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### Enhancing Cultural Diversity Management: Factors Influencing Diversity in a Higher Education Institution

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#### ABSTRACT

This article reports on research that endeavoured to determine the perceptions of management and senior staff concerning factors which influence diversity at Walter Sisulu University (WSU), a higher education institution (HEI). Diversity implies acknowledging and valuing differences among people. As such, diversity viewed from a positive perspective can create significant opportunities for a university to become a multicultural institution and to obtain a competitive advantage. Respondents at management or supervisory level was surveyed at Walter Sisulu University (WSU) in South Africa, using a self-administered questionnaire. Structural equation modelling (SEM), confirmed that four statistically significant relationships between the five variable investigated, were found; namely acculturation, structural integration, informal integration, intergroup conflict and diversity. It is argued that knowledge of the factors influencing diversity could provide insights to management regarding developing strategies by capitalising on diversity for competitive advantage within an HEI.

**Keywords:** Cultural diversity, higher education institutions, multicultural institution, structural equation modelling.

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

“Cultural differences should not separate us from each other, but rather cultural diversity brings a collective strength that can benefit all of humanity” (Silverstein, 2016). *Diversity* in the context of this article refers to the differences, similarities and related tensions that exist in any cultural mixture (Gupta, 2013; Naidoo, 2015; Podsiadlowski, Gröschke, Kogler & Springer, 2013). Over the last two decades, the employee demographics at South African universities have changed, creating a diverse, transformed workforce. It is important that managers a higher education institutions recognise and value these differences, respect the individuality of each employee and shareholder, and maintain an environment in which everyone is treated with dignity and

respect. Diversity is a typical characteristic of a multicultural work environment and has been recognised by institutional researchers as a phenomenon that has a wide range of effects in the workplace, including society in general (Bjornsdottir & Rule, 2016; Darwin, 2015; Gupta, 2013; Podsiadlowski et. al., 2013). Leaders should cultivate ‘unity through diversity’ and should stimulate a positive organisational culture in the institution (Gwele 2009, p. 6). In this study, diversity was investigated from the viewpoint and perspective of managers and senior staff at a HEI. The factors that influence diversity in an institution need to be identified and investigated. These diversity factors could be utilised by the institution to capitalise on the benefits that a diverse workforce offers.

In reality, workforce diversity within higher education institutions (HEIs) in South Africa are becoming heterogeneous in terms of race and ethnicity. The term also includes as referent disability, sexual orientation and age (Miles, Hu & Dobson, 2013; Rudhumbu & Chawawa, 2014). Management and leaders at HEIs have to deal with these challenges through different perspectives of staff in order to manage the diversity in their institutions effectively (Naidoo, 2015; Vandeyar, 2010). This implies coming to terms with each other’s differences, by acknowledging them. By discovering and dealing with the strengths and weaknesses of different cultures, the strategic objectives of the institution are achieved (Rudhumbu & Chawawa, 2014).

During the past decade, diversity has been touted as a positive feature for institutions on account of legal and ethical reasons, as well as for business requirements (Aigare, Thomas & Koyumdzhieva, 2011). In line with this view, it is noted that the complexities of managing diversity is presently one of the most difficult challenges faced by HEIs in South Africa (Council on Higher Education, 2016). The need to establish an equitable and effective higher education system should thus become a top priority for managers of institutions.

Research is necessary to explore and understand diversity in the workplace. It is an essential prerequisite for developing institutional strategy. It is perhaps more effective than legislation in dealing with employee perceptions of equity at a university, instead of enforcing it by law (Rudhumba & Chawawa, 2014). HEIs should strive to become multicultural institutions in which members of all socio-cultural backgrounds can contribute, excel and achieve their full potential (Miles et. al., 2013). This implies that, while management at universities move towards the creation of a multicultural institution, diversity management has a dual focus:

- Enhancing social justice by creating an institutional environment in which no one is privileged or disadvantaged due to race or gender, and
- Increasing competitiveness through institutional transformation (Aigare et. al., 2011). Mor Barak (2011, p. 14) argues that diversity compliance may be viewed as a continuum:

Equal employment legislation means that it is against the law to discriminate; affirmative action programmes mean that companies need to take positive steps to ensure equal employment and promotion opportunities; and diversity programmes are proactive and aim to achieve a diverse and heterogeneous workforce that values employee differences.

Various studies have highlighted diversity in the South African environment (for example Gwele, 2009; Mfene, 2010; Niemann, 2006; Naidoo, 2015); however, there appears to be a gap in the literature regarding specific factors which currently influence diversity at South African HEIs. Such research will assist management in focusing on diversity challenges and may contribute to operational efficiency through

effective diversity management. Knowledge of the factors influencing diversity within a HEI could provide insights for management regarding developing strategies for capitalising on diversity for competitive advantage and long-term sustainability.

The primary objective of the research reported on in this article was to identify and investigate the factors which influence workforce diversity at a HEI, namely Walter Sisulu University (WSU). The remainder of this article consists of a literature review of the field including defining the concept *diversity* and describing the factors influencing diversity at a university. Through empirical testing, a discussion of factors influencing diversity by means of a quantitative research approach follows and some conclusions and guidelines for managing diversity are provided.

## **2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Transformation and reform in higher education is a reality and this suggests that South African universities must be prepared, amongst other things, to facilitate diversity to ensure the effective functioning of its institutions (Council on Higher Education, 2016). The concepts related to the factors influencing diversity were explored in the literature.

### **2.1. The Concepts Diversity and Workforce Diversity**

*Diversity* signifies “differences among people due to age, gender, race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, socioeconomic background, education, experience, capabilities, disabilities, and any other characteristic that is used to distinguish between people” (George & Jones, 2006, p. 115). Any characteristic that differentiates one person from another implies diversity. Diversity is not limited or confined to issues of:

- race and gender
- the workforce, and it includes differences and similarities (Naidoo, 2015; Thomas, 2006).

*Workforce diversity* can be described as the set of individual, group and cultural differences people bring to institutions (Darwin, 2015; Podsiadlowski et. al., 2013). This concept includes the perspectives, distinctive needs, preferences, expectations and lifestyles of the workforce (Rudhumba & Chawawa, 2014). For the purpose of this article, *workforce diversity* will be defined as a relational phenomenon that focuses on the similarities and differences between people and the way in which the cultural differences studied are perceived, interpreted and acted upon in the workplace.

### **2.2. Factors Influencing Diversity**

Analysing the factors that influence diversity at universities, three implementation process models of diversity were considered. Friday and Friday’s diversity implementation model (2003, p. 874) proposes six steps to assist employees and institutions in culturally reengineering and moving towards the desired state of diversity. This model suggests that in executing the six steps of the diversity implementation process (exposure, experience, knowledge, understanding, appreciate and respect), the necessary movement required to progress from acknowledging diversity to valuing diversity is served. Jones and George’s diversity implementation model (2008, p. 193) provides guidance for implementing diversity effectively by suggesting that the entire institution needs to be mobilised and committed for the diversity initiative to be implemented

successfully. Management's role is crucial as a driving force in supporting all efforts relating to diversity awareness, diversity skills and enhancing communication (Mfene, 2010). Cox's diversity model (2008, p. 19), evaluates the success of diversity initiatives through analyses of the factors that have an impact on diversity. It is important to identify the diversity management factors in a South African university context. In this context, these factors are:

- acculturation,
- structural integration,
- informal integration,
- institutional bias in human resource systems and intergroup conflict (Cox, 1993; Strydom & Erwee, 1998).

A study by Strydom and Erwee (1998) applied these factors to investigate the perceptions of employees regarding the level of diversity management at a South African university. Such research was conducted since institutions value diversity to enhance competitiveness, but seldom indicate the link between the last two concepts (Cox 1993). Cox's model (2008) emphasises the importance of optimal diversity management in realising institutional effectiveness. In the next sections, these diversity factors are described.

### ***2.2.1. Acculturation Process***

Acculturation refers to "the process for resolving cultural differences and of cultural change and adaptation between groups, especially when one group is being merged into a larger, more dominant group" (Cox 2008, p. 67). Acculturation processes present alternative strategies for handling intercultural relationships that produce specific outcomes for both the institution and individual employees and thus complements and improves operational efficiency in an institution (Bjornsdottir & Rule, 2016; Thomas, 2006). McMahon (2010) believes that in a modern multicultural institution, pluralism is the preferred acculturation mode, where both culture groups change to a certain degree to reflect a common set of norms and values.

### ***2.2.2. Degree of Structural Integration***

The degree of structural integration refers to the levels of heterogeneity that exist within the formal institutional structure (Hellriegel, Jackson, Slocum, Staude, Amos, Klopper et. al., 2009). According to Cox (2008), the degree of planned structural integration is valuable to measure an institution's progress towards equal opportunities, including affirmative action activities. Zanoni, Nilsson, Janssens and Wahlin (2010) emphasise that full planned structural integration of the institution is desirable since this means that minorities are not only present in the institution as a whole, but rather an integral component throughout it. This indicates that such minorities are not segregated into specific jobs or work groups or at lower-institutional ranks.

### ***2.2.3. Degree of Informal Integration***

Cox (2008) describes the degree of informal integration as the extent to which people of all identity groups have access to social and communication networks. In addition, Hellriegel et. al., (2009) suggest that informal integration refers to the inclusion of minority members in social activities frequented by leaders.

This feature is based on the acknowledgement that many important decisions are taken outside normal working hours, in non-work settings. Informal integration implies that “the minority employees’ access to decision-making is not hampered by their socio-demographic profile” (Zanoniet al., 2010, p. 264), thus signifying equality between groups.

#### **2.2.4. Intergroup Conflict**

The level of intergroup conflict refers to conflict that is explicitly related to socio-cultural group differences (Cox, 2008). Mfene (2010) believes that the presence of cultural diversity offers a number of potential benefits to institutions. It may also present certain difficulties, such as group identity-based conflict between different groups within diverse groups. Zanoni et. al., (2010) suggest that low intergroup conflict is a clear indicator of the good quality of the relations between groups. In the context of cultural diversity within institutions, the following sources of intergroup conflicts stand out as particularly important, namely:

- competing goals,
- cultural differences,
- power discrepancies and disagreements based on behavioural expectations (Keyser, 2007).

#### **2.2.5. Institutional Bias in Human Resource Systems**

Institutional bias refers to the fact that preference patterns inherent in the way institutions are managed often inadvertently create barriers to full participation by institutional members from cultural backgrounds that differ from the traditional majority group (Cox, 2008). Mor Barak (2011) argues that, since most institutions are founded and managed by culturally homogeneous leadership groups in their formative years, biases unfavourable to members of other cultural backgrounds may have become ingrained in their culture and management practices. George and Jones (2006) agree with this view and emphasise that there is substantial evidence that many individuals continue to experience unfair treatment in the workplace as a result of biases, stereotypes, and discrimination. Based on the literature, the following hypotheses investigating the relationship between identified factors influencing diversity in a HEI were formulated.

### **2.3. Hypotheses**

The following hypotheses were formulated and tested to investigate which factors influence cultural diversity.

- H<sub>1</sub>: Perceptions of management and senior staff regarding the *acculturation process* are related to *diversity* in an HEI.
- H<sub>2</sub>: Perceptions of management and senior staff regarding the *degree of structural integration* are related to *diversity* in an HEI.
- H<sub>3</sub>: Perceptions of management and senior staff regarding the *degree of informal integration* are related to *diversity* in an HEI.
- H<sub>4</sub>: Perceptions of management and senior staff regarding *intergroup conflict* are related to *diversity* in an HEI.

- H<sub>5</sub>: Perceptions of management and senior staff regarding *institutional bias* are related to *diversity* in an HEI.

Based on these hypotheses, the following hypothetical model as depicted in Figure 1 was constructed.

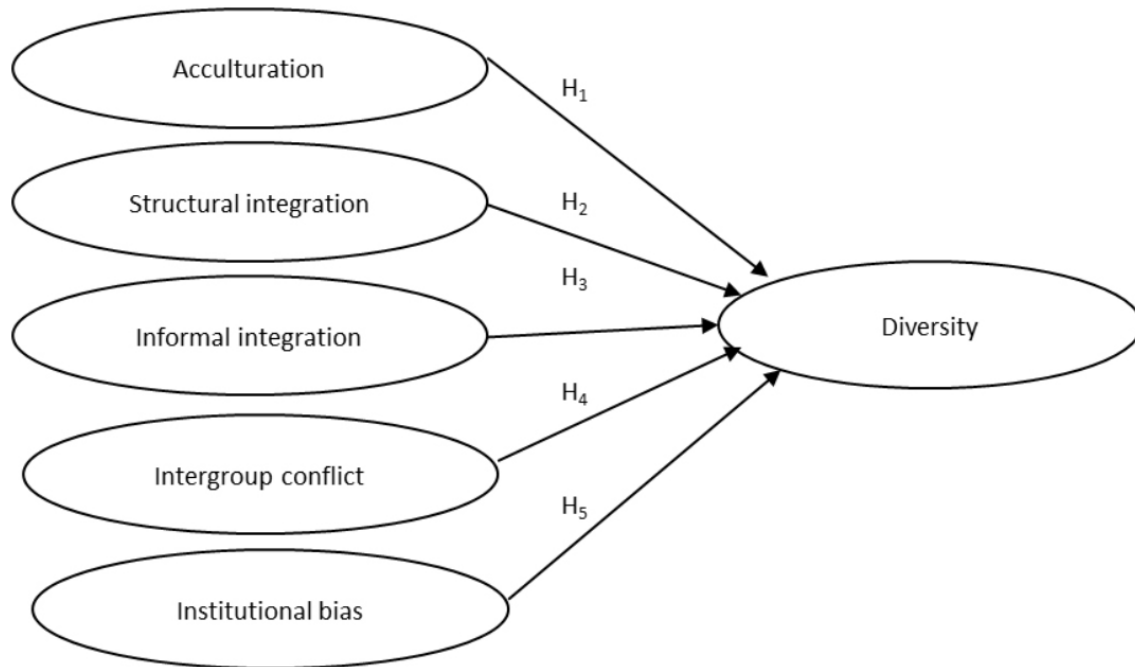


Figure 1: Factors influencing cultural diversity in a higher education institution

### 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The aim of the research reported on here was to determine the factors influencing cultural diversity in a HEI. The research approach, sample, research instrument, data collection and analysis are described.

#### 3.1. The Research Approach

Given the nature of the problem definition in this study, the positivistic research paradigm was proposed to ascertain WSU staff's opinions and perceptions regarding cultural diversity and to examine the assumed relationship empirically. Since the research variables were pre-specified based on secondary sources, structural equation modelling (SEM) was employed as the statistical tool to confirm the hypothetical model.

#### 3.2. Sample

The population of interest for the research and unit of analysis was Walter Sisulu University's executive and senior management, senior support (administrative) staff, and senior academic staff, including heads of departments and programme coordinators. The sampling frame comprised 427 WSU employees at management level or senior staff positions. A final sample of 266 usable questionnaires was obtained, giving a 62 per cent response rate. The executive and senior management category



responded at 84 per cent, which was significant as this represented the leadership structure of the university.

### **3.3. Research Instrument**

A structured questionnaire was drafted from the information obtained in the literature study and comprised two sections. The first section contained statements on the factors influencing cultural diversity. Respondents were asked to rate statements pertaining to cultural diversity according to a five-point Likert-type interval scale anchored from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). The second section of the questionnaire solicited biographic data using a nominal scale. Data included gender, position and racial group of the designated sampling frame group.

Ethics approval was granted by the NMMU Research Ethics Committee (ethical clearance number: H11 BUS BMa 033), and by the directorate of research at WSU. The questionnaire was first tested for validity and reliability in a pilot study before it was administered to the respondents.

### **3.4. Data Collection**

Primary data were collected using a survey by means of a self-administered questionnaire. The questionnaires were distributed by the researcher via email and as hard copies. A copy of the letter from the university's research directorate explaining the purpose of the study was attached to each questionnaire. Follow-up visits were performed and reminder emails were sent regularly. Data were collected with the aid of two field workers over a period of four months resulting in 266 usable questionnaires.

### **3.5. Data Analysis**

The data were statistically analysed using Structural equation modelling (SEM), which is a confirmatory approach in inferential data analysis, as the researcher had preconceived ideas about the actual structure of the data from the underlying theory. Structural equation modelling (SEM) is a multivariate statistical technique for testing statistical models that incorporate aspects of confirmatory factor analysis, path analysis and multiple regression to estimate a series of interrelated dependence relationships simultaneously (Hair, Black, Babin & Anderson, 2010). The statistical program AMOS 19.0.0 (Build 1376) was used to obtain estimates of the free parameters from the observed data.

Confirmatory factor analysis was used to verify that the identified factors had relationships with cultural diversity and to assess convergent validity. Convergent validity is a parameter often used in sociology, psychology, and other behavioural sciences, and refers to the degree to which two measures of constructs that theoretically should be related, are in fact related. Cooper and Schindler (2011) affirm that convergent validity refers to the degree to which scores on one scale correlate with scores on other scales designed to assess the same construct. Hair et. al., (1998) recommends a sample size of larger than 250 and smaller than 350 to obtain a cut-off level of 0.35. A cut-off level of pattern coefficients of 0.35 was adequate to indicate convergent validity for this study, since the sample size comprised 266 respondents.

Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients were used to verify the consistency of the inter-item reliability of the research instrument. Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient essentially measures the proportion of variation within a set of items, which can be attributed to some kind of common cause (Lee & Lings, 2008).

A Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of more than 0.70 was used to indicate a factor as reliable. Descriptive statistics were employed to indicate the mean scores and standard deviation of the factors.

#### 4. RESULTS

The empirical results of the data analysis are presented and is discussed as the demographic data and the results from the analysis to confirm the results.

##### 4.1. Results of the Demographic Data

Table 1 is a composite table reflecting on the demographic data. Table 1 indicates that most of the respondents were male (65%). The study showed that 34 per cent of the respondents were under the age of 45 years. A small percentage (20%) of respondents was older than 56 years. Regarding the level of education, over half of the respondents had either a master’s (37%) or doctoral degree (17%). This can be attributed to the fact that all the respondents in the research survey were senior managerial, senior support, or senior academic staff. The majority of respondents were black or African (74%). The manager or supervisor category obtained the highest response rate (21%), followed jointly by executive/senior management and senior academic (18% each). Respondents with 11 years or more service at the institution comprised 65 per cent of the sample, and merely nine per cent had been employed by the institution for less than five years.

**Table 1**  
**Results of the demographic data**

	<i>Demographics</i>	<i>%</i>
Gender	Male	65
	Female	35
Age	20–39 years	12
	40–45 years	22
	46–50 years	26
	51–55 years	20
	56–60 years	15
	60 years and older	5
Level of education	Grade 12 or equivalent	0
	National certificate / Diploma	7
	Bachelor’s degree	13
	Post-graduate diploma	12
	Honours	14
	Master’s/MBA	37
Race	Doctoral degree	17
	White	14
	Coloured	5
	Black/African	74
	Asian/Indian	6
	Other	1

(Contd...)



	<i>Demographics</i>	<i>%</i>
Position in the institution	Executive & senior management	18
	Senior support staff	17
	Manager/Supervisor	21
	Senior academic	18
	Head of department (HOD)	11
	Programme coordinator (PCO)	15
Length of employment with institution	Less than 5 years	9
	6–10 year	26
	11–15 years	32
	16–20 years	25
	21–25 years	6
	25 + years	2

#### 4.2. Results of the SEM Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Table 2 shows the SEM confirmatory factor matrix for diversity in a HEL. The confirmatory factor analysis in Table 2 illustrates loadings ranging between 0.104 and 0.880. Only one item (BIASHR5, Table 2) in the institutional bias factor was below the cut-off point of 0.35, and was thus deleted. With regard to the validity of the research instrument, the pattern coefficients after deletion of this one item in institutional bias, demonstrate loadings ranging between 0.413 and 0.880. This indicates acceptable levels of inter-correlation between the items and pre-specified factors. This finding illustrates that the scale demonstrated the relationships shown to exist based on the theory and/or prior research. The convergent validity of this scale could also be confirmed and could be used to assess diversity.

Cronbach’s alpha ( $\alpha$ ) values are a measure of internal consistency within a dataset. It measures how closely related a set of items are as a group (Cronbach, 1951). It is considered to be a measure of scale reliability. The Cronbach’s alpha values of all the factors in this study were above 0.7. The new adjusted Cronbach’s alpha value after the deletion of the one item for institutional bias improved to 0.793. These Cronbach’s alpha values signalled that the inter-item reliability of the measuring instrument for cultural diversity could be confirmed.

**Table 2**  
**Confirmatory factor analysis matrix for diversity**

	<i>Acculturation</i> (F1)	<i>Structural integration</i> (F2)	<i>Informal integration</i> (F3)	<i>Intergroup conflict</i> (F4)	<i>Institutional bias</i> (F5)
ACCUL1	0.726				
ACCUL2	0.827				
ACCUL3	0.827				
ACCUL4	0.504				
ACCUL5	0.504				
STRUC1		0.429			
STRUC2		0.442			

(Contd...)

	<i>Acculturation (F1)</i>	<i>Structural integration (F2)</i>	<i>Informal integration (F3)</i>	<i>Intergroup conflict (F4)</i>	<i>Institutional bias (F5)</i>
STRUC3		0.522			
STRUC4		0.653			
STRUC5		0.749			
INFORM1			0.639		
INFORM2			0.680		
INFORM3			0.691		
INFORM4			0.517		
INFORM5			0.499		
CONFL1				0.588	
CONFL2				0.483	
CONFL3				0.413	
CONFL4				0.708	
CONFL5				0.690	
BIASHR1					0.479
BIASHR2					0.640
BIASHR3					0.880
BIASHR4					0.835
BIASHR5					0.104
Cronbach alpha ( $\alpha$ )	0.839	0.691	0.733	0.722	0.700

### 4.3. Results of the Descriptive Statistics

Table 3 presents the results of the descriptive statistics of the factors influencing cultural diversity. From Table 3 it is evident that all the means scores tend towards 3 (neutral). Respondents were thus neutral in terms of whether these factors indeed had an influence on cultural diversity or not. Standard deviation scores were all below 1, indicating there was not much variability around the means scores.

**Table 3**  
**Results of the descriptive statistics**

<i>Factors</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Standard deviation</i>
Acculturation	2.598	0.787
Degree of structural integration	2.774	0.695
Informal integration	2.999	0.694
Intergroup conflict	2.990	0.666
Institutional bias	2.519	0.793

### 4.4. Results of the Goodness-of-fit Indices for Diversity

The results of the goodness-of-fit indices for cultural diversity are listed in Table 4. The ratio of  $\chi^2$  to degrees of freedom is 2.534, which is lower than the acceptable threshold of three. This indicates an acceptable model fit. The GFI is 0.872, which is above the threshold of 0.8 for an acceptable model fit. The CFI value of 0.9 is accepted as a good model fit. The CFI of this study is 0.867, which is just below the threshold

of 0.9. . The RMSEA value of 0.076 is below the threshold of 0.10, indicating an adequate model fit. The upper limit of the 90% confidence interval for RMSEA is 0.085, which is just above the threshold value of 0.08 indicating a dubious model fit. Judging from the goodness-of-fit results, the following can be deduced; although the data do not fit the model perfectly, it can be described as having a reasonable fit as three of the goodness-of-fit measures indicate an acceptable model fit. The results of the path coefficients in terms of significance, magnitude and direction of the hypothetical relationships of the cultural diversity model, are presented next.

**Table 4**  
**Results of the goodness-of-fit indices for diversity**

<i>Goodness of fit indices</i>	<i>Results</i>
$\chi^2/df$	2.534
GFI	0.872
CFI	0.867
RMSEA	0.076
90% confidence interval for RMSEA	0.097; 0.110

Sample size = 266

#### 4.5. Results of the Statistically Significant Relationships

Table 5 provides a summary of the statistically significant relationships of the cultural diversity model. As can be seen in Table 5, four statistically significant relationships of cultural diversity were found (with critical values higher than 3.96) between:

- Acculturation,
- Degree of structural integration,
- Degree of informal integration,
- Intergroup conflict and diversity.

The critical ratio for the path parameter between the latent variable *institutional bias* and cultural *diversity* is 1.588, which is smaller than 3.96, at a significance level of  $p = 0.001$  as well as at a significance level of 0.05 (critical value of 1.96) indicating no statistically significant relationship. All path coefficients are positive, and can be considered moderately to very strong with values varying between 0.563 and 0.931.

**Table 5**  
**Summary of the statistically significant relationships of the diversity model**

<i>Hypothesis</i>	<i>Factor</i>	<i>Path coefficients</i>	<i>Standard error</i>	<i>Critical ratio</i>	<i>Outcome</i>
H <sub>1</sub>	Acculturation process	0.606	0.058	7.675*	Supported
H <sub>2</sub>	Degree of structural integration	0.892	0.065	7.850*	Supported
H <sub>3</sub>	Degree of informal integration	0.563	0.057	5.689*	Supported
H <sub>4</sub>	Intergroup conflict	0.931	0.064	6.750*	Supported
H <sub>5</sub>	Institutional bias	0.092	0.058	1.588	Not supported

\* $p$ -value < 0.001

## 5. DISCUSSION

The four statistically significant relationships warrant further discussion.

### 5.1. Acculturation Process

A statistically significant relationship was found between *acculturation* and cultural *diversity* (H<sub>1</sub>). The finding implies that management and senior staff perceive that the manner in which groups resolve cultural differences will have a positive and decisive impact on cultural diversity in the institution. They appear to observe that there is a shared culture with the same values and beliefs amongst staff at the institution, and different culture groups accommodate each other. This empirical relationship is supported by Bjornsdottir et. al., (2016) and Cox (2008), who specify that acculturation is a dimension of cultural diversity since it is the process of resolving cultural differences, and of cultural change and adaptation between groups. In addition, empirical findings from McMahan (2010) confirm that in a multicultural institution, acculturation explicitly influences diversity as both groups change to a certain degree to reflect a common set of norms or values.

### 5.2. Degree of Structural Integration

A statistically significant relationship emerged between *structural integration* and cultural *diversity* (H<sub>2</sub>). The finding indicates that management and senior staff are of the opinion that the levels of heterogeneity that exist in the institutional structure will positively and conclusively influence cultural diversity at the institution. Furthermore they perceive that there are adequate resources to implement structural changes regarding employment equity at the institution. These structural changes are implemented to accommodate institutional policies of employment equity. Empirical findings by Cox (2008) confirm this relationship, and reveal that structural integration is applied to measure an institution's progress towards equal opportunities, and thus workforce diversity in the institution. Furthermore, previous research findings (Zanoni et. al., 2010) reveal that full structural integration of the institution is desirable for sustainable cultural diversity.

### 5.3. Degree of Informal Integration

A statistically significant relationship was found between *informal integration* and cultural *diversity* (H<sub>3</sub>). The finding thus implies that management and senior staff perceive that the extent to which people of all identity groups have access to social networks will positively influence cultural diversity. They are of the opinion that social networks are used as a means of informal communication at the institution. These informal networks allow staff to have a sense of belonging and acceptance of others. This empirical relationship is supported by Zanoni et. al., (2010) who suggest that informal integration entails that minority employees' access to decision-making is not hampered by their socio-demographic profile, thus indicating equality between groups. Mfene (2010) further endorses the positive relationship between informal integration and diversity by highlighting that social networks are important vehicles for communication and for personal efficacy of the institution's members.

### 5.4. Intergroup Conflict

A statistically significant relationship emerged between *intergroup conflict* and cultural *diversity* (H<sub>4</sub>). The finding indicates that management and senior staff appear to observe that conflict between cultural groups will

have a decisive and concrete influence on cultural diversity. They perceive that collaboration is the most acceptable strategy for managing conflict between groups. Moreover, effective and open communication reduces intergroup conflict at the institution. Empirical findings by Zanoni et. al.(2010) support this relationship between intergroup conflict and diversity. Rudhumbu and Chawawa (2014) contend that the presence of cultural diversity offers a number of potential benefits to institutions, but it also presents certain difficulties that should receive attention in the management of a diverse workforce. One way that this appears is that group conflict may occur in diverse groups. Furthermore, Cox (2008) in recognising the positive relationship between intergroup conflict and cultural diversity, recommends that structured interactions, institutional redesign and collaboration are the most universal strategies for managing conflict in diverse workgroups.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Cultural difference at HEIs should be managed effectively. These differences should not be viewed as a threat but as a source of competitive advantage and a pool of diverse ideas through innovation. In managing cultural diversity and creating a multicultural institution, it is essential to determine the factors which influence cultural diversity in order to enhance operational efficiency and competitiveness.

From the literature review, five hypotheses were formulated and tested to investigate which factors influence cultural diversity at a university. Structural equation modelling was used as the key statistical analysis tool. The data fitted the model as three of the goodness-of-fit indices suggest an acceptable model fit. Four statistically significant relationships were identified in the study. The factors that relate to management at WSU were identified as having a statistically significant relationship with cultural diversity through routine operational procedures namely acculturation, degree of structural integration, degree of formal integration and intergroup conflict. These empirical relationships are supported by previous studies as reported in the literature review. No statistically significant relationship was found between cultural diversity and institutional bias in the human resource systems, and there is no evidence to support H<sub>5</sub>. This finding is contrary to empirical evidence from previous research.

The following recommendations for practice are made:

- HEIs should ensure that there are equal employment opportunities for previously disadvantaged groups and that there is proportionate representation of various ethnic groups in the power structures of the institutions.
- Mentoring programmes should be put in place to support and guide inexperienced staff from various cultural groupings.
- Conflict due to opposing interests and views of diverse staff groupings should be managed effectively through collaboration and open communication.
- Management should use pluralism as the preferred acculturation process in the institution. This would involve integrating minority culture perspectives into core institutional values and norms. This can be accomplished through programmes such as valuing diversity and managing diversity in the mission statement of the institution.
- Management has to identify the relationship between diversity management, the objectives of the institution and desired institutional outcomes, for example, growth in student numbers and

advancing sustainability should be identified. Cultural diversity could be implemented effectively by, amongst others, securing top management commitment, increasing diversity skills throughout the institution and encouraging flexibility.

Future research in this field could focus on using a mixed method research design, which combines quantitative and qualitative methods. This approach could provide a more complete investigation, especially as diversity is a sensitive topic. A comparative study with another university, with similar conditions prevailing, would assist in verifying the credibility of the findings.

This research identified four factors that currently influence cultural diversity at a South African university. Management of WSU could apply the findings of this study to support and enhance cultural diversity management at the institution. Workforce diversity brings a collective strength to HEIs and this feature should be embraced as a powerful asset by institutions in South Africa.

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