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Priyan Khakhar, Hussain Gulzar Ramma, Vijay Pereira  
**Biculturals in International Business Negotiations: Moving away from the single culture paradigm**

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# **Biculturals in International Business Negotiations: Moving away from the single culture paradigm**

**Priyan Khakhar, Hussain G. Rammal, Vijay Pereira**

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## **Abstract**

**Purpose:** Biculturals possess higher cultural intelligence than monocultural individuals. This study explores biculturals' key factors and attributes and how their cultural knowledge and identification influence International Business Negotiations (IBN) and help their firms outperform others.

**Design/methodology/approach:** Data was collected from semi-structured interviews with 35 bicultural senior managers in Lebanon.

**Findings:** The findings highlight three essential qualities and behaviors that allow biculturals to act as a bridge between the parties during IBN: adaptability, culture frame switching, and creativity.

**Originality:** This study explores the notion of bicultural personnel using their understanding of multiple cultures to be innovative, avoid groupthink, and generate new creative ideas that help overcome stalemates during IBNs.

**Keywords:** Biculturals; international business negotiations; cross-cultural management; cultural identification; cultural frame switching; qualitative research method.

## **Research Paper**

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The globalization literature primarily focuses on the movement of goods and services across borders. However, the movement of people or international migration remains under-researched, even though the number of migrants worldwide has continued to proliferate, reaching 281 million in 2020 (United Nations, 2021). A consequence of this migration has been an increase in individuals who have internalized two or more cultures and identify themselves as biculturals. These biculturals are employed by organizations in developed and developing economies (Kane & Levina, 2017) and are involved in various activities, including business negotiations. For firms with an entrepreneurial outlook, employing biculturals increases their chances of success in cross-cultural settings. Hence, the presence of these individuals can help enhance the organization's competitiveness and performance.

Bicultural employees can help organizational efficiency, whether the firm is domestic or international. These biculturals can help bring new perspectives and ideas and support new migrants and expatriates to adapt to the distinct business environment. For multinational enterprises (MNEs), bicultural employees can help maneuver the challenges in the contemporary socio-political global business environment. The rise of economic nationalism in many developed countries such as Great Britain and the United States means that the traditional boundary-spanning role undertaken by expatriates during a long-term international assignment may come under scrutiny, and firms will be forced to send managers for short-term business visits, including negotiations (Rammal et al., 2022). Since the national and ethnic cultural differences between the negotiators have been highlighted as one of the reasons for failure, we would expect firms to reduce this liability by choosing negotiators who have a sound understanding of cultural issues to help overcome the differences between the two parties (Kim & Hubbard, 2007). Bicultural individuals better understand the issues faced across cultures and can act as a conduit/bridge for communication between cultures (Thomas & Brannen, 2010). Hence, organizations need to understand how best to manage the knowledge and skills of the biculturals.

While there have been some studies looking at how bicultural employees (or biculturals) negotiate and communicate their identity within their group (Toomey, Dorjee, & Ting-Toomey, 2013), the issue has not been studied in the context of International Business Negotiations (IBN). The involvement of the biculturals challenges the previous IBN studies that suggest that the monocultural background and differences of the negotiators are critical

issues (Rammal, 2005). In this study, we address this critical human resource management issue by attempting to answer the following question:

***How does biculturals' cultural identification influence international business negotiations process and outcomes?***

We interviewed experienced bicultural negotiators in Lebanon. Our findings show that biculturals can influence IBNs through their ability to integrate multiple cultures and adapt to the cultural requirements of negotiations, thereby acting as a bridge between the negotiating sides. They also display a high level of cultural frame-switching, especially using multiple languages to communicate effectively. Finally, biculturals can help avoid groupthink and generate new creative ideas that help overcome stalemates during IBNs. The findings contribute to the IBN literature by furthering the current conversations in the academic literature by adding the perspectives of biculturals and not being limited to multicultural societies. We also find that organizations strategically use these biculturals' tacit cultural knowledge to mitigate cross-cultural communication challenges and develop trust between the negotiating sides, which can be the basis for long-term relations.

## **2. BICULTURAL EMPLOYEES AND INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS NEGOTIATIONS**

Culture is a set of beliefs that people share. Therefore, culture is acquired, and it is possible for individuals who are heavily exposed to other cultures and ways of thinking to become bicultural (Fitzpatrick, 2017). Migration has been central to the increasing number of biculturals, and many organizations have employees who identify with multiple cultural customs. These biculturals are not merely exposed to two cultures but have successfully internalized them (Friedman & Liu, 2009). Biculturals include immigrants, refugees, international students, expatriates, or individuals with mixed ethnicity (Shirmohammadi, Beigi, & Stewart, 2019).

The literature on biculturals is split regarding whether a bicultural identity can hinder social interaction, commonly referred to as the bicultural identity conflict (Stroink & Lalonde, 2009). Some authors argue that biculturalism can be unsettling and disruptive to how people interact, socialize, and face pressure to act and behave in a way that relates to their dominant or ethnic culture (Rudmin, 2003). Others believe that biculturalism has more significant benefits for how individuals interact, communicate, and respond to everyday issues (Phinney, Horenczyk, Liebkind, & Vedder, 2001). These concerns tend to be raised by people who

believe that when individuals are introduced to another culture, they choose between their cultural heritage and the new culture they are exposed to. However, this exposure can benefit individuals as they tend to question assumptions about cultural heritage and avoid groupthink once exposed to another culture (Mok & Morris, 2010). For this very reason, harnessing biculturalism is encouraged in International Business activities and is seen as beneficial for organizations (Friedman & Liu, 2009).

Bicultural identity integration (BII) is another issue covered in the literature. BII explains whether biculturals see their ethnic and mainstream cultures as compatible (Mok & Morris, 2012). Exposure to different cultures does not guarantee that individuals will grasp and adopt the cultural intricacies. Individuals may know another culture but may not identify with it and are unlikely to embrace it.

Studies on cross-cultural communication and International Business Negotiations (IBNs) have flourished over the last few decades (Szkudlarek, Osland, Nardon, & Zander, 2020). The opening of new emerging and transition economies provides opportunities for increased trade and investment activities. Previous studies have focused on cultural differences in international communication and negotiations (Richardson & Rammal, 2018; Tenzer, Terjesen, & Harzing, 2017). The ability to manage these differences is a crucial skill expected of negotiators. The collectivism-individualism construct has been used to highlight critical cultural variance between countries and explain the economic development differences (Shi, 2001).

Despite the growing number of studies on IBNs, the focus has primarily been on mono-culture individuals, and the involvement of biculturals in cross-border negotiations remains under-researched. Moreover, while some attempts have been made to address the role of biculturals in intra and inter-organizational (see, for example, Suzuki, 1998), these efforts are yet to be replicated in research on IBNs.

Bicultural individuals can play an essential role in IBNs. Unlike individuals from mono-culture backgrounds, biculturals can bridge cultural differences by understanding their team members' behaviors and communication patterns and potentially that of the other team, with whom they share a common culture. Therefore, biculturals can avoid groupthink and improve the decision-making process (Hermann & Rammal, 2010). This ability to shift from one cultural mindset or mental model to another is called cultural frame switching (CFS) (Cheng, Lee, & Benet-Martínez, 2006). CFS can be a crucial resource during IBNs and includes

language as an essential component. Extant literature suggests that biculturals vary in how they manage their dual identity between their ethnic and majority cultures (Benet-Martinez, Leu, Lee, & Morris, 2002) and can trigger frame switching where they shift between their various cultural behaviors and attitudes (Ringberg, Luna, Reihlen, & Peracchio, 2010). Biculturals tend to be entrepreneurial in the way they think, partly due to greater engagement with other migrants from similar cultural backgrounds (Chand & Tung, 2014). Engaging with people helps develop flexibility in managing their affairs, creating a competitive advantage in international markets (Xu, Drennan, & Mathews, 2019), and can particularly benefit SMEs (Sadiku-Dushi, Dana, & Ramadani, 2019). Therefore, this study investigates whether biculturals in negotiating teams increase the probability of integrative outcomes.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

We distinguish between biculturalism and multiculturalism. Biculturalism is the degree to which an individual internalizes two or more cultures, while multiculturalism refers to accepting cultural differences in society (Engelsberger, Cavanagh, Bartram, & Halvorsen, 2021; Murdock, 2016). The Middle East provides an interesting context to study this phenomenon, mainly since the cultural characteristics of the region have been found to influence the way managers and employees behave compared to those in the Western world (Raven & Welsh, 2004; Welsh & Raven, 2006). Even though Lebanon is not a multicultural society, the levels of biculturalism remain high due to the migration of people during the Lebanese civil war of 1975-90, where large parts of the community fled the country with their families to an adopted country while still maintaining strong links with the country after the war was over (Ghosn & Khoury, 2011; Lischer, 2005). In their study on Lebanon, Khakhar and Rammal (2013) highlight the unique cultural setting of the country in terms of religious diversity, languages, and cultural influences that are fused with the broader Arab culture of the region. The varied effects pose challenges for management in the region (Budhwar, Pereira, Mellahi, & Singh, 2019; Pereira, Neal, Temouri, & Qureshi, 2020; Singh, Pereira, Mellahi, & Collings, 2021). For these reasons, Hofstede (1991) stated that he would have treated Lebanon separately from neighboring countries had the IBM data for Lebanon not already been merged with other Arab countries when he received it for analysis. Therefore, Lebanon provides an apt setting for us to study the phenomenon of bicultural negotiators in a society that is not multicultural.

### *Data collection and analysis*

We apply the qualitative semi-structured interview method to collect data (Silverman, 2011; Stake, 2013) and follow the contextual explanation technique (Fletcher & Plakoyiannaki, 2011). Qualitative methods are deemed appropriate since the central research question is exploratory and focuses on ‘how’ cultural identification influences IBNs involving biculturals (Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2005). Using purposive sampling (Grbich, 2007), we interviewed individuals who met the following two criteria derived from the previous literature (Hong, 2010). First, they should have lived in two or more countries, with at least five years in each country. Second, only those individuals who considered themselves biculturals are included. This includes those biculturals who had emigrated to another country during their childhood (for example, Lebanese Americans/ French/ Australian/ Canadian/ British/ Brazilians who were forced to relocate during the Lebanese civil war of 1975-90 and later returned to Lebanon), as well as displaced diasporas (for example, non-Arab Armenian managers living in Lebanon whose families had fled from Turkey over 100 years ago).

In addition, we also considered the individuals’ experience in conducting IBNs. As a result of this process, 35 managers were identified and interviewed. The interviewees included senior managers of public and private companies representing real estate and construction, marketing consulting, food export and import, insurance, banking, tourism sectors, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). This diverse sample enhanced the validity and generalizability of our study. Table 1 lists the cultural backgrounds of the interviewees.

**Table 1:** Profile of Interviewees

<i>Interviewee #</i>	<i>Country of Birth</i>	<i>Country of Citizenship</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Number of years in Lebanon</i>
1	Lebanon	USA/Lebanon	M	48	17
2	Lebanon	USA/Lebanon	M	55	20
3	Lebanon	USA/Lebanon	M	53	10
4	Lebanon	USA/Lebanon	M	60	21
5	USA	USA/Lebanon	F	46	23
6	USA	USA/Lebanon	M	45	30
7	Armenia	Armenia/Lebanon	M	41	31
8	Lebanon	Australia/Lebanon	M	59	10
9	Lebanon	Australia/Lebanon	M	61	9
10	Australia	Australia/Lebanon	M	50	30
11	Australia	Australia/Lebanon	M	48	29
12	Lebanon	France/Lebanon	F	58	12
13	Lebanon	France/Lebanon	M	57	13
14	Lebanon	France/Lebanon	M	61	10
15	France	France/Lebanon	M	40	17
16	France	France/Lebanon	M	42	20
17	France	France/Lebanon	F	42	10

18	France	France/Lebanon	M	46	21
19	Lebanon	Canada/Lebanon	F	57	23
20	Lebanon	Canada/Lebanon	M	55	30
21	Lebanon	Canada/Lebanon	M	56	31
22	Lebanon	Canada/Lebanon	M	49	10
23	Canada	Canada/Lebanon	M	44	9
24	Canada	Canada/Lebanon	M	45	30
25	Canada	Canada/Lebanon	M	41	29
26	Canada	Canada/Lebanon	M	39	12
27	Canada	Canada/Lebanon	M	43	13
28	Lebanon	UK/Lebanon	M	61	10
29	UK	UK/Lebanon	F	38	17
30	UK	UK/Lebanon	M	39	20
31	UK	UK/Lebanon	M	41	10
32	UK	UK/Lebanon	M	41	21
33	UK	UK /Lebanon	M	46	23
34	Brazil	Brazil	F	38	30
35	Brazil	Brazil	M	39	17

On average, each interview lasted one hour. The interview questions were developed from previous literature on IBNs and biculturals (Barker, 2017; Ghauri, Ott, & Rammal, 2020; Hall, 1981; Hofstede, 2001; Kane & Levina, 2017; Richardson, 2021). The questions focused on the context of communication, the group dynamics involving negotiators on both sides, and whether the bicultural nature of the negotiators influenced the negotiation and bargaining process. The interview questions included: *How would you describe your negotiation style? What aspect of your culture do you feel affects your communication with someone of a similar culture? Do you find yourself adapting to your counterpart in IBNs? Are you able to pick up different cultural cues when negotiating? When negotiating, what language do you use, and in what language do you think? When negotiating with someone with a similar cultural profile, do you use this similarly to facilitate commonalities in the negotiation? Do you see your negotiators' point of view if they are from one of your base cultures? Do you empathize with the cultural differences of your counterpart? Have there been instances in negotiations when things have deviated from the plan, but you have managed to bring them back in line? Do you read and notice the cultural nuances and performance of culturally mixed teams vs. teams of your counterpart that may not be culturally diverse? What was the makeup of the teams involved in the negotiations? Did the negotiators take any steps to familiarize themselves with each other?*

We kept written field notes to capture observations about the people, places, activities, and conversations (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Next, we transcribed, analyzed, and manually coded the interview data. Finally, we developed categories and coded the information under themes (Hartley, 2004). Each research team member followed the coding process individually to

avoid researcher bias in interpretation associated with manual coding. This ensured that the final themes were developed through a robust verification and validation of individual codes (Hubermann & Miles, 1994). These resulting connections or themes are presented as findings in the next section.

#### **4. FINDINGS**

The analysis of the interview data helped identify the behavior and traits of bicultural negotiators and the factors that influence the negotiation process. Our focus is on three key themes that laid the foundations for our propositions: the link between integration and adaptability, high cultural frame switching, and the ability of bicultural individuals to generate creative new ideas.

##### ***The link between integration and adaptability***

The words "unity", "flexibility," and "adaptability" were frequently used in the interviews with the bicultural managers. Interestingly the concept of flexibility and integration correlates with the cultural diversity and size of the teams. Bicultural teams have been examined from a conceptual perspective, but what is clear is the possible positive contribution to team effectiveness that these studies point to too. As this conversation with one of the Lebanese American interviewees, who heads a major food company, highlights, bicultural negotiators demonstrate vital cultural intelligence to engage and communicate effectively with people from various cultures:

*"Given the blockade of Qatar by some GCC countries, our business as a Lebanese food exporter with Doha has been good. However, the Qataris have a lot of choice of exporters, so more power. They can be very picky and tough negotiators. We were approached by a Qatari food import company who asked us for a proposal of Lebanese food products that would 'work' in Qatar, which they could then import. I assigned a group of three local Lebanese middle-level managers to join me to meet with them. As these managers had no international experience, I felt it would be a good learning experience. The importer gave information and specifications, and we agreed to give them a list of potential products and prices. I assigned these managers to prepare this proposal after some research. During this meeting, I noticed my team taking notes individually but not asking any specific questions. They were also working independently with no inter-group discussion. Seemed a bit disjointed. There was less interpersonal communication. It seemed like a formal meeting, all in Arabic. I didn't think much of it. The meeting lasted 40 minutes. The importer's team consisted of 4 Qataris who were American educated with strong national pride and respect for their expat population and a degree of*

*'Americanization'. They were also the decision-makers. One month later, we sent the proposal of goods, which was [to my surprise] rejected.*

*I called in a crisis meeting and asked my team how they prepared the proposal. They had assigned tasks in 3 separate parts, and then all finished their parts and combined them into one proposal. There was no team integration and no understanding of how to influence and communicate the Qataris with Western education. I could see how they missed the aspect of Qatari culture and different expat cultures, thereby suggesting Lebanese-specific food products that would not work in Qatar. I requested the Qatari team for a new meeting in Doha with a new team. I assigned different managers this time: 2 Lebanese Canadians and 1 Lebanese American manager. At this meeting, I observed my team speaking with the Qataris and discussing ideas and products that could work with Qatari expat populations and locals. The meeting lasted for nearly two hours with many questions from my team, and this team developed an excellent rapport as opposed to the first one. They were talking informally in Arabic and North American English fused. There were also some jokes and very different body language.” – Interviewee #4*

What is evident from this example and other interviews is that bicultural negotiating teams perceive and think about others' biculturalism based on how they organize and structure their own two identities, or cultural blendedness, within the negotiations. That aids social integration by fostering adaptability and identifying commonalities. This sort of *cultural blending* or mixing is preferred by many bicultural individuals, as demonstrated in our interviews. During the interviews, it also became apparent that most of the bicultural managers and negotiators made a conscious attempt to show their 'biculturalness' or 'internationalness' to the other parties by explicitly or implicitly stating their country of birth and the other places they have spent significant time, and this correlated with the interviewees who had been born outside Lebanon. For example, almost all the French Lebanese and American Lebanese interviewees said they would mention that they were born in France or the USA during the negotiations but would say they were of Arab origin in the hope of establishing some similarities (and blended cultures). This highlights their ability to adapt and quickly adjust to the other negotiators. As this quote from a Lebanese British marketing manager explains:

*"When I negotiated with someone from the U.K. recently, I found myself speaking about my connection to England, including the places I liked and football and activities I did when I lived there. I also notice that my accent changes slightly automatically. I felt this made our interaction more informal and smoother as I was able to adapt to her way of thinking." - Interviewee #29*

We also infer here a degree of cultural intelligence. More bicultural integration of the negotiators (having spent substantial time abroad assimilating a second culture) would result in a higher 'need for adaptability'. Higher bicultural integrated individuals in our interviews

had a conscious ability to control and adapt one's cognitive processes stemming from their different experiences to mold their cross-cultural interactions. As a Lebanese American management consultant states below, when talking about working in a diverse team:

*"Working in [a global consulting firm], I can easily recall moments where I, as the team lead, needed to be the distiller of a multicultural, highly functioning, working team. I can recall a moment trying to consolidate a high-energy, confrontational Italian, an introverted Swiss who delivered her thoughts in note form and expected feedback to be written, not spoken, and an Arab-Lebanese who expected me to be "on their side" as someone who's also originally Lebanese. Trying to pull this team together to deliver a unified solution and outcome to a client required incredible cultural intelligence. I attribute that to my upbringing and exposure to different working cultures. It can be uncomfortable, but with the right navigation, it can be a powerful tool to incorporate widespread creative inputs and a broad spectrum of outlooks into one powerful solution. And that doesn't take into consideration the organization's culture and how that was meant to help gel our efforts and direction to be a highly functioning unit." – Interviewee #3*

Interestingly, our interviews highlight how bicultural can build relationships with people from various cultural groups (and sub-groups), which leads to intra-team effectiveness.

### ***High cultural frame switching***

During the interviews, it was apparent that the 'thinking' and the 'spoken' mainframe and language would switch easily depending on the situation and the negotiators' cultural commonalities. Language is one of the main factors influencing an individual's degree of culture frame switching (CFS). Most interviewees stated they could effectively function with two distinct languages, hence schemas. One manager recalled a personal experience to demonstrate how their CFS ability helped them develop a working relationship with a client:

*"I was informed that one of our multinational clients was thinking of pulling out of a construction deal and wanted to re-negotiate terms. I have spoken to this client two times on the phone in the past but never in person, and as the conversation was always in Arabic, I assumed he was Lebanese Arab. My CEO usually dealt with him and would update me. It was always a professional conversation. This contract with my construction company was important. As my CEO was out of town, the management asked to meet with the client. A negotiation meeting was arranged, and we met in our board room. It began with many technical terms, specifications, and prices and felt like a rigid computer game. There was a negative air to it all, and he came in very strong. After around 30 minutes and some huffing and puffing, he declared, 'I am going back to Nice [France] tomorrow, and have plans with my family, and I need to get this done or closed'. Suddenly, as if something had clicked in my mind when he mentioned Nice, and my 'antennas' went up. I was born there, lived there until I was 25 before moving back to Lebanon, and I see myself as*

*very French and Arab Lebanese. Very fond memories of my youth. 'Es tu de Nice / Are you from Nice' I asked in French, to which he replied in French also 'Yes I moved there when I was 17 from Lebanon and have lived there for 20 years and visit Beirut for work when needed', with his facial language becoming softer. It was like an almost instant shift.*

*Suddenly, we had shifted the whole conversation from Arabic to French. We went off topic and talked about certain areas in Nice, cafes, and our schools back in Nice, and I found myself 'thinking' in French and not Arabic, as well as observing that his rigid behavior had also calmed down, as did mine. What happened is that we had now associated with each other and that now facilitated the atmosphere in the negotiation, and our interpersonal interactions had moved from negative to positive in around 20 minutes. We got back to the specifics of the deal [speaking in French]. I guess without realizing it, we both found ourselves more agreeable. I suggested some concessions, ones I would not give, and he mellowed on some of his demands. He suggested we both ask to have a break while I telephone by CEO and update him on the specifics on where each side stood. Without giving you too many details, at the end of the week, the contract was signed, and we both got a deal we were happy with.' – Interviewee #18*

The data asserts that high levels of CFS involve navigating between two different personalities when using two languages within biculturals. Language stimulates different cultural identities in biculturals, resulting in a more accommodating and socially adapted atmosphere in negotiations. As a result, biculturals can act as efficient boundary spanners and bridge cultural gaps. The interviewees explained that the business community in Lebanon is very aware of the cultural complexity and language of conducting negotiations in an ethnically and religiously diverse region. As a real-estate manager noted:

*"As a real estate agent, I often negotiate with buyers and sellers of different backgrounds in Lebanon and international clients. When speaking with Lebanese buyers, I speak Arabic, use nuances, jokes, and language-specific to Arabs. It is very different when I am speaking to an Armenian buyer. There, my personality flips as I speak in a completely different language Armenian, with its own set of nuances, jokes, small talk, and way of approaching issues such as price. If I spoke to the Armenian in a direct translation from Arabic, or the other way around, I would never be able to sell a house." – Interviewee #7*

### ***Ability to generate new ideas and creativity***

The final finding of the study deals with bilaterals' creativity and the generation of new ideas. The interviewees acknowledged that a fusion of cultural schemas leads to a greater degree of these two variables. The words "fusion", "creativity," and "out-of-the-box" were used frequently in the interviews, indicating an awareness of the cognitive complexity of their effectiveness. Thus, cognitive complexity would be an element of improving personal effectiveness, where higher creativity enhances efficiency.

One manager of an international NGO recalled their experiences with contracts in Lebanon with a purely domestic advertising house and a multinational one:

*"We were mandated to go through a phase of rebranding for the Middle East region and needed a new social media brand identity that would satisfy our stakeholders in both the Middle East and America. We approached a local marketing consultancy in Beirut and signed a contract; The brand identity samples and options they submitted did not impress our stakeholders in North America as they felt that the ideas were not offering anything new. They were considered as 'basic' ideas. We also felt the social media content they suggested felt like they didn't get us as an international organization. We then approached a multinational marketing company based in Dubai. The team they sent to our offices to discuss the project was more astute and understood the line of an identity and brand vision in a more holistic way that fitted better with us both in the MENA region and internationally. We also felt their design eye was less biased. During our negotiation, we observed the mixed nature of their team - I was negotiating with a team that was international in their approach and outlook but who were all Arab and took feedback very well. We were offered some creative, out-of-the-box ideas in our meeting, including a 3D moving logo for our social media, as well as ideas on social experiment videos on the refugee crisis, something we didn't even ask for." – Interviewee #14*

Our interview quotes suggest that a bicultural team dynamic is explicitly 'noticeable'. In addition, the data indicates that bicultural individuals are more creative, which leads to better performance. Thus, biculturalism allows negotiators to understand the complexity of the discussed issues and develop new, novel, and innovative ideas in the negotiation setting. This is a desirable quality sought by organizations, as highlighted in this quote from a Lebanese Canadian human resource manager in an investment bank:

*"When recruiting and interviewing for senior managers, our company actively seeks out candidates who demonstrate a good degree of international experience with considerable time spent abroad. We find that these candidates usually have more novel ways of looking at things when interacting with large clients as well as initiate new ideas management practices they have learned within the bank." – Interview #27*

Our final finding also implies that combining two or more cultural schemas helps elevate creativity leading to positive outcomes for their organizations. We find that this creativity leads to innovations in the work environment.

## **5. DISCUSSION**

This study finds that biculturals adapt and switch between the two familiar cultures. The more they are exposed to cross-cultural situations like IBNs, the more they can develop

general principles to analyze and interpret the unique cultural aspects of the other side (Benet-Martínez, Lee, & Leu, 2006). Figure 1 illustrates the key findings of this study.

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INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE

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In this section, we discuss our findings and highlight some propositions that would inform future research in the field. The three areas of an individual's adaptability are cognitive, emotional, and behavioral. Cognitive adaptability refers to flexibility in the way negotiators think. Their accrued experience of operating across the two cultures allows them to switch their cultural frames or even blend them if the situation demands (Friedman & Liu, 2009). Emotional adaptability captures the ability of individuals to foresee unusual emotions, better understand colleagues, and manage accordingly (Meisler, 2021). For organizations, having bicultural personnel who understand the display of emotions linked to specific cultural behavior, or cultural intelligence, can be an asset in cross-cultural negotiations (Presbitero, 2021). Finally, the cultural shock element of negotiating in another country is reduced due to the behavioral adaptability of biculturals. By choosing among the several behavioral strategies, biculturals control their behavior and better comprehend the likely intentions of other actions. In effect, they respond more appropriately to their colleague's behavior because of their ability to receive and convey information more effectively (Barker, 2017).

Our finding highlights that this adaptability makes biculturals ideal candidates to take on a boundary-spanning role to transform their bicultural experience into biculturalism. Boundary spanners are individuals that link the network structure of an organization, which is the organization's internal networks and external sources of information (Mockaitis, Zander, & De Cieri, 2018). Thus, biculturals' knowledge and experience increase the team's effectiveness in acquiring and applying external knowledge to their tasks.

Having explained the characteristics, adaptability, and boundary spanning, we can see how they help individuals succeed more in international business negotiations. Their adaptability makes them more flexible in teams and better overcome the difficulties caused by cultural diversity. Furthermore, due to their communication skills and accumulated experiences in diverse cultural settings, bicultural members in multicultural teams can help facilitate the knowledge transfer process, leading to a more informed decision-making (Dias, Zhu, & Samaratunge, 2020). The concept of cultural frame switching refers to individuals who can

quickly overcome challenges that arise from the difficulty of integrating and instead orientating between their two cultures (Miramontez, Benet-Martínez, & Nguyen, 2008). Therefore, some can easily incorporate their two cultures daily within biculturals, while others find it difficult.

Regarding bicultural identity integration (BII), individuals low on BII are more likely to face disagreements and clashes during international business negotiations when different cultural values, thoughts, and expectations arise. On the other hand, individuals high on BII find it easier to fit into IBN processes and connect with individuals with different cognitive complexities and social behaviors. Thus, individuals should be high on BII to blend their two cultures while negotiating internationally and view their personalities as close as possible to the different negotiators. Furthermore, we find that bicultural negotiators try to identify members of their in-groups in the other party in the hope of building a rapport. In brief, having an integrated cultural identity helps individuals be more optimistic, positive, and of fair attitudes towards groups of business negotiations and accordingly reduce biases and stereotypes to build a synergetic, integrated cultural identity while negotiating in an international field. The example of the Qatar blockade mentioned by the interviewees and the bridging role highlight the significance of bicultural individual integration. Therefore, we propose that:

***PI:** The higher the individual's bicultural integration, the more likely they will adapt to the international business negotiation process.*

Another finding of our study relates to the cultural frame switching (CFS) through language exhibited by the bicultural negotiators. These individuals have more than one cultural meaning system that they can adjust to according to the cultural environment they are dealing with. As our findings demonstrate, bicultural negotiators can switch their cultural frames and create an opportunity to engage with negotiators from the other side by tapping into shared experiences. CFS helps biculturals to be more flexible when interacting with individuals from different cultures; this is one of the main factors that lead to the success of an international business negotiation since it breaks down cultural barriers. When negotiating internationally, biculturals with relevant CFS skills can perform and relate suitably with different cultures. They can distinguish between cultural norms, beliefs, values, and verbal and non-verbal behaviors. Therefore, greater integration of bicultural individuals in CFS leads to a higher probability of them succeeding during international business negotiations since they will be

more prone to understand, deliver, and communicate with other parties from different cultures a desirable agreement or deal. With these competencies, bicultural individuals can more easily play boundary spanners and conflict mediators to resolve conflicts in an organization (Jehn & Mannix, 2001) and even negotiate. Hence, we argue that:

***P2:** Biculturals with high cultural frame switching (CFS) are more likely to succeed in international business negotiations.*

Finally, we highlight biculturals' ability to use the information they receive from their colleagues by coming up with creative ideas that make them effective in teams (Butler et al., 2018; Friedman & Liu, 2009). Biculturals demonstrate higher levels of creativity than monocultural individuals (Lakshman, Bacouël-Jentjens, & Kraak, 2021; Szymanski & Ipek, 2020). Since biculturals already have much experience and knowledge from different cultural settings, they are well-suited to join an outstanding team. Their ability to relate and adapt cognitively, emotionally, and behaviorally to other colleagues allows for discussing new ideas in ways that can lead to more productive results. Friedman and Liu (2009) state that the positive relationship built with team members creates trust, leading to more successful international business negotiations.

Managers are often limited by the complexity of the work environment and bounded rationality, which causes them to refer to their beliefs, perceptions, or intuitions to make decisions in negotiations. These decisions can be biased, especially since they are usually reluctant to try new and unaccustomed ideas. The example of the NGO narrated by one of the interviewees highlights that biculturals are more effective negotiators and creative problem-solvers (and solution givers), making decisions better. Since biculturals are well known for being emotionally flexible and having a high network range, they are ideal for decision-making. Biculturals' positive effectiveness in teams and decision-making can be used as an asset in international business negotiations, even if the group is more culturally diverse and creative (Szymanski & Ipek, 2020).

When negotiations involve mergers between organizations, biculturals can help bridge cultural gaps, evaluate the cultural fit, and play a pivotal role in the integration phase. Thus, we postulate that:

***P3:** Biculturals' ability to generate new ideas and sound decisions can be an asset for organizations to achieve positive outcomes in negotiations.*

## 6. THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

This study makes several contributions to theory and practice. Previous studies on culture and IBNs have focused on single culture paradigms comparing one with another. We extend this approach and look at culture not from a single country-level lens paradigm, but from the concept of multiple layers of cultural identity, namely biculturalism, within the changing international business negotiating environment. In this vein, the contribution of this study is essential as the sample is generated from industry, including managers and negotiators.

The findings have implications for human resource management and how organizations can use the knowledge and abilities of their bicultural personnel to gain a competitive advantage. We also show the value that these bicultural with their entrepreneurial mindset, which is informed by their rich social interactions and experiences, bring to organizations. The increasing emphasis on organizations becoming intrapreneurial is best served with biculturals providing distinct advantages that can help organizations compete in international markets or with international clients or other businesses. Although this study focuses on the IBN process, biculturals can also use their skills to facilitate the post-merger integration phase and help bridge the cultural gaps between the organizations. Also, their cultural intelligence makes them ideal candidates to help expatriates and repatriates adjust or re-adjust. They assist in alleviating the effects of culture and reverse culture shock by taking on the role of mentors during and after the international assignment.

Theoretically, we contribute to the international management and cross-cultural communication field. Previous studies have analyzed how negotiators' cultural backgrounds can influence negotiations. By studying biculturals, we contribute to the theory and highlight the complexity of multiple cultural influences on individuals and how this affects their communication and business negotiation skills. A critical theoretical contribution we make is that we distinguish between multiculturalism and biculturalism. Our primary research question asked of our expert informants who had fused two or three cultures within themselves as individuals. By doing so, we distinguished them from multiculturalism, which focuses on assimilating many cultures into society. In doing so, we bring the conversation about cultural influence in negotiations back to the individual rather than speculating on national-level effects only.

The data for the study was sourced from experienced negotiators actively involved in IBNs. Hence, the study's findings provide practical insights compared to studies conducted with graduate students or negotiation simulations and, as a result, are generalizable.

## 7. FUTURE RESEARCH

Like all research, this study has certain limitations, which we highlight as opportunities for future research. For example, we study biculturals from one culture, Lebanon, which has been exposed to political uncertainty over an extended period. Future research could explore whether similar negotiator behavior is observable in countries without high political risks. Other studies could investigate regional rather than country-level cultural emphasis and influences on individuals, whether there is a link between the cultural distance between countries and the level of biculturalism, and how this affects negotiation behaviors in a regional setting.

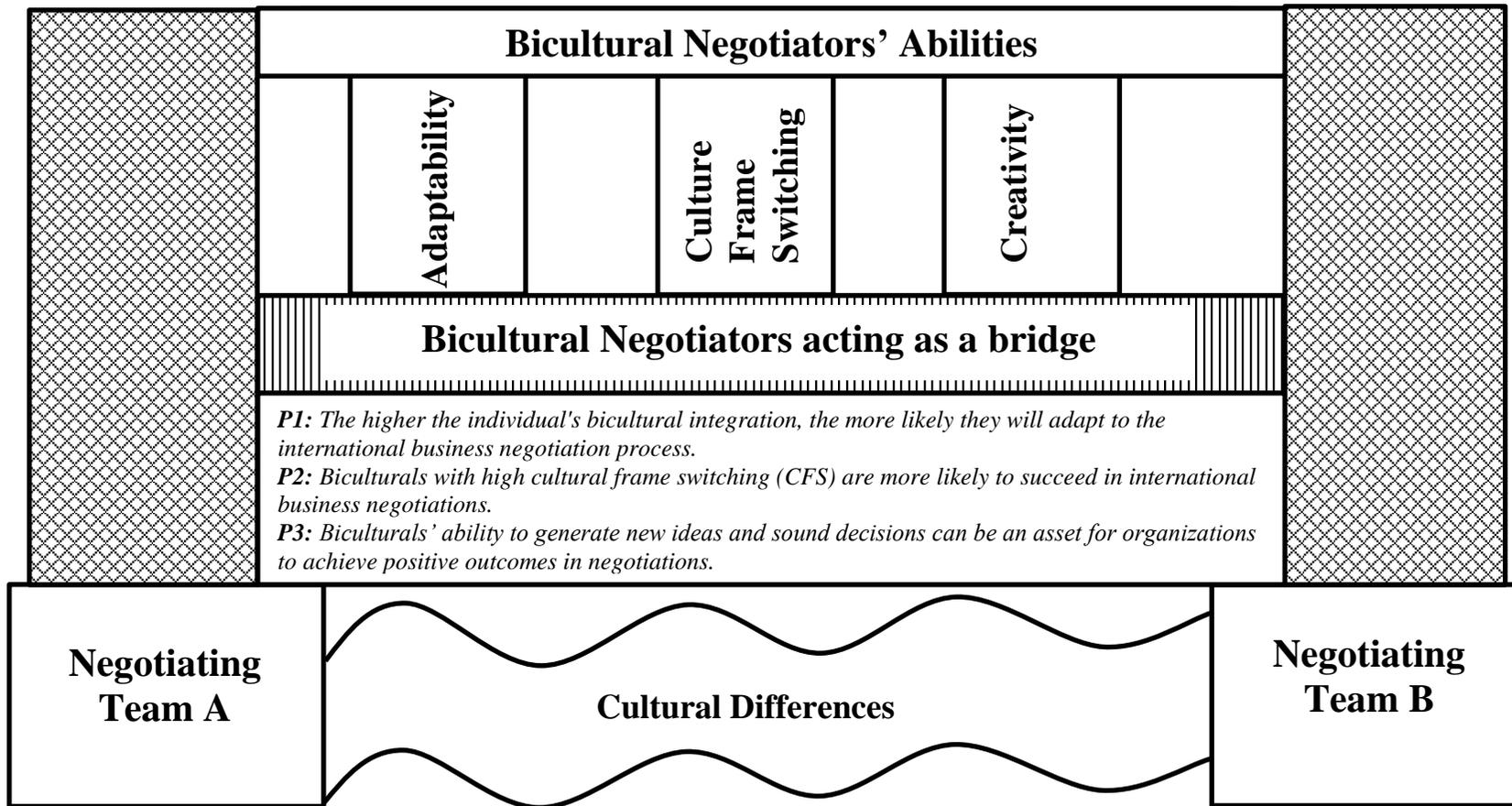
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**Figure 1:** Bicultural negotiators in International Business Negotiations