ROLE OF COGNITIVE COMPLEXITY IN CONFLICT MANAGEMENT AMONG CULTURALLY DIVERSE WORK TEAMS IN UNIVERSITIES IN KENYA

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ABSTRACT

Purpose of the Study: This study sought to assess the role of cognitive complexity in conflict management among culturally diverse work teams in universities in Kenya.

Methods: This study used a descriptive design. 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 and general staff. 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. Data analysis included quantitative and qualitative techniques.

Findings: The regression results indicated a beta coefficient of 0.177 and a p-value of $0.02 < 0.05$. This suggests that cognitive complexity significantly positively influences conflict management among culturally diverse university work teams.

Conclusion: Cognitive complexity is a meaningful factor in how culturally diverse university work teams manage conflict.

Recommendations: University management should adopt a compromise-based approach to conflict management, with each party negotiating in a give-and-take spirit.

Keywords: *cognitive complexity, conflict management, work teams, interpersonal discrimination*

INTRODUCTION

This paper examines the role of cognitive complexity in conflict management among culturally diverse work teams in Universities in Kenya. Today's world population is interconnected in many facets, ranging from racial to tribal to national. This has been necessitated by factors such as international trade and the existence of international organizations and corporations. No single society can be an island, independent from the rest. For the aforementioned reason, McLuhan (1962) coined the term "global village," which describes the simultaneous shrinking and growth of world cultures resulting from technological advancements that enable instantaneous cultural exchange. Olufemi (2012) asserted that the philosophy of globalization is one of universalization, i.e., it unites the world economically, culturally, politically, and in fact in all other facets of life. This is in contrast to some scholars who see globalization as a modern form of westernization.

Olufemi (2012) asserted that rather than breed homogenization, globalization will breed heterogenization in which everybody and every culture will have one thing or the other to contribute in terms of meaning, identity, culture, politics, and economy.' (p.89). Olufemi's view is premised on the understanding that there exists an equality of cultures across the globe and that there is no dominant or inferior culture. However, past and present experiences demonstrate that dominant cultures tend to suppress and, in most cases, replace the values and behaviours of inferior cultures. Understanding other people's cultures is essential for community coexistence, including in work communities. One way to handle cultural differences and conflict is to acquire intercultural communication competencies. Communication at the workplace is essential for productivity, but cultural differences can hinder it.

Lloyd and Hartel (2010) noted that ICCs include: cognitive complexity, tolerance for ambiguity, cultural empathy, intercultural communication and, conflict management skills among others This paper focused on cognitive complexity. Cognitive complexity is the capacity of a person to perceive a wide range of things about another person and to make finer interpersonal distinctions than cognitively simple individuals. Loyd and Härtel (2010) distinguished between cognitive complexity and cognitive simplicity." (p. 847) A direct correlation exists between cognitive complexity and cross-cultural effectiveness, according to Davidson (1975). He goes on to say that cognitively complex people have access to a variety of frameworks, whereas cognitively simple people are limited in the

frameworks they can use to evaluate situations (Gudykunst & Kim, 1997). As a result, cognitively complex individuals form more elaborate and distinct impressions of others than do cognitively simple individuals, which better reflect behavioral variability (Gudykunst & Kim, 1997; Kagan, 1992). Therefore, a cognitively complex person has clear advantages over a cognitively simple person, especially regarding cross-cultural engagements.

Differentiation and integration are the two main parts of the concept of cognitive complexity. "While integration refers to the complexity of standards used by individuals in organizing the differentiated dimensions, differentiation refers to the number of elements used by individuals to perceive environmental stimuli" (Pien Wang & Peng Chan, 1995). Relativizing the frame of reference, according to Stiftung et al. (2008), entails adopting an ethno-relative view, reflecting one's own cultural worldview and way of life rather than viewing it as absolute.

"They tend to have very differentiated and detailed information and knowledge schemes regarding cultural information, and can think deeply and more meaningfully about related concepts and challenges," according to Härtel et al. (2010), cognitively complex people. This suggests that people with high cognitive complexity have a deep, sophisticated awareness of how culture can affect behavior. We can therefore conclude that individuals with cognitive complexity can make more sense of the information they are given, which may reduce the rudimentary stereotyping of other groups (Karim, 2003). Kagan supports this theory by pointing out that people with higher levels of cognitive complexity are "able to anticipate the thinking and perceptions of others and adjust their interactions accordingly" (Page 290 of Kagan, 1992)

This study is premised on the hypothesis that cognitively complex university employees can positively contribute to enhanced performance of a culturally diverse university work team through effective management of interpersonal conflicts. This category of employees is advantaged by having several frameworks from which to evaluate situations, enabling them to accommodate others' views. Organizations whose employees have the capacity for cognitive complexity are therefore likely to have a peaceful work environment with minimal conflicts, which, in turn, leads to the effective achievement of their corporate goals.

Statement of the Problem

People tend to cluster within their tribal groups during social interaction. Studies show that their management is more costly than homogeneous teams (Shachaf, 2005). A divided work team will find it challenging to achieve the organizational goals. The different factions will pull in different directions, thereby delaying and/or sabotaging 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. Understanding employees' cognitive complexity will help address workplace heterogeneity and ensure effective conflict management.

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 through effective organizational communication, which also manages these processes and ensures open interaction with a free flow of information (Szukala, 2001; Zaremba, 2003; Tourish & Hargie, 2004; Eisenberg et al., 2009). However, several barriers to effective communication exist in a culturally diverse workforce. Key among these is the fact that individual members have different worldviews shaped by their cultural orientation and socialization. Employees assign culturally appropriate meanings to messages, leading to miscommunication and organizational-level conflicts.

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 enable group members to respond to other group members' attitudes and behaviors in a more practical, 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 comes from studies conducted in European and Asian contexts, but very few have been conducted in Africa. One example of a study conducted in Africa is Abugre et al. (2018), based in Ghana, which focuses on European expatriates working for multinational corporations and their communication with multicultural African communities.

This study was constrained to presenting only Ghana's viewpoint among diverse African perspectives. Further, its primary viewpoint was that of Western expatriates, not the

perspective of local Africans. The dearth of studies on ICCs in the African setting is therefore a research gap that this study sought to fill.

Organizations use teams more often than ever before to improve organizational effectiveness and efficiency, and it is almost a given that people will collaborate with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds in teams in the future (Barrett, 2018). Since multicultural work teams are an inevitable characteristic of both today and future organizations, and given the challenges that come with such work teams, this study sought to find out whether the employees of the three universities use ICCs and to assess their role in conflict management among culturally diverse work teams of the three universities in Kenya.

Objective of the study

To assess the role of cognitive complexity in conflict management among culturally diverse work teams in universities in Kenya.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section presents the theoretical and conceptual frameworks and the empirical review for the study.

Theoretical Framework

The Anxiety or Uncertainty Management (AUM) theory, developed by William Gudykunst, aims to understand the variables that affect the effectiveness of cross-cultural communication. According to the AUM theory, participants must manage their anxiety or uncertainty to adapt and communicate effectively during cross-cultural interactions. According to the theory, people display adaptive behaviors that reduce uncertainty when they are unsure about interacting with others, especially those from different cultures, and maladaptive behaviors that may reduce anxiety but also lead to avoidance when they are anxious about interacting with others (Gudykunst, 2005). With the help of mindfulness, this theory seeks to improve effective communication by bringing uncertainty and anxiety to manageable levels.

Effective communication is defined as when the recipient of the message interprets it to mean something roughly similar to what the sender of the message intended (Guerrero & Gudykunst, 1996).

Managed well, uncertainty and anxiety can lead to effective communication. Uncertainty is a mental occurrence, and it is defined as "inability to predict and explain strangers' attitudes, feelings, beliefs, values, and behavior" (2005a, p.282). Individuals must be acutely aware of their own behavior to manage uncertainty and anxiety at appropriate levels. This way of thinking, known as "being mindful," enables people to control their levels of uncertainty and anxiety consciously. When speaking with strangers, we must be mindful and pay closer attention to both our own and others' communication scripts.

Gudykunst (2005) asserted that uncertainty affects how we perceive those who are unfamiliar or different from us, often referred to as "strangers" or "out-group members." When interacting with strangers, we endeavor to minimize our uncertainty by predicting their behavior and responses (Hammer et al., 2011). According to Gudykunst, every individual has their own thresholds, both minimal and maximal, that allow them to determine their degree of uncertainty in each given communication circumstance and, consequently, influence their interactions with others (1985; 1991; 2005a).

The highest barrier, according to Gudykunst, is the maximum level of uncertainty that a person can endure while still having faith in their capacity to forecast the actions of another individual "enough to feel comfortable enough to interact with them" (2005a, p. 286). "The lowest amount of uncertainty one has, and not feel bored or overconfident about his/her predictions of strangers' behaviors" is Gudykunst's definition of a minimum threshold (2005b, p. 422). AUM's core elements are our minimum and maximum thresholds, which serve as standards for engagement. We will almost surely avoid engagement when our level of uncertainty exceeds our maximum threshold, since we will no longer feel confident in our ability to foresee the conduct or reactions of our counterparts (Gudykunst, 1991; Gudykunst, 2005a). However, if our level of uncertainty falls below our minimum threshold, we become overconfident and risk misinterpreting a communication from a total stranger (Gudykunst, 2005b).

Another important factor AUM uses to gauge successful cross-cultural communication is anxiety. According to Gudykunst (2005a, p. 287), anxiety is "the emotional equivalent of uncertainty." Similar to uncertainty, we experience some degree of anxiety whenever we engage with other people. AUM defines anxiety as an uncomfortable emotional condition that is often accompanied by concern, uneasiness, or fear of what might happen in a communication scenario (Gudykunst, 2005b). People often suffer from significant levels

of anxiety when they fear that they will not receive the answer they desire from others. Gudykunst highlighted that we are more prone to experience significant levels of anxiety when interacting with strangers or out-groups because we feel vulnerable and fear being perceived as biased or inept (1985; 2005a). According to Gudykunst, when our anxiety level is exceeded, we get so nervous about the interaction that we choose to avoid it (2005b) completely. We may become so terrified by anxiety that we steer clear of social interactions (Gudykunst, 2005a). We lack the interest and adrenaline that make us care enough about what can happen that we strive to communicate effectively if our anxiety is below our minimal threshold (Gudykunst, 1985; Gudykunst, 2005a; Gudykunst, 2005b).

According to AUM, to communicate effectively with others, we need to balance our fear and uncertainty by using our maximum and minimum thresholds as guiding principles. Gudykunst and other supporters of AUM frequently refer to "mindfulness" as a technique for controlling our feelings of apprehension and uncertainty. According to Langer and Moldoveanu (2000), mindfulness in communication is being receptive to new information, aware of different viewpoints, and ready to generate new categories of ideas. This view agrees Lloyd and Hartel (2010) in their reference to cognitive complexity as one of the categories of ICCs. Gudykunst asserted that practicing mindfulness improves our interactions with people from diverse cultural backgrounds by helping us better manage our feelings of uncertainty and anxiety.

Due to their cultural distinctiveness, members of the culturally diverse work teams in the three universities view each other as strangers. Their priority is therefore to manage or balance their levels of anxiety and uncertainty as they interact with each other. It is when they achieve 'mindfulness' that they can realize peaceful interaction, mutual acceptance, and ultimately fulfill their individual and corporate goals.

Conceptual Framework
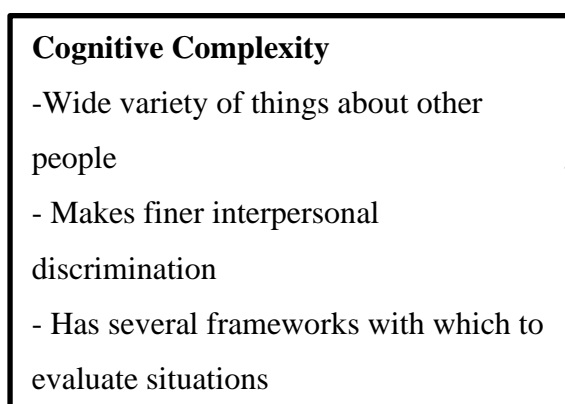
Independent variable   **Dependent variable**

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

According to this framework, cognitive complexity (Independent variable) directly influences conflict management (Dependent variable). Cognitively complex University employees exhibit characteristics such as a wide range of knowledge about other people, the ability to make finer interpersonal discriminations, and several frameworks for evaluating situations. An employee with the above characteristics will communicate with culturally diverse employees in a manner that is sensitive to differences and, consequently, minimize or eliminate interpersonal and organizational conflicts. The higher the cognitive complexity rating, the better the management of conflicts in culturally diverse university work teams in Kenya.

Empirical Review

In a separate investigation into the significance of cross-cultural communication imperatives for Western expatriates in the African context, Abugre (2018) observed that expatriates and native employees need to communicate and understand the verbal and non-verbal behaviors of each group across branches. However, given that both groups have distinct cultural backgrounds, miscommunication can lead to conflict. Competence in cross-cultural communication is crucial to reducing conflict because it enables the efficient completion of tasks and the successful implementation of business goals, such as target comprehension.

In order to avoid using derogatory and abusive language to describe Africa, Western experts should be aware of the multilingualism and cultural diversity of Africans (Jackson, 2004). He concluded that to achieve effective work outcomes, it is necessary to

accommodate these clear distinctions in African attitudes and beliefs. However, this study is constrained in that it examines cross-cultural communication only from Ghana's perspective, not from the perspectives of all Sub-Saharan African nations. Additionally, the study's primary viewpoint is that of Western expatriates only. To offer a much more balanced perspective on the lessons Western expatriates need to learn about cross-cultural communication, the local staff's perspective could also be researched.

In an Australian company that offers financial and business services, Lloyd and Härtel (2010) looked at intercultural competencies for culturally diverse work teams. 1,200 people were working for the company, 39% of whom were from Australia, New Zealand, and the Pacific Islands; 34% were from Asia; 16% were from the Americas; and 7% were from other countries. The independent variables included: cognitive complexity, goal orientation, openness to dissimilarity, tolerance for ambiguity, proficiency in cross-cultural communication, cultural empathy, emotion control, and conflict management; while the dependent variables were job satisfaction, level of happiness working in the team, level of trust for other team members, and assessment of one's team. Emails were sent to the participants, providing a Web address for the online survey. Of the total population of 1,200 workers, 223 responded, yielding a 19% response rate.

According to the findings, for culturally diverse work teams to create supportive work environments and reap the rewards of cultural diversity, they must first address each member's level of intercultural competence. People will be better able to comprehend the behaviors of culturally diverse team members, which will improve their feelings toward them and allow for more effective interactions between team members, if organizations can hold training and development sessions with the aim of increasing the level of employee competencies identified as important in the intercultural competencies classification system.

These authors also posited that the use of the Intercultural classification system will benefit management practitioners in such things as "recruitment, selection, training, development, and performance management practices".Assessing people's intercultural competencies before choosing which applicants to hire for a position or which to join a team can help management practitioners ensure that a team can fully benefit from the advantages of culturally diverse work teams, such as increased creativity and innovation. Similarly, management experts can be assisted in identifying employees' training and development

needs in culturally diverse teams to ensure these teams function to their full potential. The intercultural classification system can also be used by management professionals to identify the skills that should be covered in leadership development courses for managers of culturally diverse work teams.

In a separate study, Chang and Tharenou (2004) evaluated the skills required of managers in Australia to oversee a diverse group of subordinates. Study 1 and Study 2 were separate studies. In Study 1, 20 managers with experience leading multicultural teams participated in open-ended interviews to identify competencies through content analysis of their responses. The semi-structured interview questions for Study 2 were developed using the five major themes identified in Study 1. To determine the managerial competences needed from the perspective of subordinates, 20 managers from Study 1's subordinates participated in semi-structured interviews in Study 2. Through content analysis of responses to the second set of interview questions, the competencies recommended by subordinates were identified. The studies collaborated to determine whether a set of managerial skills applied to both managers and staff in a multicultural workplace. Chang and Tharenou (2004) used content analysis to identify five main themes and 27 sub-themes. The results suggest that cultural sensitivity, on-the-job training, communication skills, general managerial abilities, and personal style are among the required competencies. The findings also recommend actions to help the multicultural workgroup recognize, understand, value, and incorporate cultural differences.

The small sample size in this study was one of its limitations. The sample consisted of only 20 managers and 20 subordinates. The results of this study cannot be generalized due to the small sample size. Another drawback was the managers' self-reports, which prevented a determination of whether the managers in the sample behaved as they claimed. Although reports from subordinates alleviated this issue, it is possible that they believed they could not be entirely honest in their responses if they believed their answers could be shared with their bosses. The supervisors also supplied lists from which the subordinates were chosen. It is possible that managers have chosen only those subordinates they think will provide positive feedback on their superiors. Concurrent data collection from both managers and their subordinates may alleviate the fear of subordinates being intimidated by their managers.

In the engineering and architectural fields, Ochieng and Price (2009) investigated a framework for managing multicultural project teams. They sought to determine how project managers could effectively work with and influence multicultural construction teams while remaining aware of diversity and establishing the necessary framework for success. They examined eight crucial aspects of managing multicultural teams: leadership style, team selection and assembly, cross-cultural management of team development, cross-cultural communication, collectivism, trust, management practices, and uncertainty. From heavy construction engineering organizations in Kenya and the UK, eight firms were selected for the study, enabling the researchers to compare how cultural diversity influenced project performance, communication effectiveness, and overall team cohesion across different contexts. The results suggested that there must be a clear commitment from the client and project manager. To develop effective multicultural project teams, one must create an environment that not only acknowledges but also values cross-cultural complexity.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a descriptive research design to address key questions related to the research problem. Two sample populations were used: university managers (including heads of academic and administrative departments) and permanent academic and non-academic staff from JKUAT–Juja Campus, Daystar University, and Kirinyaga University. Managers were included because of their role in managing multiculturalism, while employees with at least 1 year of service were selected to ensure adequate exposure and experience. Sampling frames were obtained from the universities' Human Resource departments, yielding an optimal, representative sample of 245 respondents across the three institutions.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with managers and structured questionnaires with employees. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS with descriptive statistics, independent t-tests, correlation, and regression, while qualitative data were transcribed and thematically analyzed. Findings were presented objectively using narrative descriptions, tables, graphs, and charts to clearly illustrate patterns, frequencies, and relationships across the study variables.

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics

This section presents descriptive statistics results for the study variables. Descriptive statistics allow the researcher to describe the attributes of the study variables. The specific descriptive statistics used in this study include percentages, means, and standard deviations.

Cognitive Complexity

The respondents were asked to rate the statements measuring cognitive complexity using the 5-point Likert scale: strongly disagree (SD), disagree (D), undecided (UD), agree (A), and strongly agree (SA).

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of Cognitive complexity

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Mean	Std Dev
I have a wide variety of knowledge about people from other cultures.	1.8%	9.5%	14.2%	57.4%	17.2%	3.8	0.9
I can make finer interpersonal discriminations about people from other cultures.	14.2%	17.8%	20.1%	43.8%	4.1%	3.1	1.2
I use several frameworks to evaluate situations.	1.8%	2.4%	11.8%	61.5%	22.5%	4.0	0.8
I am open to different ways of doing things.	0.6%	0.6%	1.2%	40.8%	56.8%	4.5	0.6
Average score						**3.8**	**0.9**

The participants agreed with the statement that "I have a wide variety of knowledge about people from other cultures" (Mean=3.8, SD=0.9), "I use several frameworks to evaluate situations" (Mean=4.0, SD=0.8), and "I am open to different ways of doing things" (Mean=4.5, SD=0.6). The results imply that most of the respondents understood cognitive complexity, which was likely to improve conflict management among culturally diverse university work teams.

Conflict Management

The respondents were asked to rate the statements measuring the concept of conflict management using the 5-point Likert scale: 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 usually 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 do not 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 others' expectations.	1.8%	7.1%	12.4%	61.5%	17.2%	3.9	0.9

I keep my differences with others to myself 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 the majority of respondents demonstrated use of intercultural communication competencies in conflict management among culturally diverse university work teams.

Cultural Diversity at JKUAT, Daystar, and Kirinyaga University

Table 3 presents the ethnic composition of the three universities based on the study participants.

Table 3: Cultural Diversity at JKUAT, Daystar, and Kirinyaga University

Community	JKUAT Juja	Kirinyaga University	Daystar University	TOTAL
Kamba	8	1	18	27
Kikuyu	25	18	15	58
Luhyia	15	6	5	26
Luo	11	2	4	17
Kisii	6	2	3	11
Embu	1	-	1	2
Mbeere	1	1	-	2
Kalenjin	6	2	3	11

Chonyi	-	-	1	1
Meru	2	3	2	7
Maasai	2	-	-	2
kipsigis	-	1	-	1
Suba	1	-	-	1
No Response	**2**	**1**		**3**
TOTAL	**80**	**37**	**52**	**169**

Generally, members of the kikuyu community dominate employment opportunities (approximately 35%) at the three universities. This can be explained by Kikuyu community's numeric superiority, which is supported by the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS) projections for Mid, 2025; which projected the population of the kikuyu community to be 9.9 million followed by the Luhya community at 8.3 million, Kalenjin at 7.7 million, Luo and Kamba in that order.

However, an examination of cultural diversity of individual Universities reveals that the Kamba community was the dominant cultural group among Daystar university employees. This can be explained by the university's main campus being located in Machakos County, which is primarily populated by the Kamba community.

Using the same criteria, Jomo Kenyatta University, Juja campus, located in Kiambu County, and Kirinyaga University, located in Kirinyaga County, are dominated by the Kikuyu community, which inhabits both counties. This finding is consistent with Munene (2012), who noted that ethnicity -oriented recruitment practice has become so endemic that in some of the institutions, university business is occasionally conducted in the local mother tongue. Although one or a few communities dominate, cultural diversity remains a decisive factor in the workforces of the three universities.

Correlation Analysis

The correlation analysis was conducted to determine the relationship between Cognitive complexity and conflict management among culturally diverse university work teams.

Table 4: Correlation Matrix

N=169			(1)	(2)
Conflict management (1)	Pearson Correlation		1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)			
Cognitive complexity (2)	Pearson Correlation		0.179*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.02	

The findings reveal a weak, positive, and significant relationship between cognitive complexity and conflict management among culturally diverse university work teams (r=0.179, p=0.02<0.05) at the 95% confidence level. This implies that a change in cognitive complexity is accompanied by a significant change in conflict management among culturally diverse university work teams in the same direction.

Linear Regression Analysis

The study sought to determine the role of cognitive complexity in conflict management among culturally diverse university work teams. A simple linear regression was conducted to establish the influence of cognitive complexity on conflict management.

Table 5: Cognitive complexity and Conflict Management among culturally diverse university work teams

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R-Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.179a	0.032	0.026	0.4781

ANOVA						
Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	1.27	1			
	Residual	38.172	167			
	Total	39.442	168	1.27	5.555	.020b

Coefficients						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	T	Sig.

1	(Constant)	2.873	0.29		9.896	0.000
	Cognitive complexity	0.177	0.075	0.179	2.357	0.02

a Dependent Variable: Conflict management

The model summary table shows an R-squared of 0.032, indicating that 3.2% of the variation in conflict management among culturally diverse university work teams is attributable to cognitive complexity. The low R-square suggests that other factors 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 5.555 and a p-value of 0.02 (less than 0.05). This indicates that the regression model predicts the dependent variable (conflict management) significantly. Therefore, cognitive complexity significantly influences conflict management among culturally diverse university work teams.

The coefficients table indicates a beta coefficient of 0.177 and a p-value of $0.02 < 0.05$. This suggests that cognitive complexity significantly positively influences conflict management among culturally diverse university work teams. The results imply that a 1-unit increase in cognitive complexity would enhance conflict management among culturally diverse university work teams by 0.177 units. Notably, cognitive complexity plays a significant role in enhancing conflict management among culturally diverse university work teams.

4.4 Discussion of Findings

According to descriptive statistics for this objective, 74.6% (Mean = 3.8, SD = 0.9) of the respondents agreed that they have a wide range of knowledge about people from other cultures. Further, 84% (Mean=4.0, SD=0.8) of the respondents agreed with the statement, "I use several frameworks to evaluate situations," while 97.6% (Mean=4.5, SD=0.6) agreed that they were open to different ways of doing things. This high level of cognitive complexity by the University employees is further supported by qualitative data from participant D.03, who described the characteristics of a manager of a culturally diverse work team, thus,

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"To me, I think that first, this person needs to be very much aware that they are dealing with different cultures. That is not to think from their own culture, but to appreciate other cultures. Secondly, I would expect the manager to be very empathetic. Fit into another person's culture. For example, if someone is bereaved, the way you handle the person is very different. Some people may use culture to get away with several other things. Not just to follow the rules but to relate to the person. However, beyond that, there is a place where cultures converge; the manager should be a critical thinker to appreciate others. (D.03)"

Cognitive complexity is therefore a valuable trait among culturally diverse work team members, especially in relation to positive conflict management approaches. This result aligns with Stiftung et al. (2008), who contend that adopting an ethno-relative perspective and relativizing the frame of reference entail reflecting on one's own cultural worldview and way of life rather than viewing them as absolute. Additionally, Karim (2003) asserts that cognitive complexity broadens a person's capacity to infer meaning from incoming data and may reduce oversimplified stereotypes of various populations. It turns out that the majority of university employees have cognitive complexity, and perhaps that also explains the relative calmness across the various departments. The employees are relativizing their frames of reference and have an increased range of sense-making for incoming information from culturally diverse others. In his Anxiety/Uncertainty Theory (2005), Gudykunst posits that, to manage uncertainty and anxiety at appropriate levels, individuals must be highly aware of their own behaviour. This mindset is called "being mindful," which enables people to consciously manage levels of uncertainty and anxiety.

CONCLUSION

This study's findings reveal that cognitive complexity is a meaningful factor in how culturally diverse university work teams manage conflict. The descriptive results showed that most participants understood cognitive complexity, suggesting more effective conflict management in multicultural academic work environments. The statistical analysis further demonstrated a positive and significant relationship between cognitive complexity and conflict management ($r = 0.179$, $p = 0.002 < 0.05$), indicating that as employees' cognitive complexity increases, their capacity to manage cultural conflicts also tends to improve.

These results matter because they highlight the importance of nurturing cognitive complexity among staff in culturally diverse institutions as part of broader conflict

management strategies. Recognizing this relationship can inform human resource practices, professional development, and leadership training to enhance teamwork across cultural boundaries. Consequently, higher education administrators and practitioners should consider ways to develop cognitive complexity to foster constructive conflict resolution and more cohesive multicultural work environments.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study confirm that the employees of the three Universities exhibit cultural diversity. Since cultural diversity is one of the recommendations of the Constitution of Kenya 2010, which obligates public institutions to promote inclusiveness, non-discrimination, and the protection of vulnerable and marginalized groups, this recommendation satisfies both the legal and policy requirements of the government of Kenya.

This study therefore recommends that University Managements and by extension, leaders of other public institutions should implement cultural diversity among their employees.

Further, university management should organize regular training for their employees on cognitive complexity skills.

Similarly, university management should sensitize its leaders at all levels to the cultural realities of their work teams and equip them with management skills for culturally diverse work teams.

This study further recommends that, given the significant role cognitive complexity plays in conflict management and the ongoing globalization of work teams, university management should incorporate ICCs as a requirement for recruiting new employees or promoting current employees to higher positions.

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