as measures rather than lived processes. This paper examines how managers in an IJV within the UAE construction industry perceive and experience collaboration, conflict and adaptation. The research was based on an interpretivist approach, a qualitative, single-case study, and employed 13 semi-structured interviews with project, operations, and senior supervisory managers of a construction joint venture between a foreign and a local company located in the UAE. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data. The findings indicate five interrelated themes: multidimensional perceptions of success; centrality of partner cooperation and relationship quality; cultural, organisational, and institutional challenges; strategies to stabilise collaboration under uncertainty; and interacting financial, relational, and contextual factors affecting IJV performance. The results re-envision the concept of IJV success as a relational, situational process based on trust-building, cultural competency, confidence in governance, and adaptive managerial practice, rather than a strict focus on financial indicators. The study adds value to research on IJVs by combining the relational, institutional, and knowledge-based approaches into a single explanatory model and providing a contextually informed account of a Gulf construction environment that has not been studied extensively. Importantly, it demonstrates the strategic roles of relational leadership, regulatory intelligence, and knowledge systems rooted in learning in sustaining IJVs in emerging markets.

INTRODUCTION

International joint ventures (IJVs) have been a standard mode of market entry into other countries, and, as such, global firms can accumulate resources, share risk, and access complementary resources. From the beginning of trading alliances to modern-day strategic partnerships, IJVs have become a prominent form of internationalisation, especially since the 1970s (Liu *et al.*, 2014). They have become one of the most used and institutionally accepted ways of foreign direct investment in developing and emerging economies (Khamaksorn *et al.*, 2017).

The construction industry is a very crucial area of IJV. Infrastructure development is a core component of national economic progress, providing transport, energy infrastructure, and residential and public amenities. In the United Arab Emirates (UAE), the most prominent element of the economic diversification is the construction business, combined with the significant investments in the oil and gas sector, transport, commercial and residential infrastructure. IJVs are often used by multinational companies in collaboration with local organisations to implement technically complex projects, address regulatory factors, and address local labour and procurement issues.

IJVs are generally described as organisationally weak and challenging to manage, despite their strategic importance. High instability rates are reported in empirical studies, with numerous projects breaking down or underperforming several years after establishment (Beamish, 2013; Makino *et al.*, 2007). According to previous research, several factors influence IJV performance, among them are cultural distance, trust and commitment, governance design, control mechanism, knowledge transfer and host-country risk (Makino *et al.*, 2007; Meschi & Riccio, 2008; Li *et al.*, 2013; Kim & Kim, 2018). Much of this literature, however, is based on survey-based and quantitative research designs, conceptualises these factors as statistically measurable constructs, and examines their influence on performance through performance indices and regression models.

What is less known is how such organisational conditions are practised and controlled by the individuals within IJVs. Managers and project leaders work on formal contracts to build day-to-day collaboration, negotiate conflicts, build trust across organisational and national borders, and respond to regulatory and environmental uncertainty in real time. Their perceptions and choices determine how partnerships operate in practice, but the reality on the ground is seldom captured in surveys or

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firm-level data.

In the Gulf region, especially in the UAE, studies on IJVs have been limited and have primarily focused on macro-level attributes and firm-level factors. Though research in neighbouring contexts demonstrates the importance of cultural and relational dynamics, there has been no in-depth qualitative analysis of how managers in UAE-based construction IJVs give meaning to and practice partnership issues. This oversight is particularly critical given the project-based, multicultural nature of construction work, where uncertainty, time pressures, and interdependence can strain relationships and create operational stress.

This gap is addressed in the present paper, based on qualitative interview data from a larger doctoral research project on IJVs in the UAE construction industry. Concentrating on one joint venture involving an organisation and a local partner, it explores how managers feel about collaboration, conflict, knowledge sharing, and environmental constraints in the joint venture. The study was conducted to understand how managers make sense of organisational complexity, relational tension, and strategic uncertainty, using semi-structured interviews as part of an interpretivist, qualitative case study design.

The following research question guides the analysis: How do managers operating in an international joint venture in the UAE construction sector perceive and experience collaboration, conflict, and adaptation within the partnership?

The paper adds to the body of literature in three aspects. First, it expands on IJV research by offering a contextually rooted, qualitative report in an under-researched national and industrial environment. Second, it contributes to the knowledge of the enactment of trust, Culture, knowledge transfer and control in real-life managerial practice. Third, it provides practitioner-relevant information on how IJVs can be managed more effectively by investing in relational capability, cultural competence, and institutional awareness.

The rest of the paper will be organised as follows. In Section 2, the relevant literature is reviewed, and the theoretical foundations are presented. Section 3 describes the qualitative case study approach and the method of analysis. The empirical findings are presented in Section 4. Section 5 presents the findings regarding prior research and theory. Section 6 contains the conclusion.

LITERATURE REVIEW

International Joint Ventures in Construction

The international joint venture (IJV) is a standard entry mode in which companies from various nations pool resources, capabilities, and local expertise to achieve common goals. IJV is a legally and organisationally distinct company owned by two or more parent companies of varied national settings, which share decision rights, risks and resources (Contractor & Lorange, 2004; Shenkar & Zeira, 1987). In addition to the financial investment, IJVs are often formed to gain access to technology, market

expertise, localisation benefits, and complementary organisational competencies.

The construction industry is one such critical setting for IJVs, since major infrastructure and industrial projects may require specialised skills, regulatory manoeuvring, and massive capital. In the UAE, foreign contractors often enter into an IJV with local companies to provide intricate oil and gas, transport, energy, residential and commercial development projects. Although these ventures may offer the option to share strengths and reduce risk, IJVs are also commonly considered among the most volatile forms of international expansion, and most ventures face managerial challenges and underperformance during the initial years of operation (Beamish, 2013; Yan & Luo, 2016).

Previously conducted studies have identified a wide range of factors that influence IJV performance, including cultural distance, governance structure, inter-partner trust and commitment, cooperation, knowledge transfer, and host-country institutional conditions. To a large extent, however, this work is based on quantitative designs and firm-level performance measures, and little consideration is paid to how these dynamics are experienced, interpreted and handled at the managerial level by those who work in IJVs.

Key Relational and Contextual Factors

In this research, five dimensions are handy because they are closely interconnected and directly influence managerial experience within IJVs: Culture, knowledge transfer, trust and commitment, control and conflict, and the host-country environment.

Culture

Culture has long been recognised as a critical factor in the performance and stability of IJVs. The interpretation of authority, communication, time, risk, and cooperation among partners varies across cultures, driven by national, organisational, or professional differences (Hofstede, 1991; Sirmon & Lane, 2004). Even though some research indicates that cultural distance is associated with incongruence and low trust, other researchers contend that cultural diversity may positively promote learning and innovation when managed effectively.

Multicultural project teams in IJV construction projects face tight schedules, contractual time constraints, and safety constraints. Cultural differences arise for managers in terms of expectations for leadership, communication patterns, and problem-solving approaches. These issues are not always reflected in terms of financial indicators, but their impact is too strong on workplace interaction and collaboration.

Knowledge Transfer

The need to transfer knowledge is not only one of the main reasons for establishing IJVs but also a crucial factor in their success, particularly in new markets. The foreign partners usually bring in technical skills and managerial

systems, whereas the local firms bring in an understanding of regulatory frameworks, the labour market, and business networks. Absorptive capacity, the tacit nature of knowledge and good relationships between partners determine the effectiveness of knowledge transfer.

To managers, knowledge transfer is carried out through routine tasks such as training, joint problem-solving, and process adjustment. Conflicts between cooperation and knowledge protection are commonplace, and trust and respect are key elements of robust capability building.

Trust, Commitment and Cooperation

Trust and commitment are critical relational factors in IJV performance. Trust facilitates cooperation and perceived reduction in relational risk, and commitment indicates readiness to invest effort and resources in maintaining the partnership (Currall & Inkpen, 2002; Madhok, 2006). The two of them constitute what is commonly known as relational capital.

To managers, these dynamics take the form of reliability, fairness, openness to communication and counterpart behaviour. When commitment is perceived as asymmetrical, tensions in relations and defensive behaviour may arise despite the same contractual arrangements.

Control, Conflict and Governance

Control by IJV partners is exercised through ownership, reporting, and informal social systems. Ineffective governance structures tend to create role confusion and politics (Ma *et al.*, 2015).

The conflict is not necessarily devastating, and constant discordance over strategy or the allocation of staff or resources can compromise performance. In construction IJVs, construction operational issues at the site level and claims management are typical areas of tension. Managers are thus crucial in playing boundary-spanning roles between organisational expectations and on-site execution realities.

Host-Country Environment

The external institutional environment significantly influences IJV performance. Pro-investment policy and infrastructure construction in the UAE create opportunities, yet companies are constantly faced with regulatory demands and compliance standards.

Environmental pressures on managers include project delays, regulatory changes, and market volatility. In this regard, institutional conditions affect risk perception and strategic behaviour.

Theoretical Lenses: Relational Perspective and Resource-Based View

Two theories influence this study: the relational perspective and the resource-based view.

Relational approaches highlight the importance of trust, reciprocity, and social exchange as key to inter-firm success. In this sense, IJVs cannot be viewed solely in terms of

contractual arrangements; cooperation, relational norms, and shared meaning become central to their continued performance (Dyer & Singh, 1998; Madhok, 2006). The relational theory holds that competitive advantage can sometimes be inherent in inter-organisational relations rather than residing solely in individual firms.

The resource-based view (RBV) conceptualises firms as endowments of unique and heterogeneous resources and capabilities that confer competitive advantage (Grant, 1996). Partnerships within IJVs are channels through which companies gain access to, integrate, and capitalise on complementary resources, including technical strength, managerial practices, and market expertise (Barney, 1991; Grant, 1996).

These lenses reflect both what managers do in IJVs and how and why relational quality and resource integration contribute to the organisation's performance. Whereas the relational perspective emphasises the social basis of cooperation, the RBV describes the mobilisation of strategic resources through partnerships. Collectively, they provide a comprehensive model of explaining managerial behaviour, capability building and performance in international joint ventures (Dyer & Singh, 1998; Grant, 1996; Madhok, 2006).

Identified Gap and Positioning of the Study

Despite significant studies on IJV performance across regions, the available literature has mainly focused on quantitative survey designs and on firm-level analysis in developed or East Asian countries such as China, Europe, and North America. Constructs such as trust, Culture, and knowledge transfer have been viewed as variables rather than processes and assumed to be rare.

There is comparatively little information on the experience of partnership dynamics at the operational level among managers working in the construction IJVs in the UAE. This paper fills that gap through a qualitative case study that anticipates managerial sense-making and everyday manoeuvring in the face of relational, contextual complexity. By doing so, it introduces an interpretive element that adds to prevailing quantitative research approaches and elucidates the operations of IJVs in emerging economies.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design and Philosophical Position

The research takes an interpretivist philosophical stance to investigate the views and experiences of managers of an international joint venture (IJV) in the UAE construction industry. Interpretivism presupposes that reality is socially constructed and that organisational phenomena can be best explained by the meanings individuals ascribe to their experiences (Creswell, 2013; Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Given this position, a qualitative single-case study design was chosen to explore organisational, relational, and managerial sense-making in depth in a real-life context. Case study research is especially suitable when the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context

are vague and when contemporary events are studied in the natural environment (Yin, 2018). The selection of this particular design was to gather lived experience and subjective accounts of partnership dynamics by managers in a real-life IJV.

Case Selection and Research Context

The empirical research area is a regional joint venture operating in the UAE construction industry, with its central operations in Abu Dhabi and Dubai. The UAE offers one of the most topical situations, as this country is highly dependent on international joint ventures to enter foreign markets and boasts rapid infrastructure development and a high level of global investment.

The type of IJV that will be chosen is the foreign-local partnership between a foreign construction company and a local one. It was selected deliberately for its relevance to large-scale construction activity, multinational management teams, the organisation's availability and willingness to participate in the research, and the period of operation, to enable managers to make meaningful reflections on the partnership's performance and difficulties over time.

Participants and Sampling

Purposive sampling was used to recruit participants; the sample consisted of individuals with direct managerial interests in the joint venture. This plan was supposed to guarantee the inclusion of information-rich cases that could provide an understanding of organisational performance, partner relations, and daily managerial practices (Creswell, 2013; Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

A total of 13 managers were involved in the study. The sample included project managers, operations managers, and senior supervisory staff who had been actively involved in decision-making, project leadership, and cross-partner coordination. Where feasible, snowball sampling was employed to identify additional respondents by referring to initial respondents, especially those with knowledge relevant to partnership dynamics or specific experiences of success and challenge within the IJV.

The purposive and snowball sampling methods are consistent with current qualitative research principles, which emphasise selecting informative respondents rather than statistical representativeness (Etikan *et al.*, 2016; Palinkas *et al.*, 2015). Most interpretive research designs employ such sampling plans to gain insight, context, and experiential understanding from individuals who have direct experience of the phenomenon under investigation.

Such practice aligns with the qualitative methodological literature, which emphasises that in interview studies, the sample size and selection should be oriented towards analytical sufficiency and the richness of insight rather than scale (Gentles *et al.*, 2015).

Data Collection

The collected data were based on 13 semi-structured

interviews, aimed at achieving consistency among participants and allowing sufficient freedom for them to delve into their personal experiences. Interviews were done in English and invited respondents to say what they considered about working in the IJV; cultural and communication issues; whether they felt trust, commitment and cooperation between the partners; how they share knowledge and learn; if there were conflicts and control and governance; how the regulatory and institutional environment affected them; and what were the managerial strategies they used to solve the emerging problems.

The interviews lasted 45 to 75 minutes each and were conducted in person or via online platforms, depending on participants' availability and preference. Before each interview, participants were informed of the study's objectives and their rights as research participants. The interviews were tape-recorded with the participants' express permission. In instances where recordings were not allowed, elaborate handwritten notes were taken during and right after the interview to ensure the integrity of the data.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical consent to conduct the study was obtained before data collection commenced. An information sheet detailing the research's intended purpose was provided to all participants to ensure they understood the purpose of their participation and the use of their data. Each interview was a written informed consent.

Participants were given pseudonyms, and anonymity was ensured by withholding organisational information from all transcripts and reports. All information was kept in a secure place accessible only to the researcher and was handled in compliance with the ethical standards set for research involving human subjects.

Data Analysis

The thematic analysis was applied to the qualitative data using the model proposed by Braun & Clarke (2006). The process began with repeated reading of the interview transcripts to become familiar with the information, then continued with systematic coding of meaningful segments of text. The first codes were then analysed to determine patterns and relationships, which were put into candidate themes.

These themes were later checked and updated by comparing them to the coded extracts and the entire data set to ensure each theme was internally consistent and distinct from the others. After stabilisation of the thematic structure, themes were defined and named, and an illustrative quotation was chosen to reflect the meanings inherent in each theme. The last action was to combine the thematic conclusions into a logical story that answered the research objectives and tied the new insights to the theoretical viewpoints on international joint ventures.

Trustworthiness

In order to make the study more credible, the focus was directed on the traditional qualitative quality requirements. Credibility was ensured by being cautious with the participants, by using verbatim transcripts when recordings were used, and by repeatedly moving data, codes, and themes to ensure interpretations were always based on the participants' descriptions. Credibility was enhanced by a clear record of the research process, including sampling choices, interview methods, and analytical measures.

Transferability was also achieved through a rich description of the organisational and national context, enabling the reader to determine the applicability of the results to other IJV environments. Confirmability was ensured by preserving an audit trail of analytic decisions and reflexive notes, thereby documenting how interpretations were formed and minimising the effects of uncontrolled researcher bias. Emerging understandings were cross-tabulated with field notes and existing background knowledge of the organisations to increase consistency and credibility, but did not purport to have used procedures not employed (such as full participant validation of themes).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The thematic analysis is based on 13 semi-structured interviews with managers who held project, operations, and senior supervisor positions in the joint venture. The qualitative investigation examined how managers in the UAE construction industry who engage in international joint ventures (IJVs) conceptualise success, foster partner cooperation, and manage contextual and relational issues. Thematic analysis of the interview transcripts identified five interconnected themes: perceptions of success, partner cooperation, implementation challenges, coping strategies, and contextual factors that shape performance.

Perceptions of IJV Success

In interviews, success was consistently defined as a key to IJV sustainability; however, respondents varied in the degree to which they prioritised certain success principles. Financial performance was the main benchmark for some managers. One participant argued:

“Financial performance is one of the most important factors; without profit, it is difficult to sustain the partnership over time.” (Participant A)

Relational and process factors and, in particular, communication and collaboration, were considered by others to be as important or even more important than short-term profitability. As one manager explained:

“If partners cannot communicate clearly and work together, misunderstandings and delays will eventually destroy the project, even if the numbers look good at the beginning.” (Participant B)

Some of the respondents took a more wide-ranging and multi-dimensional approach to success, incorporating commercial, relational, and contextual aspects. As an

illustration, one of the participants observed:

“Success is not only about financial performance or communication; cultural differences, trust, and local conditions also play a crucial role.” (Participant C)

Other people associated success with formal project management and risk governance, and emphasised the necessity to:

“Adapt to the local environment, including culture, regulation, and the political landscape.” (Participant O)

In general, the definition of success was simplified to be dynamic and context-dependent, in that financial performance must be bolstered by strong partnerships, a good fit with the context, and solid managerial skills.

Partner Cooperation and Relationship Quality

The second overarching theme related to the core of partner cooperation is the success of IJVs. The respondents identified effective collaboration as invaluable for achieving project goals.

Trust, transparency, and understanding were closely related to cooperation. One manager commented:

“It is difficult to work with someone you do not trust; trust is essential to achieving the joint venture’s goals.” (Participant E)

Others focused on mutual understanding as the basis of teamwork:

“Partners need to understand each other properly; when there is a common understanding of goals and expectations, it becomes much easier to work together.” (Participant F)

Respondents also defined cooperation as a continuous practice rather than a fixed state. One of the respondents condensed this by saying:

“Successful cooperation requires a shared vision, openness about what each side can realistically deliver, and accountability for commitments.” (Participant U)

Overall, cooperation was not considered a generic attitude but a relational potential that was built through behaviour, communication, accountability, and daily joint decision-making.

Challenges in Implementing IJVs

Although managers identified the advantages of IJVs, a wide range of obstacles has been reported, complicating implementation in the construction industry.

One of the most significant structural risks proved to be cultural differences. The respondents described different attitudes towards risk, authority, time management, and communication styles. As one participant observed:

“Different cultures have different ways of thinking, deciding, and communicating, which can create serious friction if not managed properly.” (Participant L)

The complexity of legal and regulatory issues was generally mentioned. The obstacles of navigating local regulatory environments were outlined by the respondents, with them suggesting that, typically, to ensure compliance, it was necessary:

“Significant time, effort, and financial resources.”

(Participant H)

In addition to these, respondents cited other pressures, including a lack of knowledge of local markets, the unpredictability of schedules and budgets, and differences in technological capacity between partners. In totality, these issues demonstrate that IJVs in the construction industry operate in a complex, interdependent, and unpredictable environment.

“In multinational teams, it is essential to have translators or bilingual team members to avoid misunderstandings.” (Participant W)

In addition to these, respondents cited other pressures, such as a lack of knowledge about local markets, the unpredictability of schedules and budgets, and differences in technological capacity between partners. In totality, these issues demonstrate that IJVs in the construction industry operate in a complex, interdependent, and unpredictable environment.

Strategies for Overcoming Challenges

In response to these issues, respondents reported various stabilisation and coping measures.

One of the main strategies was active communication. Participants placed more stress on frequent meetings and a clear definition of expectations. One respondent explained this in the following way:

“Being proactive in communication by organising regular meetings and ensuring everyone remains on the same page.” (Participant B)

Several focused on developing trust by making long-term commitments and being open. The relationships, investment, cultural learning and transparency were recurrently mentioned as stabilising mechanisms (Participants C, J).

It was also crucial that the management style is flexible. Managers also underlined the necessity of changing leadership strategies and compromise. One interviewee described why there was a necessity to:

“Adapt to different corporate and cultural traditions and find practical middle ground.” (Participant E)

There were also reported structural strategies that entailed the establishment of formal governance systems, building capacity through training and the transfer of knowledge, developing relationships with local stakeholders, and adopting a long-term partnership perspective.

Combined, these strategies suggest that success is not determined by how non-confrontational it is, but rather by the ability to positively cope with complexity and change.

Factors Shaping IJV Success

The last theme is the respondents' descriptions of the issues that determine the success of an IJV.

In interviews, the managers emphasised financial performance, communication quality, cultural awareness, adherence to regulations, knowledge transfer, and managers' abilities as the primary influential factors.

A number of the participants were concerned with

financial sustainability. One manager stated:

“Without strong financial planning and control, failure is almost inevitable.” (Participant E)

Others pointed to cooperation and communication as being fundamental:

“Clear communication and cooperative effort are the backbone of success.” (Participant F)

Regulatory awareness and cultural sensitivity were also highlighted. One interviewee noted:

“Cultural awareness is just as important as financial investment.” (Participant G)

One of them mentioned that non-compliance with regulations might have severe implications:

“Failure to comply with regulations can damage reputation and disrupt operations.” (Participant I)

Knowledge transfer was stated on several occasions as significant in terms of capability development:

“If knowledge is not transferred effectively, the project will never reach its full potential.” (Participant J)

Participants also stated that priorities differ with the type of project, the organisation's structure, and the operational context.

Discussion

This paper has explored the lived experience and perceptions of managers regarding international joint ventures (IJVs) in the UAE construction industry through an interpretive case study design. The results indicate that IJVs cannot be evaluated solely on financial grounds, but are realised as socially embedded organisational systems due to the quality of relationships, cultural fit, institutional limitations, and adaptive management procedures (Dyer & Singh, 1998; Granovetter, 1985; Madhok, 2006). The section will use the findings to interpret them relative to existing theory and empirical research, explaining how managers conceptualise success and manage tension in international construction partnerships.

IJV Success as a Relational and Contextual Construct

The results suggest that IJV success in the construction industry cannot be translated into financial performance, but it should be viewed as a process of relationship and institutionalisation. This supports previous studies, which proposed that financial indicators cannot reflect the complexity of performance in the project-based environment, where performance is characterised by uncertainties and interdependence (Beamish & Lupton, 2009; Luo, 2002).

Instead of being an objective, success seems to be dynamically created through continual cooperation, governance negotiation, and contextual adjustment. This meaning aligns with process-based views of organisational effectiveness, which define success as a process of constant change rather than ultimate success (Killing, 2013).

The importance of communication, transparency in governance and trust also promotes relational alliance management. These results complement the current body

of knowledge by showing how relational governance operates in everyday managerial practice in construction IJVs, where site-based co-ordination, institutional conformity, and cross-cultural interplay (Currall & Inkpen, 2002; Madhok, 2006) are at play.

Notably, the findings indicate that IJV success depends on alignment rather than standardisation (Dyer & Singh, 1998; Luo, 2002). The managers' priorities are changing in response to the intensity of regulations, partner compatibility, and project complexity, reinforcing the perception that alliance performance is sensitive to the environment but not universal.

Partner Cooperation as the Structural Foundation of IJVs

Developing the results, cooperation appeared not as a managerial choice but as a structural tool which forms the basis of venture stability. The participants mentioned trust, transparency and shared goals as key to operational effectiveness. Notably, cooperation was implemented not through formal contracts but through daily managerial behaviour, indicating that relational governance functions alongside legal control systems.

These results are very much in favour of the relational theory that theorises inter-organisational advantage as the product of trustful cooperation and the accumulation of relational capital (Dyer & Singh, 1998). The results also support the argument put forward by Prashant & Harbir (2009) that cooperative capability is a strategic resource that distinguishes the successful ventures and dysfunctional joint ventures. The participants' focus on shared vision aligns with data showing that strategic alignment improves resilience in the face of ambiguity and conflict (Zhang *et al.*, 2019). Collaboration was therefore not a sign of goodwill, but a functional ability to solve problems collectively under pressure.

Cultural and Institutional Pressures in Construction IJVs

Cultural differences, governance uncertainty, and regulatory issues were identified as long-term performance-limiting factors in IJVs. Culture was not viewed as a shallow difference, but as deeply ingrained in leadership norms, communication styles and organisational assumptions.

These conclusions conform to Hofstede's (1991) claim that cultural divergence causes instability in international partnerships when it is not managed, and Shenkar's (2012) argue that cultural distance is not necessarily a nationality issue but an interpretation by the manager. The respondents further indicated that dealing with the regulatory frameworks of the UAE was a managerial load and a professional skill.

The institutional theory describes this relationship by stating that organisational legitimacy in host-country systems determines survival (North, 1990; Peng *et al.*, 2008). The results show that IJV success is determined not only by internal coordination, but also by the capacity

to navigate legal complexity, regulatory compliance, and institutional expectations.

Knowledge Transfer as Strategic Integration

The participants clearly distinguished between information sharing and embedded learning. Successful IJVs were also defined by mutually capable development, especially in terms of the transfer of tacit knowledge inherent in engineering practice and project leadership.

This supports the knowledge-based perspective of the firm, which holds that organisations are sources of specific and specialised knowledge as well as integrators (Grant, 1996). Nonaka & Takeuchi (2007) support their argument by stating that the transfer of tacit knowledge needs continuity and trust. Where trust was low, the learning was transactional; where trust was high, it was generative.

These results support the postulated hypothesis by Inkpen & Tsang (2005) that knowledge-sharing networks are based on social capital rather than on structural design. IJVs that maintained relational continuity were more successful in learning about operations and creating long-term value. Resource-based perspective (RBV): Knowledge transfer. Luxury as a strategic asset is posted in alliances, not in individual firms, so IJVs co-create capabilities rather than accessing resources.

Adaptability and Risk Navigation

The participants did not describe IJVs as stable organisational systems, but as constantly reconfigured partnerships. The notion of adaptability emerged as the fundamental survival strategy, reflected in the flexibility of leadership, the sensitivity of relations, and the negotiation of governance.

This aligns with the dynamic capability theory, which states that organisational sustainability is based on the continuous reconfiguration of assets and responsiveness to environmental change (Teece *et al.*, 1997). The IJVs, which relied on hierarchical or contractual control, were deemed weak, whereas those that relied on relational control were deemed more resilient.

Relationship to Quantitative Evidence

Although the previous quantitative research of IJVs has already revealed statistical correlations between performance and issues related to cooperation, knowledge transfer, and host-country conditions, this qualitative research reveals how these correlations can be put into functional use. Unlike viewing trust, Culture, and cooperation as abstract variables, this paper shows how managers perceive, bargain for, and enact these elements in day-to-day interactions.

In this regard, the findings complement the available survey-based evidence on the mechanisms that drive organisational behaviour socially. Quantitative models indicate that relational and institutional variables do count; the present study illustrates why and how they do so by entrenching the dynamics of performance in managerial meaning-making and practice.

Theoretical Contributions

This work has three key contributions towards the IJV literature. First, it redefines success as an embedded process within an organisation rather than a fixed performance outcome. Continued managerial interaction, adaptation and negotiation and not financial indicators alone, result in success.

Second, the aspect of cooperation is reconceptualised as a managerial ability rather than a symbolic feature of alliance. It is operationalised through building trust, communication, and decision integration, and it further elaborates on the relational theory by showing how cooperation is put into practice.

Third, the paper combines relational theory, institutional theory, and the knowledge-based view into a cohesive explanatory model that provides a comprehensive account of the interaction between structural constraints and managerial agency in international construction projects.

Managerial Implications

The results have several implications for professional practice. Relationship management must be a strategic infrastructure and not an interpersonal skill. Cultural competence should be actively acquired rather than presupposed.

The government systems must be accountable and flexible. Knowledge systems are meant to be learning platforms, not compliance mechanisms. One of the fundamental managerial capabilities is regulatory intelligence. Lack of attention to dimensions leaves IJVs unstable, regardless of their financial might.

Limitations and Future Research

Since it is a single-case study, the results do not purport to generalise statistically, but provide analysis transferability. Future studies must conduct longitudinal research on how trust is developed, international differences, and leadership mindsets in alliance management. Mixed-methods designs can also benefit future studies by qualifying perceptual depth through performance measurement.

CONCLUSION

This paper has explored managers' understanding and experience of international joint ventures in the UAE construction industry through a qualitative case study design. The results show that IJVs are not simply contractual relations but socially embedded organisational arrangements influenced by cooperation, interpretation, institutional context, and learning.

Success was measured not only in terms of financial returns but also in trust building, flexibility, and governance procedures. Conceptualising cooperation as a management skill and knowledge transfer as a management process, this research enhances understanding of how international partnerships work in emerging construction markets.

In practice, the results highlight the significance of relational leadership, as well as the awareness and flexibility of institutions' governance. IJVs that emphasise learning, trust, and environmental intelligence tend to maintain collaboration and long-term stability.

Comprehensively, this research paper provides qualitative insights into the development of IJVs by highlighting realities on the ground and offering a theoretically grounded understanding of the success or failure of international partnerships.

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