U.PORTO
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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PERCEIVED LEADERSHIP DIVERSITY, WORKPLACE MICROAGGRESSIONS AND ORGANIZATIONAL EMBEDDEDNESS AMONG BUSINESS EXPATRIATES

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Dissertation

Master's in Economics and Human Resources Management

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2025/2026

Acknowledgements

This dissertation was made possible thanks to the guidance, support, knowledge, and encouragement of my supervisor, Professor Luísa Pinto, to whom I am immensely thankful. Her presence and dedication to the process of this study were crucial from beginning to end.

All my work is a dedication to my dear parents, who have held my hand through every challenge, dream, opportunity and hardship. Their hard work, support and love allowed me to pursue my education, my dreams, and to always have a home I can return to. Thank you for making me so lucky.

To my friends and the community I was lucky enough to build – I am grateful for the patience, the laughs, the support, the encouragement and to every memory we have shared. I believe we are made out of the people we love, and I am happy I have a piece of you always with me.

Abstract

The increasing internationalization of labour markets has brought greater workforce diversity to organizations. Yet, the subtle interpersonal dynamics shaping the experiences of internationally mobile professionals remain insufficiently understood. This study examines the relationship between perceived leadership diversity, workplace microaggressions, and organizational embeddedness among business expatriates in host-country organizations. Drawing on minority stress theory, microaggression theory, and the organizational embeddedness framework, a quantitative cross-sectional survey was administered to business expatriates across multiple host countries. Data were analysed using hierarchical regression and mediation analysis. Results indicate that perceived leadership diversity is negatively associated with perceived microaggressions, which in turn negatively predict organizational embeddedness. Mediation analysis confirms that microaggressions partially mediate the positive relationship between leadership diversity and organizational embeddedness. These findings bridge microaggression theory and expatriate research, with practical implications for diversity and inclusion initiatives in international organizations.

Keywords: microaggressions, organizational embeddedness, business expatriates, leadership diversity, minority stress

Resumo

A crescente internacionalização dos mercados de trabalho tem contribuído para uma maior diversidade nas organizações. No entanto, as dinâmicas interpessoais subtis que moldam as experiências dos profissionais internacionais permanecem insuficientemente estudadas. Este estudo examina a relação entre a diversidade percebida na liderança, as microagressões no local de trabalho e o enraizamento organizacional entre profissionais expatriados em organizações no país de acolhimento. Com base na teoria do stress minoritário, na teoria das microagressões e no modelo de enraizamento organizacional, foi aplicado um questionário quantitativo e transversal a profissionais expatriados em múltiplos países de acolhimento. Os dados foram analisados através de regressão hierárquica e análise de mediação. Os resultados indicam que a diversidade percebida na liderança está negativamente associada às microagressões percebidas, as quais, por sua vez, predizem negativamente o enraizamento organizacional. A análise de mediação confirma que as microagressões medeiam parcialmente a relação positiva entre a diversidade na liderança e o enraizamento organizacional. Estes resultados estabelecem uma ponte entre a teoria das microagressões e a investigação sobre expatriados, com implicações práticas para as iniciativas de diversidade e inclusão em organizações internacionais.

Palavras-chave: microagressões, enraizamento organizacional, profissionais expatriados, diversidade na liderança, stress de minoria

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements i
Abstract ii
Resumo iii
Table of Contents iv
List of Tables v
List of Figures v
1. Introduction 1
2. Literature Review 4
2.1. Microaggressions Theory 4
2.1.1 Microaggressions and Similar Constructs 5
2.1.2 Microaggression Theory and Minority Stress Theory 6
2.1.3 Microaggressions and Intersectionality 6
2.2. Antecedents of Microaggressions in the Workplace 8
2.2.1 Organizational level antecedents 10
2.2.2 Interpersonal and individual antecedents 11
2.3. Microaggressions and Organizational Embeddedness 13
3. Theoretical Model and Hypotheses 16
4. Methodology 18
4.1. Procedures of data collection 18
4.2. Sample 18
4.3. Measures 20
5. Results 22
5.1. Measures' validity and reliability 22
5.2. Descriptive and correlational statistics 23
5.3. Tests of hypotheses 25
5.3.1 Perceived leadership diversity, microaggressions and organizational embeddedness 25
5.3.2 The mediating role of perceived microaggressions 27
6. Discussion 29
6.1. The relationship between perceived leadership diversity, microaggressions and organizational embeddedness 30
6.2. The mediating role of perceived microaggressions 32
7. Conclusion 34
7.1. Limitations and future research 34
7.2. Theoretical contributions and implications 37
7.3. Managerial contributions and implications 37
Disclosure of use to Generative Artificial Intelligence 39
References 40
Annex 1 – Survey "Workplace Microaggressions" 44

List of Tables

Table 1 – Types of Microaggressions, ... 4
Table 2 – Definitions and examples of similar constructs to microaggressions 6
Table 3 – Intra and inter-categorical approaches to the study of intersectional microaggressions 8
Table 4 - Types of workplace microaggressions 9
Table 5 - Sample of demographics 20
Table 6 - Spearman rank-order correlations between the demographic controls and the main study variables 24
Table 7 - Regression analysis for the hypothesized relationship between perceived leadership diversity and perceived microaggressions 26
Table 8 - Regression analysis for the relationships between perceived leadership diversity, perceived microaggressions and organizational embeddedness 27
Table 9 - Mediation analysis of the effect of perceived leadership diversity on organizational embeddedness through perceived microaggressions 28
Table 10 - Overall results from the test of hypotheses 29

List of Figures

Figure 1 - Theoretical model 16

1. Introduction

The mobility of qualified international employees has increased within the global labour market, contributing to greater levels of cross-cultural interaction, knowledge exchange and workforce diversity (Ghosh et al., 2024). Their integration in host-country organizations has been associated with individual adjustment (Stoermer et al., 2021) and organizational outcomes, such as knowledge transfer, retention, and organizational performance (Lehtonen et al, 2023; Stoermer et al., 2021). For example, Hunt et al. (2015) suggest that maintaining a diverse workforce has been linked to enhanced organizational performance, with evidence suggesting that institutions with higher levels of gender and ethnic diversity have a higher connection to achieving above-average financial returns. Notwithstanding the documented benefits, research is drawing attention to the positive aspects of expatriation through the lens of adjustment, knowledge transfer and career development, which overlooks the challenges and risks associated to global mobility and expatriation (Bader et al., 2019), including the experience of microaggressions in the workplace.

In this context, examining workplace dynamics that may hinder inclusion, such as microaggressions, becomes relevant, as these experiences may affect employees' sense of belonging and, consequently, their likelihood of remaining within the organization (Torino et al., 2019, p. 171). Microaggressions are subtle, automatic, and often unconscious expressions of bias that occur in everyday interactions (Torino et al., 2019, p. 32), which can be even more frequent towards business expatriates who do not share the same language and culture.

McNulty and Brewster (2017) define business expatriates (BEs) as "*legally working individuals who reside temporarily in a country of which they are not a citizen in order to accomplish a career-related goal, being relocated abroad either by an organization, by self-initiation or directly employed within the host-country*" (p. 20). Central to this definition is the distinction between two sub-types of global workers: Assigned Expatriates (AEs), whose international relocation is organized and directed by an employer, and Self-Initiated Expatriates (SIEs), who relocate abroad on their own initiative, independently of any organizational mandate (McNulty & Brewster, 2017).

Emerging research on the challenges and complexities of business expatriation (Koveshnikov & Lehtonen, 2025; Bader et al., 2019) highlights that integration processes may entail mishaps and maladjustments. In particular, dysfunctional relationships between

expatriates and host-country nationals (HCNs) can undermine both individual adjustment and organizational outcomes. Ljubica et al. (2019) showed that relational breakdowns may arise from multilevel differences, ambiguities, and misunderstandings between expatriates and HCNs, which increase emotional, social, and instrumental costs.

The successful integration and retention of business expatriates in host-country organizations is essential to organizational performance (Stoermer et al., 2021) and global talent mobility (McNulty & Brewster, 2017). A key determinant of this integration is organizational embeddedness, which includes an individual's sense of fit, links, and sacrifices associated with staying in the host organization (Kiazad et al., 2020). Research shows that organizational embeddedness goes beyond the reactive state of cultural adjustment and instead results from expatriates acting as proactive agents with the intent of adjusting, shaping, and crafting their own environment (Stoermer et al., 2021). Parallel to this reality, a growing and insufficiently researched topic of microaggressions and their omnipresence in the workplace becomes ever more prevalent in international workplaces. The continuous and rapid internationalization of labour markets has diversified organizational workforces while simultaneously exposing the limits of formal diversity initiatives, which tend to address overt discrimination but leave subtler, identity-based exclusions such as microaggressions still largely unaddressed.

Research on microaggressions in the workplace has been directed towards women and People of Colour (PoC) (Torino et al. 2019, pp. 162-163), which leaves a gap when it comes to business expatriates. This is relevant because microaggressions hinder relationship building, impede expatriates' sense of belonging, and compromise their long-term embeddedness. Business expatriates can be especially affected, once they integrate foreign and unknown cultural and societal landscapes and, in the case of SIEs, without corporate support. According to Suutari et al. (2018), SIEs are individuals who relocate voluntarily to another country for professional purposes and play a crucial role in the international workforce as a result of the internationalization of job markets, online recruitment systems and the increasing number of experiences abroad for studying, traveling and working. They may be particularly vulnerable to subtle forms of discrimination due to the difficulty to register these events but also because of their outsider status and cultural distance (Lehtonen et al., 2023), including limited access to organizational support mechanisms (Linder, 2019). In international workplaces everyday interactions are shaped by (sometimes multi) cultural

norms, communication barriers, and power dynamics (Ghosh et al., 2024) which may amplify the impact of microaggressions.

This research aims to contribute to closing this gap by addressing the following research questions: (i) *To what extent are workplace microaggressions associated with the organizational embeddedness of business expatriates in the host country, and (ii) Does perceived leadership diversity influence the organizational embeddedness of business expatriates directly, and indirectly, through perceived workplace microaggressions?*

This document is organized into six sections, in addition to this introduction. Section 2 reviews the literature relevant to and framing the study, covering microaggression theory and its related constructs, its connection to minority stress theory and intersectionality, the antecedents of workplace microaggressions, and their link to organizational embeddedness among business expatriates. Section 3 presents the theoretical model and explores the research questions and hypotheses. Section 4 describes the methodology, including the procedures of data collection, the sample, and the measures used. Section 5 reports and assesses the results, covering the validity and reliability of the instruments, the descriptive and correlational statistics, and the tests of hypotheses. Section 6 discusses the findings in light of the existing literature, and Section 7 concludes by setting out the study's theoretical and managerial contributions, its limitations, and directions for future research.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Microaggressions Theory

Initially coined by Dr. Chester Pierce in 1978, on his foundational work on the interactions between People of Colour (PoC) and White People (WP), microaggressions were defined as aversive "*subtle, stunning, often automatic, and non-verbal exchanges which are 'put downs' of blacks by offenders*" (Torino et al., 2019, p. 32) that can be expressed implicitly or explicitly.

Over the years, research on microaggressions has transcended race and ethnicity, adopting a multidimensional approach to gender, socioeconomic position, sexual orientation, or other defining characteristics of an ostracized group. Torino et al. (2019) extend the concept of microaggressions from Pierce's work to "*subtle, automatic, and often unconscious expressions of bias that occur in everyday interactions"* (Torino et al. , 2019, p. 6). They differ from overt discrimination or hate crimes in the sense that perpetrators are often *"well-intentioned people who are unaware of their bias"* and would condemn explicit bigotry (Torino et al., 2019, p. 6).

In the same work, Torino et al. (2019) have identified three primary forms of microaggression:

Type of microaggression	Definition	Example
Microassaults	**Intentional verbal, non-verbal, or environmental actions** that express clear prejudice. They are deliberate discriminatory behaviours linked to overt racism, sexism, heterosexism, ableism, or religious bias.	A male colleague calling a woman a *"bitch"* after she asserts herself in the workplace.
Microinsults	**Unintentional actions or comments** that subtly demean a person's identity or abilities.	Assuming a Black woman in academia is a secretary instead of a professor.
Microinvalidations	**Comments that dismiss or undermine** a person's lived experiences, feelings, or identity	Comments such as *"I don't see colour"* or *"There is only one race"*.

Table 1 – Types of Microaggressions

Source: Adapted from Torino et al. (2019, p. 4)

2.1.1 Microaggressions and Similar Constructs

Further differentiating microaggressions from everyday incivilities, the latter may be experienced by anyone, whereas microaggressions carry the added stress of being tied to marginalized identity trait such as race, gender, religion or sexual orientation (Torino et al., 2019, pp. 5-6).

Microaggressions can also be differentiated from macroaggressions, characterized as systemic and institutionalized forms of discrimination embedded in public policy or organizational structures, affecting entire groups rather than individuals. The following table distinguishes microaggressions from related constructs.

Term	Definition	Example
Microaggressions	Subtle, automatic, and often unconscious expressions of bias that occur in everyday interactions. Can be divided into 3 types: microassaults, microinsults and microinvalidations (Torino et al., 2019).	Mistaking a PoC for a service worker is a microaggression as it mistakenly views the (marginalized) group as less competent or capable.
Everyday Incivilities	Comparing to microaggressions, everyday incivilities are perceived as isolated acts that are not ingrained in historical marginalization of groups (Torino et al., 2019).	Someone bumping into you or taking your parking space.
Hate crimes	Illegal criminal acts, stemming from violence-based bias perpetrated against targets with the intent to cause harm (often physical) toward people from marginalized groups (Torino et al., 2019).	The lynching of PoC by the Ku Klux Klan (KKK).
Macroaggressions	Systemic and institutionalized forms of bias and oppression that impact the lives of entire groups of people (Torino et al., 2019).	Systems of oppression and disparities in education, employment, healthcare, and criminal justice.
Workplace Discrimination	Actions of institutions and/or its integrating individuals that sets unfair terms and conditions that systemically impair the ability of members of a group to work (Okechukwu et al., 2014).	A qualified female employee applies for a promotion, but her manager gives the position to a less-qualified male colleague because he believes that women are less committed to their careers after having children.

Term	Definition	Example
Racial Discrimination	Any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms (United Nations General Assembly, 1965).	Rejecting a candidate who is a PoC for a customer-facing role, believing that customers would prefer "white staff".

Table 2 – Definitions and examples of related constructs to microaggressions

2.1.2 Microaggression Theory and Minority Stress Theory

From its original racial focus, research on microaggressions moved to encompassing other forms of identity, namely ethnicity, gender, and sexuality. In his work, Meyer (2003) proposes a conceptual framework aiming to understand the higher prevalence of mental disorders among lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) individuals in terms of minority stress, further arguing that stigma, prejudice, and discrimination create a hostile and stressful social environment that culminates in mental health problems.

Meyer's minority stress theory (Meyer, 2003) serves as a model also for other stigmatized minority groups, in the sense that it is premised on the idea that minority stress is additive to the general stressors experienced by all people. Thus, stigmatized individuals are required to exert an adaptation effort above and beyond what is required of those who do not occupy a minority position.

This perception is particularly relevant for business expatriates, particularly those from a culturally or ethnically different background, as they may be occupying a minority position within the host country organization. These settings can then render expatriate workers vulnerable to additional forms of social stress that exacerbate the challenges of international adjustment.

2.1.3 Microaggressions and Intersectionality

The concept of intersectionality is central to understanding the complexity of microaggressions and their effects on marginalized individuals. As explored by Crenshaw (1998) in her work on the experience of Black women, intersectionality emphasizes that discrimination cannot always be understood through a single social category or gender alone.

Instead, individuals may experience overlapping and interconnected forms of marginalization stemming from the intersection of different social identities, such as race, gender, sex, sexual orientation, ethnicity, amongst others (Singh et al., 2021).

From this perspective, the experiences of microaggressions are rarely isolated to one dimension of identity (Singh et al., 2021). Rather, they emerge through the interaction of multiple identities and systems of oppression, producing forms of discrimination that may differ qualitatively from experiences based on a single marginalized characteristic. For example, the experiences of Black women cannot be fully understood either through frameworks drawn exclusively on race or gender, as both dimensions interact simultaneously to shape lived experiences of exclusion and bias.

Despite the increasing recognition of intersectionality within discrimination research, few measurement scales have been developed to assess intersectional microaggressions comprehensively (Singh et al., 2021). Existing qualitative and quantitative analytic strategies often require participants to prioritize or select one marginalized identity over another, treating identities as additive rather than interconnected. Singh et al. (2021) warn that such approaches risk oversimplifying the complexity and fluidity of lived experiences, particularly for individuals who navigate multiple systems of marginalization simultaneously.

Additionally, Singh et al. (2021) highlight the gap in intersectionality research in addressing intragroup differences. For instance, the experiences of White women may differ from those of Black women, even though both may experience gender-based discrimination. This limitation highlights the need for frameworks capable of capturing both shared and unique experiences across intersectional identities. To address these challenges, Singh et al. (2021) have proposed intra-categorical and inter-categorical approaches to the study of intersectional microaggressions, as illustrated in the following table:

Intersectionality | Microaggressions	**Intra-categorical approaches**	**Inter-categorical approaches**
Positive aspects	Address the unique challenges and experiences of specific combinations of intersectional identities. Allows individuals to be understood in their full social complexity.	Broader and more flexible frameworks that can be applied across diverse identity groups. Allows individuals to orient themselves according to the identities that are most salient to them in a given context.

Intersectionality | Microaggressions	Intra-categorical approaches	Inter-categorical approaches
		Increased inclusiveness and applicability of measurement scales.
Negative aspects	Developing separate measures for varying combinations of different social positions proposes methodological and practical difficulties	The flexibility of the framework may overlook or neglect experiences that are unique and relevant to one set of identities and not another. Endorsement of identities may occur (e.g.: a Black lesbian woman may experience a microaggression differently depending on whether the discriminatory interaction targets her race, gender, or sexual orientation).

Table 3 – Intra and inter-categorical approaches to the study of intersectional microaggressions

Source: Adapted from Singh et al. (2021)

Consequently, there remains no clear consensus regarding how intersectional microaggressions should be measured in ways that accurately capture the fluidity, interconnectedness, and contextual nature of social identities (Singh et al., 2021).

2.2. Antecedents of Microaggressions in the Workplace

Although microaggressions have been well studied in general contexts, specific research on workplace manifestations remains limited, particularly outside clinical or academic environments (Torino et al., 2019, p. 163). Nevertheless, broader research on workplace well-being highlights the importance of everyday interpersonal interactions for employee outcomes.

According to Pandelios et al. (2024), workplace experiences such as receiving gratitude and encountering incivility have measurable effects on employees' job satisfaction and intentions to quit, suggesting that subtle interpersonal dynamics can meaningfully influence job outcomes. For instance, Torino et al. (2019, pp. 162-163) provided two qualitative studies that shed light on the types of microaggressions that individuals contend with in the workplace.

Table 4 summarises these findings:

Victims	Types of microaggressions identified
Executive Black women	• Environmental aggressions (underrepresentation of black women); • Stereotypes of black women (black women seen as aggressive employees whose credentials were consistently challenged • Universal experience (reduced black women to employees who know *"all"* other black people within the organization) • Invisibility (when speaking during meetings, black women receive unexpected body language from coworkers, or simply little to no eye contact) • Exclusion (black women were not invited to social gatherings where appointments and opportunities were discussed, leading to fewer ways for them to move up within the organization
Asians	• Ascription of math competency (treated Asians as employees who *only* excel at math, statistics or data analysis) • Submissive/subservience (characterization of Asians as passive or docile, therefore not having what it takes to be a leader) • Invalidation of individual differences (consigns Asian individuals to a broad set of homogeneous people) • Invisibility (Asians who have been over-looked by non-Asians in meetings or during one-on-one interactions) • Inferiority (work produced by Asian employees viewed as sub-standard or not taken seriously when compared to their white peers) • Being singled out (because of their race) • Demeaning cultural values and communication styles (Asian cultural values and communication styles have been viewed as *less desirable* than the dominant cultural values and communication styles in the workplace)

Table 4 - Types of workplace microaggressions

Source: Adapted from Torino et al. (2019, pp. 162-163)

Both groups experienced general microaggressions (e.g., invisibility) but also stereotype-based ones unique to their racial identity. These findings further reinforce the relevance of examining how similarly subtle but harmful interactions in host workplaces may shape the organizational embeddedness of business expatriates.

Understanding why microaggressions are perpetrated requires examining the conditions that render them possible in the first place. Antecedents of microaggressions can be defined as the structural, relational, and individual factors that facilitate or increase the likelihood of their occurrence. Rather than emerging in isolation, microaggressions are often

the product of broader enabling conditions that operate across multiple levels: the **organizational level**, encompassing policies, workplace climate, and leadership composition (Parikh & Leschied, 2022); the **interpersonal level**, reflecting the dynamics and power relations between individuals (Williams et al., 2021); and the **individual level**, including unconscious biases, cultural assumptions, and internalized prejudices (Williams et al., 2021). Examining these antecedents is therefore essential to understanding microaggressions not merely as isolated incidents of unconscious insensitivity, but as patterned phenomena embedded within larger socio-cultural and organizational structures.

2.2.1 Organizational level antecedents

Microaggressions are not exclusively the product of individual prejudice but are also shaped by organizational and workplace contexts. In this sense, organizational environments can contribute to the normalization of and tolerance towards subtle discriminatory behaviours through workplace culture, institutional practices, and everyday interpersonal dynamics.

Salari et al. (2024) argue that microaggressions may create significant disorganization within the workplace, contributing to reduced productivity, negative work climates, high staff turnover, and organizational costs associated with internal or external investigations. Beyond their impact on organizational performance, such behaviours also affect employees' broader social and psychological well-being. Similarly, employment discrimination may undermine organizations' ability to recruit qualified employees, retain talent, improve performance, and effectively market products or services (Salari et al., 2024). These findings suggest that workplace microaggressions should not be understood solely as interpersonal incidents, but rather as organizational phenomena with wider structural and economic implications.

The work environment plays a central role in shaping employees' experiences of belonging and inclusion. Parikh and Leschied (2022) showed that workplace climate and organizational policies significantly influence whether individuals feel included or marginalized within their professional environment. The authors introduced the concept of *"environmental microaggressions"* to describe organizational conditions that subtly communicate exclusion toward marginalized groups. These may manifest as a lack of diversity in leadership and institutional representation, inadequate parental leave and maternity support policies, or the misgendering of transgender and non-binary employees. Such structural practices can

reinforce feelings of invisibility, devaluation, and exclusion among those from marginalized backgrounds, undermining their sense of belonging at a fundamental level.

To mitigate these dynamics, Parikh and Leschied (2022) argue that diversity and inclusion initiatives should become institutional priorities rather than mere compliance requirements. Suggested measures include the creation of diversity, equity, and inclusion committees, the designation of diversity champions within departments, and the allocation of sufficient organizational resources to support these initiatives. The authors further emphasize the importance of increasing awareness regarding the psychological and physical effects of microaggressions through training, education, and visibility initiatives aimed at employees and leadership alike. Furthermore, organizational diversity itself may function as a protective factor against workplace microaggressions.

Parikh and Leschied (2022) further argue that increasing the recruitment and retention of diverse employees may reduce the prevalence and impact of microaggressions by fostering more inclusive organizational cultures and reducing the normalization of discriminatory behaviours. From this perspective, diversity is not only an ethical or representational concern, but also an important mechanism for promoting healthier and more inclusive workplace environments.

2.2.2 Interpersonal and individual antecedents

At an individual level, microaggressions are frequently associated with implicit biases, unconscious stereotypes, and learned social behaviours. Although microaggressions are often unintentional, they do not emerge in a social vacuum. Individual beliefs and behaviours are shaped by broader socio-cultural environments, including family influences, educational systems, media representations, and dominant social norms (Williams et al., 2021). Consequently, subtle discriminatory behaviours may become normalized and reproduced through everyday interactions.

Williams et al. (2021) argue that individuals may "*inherit*" biases from their parents, grandparents, and other ancestors. Through processes of socialization, individuals internalize assumptions, stereotypes, and behavioural patterns that become embedded in daily interactions. These biases are further reinforced by wider social systems and institutional structures that sustain unequal power relations between dominant and marginalized groups. The sociocultural dimension of microaggressions is particularly relevant when considering the role of established power structures. As Williams et al. (2021) further explain,

microaggressions reinforce existing social hierarchies and power differentials between groups, regardless of whether this reinforcement is intentional or not. In this sense, microaggressions should not be interpreted merely as isolated interpersonal incidents, but rather as the product of broader systems of oppression and inequality.

These dynamics contribute to the persistence of discriminatory behaviours by favouring dominant in-groups while discouraging marginalized individuals from challenging subtle forms of bias. Consequently, behaviours or expressions that demean minority groups may become socially normalized within certain environments (Williams et al., 2021).

Intersectionality further complicates the understanding of individual antecedents. As discussed by Singh et al. (2021), individuals who hold multiple marginalized identities may experience microaggressions at several simultaneous levels, as discrimination is rarely directed toward a single isolated identity trait. Nadal et al. (2016) illustrate this complexity with a theoretical example of a low-income, first-generation, queer woman of colour who may encounter microaggressions linked not only to each identity, but also to the combined *"constellation"* of those identities. Thus, intersectionality shapes both the experience and interpretation of subtle discriminatory interactions.

At the same time, perpetrators themselves are also influenced by their own social identities and environments, which may condition their perceptions of what constitutes socially acceptable behaviour. Nadal et al. (2016), in their examination of microaggressions directed toward lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ+) individuals, highlight how discriminatory language and behaviours may become normalized through repeated exposure within educational and social contexts. For example, McCabe et al. (2013) examined the prevalence of heterosexist language within school environments through the perceptions of school psychologists. Their findings indicated that students frequently used expressions such as *"that's so gay"* and other derogatory slurs targeting homosexual men at least once per month. More concerningly, the study also reported that teachers and other school professionals occasionally employed the same expressions in the presence of students. These findings illustrate how discriminatory language can become normalized within institutional settings, reinforcing prejudicial attitudes and exposing children to subtle forms of bias against LGBTQ+ individuals from an early age.

Environmental and sociopolitical contexts also influence the prevalence and effects of discrimination. Drawing on the work of Hatzenbuehler et al. (2010), LGBTQ+ individuals living in the United States (US) where same-sex marriage was legalized reported better mental

health outcomes than those living in states where it remained prohibited. Although this finding does not focus exclusively on microaggressions, it shows how broader political and cultural environments can shape the experiences of marginalized groups and influence exposure to discrimination and exclusion. Similarly, Salari et al. (2024) suggest that changes in political and legal frameworks may reduce overt forms of workplace discrimination while simultaneously contributing to more subtle manifestations of prejudice. As explicit discriminatory practices become less socially acceptable, biases may increasingly emerge through indirect, ambiguous, and normalized behaviours characteristic of microaggressions.

Overall, these findings suggest that individual antecedents of microaggressions are deeply ingrained in broader socialization processes, institutional norms, and socio-cultural contexts. Microaggressions may therefore be understood not only as expressions of individual prejudice, but also as learned and socially conditioned behaviours shaped by dominant cultural values and power structures.

2.3. Microaggressions and Organizational Embeddedness

Research shows that microaggressions can be detrimental for mental health, hindering or impacting interpersonal relationships (Torino et al., 2019, pp. 67-69). The experience of microaggressions also correlate with higher symptoms of anxiety, depression, lower self-esteem, and emotional distress (Torino et al., 2019, p. 170; Kogan et al., 2022). Microaggressions are also associated, to a more serious extent, with psychological trauma and, ultimately, post-traumatic stress disorder (Torino et al., 2019, p. 91) or even suicidal intentions (Parr and Howe, 2019).

In the context of the workplace, microaggressions can be harmful not only for the individual but also for the organization, being linked to reduced motivation and job satisfaction, putting organizational commitment at stake, and increasing the intention to quit (Newman et al., 2025). These symptoms can be insidious and contribute to higher absenteeism, turnover, and a decrease in the diversity pipeline, when looking through the lens of minorities (Torino et al., pp. 160-170).

Workplace microaggressions can occur across the entire employee life cycle, including pre-employment. For example, the phenomenon of "whitening" is known as a mechanism that candidates adopt to conceal ethnic traces (name, background, association of networks) and "whiten" their résumés to improve callback rate (Kang et al., 2016).

Organizational embeddedness has been defined by a cluster of links, fit, and sacrifices that bind employees to their organization, which can reduce the likelihood of departure (Kiazad et al., 2020). Ghosh et al. (2024) further extend this definition by categorizing organizational embeddedness as a dynamic process that develops unevenly across social groups, particularly in environments shaped by demographic diversity and unequal inclusion. For employees from marginalized groups, this developmental unevenness tends to manifest across all three dimensions articulated within embeddedness. Building meaningful workplace relationships (establishing links) can be hindered by social dynamics that subtly position certain employees as outsiders within their own organization. Similarly, achieving a genuine sense of fit becomes difficult when organizational culture, values, or leadership composition fail to reflect or validate one's identity. Finally, the sense of sacrifice (the feeling that leaving would be equivalent to a cost or a loss) is gradually eroded when employees do not feel sufficiently recognized, valued, or integrated. Embeddedness is not equally accessible, and experiences of subtle exclusion and identity-based disadvantage may systematically wear out the organizational ties that would otherwise encourage employees to stay.

The higher the level of embeddedness of the employee, the higher the chance of remaining because leaving would entail (subjective) substantial professional and psychological costs, namely losing career advancement opportunities, organizational status, and accumulated organizational-specific human capital (Kiazad et al., 2020). Ghosh et al. (2024) also share this line of thought, particularly from the point of view of social links and marginalized groups. Their approach suggests that organizational embeddedness may be weaker or develop more slowly for these individuals, leaving them in a (comparatively more) vulnerable position to withdraw over time.

This perspective is especially relevant for business expatriates, whose embeddedness in the host organizations may be shaped by everyday interactions that signal inclusion or exclusion, while going hand in hand with the lack of organizational support among SIEs, when compared to their local and assigned expatriate peers.

Lehtonen et al. (2023) addressed the host-country embeddedness for SIEs, particularly in shaping their intentions to remain in or withdraw from the host country. Both career and community embeddedness were negatively associated with host-country withdrawal intentions, and perceived workplace discrimination played a significant role in this relationship. These findings suggest that discriminatory treatment at work can be a clear push factor encouraging expatriates to consider leaving the host country (Lehtonen et al.,

2023). Furthermore, the same authors showed that the negative effects of workplace discrimination were not uniform across expatriates. When business expatriates perceive strong career-related benefits (e.g., favourable professional opportunities or economic rewards), their intention to withdraw is reduced, particularly when discrimination is perceived. By contrast, community embeddedness is not sufficiently strong to mitigate the relationship between workplace discrimination and withdrawal intentions, linking and highlighting the central role of work-related experiences in shaping expatriates' decisions to remain or leave (Lehtonen et al., 2023). As suggested by Linder (2019), career success can compensate for the negative effects of workplace discrimination by strengthening assigned expatriates' organizational embeddedness. When SIEs achieve perceived positive outcomes, whether in terms of financial compensation or in terms of career progression, the perceived cost associated with leaving the organization increases. In this context, organizational embeddedness makes withdrawal less likely even when SIEs encounter discriminatory treatment. Linder (2019) further adds that business expatriates might even perceive career success as a form of return for their efforts, which can lead them to be more prone to tolerating unfavourable workplace occurrences (sometimes perceived as discriminatory) to preserve career-related benefits.

While these studies provide valuable evidence that discrimination affects business expatriates' decisions to remain in or leave their host-country organizations, they provide insufficient insight into how microaggression experiences are subjectively perceived and experienced in everyday workplace interactions. In particular, limited attention has been paid to workplace microaggressions towards business expatriates in their host-country organizations. This gap highlights the need to understand how business expatriates make sense of workplace microaggressions, how these experiences shape their sense of connection to and embeddedness within the host-country organization, and how perceived leadership diversity has a stake in these experiences.

3. Theoretical Model and Hypotheses

The main objective of this study is to examine the relationship between perceived leadership diversity, workplace microaggressions, and organizational embeddedness among business expatriates in host-country organizations. Accordingly, the study addresses the following research questions: (i) *To what extent are workplace microaggressions associated with the organizational embeddedness of business expatriates in the host country, and (ii) Does perceived leadership diversity influence the organizational embeddedness of business expatriates directly, and indirectly, through perceived workplace microaggressions?*

To address these questions, the study adopts a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design aimed at testing the hypothesized relationships between perceived leadership diversity, workplace microaggressions, and organizational embeddedness among business expatriates.

Figure 1 presents the research model and hypotheses.

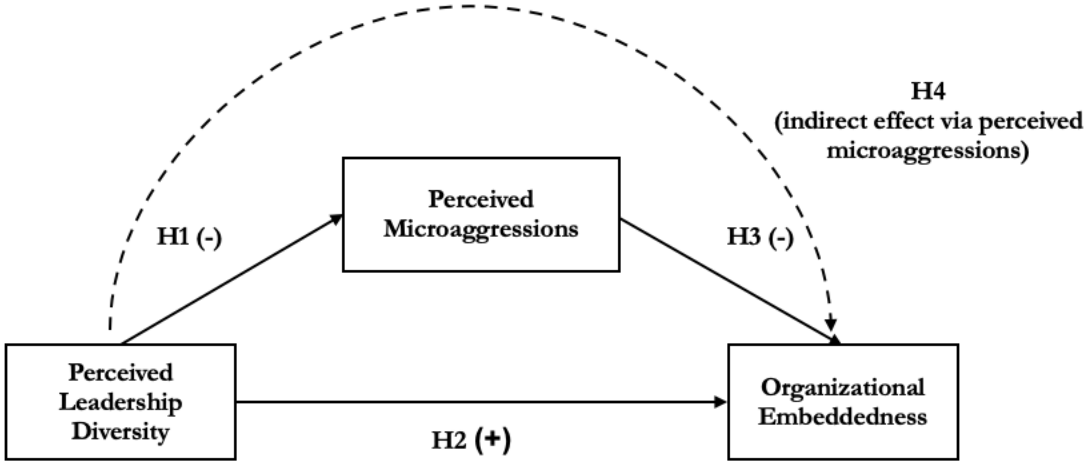


Figure 1 - Theoretical model

H1: Perceived leadership diversity is negatively associated to perceived microaggressions, such that business expatriates (SIEs and AEs) working in organizations with higher perceived leadership diversity will experience lower exposure to workplace microaggressions.

H2: Perceived leadership diversity is positively associated with host organizational embeddedness, such that business expatriates (SIEs and AEs) working in organizations with higher perceived leadership diversity will experience higher organizational embeddedness.

H3: Perceived workplace microaggressions is negatively associated with host organizational embeddedness among business expatriates.

H4: Perceived microaggressions mediates the relationships between perceived leadership diversity, respectively on organizational embeddedness, so that the positive association between perceived leadership diversity and organizational embeddedness is weaker when business expatriates are exposed to workplace microaggressions.

4. Methodology

The presented study followed a quantitative, cross-sectional research design, collecting data based on a structured survey. This approach was considered appropriate given the study's deductive logic: the hypotheses were derived from existing theory on microaggressions, expatriation, and organizational embeddedness, and a quantitative design enabled these theoretically grounded relationships to be operationalized through measurable constructs and tested empirically across a sample of respondents. Because the objectives concern the existence, direction, and strength of the associations between the study variables, and an indirect, mediating effect, a quantitative approach that can statistically estimate these relationships is adequate.

4.1. Procedures of data collection

This investigation targets business expatriates from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds, living in countries other than their country of origin, and working across a range of professional fields.

Accordingly, business expatriates were invited to take part in this research by answering a web survey. To qualify for participation, respondents had to meet the single eligibility criterion of *working in a country other than their country of origin for a minimum of six months* (see Annex 1). This broad criterion was intended to capture the heterogeneity of the business expatriate population rather than to restrict it.

The survey instrument was made available in English to be accessible to a wider range of respondents, through an online link with a response time of approximately five minutes. Individual participation was voluntary. Data were collected during July 2026, yielding a total of 124 responses, of which 115 were complete and considered valid.

4.2. Sample

As mentioned, the final sample is constituted by 115 valid responses from respondents complying with the established criteria. The vast majority identified as Self-Initiated Expatriates (90.4%), while the remaining 9.6% were Assigned Expatriates.

Participants reported to work and live in a range of 14 host countries. The largest share of respondents was living in Germany (50 respondents, equivalent to 43.5%), the Netherlands (16 respondents, 13.9%), Belgium (15 respondents, totalling to 13%),

Luxembourg (10 respondents, 8.7%), and France (9 respondents, totalling 7.8%). The remaining 15 respondents were distributed across Ireland, Denmark, Switzerland, Portugal, Austria, Italy, Spain, Malta and the United Kingdom (in descending order). In terms of country of origin, the sample was mostly composed of expatriates from Italy (35 respondents, 30.4%) and Portugal (30 respondents, equivalent to 26.1%), followed by Spain (9 respondents, 7.8%), Brazil (8 respondents, 7%) and Ireland (5 respondents, 4.3% of the sample). The remaining respondents stemmed from a diverse range of origins, such as Mozambique, China, Zimbabwe, Venezuela, Czechia, Belgium, among others. As per industry of employment, the majority worked in European and International institutions (42.6%), followed by Technology and Data (17.4%), and Finance and Banking (13.9%). Fewer reported to work in Retail and Consumer Goods (6.1%), Healthcare and Life Sciences (5.2%), and Human Resources and Consulting (3.5%) while 13 respondents (11.3%) reported working in other industries.

Table 5 provides more details about the aforementioned demographic characteristics

Demographics		***Count***	***%***
Gender	Male	54	48.2%
	Female	58	51.8%
	Total	115	100.0%
Education	No High-Education	2	1.7%
	High Education	113	98.3%
	Total	115	100.0%
Tenure in Host Country	Less than 6 months	18	15.7%
	6 to 12 months	34	29.6%
	1 to 5 years	50	43.5%
	Over 5 years	13	11.3%
	Other	115	100.0%
Main Countries of Origin	Italy	35	30.4%
	Portugal	30	26.1%
	Spain	9	7.8%
	Brazil	8	7.0%
	Ireland	5	4.3%
	Total	115	100.0%
Main Host Countries	Germany	50	43.5%
	The Netherlands	16	13.9%
	Belgium	15	13.0%

Demographics		*Count*	*%*
	Luxembourg	10	8.7%
	France	9	7.8%
	Total	115	100.0%
Industry of Employment	European & International Institutions	49	42.6%
	Technology & Data	20	17.4%
	Finance & Banking	16	13.9%
	Retail & Consumer Goods	7	6.1%
	Healthcare & Life Sciences	6	5.2%
	Human Resources & Consulting	4	3.5%
	Other	13	11.3%
	Total	115	100.0%

n = 115

Table 5 - Sample demographics

4.3. Measures

The variables of this study were measured using previously validated scales, adapted to the expatriation literature for the purposes of the present research. With the exception of expatriation type, all constructs were assessed with multi-item scales rated on 5-point Likert formats, and the items were adapted to refer to the respondents' experiences within their host-country organization.

Expatriation Type. Expatriation type was measured with a single-item classification question adapted from Suutari et al. (2018), and Shaffer (2017). Respondents were asked which option best described their current international work experience and classified themselves as SIE, AEs or "other" when none of the previous two were applicable.

Perceived Leadership Diversity. Perceived leadership diversity was assessed with a four-item scale adapted from Parikh and Leschied (2022) and Ghosh et al. (2024). The items were thus adapted to capture the perceived representation of employees from diverse cultural or national backgrounds in leadership position in the host-country organization. Respondents indicated their level of agreement on a Likert scale from 1 to 5 (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree). As a newly adapted measure, no prior reliability coefficient was made available.

Perceived Microaggressions. Perceived microaggressions were assessed with an eight-item scale resulting from the adaptation of Nadal's (2011) Racial and Ethnic Microaggressions Scale (REMS), and Torino et al. (2019). The adapted scale encompasses

three dimensions of workplace microaggressions: microassaults, microinsults and microinvalidations. Respondents rated how frequently they had experienced each situation on a 5-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree; 5=strongly agree). The original scale reported reliability coefficients ranging from .82 to .93 (Nadal, 2011), while in the present study, the eight items were retained as a single composite, which showed excellent internal consistency (α = .91). The items were adapted to refer to experiences related to the respondents' nationality or cultural background in the workplace.

Organizational Embeddedness. Organizational embeddedness was categorized as a dependent variable and was measured within a nine-item scale drawing on Mitchell et al. (2001), Tharenou and Caulfield (2010), and Stoermer et al. (2021). The scale encompasses three dimensions of assessment: fit, links, and sacrifice. Respondents indicated their agreement on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree). Previous studies reported internal reliabilities between .78 and .86 (Mitchell et al., 2001), as well as an alpha of .82 in an expatriate context (Stoermer et al., 2021). In this study the alpha of Cronbach varied between .80 and .89 across the three dimensions (fit = .89, links = .80, sacrifice = .85), while the overall nine-item composite used in the analysis reached α = .74. All items were thus adapted to refer to the respondents' host-country organization.

Demographic and Control Variables. Several demographic and control variables were added to the questionnaire. Respondents were requested to indicate their gender, the industry in which they work, their home country and host-country, as well as the years of experience and level of education. These variables were dummy-coded and included in the statistical analysis.

5. Results

The data from the survey were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics (version 29). Section 5.1. addresses the validity and reliability of each instrument, while section 5.2. presents the descriptive statistics for the main study variables, concluding with section 5.3. with testing the hypotheses.

5.1. Measures' validity and reliability

To assess the validity and reliability of the measures, a principal component analysis (PCA) and internal-consistency analysis were conducted for each scale. For every measure, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy exceeded the conventional threshold of .60, and Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ($p < .001$), confirming that the data were suitable for factor analysis. Internal consistency was assessed with Cronbach's alpha, with a coefficient of .70 or above regarded as acceptable (Pestana & Gageiro, 2003).

The four items of Perceived Leadership Diversity (including the reverse-coded item RPDL4) loaded on a single component (eigenvalue = 2.24) explaining 55.97% of the variance, with loadings between 0.54 and 0.89. The scale reached an acceptable internal consistency ($\alpha = .73$).

The eight items of Perceived Microaggressions loaded on a single component (eigenvalue = 5.01) explaining 62.68% of the variance, with all loadings above .69. Although the scale was originally conceived to capture three dimensions (microassaults, microinsults and microinvalidations), these dimensions did not emerge as distinct components; a one-dimensional solution was therefore retained and the eight items were used to compute a single composite. The scale showed excellent reliability ($\alpha = .91$).

The nine items of Organizational Embeddedness produced three components (eigenvalues = 3.10, 2.32 and 1.59) jointly explaining 77.92% of the variance, broadly corresponding to the theoretical dimensions of fit, links, and sacrifice. Each dimension displayed good internal consistency (fit $\alpha = .89$; links $\alpha = .80$; sacrifice $\alpha = .85$). Consistent with the job-embeddedness literature, which uses embeddedness as a global construct composed of distinct facets, the nine items were combined into an overall composite that was used as the dependent variable ($\alpha = .74$).

5.2. Descriptive and correlational statistics

On average, Perceived Leadership Diversity was above the midpoint of the scale (M = 3.70; SD = 0.83), whereas Perceived Microaggressions were reported at a low level (M = 1.86; SD = 0.86). Respondents reported relatively high levels of Organizational Embeddedness (M = 3.82; SD = 0.59).

Table 6 presents the Spearman rank-order correlations between the demographic controls and the main study variables. The demographics (gender, education and tenure in the host country) were, overall, weakly and mostly non-significantly related to the main variables. The only significant demographic association was between gender and Perceived Leadership Diversity (rho = .234, p = .013; with gender coded 0 = female, 1 = male), indicating that men in the sample perceived somewhat more diverse leadership than women.

Among the main variables, the correlations were consistent with the hypothesized relationships. Perceived leadership diversity was negatively correlated with perceived microaggressions (rho = -.348, p < .001) and positively correlated with organizational embeddedness (rho = .402, p < .001). Perceived microaggressions were negatively correlated with organizational embeddedness (rho = -.427, p < .001).

Spearman correlations between demographics and the main research variables

Variable	M	SD	Gender	Education	Tenure	Perceived Leadership Diversity	Perceived Microagression	Organizational Embeddedness	Career Embeddedness
Gender	--	--		-.140	.079	.234	-.018	-.055	-.120
Education	--	--			-.005	.131	-.023	.007	.069
Tenure	--	--				.036	-.075	-.056	-.133
Perceived Leadership Diversity							-.348***	.402***	.149
Perceived Microagression								-.427***	-.258***
Organizational Embeddedness									.501***
Career Embeddedness									

Notes. Spearman correlations. Significant at: *$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$, $n = 115$

Table 6 - Spearman rank-order correlations between the demographic controls and the main study variables

5.3. Tests of hypotheses

In order to test the hypothesized relationships, two hierarchical regression analyses and a mediation analysis (PROCESS macro, Model 4) were executed. Given that gender, education and tenure in the host country may influence the study variables, these were included in the first step of each regression and as covariates in the mediation model.

As mentioned previously on Table 6 as gender is coded 0 = female, 1 = male, three respondents who preferred not to disclose their gender or identified as non-binary were not accounted for and thus, all models were estimated on 112 cases. The mediation analysis relied on 5,000 bootstrap samples and 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals.

5.3.1 Perceived leadership diversity, microaggressions and organizational embeddedness

Hypothesis 1 predicted that Perceived Leadership Diversity would be negatively associated with Perceived Microaggressions. A hierarchical regression analysis was conducted with the controls in Step 1 and Perceived Leadership Diversity in Step 2 (Table 7). While the controls explained a non-significant portion of the variance (R^2 = .010, F (3,108) = 0.36, p = .784), the addition of Perceived Leadership Diversity in Step 2 significantly improved the model (ΔR^2 = .143, F-change (1,107) = 18.04, p < .001) and negatively predicted perceived microaggressions (β = -.389, p < .001).

The results support hypothesis 1, meaning that business expatriates working in organizations with higher perceived leadership diversity reported lower exposure to workplace microaggresions.

Test of Hypothesis	H1	
Predictors	**Perceived Microaggression**	
	Step 1	*Step 2*
Intercept	2.496***	4.130***
Step 1		
Gender	-.009	.066
Education	-.095	-.134
Tenure	-.030	-.022
Step 2		
Perceived Leadership Diversity		-.389***
Step 3		
Perceived Microagression		
Overall F	.357	4.821***
R2	.010	.153
Adjusted R2	-.018	.121
Change in R2		0.146***

Notes. Significant at: $*p < .05$. $**p < .01$. $***p < .001$; standardized β coefficients are reported after Z-score transformation; $n = 115$

Table 7 - Regression analysis for the hypothesized relationship between perceived leadership diversity and perceived microaggressions

Hypotheses 2 and 3 concerned the prediction of Organizational Embeddedness. To test them, a second hierarchical regression was conducted with the controls in Step 1, Perceived Leadership Diversity in Step 2 and Perceived Microaggressions in Step 3 (Table 8). The controls were non-significant ($R^2 = .006$, $p = .878$).

Hypothesis 2 predicted that Perceived Leadership Diversity would be positively associated with Organizational Embeddedness. As per Table 8, Perceived Leadership Diversity significantly and positively predicted Organizational Embeddedness when entered in Step 2 ($\beta = .432$, $p < .001$; $\Delta R^2 = .177$), such that expatriates in organizations with higher Perceived Leadership Diversity reported stronger organizational embeddedness.

Hypothesis 3 predicted that Perceived Microaggressions would be negatively associated with Organizational Embeddedness. As shown in Table 8 when entered in Step 3, Perceived

Microaggressions significantly and negatively predicted Organizational Embeddedness (β = -.300, p = .001; ΔR^2 = .076).

Test of Hypothesis	H2 & H3		
Predictors	**Organizational Embeddness**		
	Step 1	*Step 2*	*Step 3*
Intercept	3.882***	2.616***	3.480***
Step 1			
Gender	-.028	-.111	-.091
Education	.005	.048	.008
Tenure	-.071	-.081	-.087
Step 2			
Perceived Leadership		.432***	.316***
Step 3			
Perceived Microagression			-.300***
Overall F	.226	5.991***	7.426***
R2	.006	.183	.259
Adjusted R2	-.021	.152	.224
Change in R2		.177***	.076***

Notes. Significant at: *p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001; standardized β coefficients are reported after Z-score transformation; n = 115

Table 8 - Regression analysis for the relationships between perceived leadership diversity, perceived microaggressions and organizational embeddedness

As per Table 8, the results supported each hypothesis accordingly. Notably, Perceived Leadership Diversity remained a significant positive predictor of organizational embeddedness after the mediator was entered (β = .316, p = .001), which anticipates the partial mediation examined next.

5.3.2 The mediating role of perceived microaggressions

Hypothesis 4 predicted that Perceived Microaggressions would mediate the relationship between Perceived Leadership Diversity and Organizational Embeddedness, such that the positive association between Perceived Leadership Diversity and Organizational Embeddedness would be weaker in the presence of microaggressions.

Following Table 9, Perceived Leadership Diversity was negatively related to Perceived Microaggressions (a-path: B = -0.394, p < .001), and Perceived Microaggressions were, in turn, negatively related to Organizational Embeddedness (b-path: B = -0.209, p =

.001). The total effect of Perceived Leadership Diversity on Organizational Embeddedness was positive and significant (c-path: B = 0.305, $p < .001$), and the direct effect remained positive and significant once the mediator was included (c'-path: β = .223, $p = .001$). Importantly, the indirect effect of Perceived Leadership Diversity on Organizational Embeddedness through Perceived Microaggressions was positive and significant, as its 95% bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval did not include zero (β = .083, BootSE = 0.029, 95% CI [0.028, 0.141]).

Because both the indirect and direct effects were significant, these results indicate partial mediation: part of the positive association between Perceived Leadership Diversity and Organizational Embeddedness operates through reductions in Perceived Microaggressions, while a significant direct association remains. In other words, the positive influence of Perceived Leadership Diversity on embeddedness is partly carried by, and would be weaker without, its role in lowering microaggressions. This result thus partially supports hypothesis 4**.**

Predictor	***β***	**SE**	***t***	***p***	**95% CI**
Dependent variable: Perceived Microagressions					
Perceived Leadership Diversity (a)	-0.394	0.093	-4.248	< .001	[-0.578, -0.210]
Gender	0.112	0.156	0.718	.474	[-0.198, 0.422]
Education	-0.858	0.579	-1.482	.141	[-2.006, 0.290]
Tenure	-0.021	0.086	-0.246	.806	[-0.191, 0.149]
Dependent variable: Organizational Embeddedness / Total Effect					
Perceived Leadership Diversity (c', direct)	0.223	0.066	3.396	.001	[0.093, 0.353]
Perceived Microaggressions (b)	-0.209	0.063	-3.308	.001	[-0.335, -0.084]
Gender	-0.108	0.103	-1.052	.295	[-0.311, 0.095]
Education	0.035	0.383	0.092	.927	[-0.724, 0.795]
Tenure	-0.058	0.056	-1.039	.301	[-0.170, 0.053]
Dependent variable: Organizational Embeddness / Indirect Effect					
Total effect (c)	0.305	0.064	4.811	< .001	[0.180, 0.431]
Direct effect (c')	0.223	0.066	3.396	.001	[0.093, 0.353]
Indirect effect (a × b, via Microaggressions)	0.083	0.029	—	—	[0.028, 0.141]

Table 9 - Mediation analysis of the effect of perceived leadership diversity on organizational embeddedness through perceived microaggressions

6. Discussion

The study set out to examine how perceived leadership diversity relates to the organizational embeddedness of business expatriates in their host-country organizations, and whether this relationship is influenced by perceived microaggressions in the workplace. Drawing on a sample of 115 business expatriates, the empirical analysis tested four hypotheses that received support, with Hypothesis 4 supported in its partial form. Table 10 below summarizes the overall results from the mentioned test of hypotheses.

Hypothesis	Description	Result
H1	Perceived leadership diversity is negatively associated to perceived microaggressions, such that business expatriates (SIEs and AEs) working in organizations with higher perceived leadership diversity will experience lower exposure to workplace microaggressions.	Supported
H2	Perceived leadership diversity is positively associated with host organizational embeddedness, such that business expatriates (SIEs and AEs) working in organizations with higher perceived leadership diversity will experience higher organizational embeddedness.	Supported
H3	Perceived workplace microaggressions is negatively associated with host organizational embeddedness among business expatriates.	Supported
H4	Perceived microaggressions mediates the relationships between perceived leadership diversity, respectively on organizational embeddedness, so that the positive association between perceived leadership diversity and organizational embeddedness is weaker when they are exposed to microaggression.	Supported (partial mediation)

Table 10 - Overall results from the test of hypotheses

Looking at the bigger picture, the results show that perceived leadership diversity has an impact in and influences expatriates' attachment to their host organizations, meaning that

if an expatriate observes a leadership team from diverse cultural, national, or demographic backgrounds, they are more likely to feel a higher sense of fit and belonging to the institution. Moreover, since leadership composition signals organisational values, expatriates' perceptions of leadership diversity can shape their connection to the organisation and, in turn, how they interpret subtle identity-based slights in everyday work.

The descriptive profile of the sample conveys these conclusions, as on average, respondents considered their leadership as diverse (M = 3.70) and reported high levels of organizational embeddedness (M = 3.82). In addition, experiencing microaggressions was infrequent (M = 1.86). This profile is consistent with a sample drawn largely from European and international institutions, which along other highly internationalized working environments located in Western European countries, offer culturally heterogenic workplaces where equality norms are comparatively salient.

The relatively low frequency of microaggression experienced by this sample is foreseeable. What is noteworthy, however, is that even subtle variation in how often respondents perceived microaggressions was consistently associated with both their perceptions of leadership diversity and their sense of organizational embeddedness. Microaggressions do not need to be frequent to matter as even at low levels, differences in exposure can be meaningfully linked to key organizational outcomes. This lends further credibility to the hypothesized relationships and suggests that the findings are not driven by extreme cases, but reflect a broader, more generalizable pattern.

6.1. The relationship between perceived leadership diversity, microaggressions and organizational embeddedness

Hypothesis 1 proposed that Perceived Leadership Diversity would be negatively associated with Perceived Microaggressions, and this expectation was supported (β = -.389, $p < .001$; $\Delta R^2 = .143$). Business expatriates who perceived greater diversity within their organization's leadership experienced less workplace microaggressions. This finding is consistent with the argument advanced by Parikh and Leschied (2022) that leadership composition and institutional representation function as environmental signals that can either communicate inclusion or, in their absence, reinforce the marginalization of minority employees. Where leadership visibly reflects a range of cultural and national backgrounds, subtle discriminatory behaviours may be less likely to become normalized, and inclusive norms are more likely to be modelled from the top of the organization. For business

expatriates, who, by definition, occupy a culturally distinct position within the host-country workplace, a diverse leadership team may signal that their background is recognized and valued rather than treated as a deviation from an implicit norm.

Hypothesis 2 proposed that Perceived Leadership Diversity would be positively associated with Organizational Embeddedness, and this too was supported. Perceived Leadership Diversity emerged as the strongest single predictor of embeddedness in the analysis (β = .432, p < .001; ΔR^2 = .177). This result reflects the framework proposed by Ghosh et al. (2024), who theorize embeddedness as a process that develops unevenly across social groups and is shaped by demographic diversity, and the degree of genuine inclusion within an organization. Interpreted through the fit–links–sacrifice structure of embeddedness (Kiazad et al., 2020), diverse leadership plausibly strengthens expatriates' sense of fit, because an organizational culture that reflects varied identities is more likely to validate their own; it may also facilitate the perception of links, to the extent that visible representation supports a sense of belonging and connection to colleagues and the organization. In this respect, the finding extends expatriate embeddedness research beyond its traditional focus on individual adjustment and cultural intelligence (Stoermer et al., 2021) by highlighting a structural, organization-level antecedent of expatriates' attachment to the host organization.

Hypothesis 3 proposed that Perceived Microaggressions would be negatively associated with Organizational Embeddedness, and this was likewise supported (β = -.300, p = .001; ΔR^2 = .076). Expatriates who perceived more frequent microaggressions reported weaker embeddedness in their host-country organizations. This finding provides support to the broader claim in the microaggression literature that subtle, identity-based slights implicate organizational costs, including reduced commitment and heightened intentions to leave (Newman et al., 2025). It also converges with expatriation research showing that perceived workplace discrimination operates as a push factor in host-country withdrawal intentions (Lehtonen et al., 2023). Within the embeddedness framework, microaggressions can be understood as gradually eroding the ties that would otherwise bind an expatriate to the organization: they can undermine fit by signalling that the individual does not fully belong, they weaken links by positioning the expatriate as an outsider, and they can diminish the perceived sacrifice associated with leaving.

Finally, among the demographic controls, the only significant association was between gender and perceived leadership diversity, with men perceiving somewhat more

diverse leadership teams than women (rho = .234, p = .013). Although not central to the hypotheses, this pattern is consistent with the broader observation that perceptions of organizational inclusion can themselves differ across social groups, and it emphasizes that the subjective perception of diversity is, in fact, an appraisal shaped by the observer's own position within the organization.

6.2. The mediating role of perceived microaggressions

Hypothesis 4 proposed that Perceived Microaggressions would mediate the relationship between Perceived Leadership Diversity and Organizational Embeddedness. The mediation analysis supported this expectation in its partial form. Perceived Leadership Diversity was negatively related to Perceived Microaggressions (a-path, β = - .394, p < .001), while microaggressions were in turn negatively related to embeddedness (b-path, β = - .209, p = .001), and the resulting indirect effect was positive and significant, with a bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval that excluded zero (β = .083, 95% CI [0.028, 0.141]). Because the direct effect of leadership diversity on embeddedness remained significant once the mediator was included (c' = 0.223, p = .001), the results indicate partial rather than full mediation.

Substantively, this pattern means that part of the benefit of Perceived Leadership Diversity for expatriates' embeddedness is carried by its capacity to reduce perceived microaggressions. Diverse leadership is associated with fewer perceived slights, and fewer perceived slights are in turn associated with stronger organizational attachment; the positive indirect effect reflects the combination of these two negative associations. This is the study's central contribution, as it positions workplace microaggressions not merely as an outcome of exclusionary environments but as an intervening mechanism that helps to explain why leadership diversity matters for expatriate retention. In doing so, the finding bridges microaggression theory (Torino et al., 2019) with the expatriation and embeddedness literatures (Ghosh et al., 2024; Kiazad et al., 2020; Lehtonen et al., 2023), two bodies of work that have developed largely in parallel. It is also consistent with the logic of minority stress theory (Meyer, 2003), to the extent that expatriates occupy a minority position within the host organization, a diverse leadership team appears to attenuate one of the everyday stressors that would otherwise accumulate and weaken their ties to the organization.

At the same time, the persistence of a significant direct effect indicates that reducing microaggressions is not the only route through which leadership diversity supports

embeddedness. Diverse leadership also operates through additional channels not captured by the mediator, such as directly strengthening expatriates' sense of fit, offering identification and role models, or signalling genuine organizational openness to internationally mobile talent. Perceived microaggressions therefore explain an important part of the relationship but not the whole.

One measurement observation further nuances the interpretation of the mediator. Although the microaggressions scale was designed to capture three theoretically distinct dimensions (microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidations), these did not emerge as separate components, and a single, highly reliable composite was retained ($\alpha = .91$). For this sample of business expatriates, subtle discrimination tied to nationality or cultural background appears to be experienced as a relatively undifferentiated stream. What appears to affect expatriates is not the specific type of microaggression, but rather its accumulation and the frequency with which it occurs. Moreover, the common denominator is not nationality itself, but expatriates' position as outsiders within the organisation.

Taken as a whole, the discussion points to a coherent account: perceived leadership diversity strengthens the organizational embeddedness of business expatriates both directly and by lowering their exposure to perceived workplace microaggressions. These findings carry implications for how international organizations approach diversity in leadership and the management of everyday inclusion, which are developed further in the conclusion that follows.

7. Conclusion

This study set out to understand the relationship between perceived leadership diversity, workplace microaggressions, and organizational embeddedness among business expatriates in host-country organizations. Using a quantitative, cross-sectional design and a sample of 115 (valid responses from) business expatriates, it tested four hypotheses derived from the integration of microaggression theory with the expatriation and embeddedness literatures. All four received empirical support, with the mediation hypothesis supported in its partial form.

Taken together, the findings provide a clear answer to the central research question. Perceived leadership diversity is positively associated with the organizational embeddedness of business expatriates, and this association unfolds through two complementary routes: a direct path, whereby diverse leadership strengthens expatriates' attachment to the organization in its own right, and an indirect path, whereby diverse leadership reduces the frequency of perceived microaggressions, which in turn supports embeddedness. Microaggressions therefore emerge not simply as an adverse experience, but as a mechanism that helps to explain why representation at the top of an organization matters for the retention of internationally mobile talent. Even in a sample where microaggressions were reported infrequently, their perceived frequency was systematically related to how embedded expatriates felt, underscoring the practical weight of these everyday, subtle experiences.

The remainder of this chapter considers the study's limitations and the avenues they open for future research, before setting out its theoretical and managerial contributions.

7.1. Limitations and future research

Despite all its findings, the study is still subject to a set of limitations from different dimensions. These not only dictate the conclusions reached, but also the suggested directions for future research.

A first set of limitations concerns the sample. With 115 valid responses, the sample is modest in size and unevenly distributed across several dimensions. The overwhelming majority of respondents were self-initiated expatriates (90.4%), leaving assigned expatriates substantially underrepresented; the sample was also concentrated in European and international institutions and in a small number of Western European host countries, drawn heavily on expatriates of Italian and Portuguese origin. This profile limits the generalizability

of the findings to assigned expatriates, to non-European and non-Western host contexts, and to industries and occupational profiles that were only sparsely represented. Future research should therefore seek larger and more balanced samples, in particular ones that allow assigned and self-initiated expatriates to be compared directly, and that extend the enquiry to host regions with different cultural and institutional characteristics and to a broader range of sectors, educational backgrounds, and career stages.

A second, and particularly important, limitation stems from the study's cross-sectional design. Because all variables were measured at a single point in time, the analysis captures associations rather than causal relationships, and the direction of the proposed effects cannot be firmly established. Although the model specifies that perceived leadership diversity reduces perceived microaggressions and thereby strengthens organizational embeddedness, the data are equally consistent with alternative orderings. For instance, expatriates who are already highly embedded perceive their leadership as more diverse and report fewer microaggressions. The fit of the mediation model should therefore be read as consistent with, but not confirmation of, the hypothesized causal process; moreover, estimating a mediation that inherently unfolds over time from a single snapshot may itself bias the indirect effect. Clarifying the temporal and causal dynamics among these variables would require longitudinal data, in which leadership diversity, microaggressions, and embeddedness are measured on the same individuals at successive points, or an experimental design.

A further set of limitations concerns measurement. Because all constructs were assessed through self-report from a single source, the findings may be subject to common-method concerns (Podsakoff et al., 2003), and the measures capture expatriates' subjective perceptions of leadership diversity rather than the objective composition of leadership. In addition, the perceived leadership diversity scale was newly adapted for this study and achieved only acceptable internal consistency ($\alpha = .73$), and the microaggressions items, though highly reliable overall, did not separate into the three dimensions they were designed to capture. Finally, the low base rate of reported microaggressions may have restricted the observed range of that variable. Future work could address these issues by combining perceptual measures with more objective indicators of leadership composition, by drawing on multiple data sources, and by further refining the measurement of microaggressions in the specific context of nationality- and culture-based bias.

Another limitation concerns the scope of the variables included in the final analysis. Career embeddedness, initially operationalized as the perceived career benefits of remaining

in the host-country organization, was initially considered into the theoretical model as a moderating variable and was measured in the survey accordingly. However, given the sample size constraints and the need to maintain analytical parsimony, it was ultimately not retained in the proposed theoretical model entailed in the study. While the survey data on career embeddedness were collected and may offer exploratory insights, the absence of a formal test of its moderating role represents a limitation of the present study. Future research with larger and more diverse samples would be well positioned to examine whether career embeddedness meaningfully buffers the negative relationship between microaggressions and organizational embeddedness, as originally hypothesized.

Beyond addressing these limitations, future research could also extend the model itself. Promising directions include testing boundary conditions and moderators of the observed relationships, such as cultural distance, host-country tenure, cultural intelligence, or expatriate type, and examining whether the mechanism identified here generalizes to outcomes beyond embeddedness, including turnover intentions, wellbeing, job performance, and career embeddedness. Such extensions would help to establish both the robustness and the reach of the account developed in this thesis.

7.2. Theoretical contributions and implications

The study presented proposes several contributions to the literature. Its central theoretical contribution is to bridge research on workplace microaggressions and research on expatriation and organizational embeddedness. By situating microaggressions within an expatriation framework and linking them empirically to embeddedness, the study addresses the gap identified at the outset, namely that microaggressions experienced by business expatriates have been generally neglected.

Relatedly, the study repositions microaggressions theoretically. Rather than treating them solely as an outcome of exclusionary environments, it models them as an intervening mechanism, showing that perceived leadership diversity supports embeddedness in part by reducing the microaggressions expatriates perceive. This mediating role explains why organization-level diversity translates into individual-level attachment and thereby adds explanatory depth to account for expatriate retention.

The study also extends embeddedness theory by identifying a structural, organization-level antecedent of embeddedness. Whereas much of the embeddedness literature has emphasized individual adjustment and personal resources such as cultural intelligence, the present findings highlight perceived leadership diversity as a feature of the organizational context that shapes how embedded expatriates become. In doing so, the study broadens the range of factors understood to influence expatriates' fit, links, and sense of sacrifice.

Finally, by demonstrating these relationships among business expatriates experiencing bias tied to nationality and cultural background, the study lends empirical weight, in a new population, to the logic of minority stress theory, and it contributes a preliminary adapted measure of perceived leadership diversity together with the observation that, in this context, microaggressions appear to be experienced as a single, cumulative stream rather than as clearly distinct types

7.3. Managerial contributions and implications

The findings also carry practical implications for human resource professionals and managers in international organizations. Most directly, they indicate that leadership diversity is not merely a symbolic or reputational matter but a factor with measurable consequences for the retention of expatriate talent. Because perceived leadership diversity emerged as the

strongest predictor of embeddedness in this study, organizations seeking to retain internationally mobile employees have a concrete reason to invest in genuinely diverse and visible representation within their leadership.

At the same time, the partial mediation result suggests that representation alone is not sufficient. Since part of the benefit of diverse leadership operates by reducing everyday microaggressions, organizations should pair structural diversity with active efforts to address subtle bias in day-to-day interactions, for example through awareness and training initiatives, the cultivation of an inclusive climate, and accessible mechanisms through which expatriates can raise concerns. The two pathways identified here point to a dual intervention: building representation while simultaneously reducing the frequency of the subtle slights that erode belonging.

These implications are especially relevant for the retention of self-initiated expatriates, who made up the large majority of this sample and who typically relocate without the organizational support available to assigned expatriates. Targeted onboarding, mentoring, and belonging initiatives may be particularly valuable for this group. More broadly, the observation that perceptions of leadership diversity differed across groups within the sample is a reminder that inclusion is experienced unevenly; organizations would therefore do well to monitor how inclusion is perceived across different segments of their workforce, rather than assuming that formal diversity is felt equally by all.

As international workforces continue to grow in size and complexity, the successful integration and retention of business expatriates will depend not only on formal diversity and inclusion policies but on the lived, everyday experience of inclusion within the organization. This study shows that leadership diversity contributes to that experience in part by shaping how frequently expatriates encounter subtle bias, and in doing so it offers both a clearer theoretical account of expatriate embeddedness and a practical case for treating diversity and everyday inclusion as complementary priorities.

Disclosure of use to Generative Artificial Intelligence

Author responsible for the work: Maria Inês da Silva Almeida Paiva.

The author declares the use of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) in the research and writing process. According to the GAIDeT taxonomy (2025), the following tasks were delegated to GenAI AI tools under full human supervision:

Literature review: support in identifying and verifying references (confirming sources and formatting in the appropiate style), as well as the selection, reading, and integration of sources were carried out by the author.

Methodology*:* support in drafting the paragraph justifying the methodological approach.

Writing and editing: generation of initial drafts of the Discussion and Conclusion sections (including the theoretical and managerial contributions, limitations, and future research), reformulation of the Research Questions section and of several paragraphs, language revision, and improvements to clarity. All drafts were reviewed, adapted, and rewritten by the author.

Data management: support in extracting the reliability coefficients (Cronbach's alpha) from the SPSS output file produced by the author. Data collection, processing, and statistical analysis were carried out entirely by the author in SPSS.

Supervision and quality control: cross-checking of citations, detection of inconsistencies, and support in reviewing internal consistency

The GenAI tool used was Claude Opus 4.8.

The author assumes full responsibility for the final content of the dissertation.

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Annex 1 – Survey "Workplace Microaggressions"

This survey is part of an investigation that is being carried out at the **Faculty of Economics and Management of the University of Porto** and is targeted to **Business Expatriates** from culturally varied backgrounds. It examines perceived microaggressions in the workplace.

The survey takes approximately 5 minutes to complete. It contains a section with some demographic questions, important to characterize the sample, but not used to identify you in any way. Replies are totally anonymous. We ask you to fill the entire survey. There are no "right" or "wrong" answers, since it is your experience that is important.

We deeply thank your participation. **We also ask for your help in forwarding an invitation to participate in the survey to other Business Expatriates**.

For any doubts or further questions, please contact the main researcher: Maria Inês Paiva - minespaiva@hotmail.com

University of Porto - Faculty of Economics and Management - Rua Dr. Roberto Frias 4200-464 Porto, Portugal (www.fep.up.pt).

Sincerely,
Maria Inês Paiva

1. **Do you consent to participate in this survey?**

	Yes
	No

2. **Present Situation**

Please characterize your present situation (choose the option that fits your case):

	I am temporarily living and working abroad because I was assigned by my employer (Assigned Expatriate - AE)

	I am temporarily living and working abroad on my own initiative (Self-Initiated Expatriate - SIE)
	Other

3. Perceived Leadership Diversity

Regarding the following statements and your current employment situation, please indicate your level of agreement, knowing that 1 stands for "Strongly disagree" and 5 for "Strongly agree".

People from different cultural/national backgrounds are well represented in my host-country organization's leadership	1	2	3	4	5
Leadership positions in my host-country organization reflect the diversity of its workforce	1	2	3	4	5
Employees from minority or underrepresented groups have equal access to leadership roles in my host-country organization	1	2	3	4	5
A lack of diversity in my host-country organization's leadership is noticeable	1	2	3	4	5

4. Types of Microaggressions

Microassaults are defined as intentional verbal, non-verbal, or environmental actions that express clear prejudice. They are deliberate discriminatory behaviours linked to overt racism, sexism, heterosexism, ableism, or religious bias.

Microinsults are unintentional actions or comments that subtly demean a person's identity or abilities.

Microinvalidations are categorized as comments that dismiss or undermine a person's lived experiences, feelings, or identity.

According to the definition of **Microassaults** (i.e., intentional verbal, non-verbal, or environmental actions that express clear prejudice), please indicate your level of agreement to the following statements, knowing that 1 stands for "Strongly disagree" and 5 for "Strongly agree".

Someone in my workplace made a deliberately offensive or derogatory comment about my cultural or national background.	1	2	3	4	5
I have been treated with open hostility because of my nationality or cultural background.	1	2	3	4	5

According to the definition of **Microinsults** (i.e., unintentional actions or comments that subtly demean a person's identity or abilities), please indicate your level of agreement to the following statements, knowing that 1 stands for "Strongly disagree" and 5 for "Strongly agree".

Someone at work expressed surprise at my professional competence based on my nationality or cultural background.	1	2	3	4	5
My ideas were dismissed in ways that seemed related to my status as a foreigner	1	2	3	4	5
I was treated as less capable than my colleagues because of my cultural or national background.	1	2	3	4	5

According to the definition of **Microinvalidations** (i.e., **comments** that dismiss or undermine a person's lived experiences, feelings, or identity), please indicate your level of agreement to the following statements, knowing that 1 stands for "Strongly disagree" and 5 for "Strongly agree".

Someone told me I was "too sensitive" when I raised discomfort about a comment related to my background.	1	2	3	4	5
My experiences of exclusion in the workplace were minimized or disbelieved.	1	2	3	4	5
I was told that cultural background does not matter at work, dismissing the challenges I face.	1	2	3	4	5

5. Organizational Embeddedness

Regarding your sense of **fit** within your host-country organisation, please consider the following statements in relation to your current employment situation and indicate your level of agreement, where 1 means "Strongly disagree" and 5 means "Strongly agree".

I feel like I fit well in my host-country organization.	1	2	3	4	5
My values are compatible with those of my host-country organization.	1	2	3	4	5
I was told that cultural background does not matter at work, dismissing the challenges I face.	1	2	3	4	5

Regarding your **links** within your host-country organisation, please consider the following statements in relation to your current employment situation and indicate your level of agreement, where 1 means "Strongly disagree" and 5 means "Strongly agree".

I have close working relationships with my colleagues in my host-country organization.	1	2	3	4	5
I work closely with members of my team on a regular basis.	1	2	3	4	5
I feel well connected to the people in my host-country organization.	1	2	3	4	5

Regarding what you consider as **sacrifice**, within your host-country organisation, please consider the following statements in relation to your current employment situation and indicate your level of agreement, where 1 means "Strongly disagree" and 5 means "Strongly agree".

It would be difficult for me to leave my host-country organization given what I would lose.	1	2	3	4	5
I have invested a great deal in my host-country organization.	1	2	3	4	5
Leaving my host-country organization would mean giving up a lot.	1	2	3	4	5

6. Career Embeddedness and Career Benefits

Please consider the following statements in relation to your **current employment situation** and indicate your level of agreement, where 1 means "Strongly disagree" and 5 means "Strongly agree".

Working in my host-country organization offers me important career advancement opportunities.	1	2	3	4	5
Staying in my host-country organization is important for my professional development.	1	2	3	4	5
The career benefits I gain from my host-country organization outweigh the difficulties I encounter.	1	2	3	4	5
Leaving my host-country organization would significantly harm my career prospects.	1	2	3	4	5
My host-country organization provides me with professional opportunities that are difficult to find elsewhere.	1	2	3	4	5

7. Demographic Information

Please indicate your **country of origin**

Please indicate the **country you currently work in**

Please indicate the **industry you currently work in**

Please indicate the **industry you currently work in**

	Less than higher education (e.g.: high school and below)
	Higher education (e.g.: Bachelor's degree and above)

Please indicate which **gender you identify** with

	Man
	Woman
	Non-binary
	Prefer not to say
	Other:

Please indicate the **tenure in the country** you currently reside/work in

	Less than 6 months
	6 months to 1 year
	1 to 5 years
	5 to 10 years
	10 to 15 years
	More than 15 years