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Abstract

Globalization has reduced geographical and cultural boundaries, making culturally diverse work teams necessary. Furthermore, due to basic disparities in the opinions of team members, culturally diverse work teams often lack cohesiveness, which can result in subgroup formation and conflict. This study aimed to explore the role of cultural empathy in managing conflicts among culturally diverse work teams in universities in Kenya. This study used a descriptive study design, and the target population included permanent employees of three universities: Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology, Kirinyaga University, and Daystar University. Qualitative data were subjected to content analysis. In addition, quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and regression analysis. The study established that there was a weak positive and significant relationship between cultural empathy and conflict Management among culturally diverse work teams in Universities in Kenya. The study implications are that leaders should not be biased or prejudiced, should demonstrate objectivity, acknowledge and appreciate diversity, be open-minded, and listen to the members. Leaders in culturally diverse work teams have the potential to make or break a group. Effective leadership, especially during conflict management, requires skills such as effective communication, problem-solving, and negotiating with a focus on interests. Such leaders should be recruited based on their cultural empathy skills or trained in the job to become proficient in cultural empathy to deliver on their responsibilities as managers.

Keywords: *Cultural empathy, conflict management, culturally diverse work teams*

1.0 Introduction

According to Stahl *et al.* (2021), diversity can be a source of friction and conflict- and hence an obstacle to effective team functioning. These authors aver that, on the reverse, cultural diversity can be a source of synergy and learning, which is a powerful seed for something new. The difficult intercultural interaction has a negative effect of suppressing team creativity and innovation (Williams & O'Reilly III, 1998). Williams and O'Reilly refer to this perspective as social categorization. Additionally, compared to homogeneous teams, culturally diverse teams experience higher process losses (Syed *et al.*, 2013). The majority of multinational corporations employ a variety of team structures to address the challenges of globalization and internal

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organizational change (Ranney & Deck, 1995). There is a need to promote diversity through an intercultural strategy, influencing knowledge construction and enhancing intercultural sensitivity. It also serves as a tool to reduce the chances of racial or tribal segregation at the workplace (Zapata-Barrero, 2015). Sarwari *et al.* (2023), in their defense for ICCs in the 21st Century, argue that in the ever-growing, diversified multicultural environments and organizations, human beings have to interact with people of different backgrounds to pursue and perform their personal, social, and professional lives and duties.

According to Dubrin (1994), conflict in individuals and groups is natural and it results from a competitive environment. Reza Seyed *et al.* (2025) argue that conflict occurs when the needs, desires, goals, opinions, and values of two or more people differ, and it is often accompanied by anger, helplessness, discouragement, worry, anxiety, and fear. Due to the above negative conditions that accompany conflicts, there is therefore a need for the stakeholders to institute mechanisms that can normalize the situation or manage the conflict.

Through intercultural communication competencies, people can communicate and integrate across cultural differences, which helps them understand potential differences that may result from their varied cultural backgrounds. Stahl *et al.* (2014) emphasized the central role of intercultural communication competencies in enhancing effective interactions in culturally diverse work teams. The two scholars concluded that cultural diversity leads to higher performance only when members have mutual understanding, integrate, and share their ideas. This is a situation where members of a culturally diverse team take advantage of and benefit from their diverse composition. The absence of ICCs facilitates team members to understand each other may result in such things as the creation of a class society, social imbalance, unfair treatment, and the underestimation of the contributions made by the diverse team members. Additionally, individual team members can be dissatisfied, uncommitted, and less trusting, thus making diverse teams experience low innovation and productivity (Jackson & Ruderman, 1995; Linnehan & Konrad, 1999; Ng & Tung, 1998). In multicultural teams, strong cultural borders between groups frequently develop, which hinders social bonding, communication, and eventually collaboration (Park & Lee, 2012). Coming closer today, Turabay *et al.* (2023) posit that even if people do not move geographically, online communication in today's world enables communication independent of time and space, making the encounter of culture inevitable.

In Kenya, the National Cohesion and Integration Commission (n.d.), reported that there is unequal representation of ethnic communities in the civil service. The report was aimed at guiding recruitment in the public service, aimed at promoting ethnic diversity. According to the formula, the recruitment of the Kikuyu community was limited to 17% in the public service, while the Luhya community was limited to 13%, the Kalenjin were allocated 12.8% and the Luo were allocated 10%. The new formula is also meant to enhance opportunities for all Kenyans proportional to their national population strength. The decision by the Public Service Commission (PSC) to develop the criteria is aimed at addressing a problem that was recently disclosed by the National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC), which published a report revealing that only five ethnic groups in Kenya dominate employment opportunities in the Public Service. The permanent staff of Kenya's public and private universities served as the study's target population. The researcher posits that ICCs have the net effect of augmenting and not inhibiting the process of conflict management among culturally diverse work teams in universities in Kenya.

Otundo (2024) notes that in Kenya, tribalism significantly affects the governance of public universities. The author cites Mwangi (2019), who highlighted that ethnic favouritism in key

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administrative positions at Maseno University creates an environment of exclusion and tension, reducing staff morale and operational efficiency. Similarly, at Moi University, ethnic favouritism in leadership appointments has led to widespread protests and disruptions (Ngare, 2020). This has negatively impacted the institutional performance in a number of ways, including reduced academic standards, inefficiencies in administration, erosion of public trust, internal conflicts, and limited growth opportunities. The current situation at the universities in Kenya, where cultural diversity exists and yet there is reported tribalism and ethnic favouritism, begs the need for strategies to cultivate harmonious coexistence of the different communities, to enable the University work teams to achieve their mutual goals.

1.1 Problem Statement

One of the key challenges organizations face today is managing cultural diversity, which Bruna Dias (2024) defines as the coexistence and active inclusion of individuals from varied cultural backgrounds and value systems within a single organizational setting. While diversity can bring valuable perspectives and innovation, it also presents significant challenges. Culturally diverse teams often encounter difficulties due to differing viewpoints, which can lead to misunderstandings, internal divisions, and the formation of subgroups or factions, ultimately increasing the potential for conflict.

People tend to cluster in their tribal groups in their social interaction. Studies show that their management is more costly than homogeneous teams (Shachaf, 2005). A divided work team will find it difficult to achieve the organizational goals. The different factions will pull in different directions and hence delay and/or sabotage the achievement of organizational goals. Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology, Daystar University, and Kirinyaga University have employees from diverse Kenyan cultural communities and, indeed, a few international employees as well.

According to Blazenaite (2012), there is mounting proof that good communication is essential to keeping a company united behind successful, integrated goals. An open and adaptive communication system is created as a result of effective organizational communication, which also manages organizational communication processes and ensures open interaction with a free flow of information (Szukala, 2001; Zaremba, 2003; Tourish & Hargie, 2004; Eisenberg *et al.*, 2009). However, there are a number of barriers to effective communication in a workforce that is culturally diverse. Key among these is the fact that individual members have different worldviews, based on their cultural orientation and socialization. The employees assign culturally appropriate meanings to messages, leading to miscommunication and conflicts at the organizational level.

People who work in multicultural teams can benefit from intercultural communication competencies (ICCs) in several ways. For one thing, they help members of the team communicate their differences more effectively. Secondly, they give group members the ability to react to the different attitudes and behaviors displayed by other group members in a more practical and less critical way. Additionally, they enable group members to more precisely evaluate how their actions impact group dynamics (Shaw & Barrett-Power, 1998). Available literature on ICCs is from studies done in European and Asian contexts, but very few studies have been done in Africa. One example of a study done in Africa is by (Abugre *et al.*, 2019), based in Ghana, focusing on European expatriates working for multinational corporations and their communication with multicultural African communities. The dearth of studies on ICCs in the African setting is therefore a research gap that this study sought to fill.

1.2 Research Objective

The study sought to determine the role of cultural empathy in conflict management among culturally diverse work teams in universities in Kenya.

2.0 Literature Review

This section presents the theoretical and empirical review.

2.1 Theoretical Review

The Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC) model was proposed by Brian H. Spitzberg in 1994. This model takes the general view that behaviour is appropriate and effective in each environment. As noted by (Spitzberg, 1991) Competence is considered an ability or a set of skilled behaviours. Spitzberg further noted that ICC is viewed as a social evaluation of behaviour. A given behaviour or ability can be viewed as competent in one context, and incompetent in yet another. The social evaluation is categorized into two primary criteria of appropriateness and effectiveness.

In Spitzberg's view, appropriateness means that the critical rules, practices, and expectations of the relationship are preserved, while effectiveness, on the other hand, has to do with accomplishment of valued targets or rewards relative to inputs and options. Appropriateness also means that behaviour is perceived as legitimate and fitting to the context. Effectiveness, on the other hand, is relative to the available options, and it often implies satisfaction. The ICC speaker possesses respect, patience, motivation, curiosity, interest, empathy, openness, flexibility, tolerance for ambiguity, a sense of humour, and a willingness to suspend judgment (Fantini, 2000). If a speaker were to demonstrate all these characteristics, the outcome is bound to be positive and effective interpersonal communication.

To accomplish an actor's goals in a context that is appropriate, communication in an intercultural setting must be competent. Here, context refers to a range of factors, such as culture, relationship, place, and function (Spitzberg & Brunner, 1991). Several scholars have presented multiple skills, abilities, and attitudes to summarize what ICC means. However, there is no feeling of coherence or integration among the lists. There is therefore a need for a more productive approach to developing an all-encompassing model of ICC that is both theoretically and empirically sound and can predict specific competent behavior (Spitzberg, 2000). "Three levels of analysis: the individual system, the episodic system, and the relational system," are used to break down several propositions that serve as the basis for this approach (Spitzberg, 2000, p. 380).

The individual system includes the individual attributes that enable him/her to interact in a normative social situation. The episodic system includes speaker characteristics that enable competent interaction on the part of a receiver in a particular episode of interaction. The relational system, on the other hand, has those elements that support an individual's competence over the course of all relationships as opposed to just one specific episode of interaction. This study focused on the individual system which relates well with the study objectives. The focus of analysis is the university employee and his/her individual use or lack of use of Intercultural communication competencies. According to the model, interpersonal interaction is a function of two people's desire to communicate, their familiarity with communication in that situation, and their aptitude for putting desire and knowledge into practice. According to Spitzberg (2000), only knowledge of particular cultural norms, the ability to put that knowledge to use, and the desire to do so are necessary to promote appropriateness and effectiveness.

Nadene Vevea (2011) discusses three dimensions that provide the most basic understanding of ICC theory. First and foremost, ICC is the result of intercultural interaction. ICC is a result based on how the participants interacted. According to Canary *et al.* (2007), ICC refers to people's evaluations of interactions and how those evaluations affect their relationships. The second tenet is that ICC is observed and assessed from the outside. Hammer (1989) defined ICC as a social impression because, even though people may be in control of their own communicative behaviors, competence is determined by the impression that is made. According to Spitzberg (1988), effective and appropriate communication are two requirements for competent communication. Thirdly, the cultural context of the interaction is used to calculate ICC. The majority of literature, including Spitzberg (1988), agrees that in order to be competent, the speaker must adapt to the audience member or culture. The expectations for competence are determined by the cultural context.

In light of these challenges, Stiftung *et al.* (2008) emphasize the importance of intercultural communicators developing the ability to relativize their own cultural frame of reference. This involves consciously setting aside one's cultural assumptions to understand and interpret reality from the perspective of another culture. This approach aligns closely with the concept of cultural relativism, which is intrinsically linked to intercultural sensitivity, the capacity to recognize, appreciate, and respond to meaningful cultural differences. Cultivating this sensitivity leads to higher levels of empathy, enhanced cultural awareness, and more effective intercultural communication, key competencies in today's diverse organizational environments.

2.2 Empirical Review

The complete manifestation of our cognitive and affective selves in our interactions with other people is empathy. It differs from other relationship orientations like sympathy or enmeshment, although it has emotional components. It is different from these since it involves mental effort. In empathy, the intellect tries to comprehend the feelings of the other person while maintaining one's own uniqueness, enabling a thorough and impartial interaction of both. According to Karim (2003), "cultural empathy is the capacity to identify, comprehend, and accept the identity, experience, and position of a person from a culturally different background without denying one's own cultural identity." It involves applying the cultural reality of other individuals within the team and being bicultural whenever one interprets behaviours (Fine, 1995). Cultural empathy leads to building trust among team members and improving their ability to communicate with one another (Johnson *et al.*, 1996).

People need to be sensitive, adaptable, and cognizant of cultural differences in addition to having empathy for them. A person who has cultural empathy is not only willing but can adapt to the different cultural contexts that he/she encounter. In International Management literature, there is overwhelming proof that cultural empathy plays a key role in the success of cross-cultural engagements. A few studies demonstrate that successful cross-cultural interactions require people to be cognizant of and sensitive to cultural differences (for example, Hawkes and Kealey, 1981; Abe and Wiseman, 1983; Lolla and Davis, 1991). Other facets of cultural empathy that impact cross-cultural interactions include the ability to relate to coworkers from diverse cultural backgrounds, knowledge of other cultures, and a readiness to engage and build relationships with individuals from other cultures (Johnson *et al.*, 1996).

Cultural awareness and comprehension, respect for other values, considering people as individuals, employing other viewpoints when dealing with people, and experience in a foreign culture are the six sub-themes of cultural empathy, according to Chang and Tharenou (2004). Cultural awareness

focuses on knowing how individuals from different cultures might interact and their rating of various aspects. Cultural understanding is the need to be flexible and appreciating cultural differences. This is having a fundamental understanding without having to be completely aware of every culture. Respecting other values entails respecting cultural diversity and other people's values. Real respect and appreciation for the differences are required. It is to really enjoy them and the difference rather than just accepting them. People should always be treated as unique individuals rather than being stereotyped as members of their cultures. Putting oneself in another person's shoes is using different perspectives when dealing with people. It is the capacity to use various viewpoints in a multicultural team. Experience in another culture is having been involved in another culture. This is being in the minority in a workplace environment.

Cultural empathy enables a person not only to communicate inter-culturally, but it also gives them a head start in interpersonal relationships (Smith, 1992). Most of the successful European missionaries in Africa are those who succeeded in developing cultural empathy with their host cultures. They acclimatized and made themselves comfortable in the new cultures. This study, therefore, views cultural empathy as a necessary intercultural communication competence that would minimize interpersonal conflicts and enhance the performance of culturally diverse university work teams.

3.0 Methodology

This study used a descriptive study design where respondents' perceptions of the role of ICCs in conflict management were sought. The target population for this study was permanent employees of three universities: Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology, Kirinyaga University, and Daystar University. For each university, the population was stratified into two strata: managers as one stratum and general staff as the other stratum. The list of university employees was the sampling frame. A total of 169 employees responded to the questionnaire, and 16 managers were interviewed. Primary data was gathered using in-depth interviews and a structured questionnaire. Qualitative data were subjected to content analysis. In addition, quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and regression analysis.

4.0 Results and Discussion

4.1 Descriptive Statistics of Cultural Empathy

The respondents were asked to rate the statements measuring the concept of cultural empathy using the 5-point Likert scale as follows: strongly disagree (SD), disagree (D), undecided (UD), agree (A), and strongly agree (SA).

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of cultural empathy

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Mean	Std Dev
I enjoy interacting with people from other cultures	0.0%	2.4%	0.0%	26.6%	71.0%	4.7	0.6
I get upset easily when interacting with people from other cultures	46.2%	43.8%	1.2%	4.7%	4.1%	1.8	1.0
I do not stereotype other people but treat them as individuals.	3.0%	1.2%	5.9%	40.2%	49.7%	4.3	0.9
I know that my own cultural values shape my assumptions, thoughts, and behaviour.	3.0%	16.6%	7.1%	34.9%	38.5%	3.9	1.2
I am usually curious about other cultures and their norms.	3.0%	5.3%	10.1%	46.2%	35.5%	4.1	1.0
I can observe other cultural values without judging.	3.0%	10.1%	10.1%	43.8%	33.1%	3.9	1.1
I feel irritated when people of different ethnic backgrounds speak their language around me.	30.2%	26.6%	9.5%	23.1%	10.7%	2.6	1.4
I believe that cultural diversity is an asset.	2.4%	4.1%	6.5%	28.4%	58.6%	4.4	0.9
Average score						3.7	1.1

The findings indicate that the participants agreed with the assertion that “I enjoy interacting with people from other cultures” (Mean=4.7, SD=0.6), “I do not stereotype other people but treat them as individuals” (Mean=4.3, SD=0.9), “I know that my own cultural values shape my assumptions, thoughts, and behaviour” (Mean=3.9, SD=1.2), “I am usually curious about other cultures and their norms” (Mean=4.1, SD=1.0), “I can observe other cultural values without judging” (Mean=3.9, SD=1.1), “I believe that cultural diversity is an asset” (Mean=4.4, SD=0.9). Furthermore, the respondents disagreed with the statement that “I get upset easily when interacting with people from other cultures” (Mean=1.8, SD=1.0), “I feel irritated when people of different ethnic backgrounds speak their language around me (Mean=2.6, SD=1.4). The results imply that majority of respondents had cultural empathy, which was likely to enhance conflict management among culturally diverse university work teams.

4.2 Descriptive Statistics of Conflict Management

The respondents were asked to rate the statements measuring the concept of conflict management using the 5-point Likert scale as follows: strongly disagree (SD), disagree (D), undecided (UD), agree (A), and strongly agree (SA).

Table 2: Descriptive statistics of Conflict Management

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Mean	Std Dev
I discuss problems with others in order to come up with solutions that satisfy everyone.	1.2%	5.3%	7.7%	45.0%	40.8%	4.2	0.9
I make an effort to compromise and have a "give-and-take" stance while dealing with difficult circumstances.	3.0%	7.7%	8.3%	59.2%	21.9%	3.9	0.9
I generally argue my case and insist on my point of view.	18.3%	43.8%	5.9%	24.3%	7.7%	2.6	1.3
I normally say very little and attempt to get out of arguments as quickly as possible.	10.1%	29.6%	10.7%	34.9%	14.8%	3.2	1.3
I try to see conflicts from both sides, what do I need? What does the other person need? What are the issues involved?	0.0%	1.2%	10.7%	60.4%	27.8%	4.2	0.6
To break deadlocks, I would meet people halfway.	2.4%	14.8%	22.5%	47.3%	13.0%	3.5	1.0
The cost of maintaining harmony is minimal, even if I don't receive what I desire.	3.6%	11.2%	10.7%	50.9%	23.7%	3.8	1.0
I can figure out what needs to be done and I am usually right.	5.3%	32.0%	18.3%	34.9%	9.5%	3.1	1.1
I try to meet the expectations of others.	1.8%	7.1%	12.4%	61.5%	17.2%	3.9	0.9
I keep my differences with other people to myself in order to avoid hurt feelings.	8.3%	20.7%	17.8%	44.4%	8.9%	3.3	1.1
Average score						3.5	1.0

The findings reveal that the respondents agreed with the statement that “I explore issues with others to find solutions that meet everyone’s needs” (Mean=4.2, SD=0.9), “I try to negotiate and adopt a “give-and-take” approach to problem situations” (Mean=3.9, SD=0.9), “I try to see conflicts from both sides, what do I need? What does the other person need? What are the issues involved?” (Mean=4.2, SD=0.6), “To break deadlocks, I would meet people halfway” (Mean=3.5, SD=1.0), “I may not get what I want, but it is a small price to pay for keeping the peace” (Mean=3.8, SD=1.0), “I try to meet the expectations of others” (Mean=3.9, SD=0.9). The results imply that

majority of respondents demonstrated use of intercultural communication competencies in conflict management among culturally diverse university work teams.

4.3 Role of Cultural Empathy in Conflict Management among Culturally Diverse University Work Teams

The research determined the role of cultural empathy in conflict management among culturally diverse university work teams. A simple linear regression was conducted to establish the influence of cultural empathy on conflict management.

Table 3: Cultural Empathy and Conflict Management among culturally diverse university work teams

Model Summary						
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted Square	R	Std. Error of the Estimate	
1	.235a	0.055	0.049		0.47242	
ANOVA						
A						
Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	2.171	1	2.171	9.726	.002b
	Residual	37.271	167	0.223		
	Total	39.442	168			
Coefficients						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.514	0.335		7.511	0.000
	Cultural empathy	0.281	0.09	0.235	3.119	0.002

a Dependent Variable: Conflict management

The model summary table indicates an R-squared value of 0.055, which denotes that 5.5% of the variation in conflict management among culturally diverse university work teams is attributable to cultural empathy. The low R-squared implies that there are other factors that influence conflict management among culturally diverse university work teams but are not included in this model.

The Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) table shows an F statistic of 9.726 and p p-value of 0.002 (less than 0.05). This denotes that the regression model significantly predicts the dependent variable (conflict management). Therefore, there is a significant influence of cultural empathy on conflict management among culturally diverse university work teams.

The coefficients table indicates a beta coefficient of 0.281 and p p-value of 0.002<0.05. This suggests that cultural empathy had a significantly positive influence on conflict management

among culturally diverse university work teams. The results imply that one unit improvement in cultural empathy would enhance conflict management among culturally diverse university work teams by 0.281 units. Notably, cultural empathy plays a significant role in enhancing conflict management among culturally diverse university work teams.

4.4 Content Analysis of Qualitative Data

According to biographical data of the participants, 8 participants were from the Kikuyu community, 3 from the Luhya community, 2 from the Kamba community; while the Embu, Meru, and Kisii communities had 1 participant each. This data compares well with quantitative data, where the Kikuyu community had the largest representation of 35.7% of the respondents. This data is also consistent with the 2019 Kenya Population and Housing Census Results, which indicated that the Kikuyu community made up 17% of the total Kenyan population.

To establish whether there is cultural diversity in the work teams, participants were asked if their work team members come from different cultures. All the participants confirmed that members of their work teams in the different departments came from different Kenyan communities. This finding is significant because it's at the core of this study, which focuses on the role of intercultural communication competencies in conflict management among culturally diverse university work teams. If participants had indicated that there was no cultural diversity in the departments, this study would have suffered irreparable damage in terms of the study rationale.

The study also sought to get the view of the participants on whether cultural diversity among the employees was either an asset or a liability to the university. The majority, 12 participants answered in the affirmative, indicating that cultural diversity was indeed an asset to the university. On the other hand, three (3) participants indicated that cultural diversity can be both an asset and a liability at the same time.

Below are some responses that indicate that cultural diversity is an asset.

Cultural diversity is an asset. It allows for divergent ideas on an issue. It can be a liability in the sense that it can divide the team. It can exclude some people and cause division in the team. (K.01)

An asset. As much as we appreciate our culture, we need other cultures. Again, you look at what other people are doing and learn from it. (K.03)

It is an asset and brings diversity, which brings different skills and experiences. It juices up a university and/or organization. (D.01)

You know, for communication, we say it's sometimes good to have a crisis, bad as it may be, but it helps you think through an issue. If people can appreciate that we are doing this together, but we are just looking at it from different perspectives, then it's an asset. If we allow culture to mess us up and communication does not correct that mess, the end is the collapse of the organization. Organizations are poorer if they don't get the diversity of other cultures. (D.03)

If well managed and awareness created, especially among the managers, cultural diversity is an asset. Because we can tap into the wealth and perspectives of different cultures. We built a new culture and promoted it. We also need training in the same. (D.06)

Cultural diversity is an asset to any organization. It brings respect for each other. It makes people in the office adapt to the official language, unlike where people switch to vernacular languages and deal with clients from diverse cultures. It also enhances listening and brings in the need to learn about other cultural values. (D.07)

Cultural diversity is an asset. It's good to have conflicts. Sometimes when we don't agree we end up brainstorming and coming up with great ideas and ways of looking at an issue. (J.01)

Cultural diversity is an asset. There is something good we can learn from each community. Together we are better than any one individual community. (J.02)

Cultural diversity is an asset. Because the students in the department come from all over Kenya. Further, when a student is undertaking a project based on Coast community activities, it's advisable that a faculty member who is familiar with the region and its activities is assigned to supervise the student. (J.03)

And below are responses of three (3) participants who indicated that cultural diversity was both an asset and a liability.

I think I will take it both ways. It's a yes and no. It's yes in the sense that we are different. We learn from our differences and appreciate and integrate cultures to get a better result. It's a no if culture is taken as a criterion to deny other people their rights. (K.02)

Cultural diversity is more of an asset because diversity brings beauty, brings life, brings different orientations to the table. If we were all the same, it would be boring. Every organization should have cultural diversity. There is more richness in the department and all of us should embrace it. For Example, when Prof. Ayiro was dismissed from Moi University because he is not a Kalenjin, they lost an asset. (D. 05)

Cultural diversity I believe if taken nicely it can be an asset but if taken negatively it can be a liability. Positive aspects of culture taken and applied in the workplace can be an asset. But using culture as a basis for promotion can be a liability. You can teach people that if you behave this way: kind, generous, hard-working, these aspects are an asset. (D.04)

Based on interview data, it can be concluded that cultural diversity is viewed positively among university employees and managers. This agrees with the mandate and provisions of the National Cohesion and Integration Commission of Kenya. The Commission which is a product of the Constitution of Kenya 2010, acknowledges the existence of diverse cultures in Kenya and recommends that public institutions should portray the face of Kenya in the composition of their workforce.

4.5 Discussion of the Findings

The findings of descriptive statistics from this study had an overwhelming majority, 97.6% of the respondents, (Mean=4.7, SD=0.6) agreed that they enjoyed interacting with people from other

cultures. In response to the statement, “I do not stereotype other people but treat them as individuals,” 89.9% (Mean=4.3, SD=0.9) of the respondents agreed with the statement. Seventy Three percent (73.4%) (Mean=3.9, SD=1.2) of the respondents agreed with the statement ‘I know that my own cultural values shape my assumptions, thoughts and behaviour while 81.7% (Mean=4.1, SD=1.0) of the respondents agreed with the statement, “I am usually curious about other cultures and their norms.” Another 76.9% (Mean=3.9, SD=1.1) of the respondents agreed with the statement that, I can observe other cultural values without judging.” Regarding whether cultural diversity is an asset to the organization, 87% (Mean=4.4, SD=0.9) of the respondents agreed that indeed it was an asset.

On the other hand, 90% (Mean=1.8, SD=1.0) of the respondents disagreed with the statement, “I get upset easily when interacting with people from other cultures,” while another 56.8% (Mean=2.6, SD=1.4) disagreed with the statement, “I feel irritated when people of different ethnic backgrounds speak their language around me.”

The findings of this study indicate that the employees of the three Universities have cultural empathy, which is one of the factors that contribute to mindfulness; an intercultural trait that is necessary for managing uncertainty and anxiety among strangers (Gudykunst, 2005). Langer and Moldoveanu (2000) define mindfulness as being receptive to new information, cognizant of multiple viewpoints, and willing to develop new categories of ideas when speaking with others. This characteristic among university employees contributes immensely to the smooth and cordial working relations among culturally diverse University work teams and can enhance conflict management among them.

5.0 Conclusion

Results from descriptive statistics show that majority of the respondents had cultural empathy, which is likely to enhance conflict management among culturally diverse university work teams. The correlation analysis indicated that there was a weak, positive and significant relationship between cultural empathy and conflict management among culturally diverse university work teams. This means that a change in cultural empathy is accompanied by a significant change in conflict management among culturally diverse university work teams. This study therefore, concludes that cultural empathy is a necessary trait in conflict management among culturally diverse work teams in universities in Kenya.

6.0 Recommendations

The study highlights the critical role of leadership in managing culturally diverse work teams. To be effective, leaders should exhibit a high degree of cultural sensitivity and impartiality. This includes actively avoiding bias or prejudice, demonstrating objectivity, and fostering an inclusive environment where diversity is not only acknowledged but genuinely valued. Open-mindedness, active listening, and respect for different cultural perspectives are essential traits for leaders in such settings.

Moreover, leadership in diverse teams can significantly influence team dynamics and outcomes, positively or negatively. Particularly during moments of conflict, effective leadership hinges on advanced interpersonal skills such as clear communication, collaborative problem-solving, and interest-based negotiation. Given the complex nature of cultural diversity, it is recommended that organizations prioritize the recruitment of leaders who possess strong cultural empathy. Where this is not feasible, targeted training and development programs should be implemented to build

these competencies. Cultivating such leadership capacity is essential for maximizing team performance and cohesion in increasingly globalized work environments.

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