Evaluating the Impact of Employee Diversity Cognizance on Decision-Making at Different Management Levels in Malawi's Public Institutions: *A Case Study of the Ministry of Gender, Community Development and Social Welfare (MoGCDSW)*

Vincent Thoko Katopola
Student Number: x20117949

MSc in Management
National College of Ireland

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Abstract

This study evaluated the impact of employee diversity cognizance on decision-making at different management levels in Malawi's public institutions. The study specifically focused on the Ministry of Gender, Community Development and Social Welfare (MoGCDSW), the custodian for gender equality and social welfare policy formulation. To find the answers to the research problem, the study had four specific objectives.

The investigation adopted a qualitative research design that followed an Interpretivism research philosophy by sampling 28 employees from different management levels of the MoGCDSW who shared varying perceptions and experiences on workforce diversity management and their contribution to decision-making. The data for the study was collected through online semi-structured interviews due to Covid19 pandemic limitations and was analysed using thematic analysis.

The findings of the research indicate that employee diversity has an impact on the decision-making processes of an institution at different management levels. The study has also revealed the relationship that exists between employee diversity and institutional innovation and performance. The findings also indicate that diversity exists in the MoGCDSW and that the employees accept and understand the existing employee diversity. The findings have further indicated that low management level employees and frontline managers are involved in the decision-making processes of the Ministry and that their inputs and views make a difference. However, the findings have also discovered that embracing diversity is not enough but the need to properly manage employee diversity to avoid the chaos that can come with increased differences.

Briefly, the findings of this study indicate that knowledge of existing employee diversity has an impact on the decision-making processes of MoGCDSW and other institutions. Therefore, the study recommends that Malawi public service institutions consider organizing regular training for employees on diversity management issues to keep up with economic, political and cultural globalization.

Declaration

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Name: Vincent Thoko Katopola

Student Number: x20117949

Degree for which thesis is submitted: MSc in Management

Title of Thesis: Evaluating the Impact of Employee Diversity Cognizance on Decision Making at Different Management Levels in Malawi's Public Institutions: A Case Study of the Ministry of Gender, Community Development and Social Welfare (MoGCDSW)

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Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my loving parents Gray K. Nyandule-Phiri and Joyce K. Nyandule-Phiri (Nee Naketo) whose love, hard work, and determination to raise me made everything possible. You mean the world to me, and I love you.

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List of Abbreviations

MoGCDSW: Ministry of Gender, Community Development and Social Welfare

<center>**Chapter 1**</center>

1.0 Introduction

"An individual has not started living until he can rise above the narrow confines of his individualistic concerns to the broader concerns of all humanity". ~

<center>Martin Luther King, Jr</center>

1.1 Background

1.1.1 The concept of employee diversity cognizance

The concept of diversity started mainly in the United States of America, with many corporations hiring diversity experts to help them implement their diversity programs (Munjuri, 2012), Zenger and Lawrence (1989). However, in Africa, South Africa presents a dominant study case for diversity. In South Africa where a non-racial, democratic constitution came into effect in 1996, equal rights legislation was implemented at just about the same time as its affirmative action policies, and many of its companies have been trying to almost simultaneously design and implement diversity management programs (Wachira and Njeri, 2016).

The outcomes of both equal rights laws and the affirmative action policies in South Africa are already evident in the increased proportion of black administrators, though these rates are still far from their demographic representation in the broader society (Cordero, 2006). As the racial and cultural profile of South African institutions continues to transform, the process of managing diversity is becoming more significant (Horwitz, 2002). However, as legislation and implementation of workplace diversity management practices continue to take hold in South Africa, the impact of these diversity management programs on organizational performance are not documented.

In a developing and ethnic country like Malawi which has opened up to globalization over the recent years, workforce diversity management is gradually being adopted in many Malawian institutions (Durevall and Mussa, 2010). Diversity in Malawi is most expressed through ethnicity, cultural differences, age, and social status, level of education, gender and religion.

Saxena (2014) defines employee diversity as the existence of physical and non-physical differences and similarities between individuals in an organization setting.

Employee diversity can also be defined as the variations between people in an institution; the differences range from gender, age, education, tenure, background and personality differences (Patrick and Kumar, 2012). When an organization has employees of different ages, cultures or races, it simply means that the organization is diversified. A diversified organization intentionally employs a workforce comprised of individuals who vary in both physical and non-physical attributes.

Gender refers to one's self-identity, for instance how much an individual associate themselves with masculinity or femininity as established by society norms (Shakeel and Rahman, 2019). In the same way, some anticipated behaviours are linked to being male or female due to their inborn tendencies, natural affiliation, attitude, cognitive skills or interests that attract one sex than the other. These gender differences influence the approach in which different employees react in the workplace (Singh and Vinnicombe, 2004). Sometimes gender diversity adversely affects the behaviours like discrimination, prejudice and stereotyping.

Gelner and Stephen (2009) point out that diversity in age groups adversely influences the efficiency of employees because of differences in belief, value and preferences of distinct age groups. Generally, generation gaps are a source of low productivity, clashes and conflicts. Each generation believes that its strengths are matchless and therefore no need to worry about disparities (Rowe, 2010). Similarly, with cultural diversity, differences help bring innovative and creative performance among employees.

Employee diversity cognizance refers to people's ability in a society to understand that individuals in a firm have differences in personality, perspective, backgrounds, physical attributes and education (Bassett-Jones, 2005). Some organizations provide diversity training to all employees, which use scenarios to help employees to solve sensitive situations in the workplace and set up online training to build awareness and understanding about diversity issues. For example, in Malawi, Illovo sugar company which is one of the biggest employers offer development and training to its employees on workplace diversity so that workers can have a clear understanding and be open-minded to other people's views (Illovo Sugar Africa, 2017).

1.1.2. Benefits and challenges of employee diversity

Foster and Harris (2005) point out that the differences in workers influence how they interact and achieve business goals whereby they can interact either well or not. According to Shakeel and Rahman (2019), differences between people bring confusion and chaos; however, if they are managed well they produce results.

According to Saxena (2014), employee diversity makes the workplace heterogeneous. In recent times, employee diversity has been held in high regard by Managers as it is believed to be something that increases productivity and good performance. Unlike in the past when organizations were homogenous, organizations these days have heterogeneous employees who act and think differently.

Fáilte Ireland (2005) believes that cultural and gender diversity can increase productivity and improved innovation. Diversity in an organization can improve employees' resourcefulness in handling tasks and problem solving, add renewed ways of thinking and skills. In addition, diversity in the workplace can benefit employer brand such as a better image in public, increasing peer competitiveness (Kochan et al., 2003). Other possible professional benefits include access to creative ideas, uncommon skills, and better service for clients. Similarly, Kochan et al. (2003) state that to enhance the overall efficiency of an enterprise or organization, it is necessary to involve females at all levels because gender diversity is positively correlated to performance or workers.

Wachira and Njeri (2016) explain that many firms today seem to be increasingly embracing racial, ethnic and gender employee balance not for lawful or ethical requirements but as a matter of taking a progressive viewpoint on financial self-interest. Diversity provides a greater pool of talented and experienced individuals, which in turn enhances innovations and creativity within society (Randeree, 2009). Institutions seek diversity as a way of increasing their business competency, improving their bottom line, gaining competitive advantage, building the ability to compete in international markets, enhancing business performance, accomplishing higher employee contentment, improving relationships with multi-ethnic communities, attracting complex skills and talents. An organization with diverse employees has greater chances of building an innovative working environment (Richard, 2006).

Despite having so many benefits, employee's diversity has challenges. According to Foster and Harris (2005), a diversified workforce can lead to productivity but may lead to disaster if not properly managed because employees may experience problems of language differences, attitude clashes and different perceptions. Rowe (2010) gives an example of age diversity; despite bringing benefits it can also cause low productivity, idea clashes and conflicts because of the generation gaps.

The research of Zenger and Lawrence (1989) explains that age diversity in an organization has some undesirable effects on organizations, which include difficulty in sharing knowledge, lack of consent and sometimes ineffective communication. In addition, Patterson et al. (1999) expound that the more age groups in the company, the less profitability of the business, because of difficulty to communicate, collaborate by different age groups.

Since organizations are heterogeneous, decision-making ought to be affected because there will always be differences in options, experiences, and perspectives to situations that can affect decision-making. It was still unknown if employee diversity cognizance has an impact on the decisions made at different management levels of Malawian public institutions, specifically the Minister of Gender, Community Development and Social Welfare (MoGCDSW). Hence, this thesis evaluated the impact of employee diversity cognizance in this Ministry.

1.2 Problem statement

In an organization, Human capital is one of the important resources that cannot be easily duplicated by other organizations. The human capital originates from a pool of personnel that bring diverse experiences, skills and backgrounds, all of which contribute to the success of an institution. Every organization that embraces the management of workforce diversity enjoys more creative decision-making, a satisfying work environment and better products because all employees are involved and feel encouraged to contribute in a meaningful way. Saxena (2014) suggests that employee diversity leads to improved productivity but proves to be a disaster if not managed well. Urwin et al. (2013) also noted that firms have benefited from employee diversity but not always. Every organization that embraces the management of workforce diversity enjoys more creative decision-making, a satisfying work environment, and

better products because all employees are involved and feel encouraged to contribute in a meaningful way.

In previous research work, Galbraith and Kazanjian (1986) report that globalization and advancement in technology necessitate a diversified workforce in the 21st century. A study by Kundu (2001) on how cross-cultural diversity issues are managed concludes that organizations with high levels of well-managed diversity are effective in the navigation of corporate cultures that offer fresh ideas, new pioneering capabilities and perspectives necessary for survival. Jerono (2011) studied the participation of women in university leadership and noted that women involved in leadership was below one-third of the constitutional requirement and was only concentrated in the lower hierarchy of university leadership. However, despite several studies that have been conducted on workplace diversity, it was still not clear if a diversified workforce has an impact on individual decisions made in the organizations.

Malawi enacted its labour relations act in 2000 which sought to break the culture of favouritism, nepotism and tribalism at the workplace in order to institutionalize professionalism and positive diversity attributes in public institutions. However, the report published by Durevall and Mussa (2010) shows that despite the adoption of the legislation by public establishments, the influence of the diversity programs at the organization level still need to be identified since these programs are executed deliberately by human resource managers, and had varied adaptations and unintended consequences. Therefore, these statements raised questions on whether employee knowledge of existing diversity had an impact on the individual decisions made at different levels.

Hence, this study sought to evaluate the impact of employee diversity cognizance on decision-making at different management levels in public institutions.

1.3 Objective of the study

1.3.1 Main objective
The main objective of the study was to evaluate the impact of employee diversity cognizance on decision-making at different management levels in Malawian public institutions.

1.3.2 Specific objectives

- Examine the perceptions of employees at different management levels on the existence of diversity in the MoGCDSW.
- Determine whether diversity knowledge is regarded as less important from top management down.
- Assess the influence of front line managers' inputs or views on decisions made in the MoGCDSW.
- Determine the involvement of low management level employees in the decision-making processes of the MoGCDSW.

1.4 Research questions

- What are the perceptions of employees on the existence of diversity at different levels in the MoGCDSW?
- Is the knowledge of employee diversity regarded less important from top management down?
- Do first-line managers have any influence on the decisions made in the MoGCDSW?
- Are low-level management employees involved in the decision-making processes of the MoGCDSW?

1.5 Hypothesis

Employee diversity cognizance has an impact on the decision-making at different management levels in the MoGCDSW.

1.6 Rationale and significance of the study

The study findings will be useful to institution management as they inform on the design and implementation of employees' diversity programs in organizations by outlining best practices that could further the impact of these programs on organization performance.

The findings of this research can also be used by other organizations and the government to further best practices in employee diversity management through building sustainable diversity management models and programs. Additionally, the study stimulates further interest and more studies in the area of employee diversity at the workplace, especially in an African and Malawian context. There are still limited studies in the area of employee diversity in Africa since existing research has focused

mainly on developed economies. Hence, it was crucial to examine employee diversity in the context of developing economies.

The results of the study have enriched the literature on the impact of diversity awareness by employees at different levels on decision making in public institutions. Scholars can utilize the results from the study to review literature and identify gaps in future studies. Further to that, the results from the study contribute and help Malawian institutions to recognize and value employee diversity.

Chapter 2

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews literature that covers a global context on employee diversity and its impact on organizations that will help to explain the research gap that exists in the Malawian setting.

2.2 Empirical review

Scholars around the world have researched various topics concerning employee diversity and this section presents some of the findings unearthed on the impact of employee diversity.

To identify the interrelationship between organization performance and diversity at an organizational level, it's important to be clear about how diversity and performance are defined and measured (Wachira and Njeri, 2016). The diversity ranges from distributive concerns based on the traditional categories of race, ethnicity and gender to the inclusion of a vast array of variations in educational background, sexual orientation, religion, age, lifestyle, disability, tenure, race, function, beliefs and values in addition to employment status (Kochan et al., 2003).

There are three different categories of employee diversity: Social category diversity relates to differences in demographic characteristics, such as gender, geographical region of origin, age and ethnicity; informational diversity refers to the diversity of backgrounds such as education, knowledge, experience, tenure and functional background; and value diversity which includes differences in personality and attitudes (Anderson and Metcalf, 2003).

Several studies indicated that employers who successfully manage diversity are better at attracting and retaining talent because individuals are drawn to establishments that embrace diversity (Woods and Sciarini, 2005). Organizations recruit the best people in the labour market by embracing diversity; such employers also benefit from cost savings by having an effective talent pool. McCuiston and Pierce (2001) found that the recruitment expenditure of organizations that value diversity is 40% less than for firms that do not value diversity because they suffer less from high costs of labour turnover, absenteeism and discrimination lawsuits.

Saxena (2014) found that workplace diversity is a strength for organizations and it improves productivity. The study commended that a diversified workforce has many benefits because it stimulates innovation and productivity. Diversity makes it easy for organizations to solve problems because it avails expanded meanings and ideas from heterogeneous employees with distinct experience, perspectives and skills who feel comfortable in such a setting (Cox, 1994). The research discovered that a diverse workforce might be a disaster if not managed properly because employees find it difficult to cope with each other's differences.

Armstrong et al. (2010) studied 132 Irish companies and found that firms that invested in workforce diversity and managed it very well experienced low voluntary turnover, better innovation and high productivity. The results exposed that good management of employee diversity was key for institutions to realize its benefits. Urwin et al. (2013) observed that firms have benefited from diversified workforces but not in all contexts and times. The context in which firms operate and how they manage diversity determines if workforce diversity can achieve better outcomes or disaster. If poorly managed, diversity can make organizations incur more business costs than benefits (Urwin et al., 2013).

A sturdy and helpful relationship exists between workforce diversity and organization performance; successful diversity management results in improved organizational performance (Ozbilgin and Tatli, 2008). According to Panicker (2017), diversity management is a practice that intends to foster a positive work environment where people's differences are respected enough to allow employees to reach their full potential and maximize their contribution to company objectives.

Dike (2013) focused on the impact of workforce diversity on Ghanaian organizations' performance and found that diversity played an active role and that inadequate mentoring and guidance on diversity in heterogeneous firms contributed to low productivity. Foma (2014) studied the impact of workplace diversity and found that a heterogeneous workforce increases creativity, productivity and problem-solving. Further explained that lack of proper diversity management had a greater impact and it brought challenges in information flow and unification.

An organization will have employees with differences in personalities; these personality differences influence employees' decision making and attitudes towards

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team participation, training and development, organization change and the general comfort of employees to different social and collaboration standards (Wachira and Njeri, 2016). Attitude on the other hand can be described as the person's tendency to respond to various aspects of people, situations and objects (Bunderson and Kathleen, 2002). This was influenced by an individual's feelings and beliefs drawn from economic, social and cultural experiences. Hence, an employee's understanding determined their overall value and involvement in the organization and the quality of value addition to their employer (Bunderson and Kathleen, 2002). This significance is the source of innovation, creativity, efficiency and effectiveness in the organization which translates to an organization's success through increased revenues and market share growth (Anderson and Metcalf, 2003).

Diversity drives creativity and performance. On complex tasks with equally skilled leadership, diverse teams will outperform teams that are not diverse (DiTomaso et al., 2007). With the further argument that diversity increases the opportunity for creativity and the quality of the product of group work. It is thus evident that the benefits of diversity may extend beyond team and workplace functioning and problem-solving. Similarly, Bunderson and Kathleen (2002) state that teams composed of individuals with a breadth of functional experiences were well-suited to overcoming communication barriers because team members could relate to one another's functions while still realizing the performance benefits of diverse functional experiences.

However, Kochan et al. (2003) found no significant direct effects of either racial or gender diversity on business performance. Kochan et al. (2003) stipulate that gender diversity had positive effects on group processes while racial diversity had negative effects. The negative relationship between racial diversity and group processes, however, was largely absent in groups with high levels of training in career development and diversity management (Horwizt, 2002). These scholars also found that racial diversity is positively associated with growth in branches' business portfolios. Racial diversity is linked with higher overall performance in branches that enact an integration-and-learning viewpoint on diversity, but employee participation in diversity education programs has a limited impact on performance (Kochan et al., 2003). The study also found no support for the idea that diversity which matches a

firm's client base increases sales by satisfying customers' desire to interact with those who physically look like them.

2.3 Public institution

Patterson (2011) defines a public institution from a legal perspective as establishments that exist as separate legal entities that are established without share capital and distinct from private businesses or profit-making corporations. They are legally established entities controlled by the government whose activities are financed by public taxes and tend to public needs (Matei and Alexandru, 2018).

Public institutions have an extensive history of implementing diversity policies intended for growing the representation of minority groups amongst their staff. Through these policies, they emphasize their exemplary role and aim to improve their legitimacy (Ely and Thomas, 2001). Most recently, public organizations have been revising policies to attract, retain and manage a diverse workforce in order to enhance their performance (Patterson, 2011).

Malawi has a number of public institutions whose activities are financed by public taxes and tend to public needs. These public institutions include Central Government (Ministries), Statutory Corporations, Local Government (District Councils) and many others (Durevall and Mussa, 2010). All these institutions are supposed to work according to the Malawi labour law act of 2000 that outlines and promotes acceptance of diversity and non-discriminatory actions.

2.4 Management levels

Jaques (1965) explains that existing demarcations between managerial positions in an organization constitute levels of management. These numbers of levels increase when the size of the business or workforce increases. Juneja (2015) expounds that these management levels are mainly classified into three broad categories, namely top, middle and low levels.

The top management level consists of chief executives who are the ultimate source of authority for an organization. The middle level consists of departmental managers who answer to the top level and focus on departmental functions. The low level consists of supervisors and sections officers who supervise and direct operations employees (Hitt et al., 2009).

Many previous studies on how an institution's performance is related to the diversity of employees have focused on the effect of diversity in the top management team (McCuiston and Pierce, 2001). The upper framework analyses factors that the executive leadership strategy formulation and subsequently organizational behaviour and performance. Finkelstein and Hambrick (1990) argue that functional background and demographic characteristics influence the manager's interpretation of problems and the length of tenure is related to strategic inertia. However, they also found that characteristics of the management team as a whole had greater predictive power for firm performance than the characteristics of the top manager (Finkelstein and Hambrick, 1990).

Laursen et al. (2005) take a broader perspective and analyze the composition of engineers in Danish engineering consulting firms to see how employee diversity affects firm performance. They argue that a firm's performance is not only related to levels of human resources but also to the composition of these resources. They also argue that too little and too much diversity can have a negative impact, which implies an inverted curvilinear relation between diversity and performance (Laursen et al., 2005). They discover that combining fundamentally different skills leads to a competitive advantage.

Innovation often depends on groups of individuals in the organization, and it is in the context of a complex social system in an organization where different types of individual knowledge come into play to generate new knowledge or ideas (Woodman et al., 2010). Therefore, the composition of individuals within the firm is an important factor for understanding innovation since diversity in the composition of the firm's employees contributes to diversity in the knowledge base. Innovation is an interactive process where employees interact in groups and develop, discuss and modify and realize new ideas. As a result, it is not sufficient to analyze diversity in top management teams only but consider the composition of the entire firm (Bassett-Jones, 2005).

2.5 Diversity in the workplace

Diversity refers to variety and differences in a group (Hatch and Dyer, 2004). It describes the composition of a group according to one or more characteristics of its members. Hatch and Dyer (2004) further explain that the meaning of variety can extend beyond race and gender to include all types of individual differences, such as

ethnicity, sexual preferences, disability status, religion, personality, geographic location, age and a myriad of other personal, demographic and organizational characteristics. Diversity can thus be an all-inclusive term that incorporates individuals from many unrelated clusters (Herring, 2009). In the workplace, this means the diversity among employees relates to such factors as age, culture, education, employee status, family status, gender, physical appearance, race, regional origin, religion, and sexual orientation.

Dike (2013) defines workplace diversity as recognizing, understanding and accepting individual differences irrespective of their physical and non-physical attributes in an organization. Hitt et al. (2009) emphasize that the notion of diversity embraces respect and acceptance with consideration that individuals are distinctive and have differences.

Diversity does not encompass only self-personal perceptions but also perceptions about others and these affect interactions between people (Patrick and Kumar, 2012). According to Foma (2014), the existence of diversity makes an office heterogeneous in terms of gender, age, culture, personality and other differences.

Additional reviewed literature suggests that hiring diversity is not enough for good performance but managing it well is key (Panicker, 2017). It also argues that with declining homogeneity in the employee, it has become crucial for organizations to develop equal opportunities and diversity management policies to retain the skills of employees with diverse backgrounds in order to protect their competitive position in the marketplace (Gilbert and Ivancevich, 2000).

Benschop (2001) demonstrates the need to include employee diversity in the Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) debate since the majority of research models have implicitly assumed that employees are generic and homogeneous categories without considering cultural differences between employees. The need to incorporate diversity in the SHRM debate is one of the main challenges to be addressed in future research on the field (Foster Curtis and Dreachslin, 2008).

Diversity in relation to social categories is linked to differences in cultures and demographic attributes of employees (Anderson and Metcalf, 2003). These differences can be in gender, places of origin, age and ethnicity. This diversity is also associated with a mix of viewpoints, opinions and experiences at the workplace

(Wachira and Njeri, 2016). Gender and age diversity have been associated with enhanced business performance through increased employee satisfaction and overall firm productivity with reduced labour costs. Wachira and Njeri (2016) further state that a productive employee delivers results through increased sales, costs savings, improving their job efficiency that feed to the overall bottom-line results for an organization.

Employees' age diversity on the other hand is a tremendous source of organizational learning that helps innovativeness which results in new and improved products and services for the organization and the promotion of efficient business processes that impact the bottom-line (Kochan et al., 2003). On the other hand, firms that encourage gender diversity earn both professional acclaim today accompanied by an increased employee and customer loyalty. They attract large numbers of job applicants, which gives them the advantage of recruiting the best personnel in the labour market and gain a source of competitive advantage. Increased client gratification is associated with an improved bottom line since clients always reward such organizations with repeat business, hence sustained revenue growth (Nishii and Özbilgin, 2007).

Ethnic diversity has been found to have a positive effect on organizations that operate in industries more open to trade, e.g. multinationals (Wachira and Njeri, 2016). These establishments are able to employ workers that reflect the ethnicity of the markets they serve. This makes it easy for such businesses to communicate to their customers in these markets more effectively. Social category diversity allows the establishment's staff to communicate with distinct categories of stakeholders effectively. It assists an organization to competently navigate past biases or misconceptions through respect for differences that they may not comprehend. This in return helps an organization expand its market share, increase customer satisfaction and loyalty (Gilbert and Ivancevich, 2000).

2.6 Decision-making

The oxford learner's dictionary defines decision-making as the process of deciding about something important, especially in a group of people or an organization. Hudson (2015) defines decision-making as a course of action selection process that considers multiple alternatives in order to accomplish preferred outcomes. Decision-making is

integral for individuals in a societal setting; without sound decision-making productivity for both individuals and organizations is negatively affected (Juneja, 2015).

Gruenfeld et al. (1996) provide a theoretical approach that describes the effects of diversity through a framework of information and decision-making. This perspective demonstrates how information exchange and the ability to make decisions is affected by the heterogeneity within a group. The theory demonstrates the potential advantages of heterogeneous groups. The framework presents that members of varied groups have access to a wider variety of information using more contacts and networks outside the group than homogeneous teams.

Theories on decision making in groups suggest that the quality and consensus of the group discussions improve in more diverse groups, but it takes a longer time to reach an agreement. To make good decisions when facing complex and uncertain difficulties, it often needs some degree of cognitive conflict and expression of different viewpoints to avoid a premature consensus (Priem et al., 1995). However, diversity is negative if it creates a social-emotional conflict between individual employees since this type of conflict is not related to a fact-based problem-solving process and draws important resources away from the tasks at hand (Pelled et al., 1999).

Members of informationally heterogeneous groups are assumed to have different training and socialization experiences (Hinds and Mortensen, 2005). Disagreements and debates concerning group tasks commonly happen due to differences in experiences and knowledge (Wittenbaum and Stasser, 1996). The presence of different perspectives is likely to manifest itself as intragroup task conflict (Pelled et al., 1999). They also found that functional background and educational diversity were related to conflicts that focused on the task or content of ideas.

Decisions in organizations determine operational and managerial activities (Hitt et al., 2009). These explanations depict decision-making as a consultative process that considers many factors and this thesis evaluated the impact of employee diversity cognizance on decision-making at different management levels.

Chapter 3

3.0 Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter indicates the research methodology utilized within the study of the impact of employee diversity cognizance on decision-making at different management levels in Malawian public institutions. Chapter 3 demarcates the research philosophy, research approach and design, qualitative research methods, data collection method and research ethics that were considered.

3.2 Research philosophy

There are five known philosophical paradigms in research namely, positivism, interpretivism, postmodernism, pragmatism and critical realism (Saunders et al., 2016). These research philosophies provide guidance to research methods and analysis. Positivism is commonly associated with experiments and quantitative research, and positivism is considered a form of empiricism (Myers, 2008). Interpretivism argues that truth and knowledge are subjective, culturally and historically situated based on lived experiences and understanding, while critical realism states that societies are influenced by their own perceptions and experiences, but these are manipulated by power and structures, e.g. culture, politics, race, gender and class (Saunders et al., 2016).

The research philosophy for this study is compatible with interpretivism because it relates to the subjective nature of a study and provided great room for bias. Primary data generated in Interpretivism studies cannot be generalized since the data is heavily impacted by personal viewpoints and values. In addition, this paradigm relates to qualitative research areas such as cross-cultural differences in societies, issues of ethics, leadership and analysis of factors affecting leadership etc. The reliability and representativeness of data are undermined to a certain extent if associated with inductive reasoning in interpretivism (Saunders et al., 2016).

3.2.1 Inductive research approach

There are three general approaches that can be used for research conduction, namely deductive, abductive and inductive approaches based on the type of research paradigm used (Saunders et al., 2016). Deborah (2003) explains that the main difference between inductive and deductive approaches is that a deductive approach

tests a theory, while an inductive approach seeks new theories from emerging data. A deductive approach usually starts with hypothesis and causation, while an inductive approach starts with observation and then theory development the theory (Myers, 2008).

Hunges (2006) states that inductive reasoning moves from specific observations, observation of patterns to broad generations/development of theory from themes.

3.3 Research design

This research used a qualitative research method to answer the research questions aforementioned in the previous chapter. According to Patrick and Kumar (2012), research design involves a plan and an assessment approach utilized to get answers to academic study questions and problems. Research design offers a framework for data collection, analysis and specifies a research method that is suitable for a study (Saunders et al., 2016).

For the purpose of this study, a non-probability sampling procedure was adopted. Non-probability sampling relates to subjects not having any criterion for being chosen as participants in the study. Loether and McTavish (2000) indicate that non-probability sampling means each element has an equal probability of being included in the sample; therefore, the probability of selecting population elements are unknown. However, in this method lies a greater prospect for bias to enter into the sample that can distort findings.

According to Saunders et al. (2016), non-probability samples that are unrestricted are called convenience samples. Convenience sampling pertains to members of a population who are conveniently available to provide the information. Hence, the authors indicate that convenience sampling allows for the selection of a rather desired group of people.

Convenience sampling is a non-random sample that is chosen for ease of access to participants and availability (Saunders et al., 2016). The advantage of non-probability convenience sampling is that it allows quick, efficient and easy summarization of data (Cooper and Schlindler, 2008). In addition, it involves lower costs, greater accuracy of results, swift data collection and the availability of population elements. Cooper and Schlindler (2008) further explain that the convenience sampling method is the least

expensive and easiest to conduct for exploratory research. As this study was of an exploratory nature, convenience sampling was adopted.

3.4 Qualitative research methods approach

Qualitative research is mainly concerned with qualitative phenomena; Kothari (2004) expands that the phenomena most of the time relates to quality or kind. According to Saunders et al. (2016), most qualitative studies try to understand the reasons underlying a certain behaviour of societies, for example why millennials jump from one occupation to another, this is a qualitative phenomenon.

Qualitative research is primarily exploratory research and it is used to gain an understanding of underlying reasons, opinions and motivations of people (Myers, 2008). It mainly follows unstructured or semi-structured techniques like focus groups, individual interviews and observations. The sample size is normally small and participants are carefully chosen to fulfil a specified quota.

Hunges (2006) explains that a qualitative research design is associated with the subjective analysis of ideas, attitudes and conducts. Walliman (2011) adds that the emphasis of qualitative research is to comprehend, learn and clarify a situation, beliefs, behaviours, attitudes, feelings and perceptions of certain groups.

A qualitative research design was preferred because the phenomenon under study aligned to an interpretivism philosophy (Saunders et al., 2016). There are many benefits to carrying out qualitative research. The biggest advantage is that the researcher is more likely to gain a good understanding of further details and perspectives (Hunges, 2006). An interview is a common way used by many researchers. The researchers can encourage interviewees to say more deep views and opinions. But, the potential limitation of it is not all interviewees can be open-minded to expression (Creswell, 2017).

The researcher wanted to understand, explore and discover the impact of employee diversity cognizance on decision-making at different levels of management.

3.4.1 Interviews

The study was done through a semi-structured interview approach that utilized an online self-administered questionnaire sent to respondents via email. The interview

had a few close-ended questions and many open-ended questions that allowed the respondents to give as many details as possible.

3.5 Research data collection methods

The dissertation utilized data from primary sources that were collected through interviews using an online self-administered questionnaire that was sent to participants via email. Respondents were required to formally consent to their willingness to participate in the study before proceeding with the interview. The study also considered secondary data from previous studies and publications in the literature review.

3.5.1 Data collection tools

An online self-administered questionnaire was used as a tool for data collection. The data collection tool comprised of many open-ended questions and a few close-ended questions that helped the researcher to collect precise data. Using the online self-administered questionnaire saved time for respondent's participation, reduced costs, and made it easier to have accurate transcripts for thematic analysis by the researcher.

3.6 Sampling selection process

In order to gather the data required to meet the objectives of the study, a qualitative research methodology approach was used whereby a non-probability sampling technique of convenience was applied. Caulfield (2020) argues that the main objective of convenience sampling is to examine participants in a premeditated way because of availability and this study focused on readily available participants that hold supervisory roles at different management levels in the MoGCDSW.

3.6.1 Study area

The study area for this research was Lilongwe, Malawi where the MoGCDSW is located.

3.6.2 Study population

According to Sekaran and Bougie (2016), a population refers to the whole group of events, people or things of interest that a researcher wants to investigate. Cooper and Schlindler (2008) reinforce this by stating a population is a group of elements on which a researcher wishes to make some inferences.

Saunders et al. (2016) state that population in research does not refer to a number of people but rather a collective term used to define the total size of anything that is subject to a study. A population can consist of any type of objects, people or organizations (Walliman, 2011). The study population for this research was comprised of employees from MoGCDSW.

3.6.3 Sample size

The sample is the section of the wider population that is engaged in the research so that conclusions can be drawn for the entire population. Initially, the targeted sample size was thirty (30) respondents, but due to Covid19 pandemic limitations and non-responsiveness of some targeted emails, the research managed to sample Twenty-eight (28) employees from MoGCDSW who belong to different management levels, which was enough to draw conclusions from for an exploratory qualitative study.

3.7 Rationale and validity of the instrument

This research used both primary and secondary data. The primary data was collected through interviews using an online self-administered questionnaire that comprised of questions adapted from a previously validated Chrobot-Mason (2004) diversity and managerial role model behaviours questionnaire. According to Cooper and Schlindler (2008), validity is the extent to which differences found with a measuring tool reflect the true differences among respondents being used. Validity is defined as the extent to which an empirical measure adequately reflects the real meaning of the concept being measured (Sekaran and Bougie, 2016).

A pilot study was conducted where six (6) participants were engaged to check if the questionnaire is capable of soliciting specific data that aligns with the research objectives. The pilot study was a success and corrections were made using the feedback from the six (6) participants. The use of a semi-structured interview approach also ensured reduced variances in data collected and clarification of questions was done to allow respondents to understand the questions fully and respond without pressure.

3.8 Data analysis method

This research uses thematic analysis to analyze data. According to Caulfield (2020), thematic analysis is a method of analyzing qualitative data by extracting themes. Maguire and Delahunt (2017) further explain that this method is usually applied to a

set of texts such as interview transcripts where a scholar examines data to identify common topics, themes, ideas and patterns of meaning that repetitively come up from responses.

A thematic analysis follows a six-step process of familiarization, coding, generating themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes and writing up (Braun and Clarke, 2006). For this research, ideas, themes, patterns of meaning and topics were extracted from completed questionnaire transcripts.

3.9 Research ethics

The researcher observed the ethical considerations of confidentiality, anonymity and informed consent of the participants. The researcher concealed the identities of respondents from all interested parties and collected de-identified data for the dissertation. The researcher asked for consent from the respondents and informed them that participation is voluntary and that they are at liberty to withdraw from participation at any point in time.

3.10 Limitations to the study

Scholastic research just like any other research is subject to limitations that should be acknowledged in order to allow those that benefit from the knowledge to comprehend conclusions drawn critically. For this study, a qualitative approach was adopted which utilized an online semi-structured questionnaire that was sent via emails. This means that participation was limited to individuals that had access to their emails within the data collection period and only those email addresses accessible to the researcher from the MoGCDSW.

Secondly, the sample size utilized was only a small group from one government ministry that cannot generalize the results for the whole Malawi public service. A larger sample from multiple public institutions of different functional sectors would provide a more robust analysis and results.

Lastly, the study may be considered subjective. Qualitative studies are subjective in nature and the possibilities of other scholars doing the same study and getting different results are inevitable. The subjective nature can come about because of differences in interpretation influenced by sample size, environmental factors and time. Hence, the researcher acknowledges that the study does not claim to offer a fixed answer to

the research gap but a relevant smaller piece to the puzzle for consideration in future studies.

Chapter 4

4.0 Study Findings and Analysis

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents and analyses the findings of this study in line with the specific objectives. The study aimed at evaluating the impact of employee diversity cognizance on decision making at different management levels in Malawi's public institutions. The study focused on the Ministry of Gender, Community Development and Social Welfare (MoGCDSW). In order to find the answers to the research problem, the study had four specific objectives. The following are the specific objectives: to examine the perceptions of employees at different management levels on the existence of diversity in the MoGCDSW; to determine whether diversity knowledge is regarded less important from top management down; to assess the influence of front line managers' inputs or views on decisions made in the MoGCDSW, and to determine the involvement of low management level employees in decision-making processes of the MoGCDSW.

The researcher intended to sample out 30 employees from MoGCDSW. However, due to Covid19 pandemic limitations and the non-responsiveness of some potential targeted participants, the research managed to sample out twenty-eight (28) employees from MoGCDSW who belong to different management levels. Therefore, the findings presented in this chapter will reflect the perceptions of the 28 people.

As already aforementioned, the findings are presented in line with specific objectives. The questions that were included in the questionnaire reflected the specific objectives of the study.

4.2 Demographic profile

Figure 1: Gender distribution of the participants

1. What is your gender?
28 responses

- Female
- Male

57.1%

42.9%
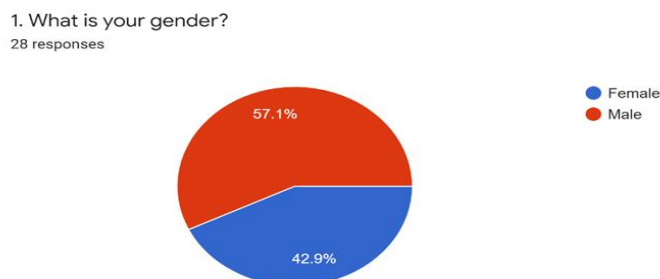
The above pie chart shows that 57.1 % of the participants were male and 42.9 were females. This means that most of the employees at MoGCDSW are males. These findings however are a reassurance that there is inclusivity because females are now taking up managerial jobs in public institutions' offices compared to the past; even though the findings do not reflect 50%, the percentage is still encouraging as it is close to 50%. This is a positive development for the 50:50 Campaign which is being advocated by various Non-governmental and public organizations in Malawi as part of diversity and gender equality.

Figure 2: Age group distribution of the participants

3. Which age group do you belong to?
28 responses
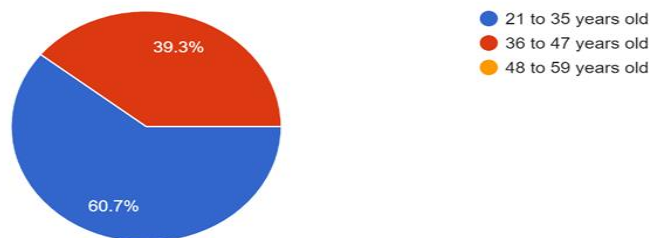
The above pie chart shows that the management of MoGCDSW is comprised of employees of two age groups, 21-35 and 36 to 47, with the age group of 21-35 dominating at 60.7%. This shows that the youth in Malawi are taking a leading role in the development activities of the Nation. This shows that the country is also focusing on employing and retaining an energetic youthful workforce.

Figure 3: Pie chart showing the management level of the participants

2. Which Management level do you belong to?
28 responses
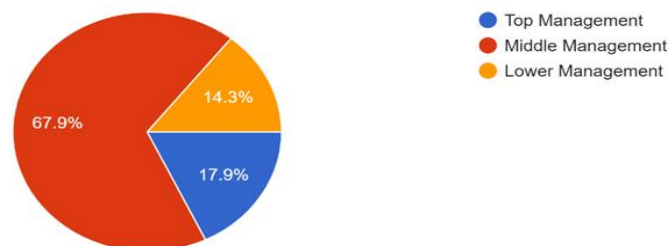
The above pie chart shows that most participants belong to the middle management level at 67.9%, followed by those at top management level at 17.9% and lastly the lower management at 14.3%. These findings mean that the findings of this research will be valid because the research problem aimed at evaluating the perceptions of employees from all management levels of the MoGCDSW.

4.3 To examine the perceptions of employees at different management levels on the existence of diversity in the MoGCDSW

Quite a number of questions were asked on this specific objective. The questions aimed at soliciting answers on the perceptions of the employees at different management levels on the existence of diversity in the MoGCDSW. The questions asked comprised of open and close-ended questions.

Asked on what the employees understanding of employee diversity was, many employees demonstrated excellent knowledge of the term. One respondent said that a diversified workforce is a workforce that comprises individuals emanating from different racial, tribal, cultural, backgrounds as well as gender. Another employee expounded that a diversified workforce encompasses staff members from dissimilar backgrounds in ethnicity, education, political ideology as well as language. Another participant highlighted that a diversified workforce entails the hiring of a wide range of different individuals in terms of gender, race, ethnicity, language, education and it ensures equal participation of employees in different activities. The answers from these participants and others showed that employees at MoGCDSW have sufficient knowledge of employee diversity.

The employees were also asked to confirm if employees at MoGCDSW are varied in terms of culture, age and gender. The following pie charts indicate the findings.

Figure 4: Pie chart showing the variance of MoGCDSW employees in terms of culture

5.Are employees varied in terms of cultural background in the MOGCDSW?
28 responses

- Disagree
- Not Sure
- Agree

60.7%

14.3%

25%
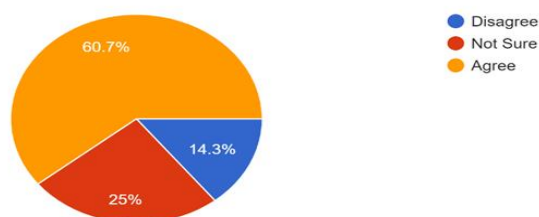
The above pie chart shows that employees at MoGCDSW vary in terms of their cultural background. The participants who agreed that the cultural background of employees varies was represented by 60.7%, those that said not sure were at 25% and those that disagreed were represented at 14.3. These findings reveal that the workforce at MoGCDSW is diversified in terms of their cultural background as many employees agreed to this assertion.

Figure 5: Pie chart showing the variance of employees at MoGCDSW in terms of age

6. Are employees varied in terms of age in the MOGCDSW?
28 responses
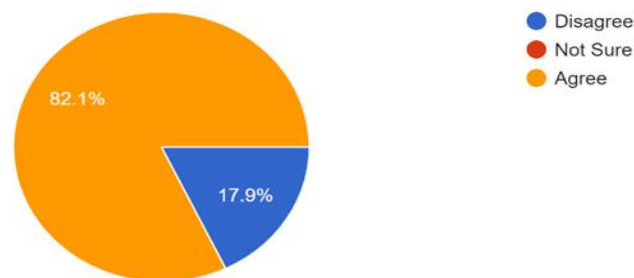
The employees were further asked on whether the age of employees at MoGCDSW vary. 82.1% of employees agreed that the age of employees varied, whereas 17.9% disagreed. The findings of this question reveal that indeed there is employee diversity at MoGCDSW in regards to age.

Figure 6: Pie chart showing the assertion of employee gender variation at the MoGCDSW

7. Are employees varied in terms of gender in the MOGCDSW?
28 responses
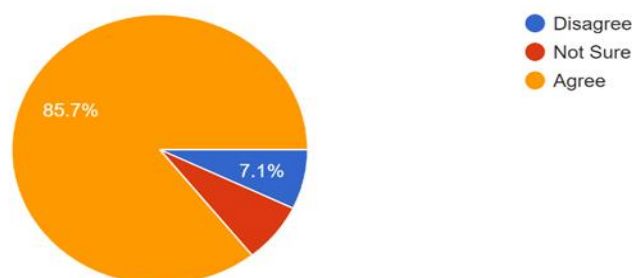
Participants were asked if employees vary in terms of gender in the MoGCDSW, and 85.7% of the employees agreed, whereas 7.1 disagreed and 7.2% of the respondents were unsure. These findings indicate that the employees of MoGCDSW are varied in terms of gender.

Figure 7: Pie chart showing the perceptions of employees on the existence of diversity in the MoGCDSW

8. Do you recognize that diversity exists in the MOGCDSW?
28 responses

- Yes
- No

96.4%
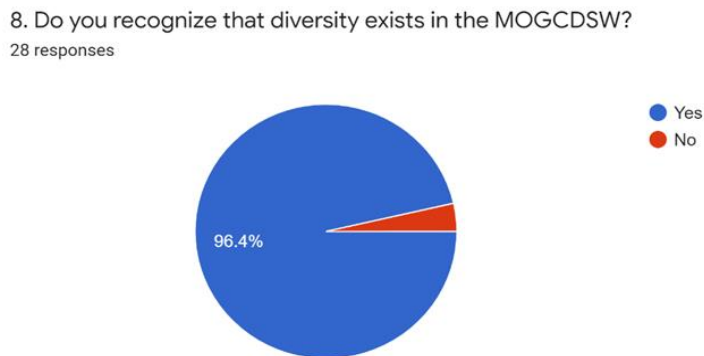
In order to examine the perceptions of the employees on the existence of diversity in the MoGCDSW, employees were asked on whether they recognize the existence of diversity in the Ministry. Most employees were of the belief that diversity exists in the MoGCDSW. 96.4% of the employees said that diversity exists in the MoGCDSW, whereas 3.6% said it does not exist. This shows that there is diversity in the MoGCDSW.

The employees were further asked on how they handle the differences across gender, age and culture when working in their workplace. Participant 2 said that He gives everyone equal opportunity to participate in different activities regardless of the differences that exist between them. Participant 3 on the other hand said that she handles the difference through teamwork in which people from different cultures, ages and gender share ideas and knowledge. Participant 5 noted that the differences are addressed by ensuring an inclusive working environment, accepting every individual differences, following legal frameworks that do not disadvantage an employee due to their gender, sexual orientation and age. Participant 6 said that she tries to respect people's differences and strictly keep her work professional with the aim of handling the differences across gender, age and culture. Participant 9 said that he respects diversity to create a conducive environment workplace for all. Participant 17 said that she handles diversity through teamwork and involvement of all in decision-making.

Responding to the same question, participant 21 who belong to the top management said that he bears in mind the existing differences amongst employees within the institution and ensuring that he respects workmates regardless of gender, age or cultural differences as provided for in the Malawian Constitution. All the responses above show that employees in the MoGCDSW embrace diversity and handle it properly. From the responses above, quite a number of recurring words can be captured as themes; these words are respect, acceptance and teamwork. Most of the employees narrated that they accept the fact that they are different in terms of their culture, age and gender, and so they respect each other despite having the difference through coordinated teamwork.

The findings on the specific objective of examining the perceptions of employees on the existence of diversity in the MoGCDSW show that diversity exists in the MoGCDSW. Most of the respondents have shown that they are aware that diversity exists in their workplace; further to that, the employees seem to understand diversity very well. From the sentiments of the sampled employees, it can also be noted that diversity is acknowledged and respected in the MoGCDSW.

4.4 To determine whether diversity knowledge is regarded less important from top management down

This specific objective aimed at soliciting answers on whether diversity is regarded as important in the MoGCDSW. Quite a number of questions were also asked on this specific objective. First, the employees were asked on their thoughts on whether a diversified workforce is necessary or not.

Figure 8: Pie chart showing the views of employees on the necessity of a diversified workforce

10. Do you think that a diversified workforce is necessary?
28 responses

Yes
No

100%
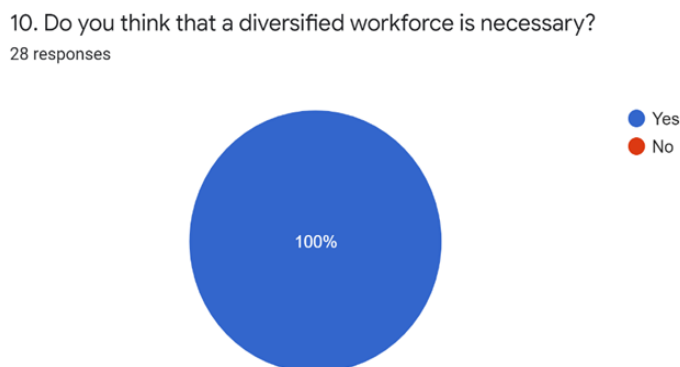
The findings presented by the pie chart show that the employees in the MoGCDSW regard diversity highly. All the employees said that a diversified workforce is necessary and these findings reveal that the employees regard a diversified workforce as very important.

The respondents were further asked to justify their thoughts of a diversified workforce being necessary for the MoGCDSW. Participant 2 stated that a diversified workforce is necessary because it improves performance in an organization since people contribute their ideas from different levels. Participant 3 explained that a diversified workforce is necessary because it helps employees to learn different cultures through interactions that come with diversity. Additionally, participant 3 also narrated that a diversified workforce is necessary because it helps in ensuring that issues are resolved by accommodating multiple perspectives because diversity means that people do not think the same way. Furthermore, participant 3 argued that diversity is essential in ensuring that less one size fits all policies are made because due consideration of people's backgrounds and needs are considered into context.

Participant 8 explained that having a diverse workforce helps to improve innovation in the workplace since the employees see things differently and also think differently. According to several participants, interactions with each other result in the sharing of ideas, knowledge and experiences which makes brainstorming a lot more fruitful. Participant 8 further said that diversity in the workplace also makes employees more receptive to trying out new things which is the key to creativity and innovation at work. Other participants also agreed with participant 8 by commenting that a diversified workforce helps bring in different innovations from different people. Participant 10 also concurred with participant 8 and others by stating that a diversified workforce results in increased creativity or innovation since employees are coming from different backgrounds. Participant 19 also narrated further that a diversified workforce increases productivity as it boosts employee morale to work effectively and encourages creativity and innovation, room for new ideas and perspectives.

The findings above show that a diversified workforce is very important and employees in the MoGCDSW regard diversity as a very important tool for creativity and innovation in the Ministry. In the responses of the participants to question 13, recurring words can

also be noted which helped identify innovation, productivity and creativity as the main themes that the sampled employees believe are the benefits of workplace diversity.

The respondents were also asked if they have had any training on employee diversity and the pie chart below shows the acquired responses from the employees.

Figure 9: Pie chart showing the number of employees who have had any training on employee diversity and those that have not had any training

12. Have you ever had any training on employee diversity within the Ministry?
28 responses
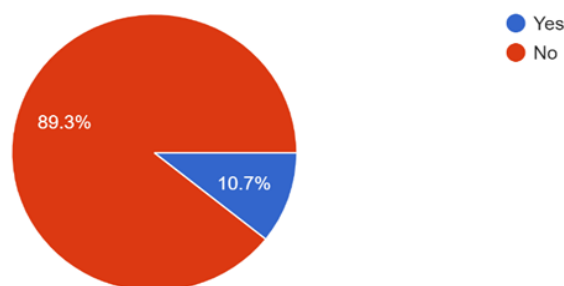
The findings on the pie chart show that 89.3% of the employees in the MoGCDSW have never had training on employee diversity, whereas 10.7 % have ever had training on employee diversity. These findings show that the top management employees in the MoGCDSW do not formally champion employee diversity and this is evident by the high number of employees who have never attended a training session on employee diversity issues. If the top management of MoGCDSW were organizing training for their employees many respondents would have stated that they have ever attended such training.

The employees that had training before were asked to explain the importance of the knowledge imparted during the training, and those that have never had training were asked if they would like to be trained in employee diversity and why. According to participant 5, the training would be necessary to better his knowledge and understanding of how to handle diverse employees without hindering anyone's rights as individuals. Participant 12 also explained that the training is required as it will be an eye-opener for employees to understand some of the workplace challenges and how to deal with them. Several respondents narrated that they would really love to be

trained on employee diversity management as this would go a long way in ensuring that they understand the importance of having diversity at a workplace and learn how to handle differences in an environment where you have employees from various backgrounds for improved productivity and betterment of the organization's image.

Participant 8 who was once trained in employee diversity, said the training was important because they learnt how to interact with others and gained a lot of knowledge on cohesion. One of the participants stated that they have never attended a training per se on employee diversity, but the topic was once included as an integral part of the course they attended. This sentiment shows that companies and organizations do not have time to organize training on some matters that are important to employees. This shows that the MoGCDSW has recently never organized a training for its employees on employee diversity issues.

Question 16 of the interview questionnaire wanted to find out from the employees if they think that employee diversity has any impact on the productivity of an institution. The following pie chart shows the findings.

Figure 10. Pie chart showing the perceptions of employees on whether employee diversity has any impact on the productivity of an Institution

14. Do you think that employee diversity has any impact on the productivity of an institution?
28 responses

- Yes
- No

100%
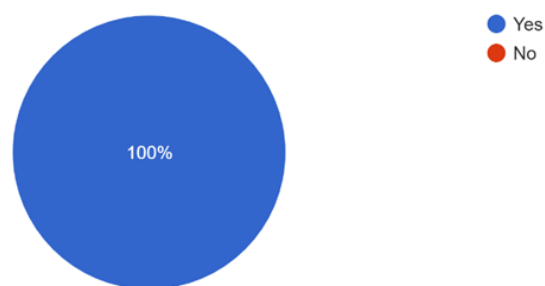
From the above pie chart, it can be noted that employees at the MoGCDSW are of the view that employee diversity has an impact on the productivity of an institution. These statistics indicate that employees at the MoGCDSW highly regard employee's diversity as a factor for improved or declining productivity in the institution.

The employees were further asked to explain their answers to question 16. Since all of the respondents said that workforce diversity has an impact on the productivity of

an institution, the participants expounded on how employee diversity has an impact on institutional productivity. According to participant 27, having employees from different backgrounds means having a diversified set of skills and talents which can go a long way in making an institution more productive as the likelihood of achieving institutional goals is more certain. Participant 21 said that employee diversity brings about different capabilities which if well utilized can complement each other and promote skill-sharing at the workplace, hence the impact on institutional productivity. Participant 4 also concurred with the previous quoted participants by saying that each employee brings a specific set of skills and viewpoints unique to the individual. Participant 4 further narrated that the sum of our collective parts is made greater by how each of us sees and approaches the work we do. Participant 7 also stated that the collective contributions, experiences and unique capabilities of each individual helps the organization to perform better.

From the above findings, it can be noted that employee diversity has an impact on institutional productivity. According to the sentiments of the participants, the impact is there because employee diversity brings about different sets of skills, capabilities, experiences and talents which at the end of the day help to improve the innovation and performance of the institution thereby contributing to better productivity levels.

4.5 Assessing the influence of frontline managers' inputs or views on decisions made in the MoGCDSW

This objective aimed at soliciting answers from the employees on the influence of frontline managers' views on the decisions made in the MoGCDSW. Similarly, quite a number of questions were also asked on this specific objective.

The respondents were asked to give in their views on whether the views or inputs of frontline managers make any difference on the decisions made in the MoGCDSW. The following pie chart shows the findings on this question.

Figure 11: Pie chart showing the views of participants on the influence of frontline managers' views in decision making in the MoGCDSW

19. Do the views or inputs of frontline managers make any difference on the decisions made in the MOGCDSW?

28 responses
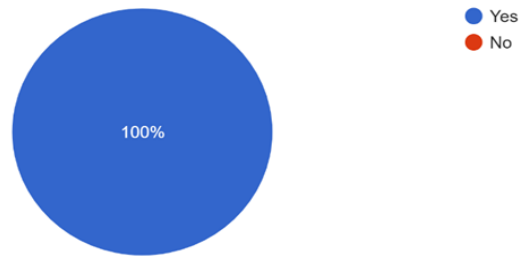
The findings as per the pie chart indicate that the views and inputs of the frontline managers do make a difference on the decisions made in the MoGCDSW. These findings reveal that the frontline managers are regarded as important in the institution since their views are not trashed but accommodated. The respondents were asked to further justify their views to the aforementioned question depending on their responses.

According to participant 3, frontline managers are technical experts whose grasp of issues is key in determining the future of the organization; hence their views make a difference. Participant 5 said that the frontline managers are the eyes and ears on the ground, their views and decisions are taken on board because they have first-hand experience. Participant 10 also said that frontline managers directly manage staff; the staff are very critical in implementing core duties of an institution; therefore, their views are very crucial. Participant 12 agreed with participant 10 by saying that frontline managers could be considered as foot soldiers for the organization because they work closely with clients and stakeholders on the ground which means they are the ones who usually notice most problems first. According to participant 12, this means that their recommendations may give a true reflection of the performance and impact of the institution.

The findings on this specific objective show that the views of frontline managers make a difference on the decision made in an institution.

4.6 Determine the involvement of low management level employees in the decision-making processes of the MoGCDSW

Quite a number of questions were asked on this specific objective with the aim of gauging the involvement of low management level employees in the decision-making

processes of the MoGCDSW. Firstly, the participants were asked if the low management level employees are involved in the decision-making processes of the Ministry. The following pie chart shows the findings of this enquiry.

Figure 12: Pie chart showing the views of participants on whether low management level employees are involved in the decision-making process of the MoGCDSW or not

16. Are low management level employees involved in the decision-making processes of the MOGCDSW??
28 responses

- Yes
- No
- 21.4%
- 78.6%
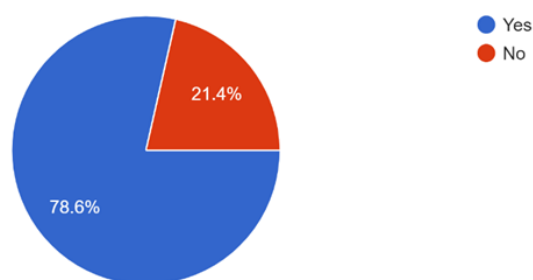
The above pie chart shows that 78.6% of the employees at MoGCDSW were of the view that low management level employees are involved in the decision-making processes of the institution, whereas 21.4% were of the view that they are not involved. These findings allude to the fact that low management level employees are involved in the decision-making processes at the MoGCDSW.

Furthermore, the participants were asked on whether the involvement of these low-level management employees makes any difference. According to participant 5, the involvement of low management level employees makes a difference because low management level employees are better placed to know what is directly happening on the ground; hence their input is of importance. Participant 8 also explained that the involvement of low management level employees makes a lot of difference as their ideas and feedback opens up the mind of their employers to new perspectives. Participant 15 also concurred with the other participants by stating that the involvement of low management level employees makes a difference because most decision-making in the implementation and development of guidelines for the running of program components are done through consulting the lower-level employees. According to participant 15, having such a process helps to develop program implementation plans that are realistic, encompassing as well as accommodative. With

such type of an approach, program implementation is made easy and resulting in increased productivity.

Even though most of the participants stated that the involvement of low-level management staff makes a difference, some employees were sceptical that the involvement of low management employees really makes a difference. Participant 10 expressed that their involvement makes a difference sometimes. Participant 6 also said that their involvement makes a difference sometimes but not always. Participant 12 expounded that the involvement of low management level employees makes a difference sometimes, but in other cases it does not, as their contributions may be shortsighted and management considers decisions that would affect the future plans of the institution. Participant 12 further stated that it is however always good to provide feedback to them and appreciate their contributions.

However, another respondent expressed that the difference that low management level employees can make depends on the direct superior's willingness to accept new information.

The findings on this question show that low management level employees have the capability to make a difference in the decisions made at the MoGCDSW. However, the difference that they can make depends on the willingness of their superiors to give them a chance to get involved and to accept the varying information provided by the low management level employees. Since most of the respondents expressed that the involvement of low management level employees makes a difference at the MoGCDSW, it can be concluded that their involvement does make a difference.

Asked on how important it is to involve lower-level employees in the decision-making processes for an institution, most participants said that involvement of low management level employees makes decision implementation easy, it motivates the employees and gives a sense of belonging and ownership to the employees. Participant 2 said that the involvement of low management level employees is important because it improves performance since the employees will willingly implement new ideas knowing that they were part of the formulation. Participant 5 stated that the involvement of low management level employees is important because it motivates them and they take ownership of decisions that are made in the organization. Participant 7 explained that the involvement of low-level management

employees is important because it shows support; hence they get motivated and feel that they are recognized therefore they work harder. Participant 14 also commented that it is important because decision implementation becomes easy. Participant 15 also concurred with the other sampled employees quoted above by expounding that their contribution is very important because their involvement in the decision-making process helps them to own, accept, understand the final decision, hence lessen the burden that can develop during implementation due to unfamiliarity or unrealistic program plans.

These findings suggest the fact that the involvement of low management level employees is very important because their involvement guarantees smooth implementation of organizational strategies or decisions, hence contributing to the good performance or improved productivity of an institution.

4.7 To evaluate the impact of employee diversity cognizance on decision-making at different management levels in Malawian public institutions

This was the main objective of the research; this objective was trying to solve the research problem of the investigation. Two questions were asked on this main objective. The participants were asked if a diversified workforce has any impact on the decisions made in an institution at all levels of management. The following pie chart shows the findings of this enquiry.

Figure 13: Pie chart showing the views of participants on the impact of a diversified workforce on decisions made in an institution at different management levels

21. Does a diversified workforce have any impact on the decisions made in an institution at all levels of management?

28 responses
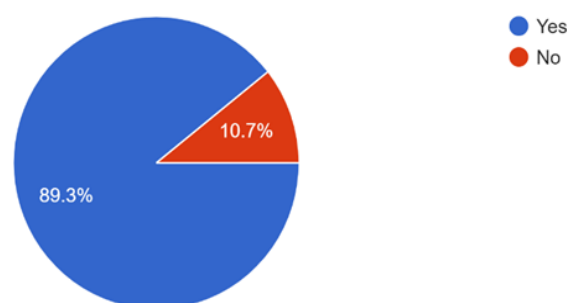
From the above pie chart, it can be noted that 89.3% of the participants were of the belief that a diversified workforce does have an impact on decisions made in an institution, whereas 10.7% were of the belief that it does not. The findings however indicate that a diversified workforce has an impact on the decisions made in an institution.

The respondents were further requested to justify their views on this question. Participant 27 explained that a diversified workforce indeed has an impact on the decisions made in an institution at all levels in the sense that most decisions made have to be made in a manner that will not be seen as being discriminatory against or favouring one group as this has the potential to incite infighting within the institution. Participant 21 expounded that a diversified workforce brings about quality of decisions made as different individuals contribute based on their varying knowledge, expectations and expertise. Participant 18 said that a diversified workforce improves workplace relationships as it gives employees the opportunity to voice out their opinions and share their knowledge and experiences with others. This therefore, offers an opportunity to gather information about the employees as to how they work in a team environment and where training may be necessary. Participant 10 said that a diversified workforce brings about diversified solutions to problems; hence the workplace has a broader way of looking at issues from different perspectives provided by the diversified employees.

On the contrary, three respondents were of the view that a diversified workforce does not have any impact on decisions made in an institution. According to participant 28, a diversified workforce makes it difficult to consider the needs of everyone; hence it becomes hard or it takes time to make a final decision. Participant 19 argued that a diversified workforce causes conflicts that may arise due to the differences between employees leading to delayed achievement of tasks and goals, too many opinions result in loss of direction as one might not want to pick one in fear of favouritism. Participant 2 said that a diversified workforce does not have an impact on most decisions made in an institution because when making decisions it does not matter the background of the people.

The aforementioned findings indicate that a diversified workforce has an impact on the decisions made in an institution. Despite other employees being of the contrary view,

many employees believed that a diversified workforce guarantees diversified solutions, ideas and experiences hence having an impact on the decisions made in the institution at different management levels.

4.8 Conclusion

This chapter presented the findings of this research. The findings indicate the views of employees' awareness on the existence of employee's diversity in the MoGCDSW. The findings have further determined whether employee diversity is regarded as less important from top-down management. The findings have also shown that the views of front line managers have an influence on the decision-making processes of an institution. Finally, the chapter has also indicated the impact of employee diversity cognizance on the decisions made in an institution. The findings presented in this chapter will be discussed and analyzed in the next chapter in line with the specific objectives.

Chapter 5

5.0 Discussion of Findings

5.1 Introduction

This chapter will provide a detailed discussion and analysis of the findings presented in the previous chapter. As already alluded to, the discussion and analysis will be done in line with the specific objectives of the study. In discussing these findings, the perceptions of the employees on the existence of workplace diversity will be discussed, the involvement of front line managers and low management level employees will be discussed and how that makes a difference in the decisions made in the Ministry. Further to that, the overall impact of employee diversity cognizance on decisions made in an institution will also be discoursed. The discussion of the findings will be correlated to secondary data on employee diversity reviewed in chapters 1 and 2.

5.2 The perceptions of employees at different management levels on the existence of diversity in the MoGCDSW

As discussed in the literature review, workplace diversity is all about recognizing, understanding and accepting individual differences irrespective of their physical and non-physical attributes in an organization. It was very relevant that the perceptions of employees at the MoGCDSW be examined, with the aim of gauging the views of the workers on what diversity means to them and if they know it exists in their workplace. The findings presented in the previous chapter indicate that diversity exists in the MoGCDSW and the employees respect and understand each other's differences across gender, age and cultural background. Most of the participants agreed that workplace diversity existed in the Ministry and that the differences are handled through teamwork, fostering an inclusive working environment and respecting each other's differences. These findings agree with the sentiments of Hitt et al. (2009) who emphasized that the notion of diversity embraces respect and acceptance with consideration that individuals are distinctive and have differences. These findings established the knowledge that the employees of MoGCDSW have of workforce diversity. The findings have also established the existence and acceptance of workforce diversity in the MoGCDSW.

The findings of the research indicate ample knowledge and acceptance of employee diversity among the employees of MoGCDSW. The findings show that employees at MoGCDSW perceive employee diversity as something that is in existence in their workplace.

5.3 Diversity knowledge importance

The study looked at the perceptions of employees on the importance of workforce diversity. The study wanted to determine the views of the employees on how important workplace diversity was to them. It was very necessary that this aspect to be looked into because if the employees regard workplace diversity so lowly, then they might not recognize the impact that it has on the decisions made in the institution. The findings indicate that employees regarded employee diversity as a necessary tool for driving the institution. The findings indicate that a diverse workforce is necessary because it improves the performance of an institution and fosters innovation and creativity in an institution. These findings agree with the conclusions of DiTomaso et al. (2007) who found that diversity drives creativity and performance. On complex tasks with equally skilled leadership, diverse teams will outperform teams that are not diverse.

The respondents were of the view that a diversified workforce is very important because it brings about creativity, productivity and continued innovation to an institution. The employees believe that different people see things differently; therefore, issues are resolved using multiple perspectives, hence having a creative, innovative and productive workforce. These findings relate to the inferences by Foma (2014) who studied the impact of workplace diversity and found that a heterogeneous workforce increases creativity, productivity and problem solving since the employees have heterogeneous skills, experiences and talents.

However, the findings also indicate that the top management employees of MoGCDSW do not really regard employee diversity on that higher level. This is evident in their lack of willingness to conduct training for their employees, as many participants stated that they have never been trained on workforce diversity management issues. A few of the employees were trained on employee diversity as a topic in one of their courses at the university and colleges. These findings somehow show that upper management in the MoGCDSW has less regard for employee diversity.

Nevertheless, the participants showed a willingness to be trained on workforce diversity. The participants argued that training on workforce diversity is necessary because it will better their understanding and knowledge on how to manage diverse employees. These findings indicate that employees regard workforce diversity as important and they are willing to be trained and know more about it.

5.4 The influence of frontline managers' inputs or views on decisions made in the MoGCDSW

In order to gauge the diversity awareness at the operational level and involvement of decision making at different management levels in the MoGCDSW, the research examined the involvement and influence of frontline managers on the decisions made in the institution. The findings have indicated that the views of frontline managers have an influence on the decisions made in the MoGCDSW. One of the respondents explained that the frontline managers are the eyes and ears on the ground, their views and decisions are taken on board because they have first-hand experience. Many respondents were of the view that the inputs of frontline managers' influence the decisions made in their organization because they are the ones who work directly with people; hence their inputs are important for the Ministry. Some respondents narrated that the frontline managers are the ones who work closely with clients and other stakeholders; hence their input reflects a true picture of what is on the ground and that is why their input influences decision-making at MoGCDSW. These findings therefore indicate that the views of various frontline managers who manage the operations personnel have an influence on the final resolutions by upper management in the MoGCDSW.

5.5 The involvement of low management level employees in decision-making processes of the MoGCDSW

The findings presented in chapter 4 indicate that low management level employees are involved in the decision-making processes of the MoGCDSW. Asked on whether the involvement of low management level employees makes any difference, one participant argued that their involvement makes a difference because low management level employees are better placed to know what is directly happening on the ground hence their input is of importance. However, other employees were sceptical of the difference that the involvement of low management level employees can make in the decision-making process of the institution. One participant said that

the involvement of low-level management employees could sometimes make a difference but it depends on the willingness of their superiors to accept new information.

The findings therefore indicate that low management level employees are involved in the decision-making process of the MoGCDSW. The findings have also highlighted that the involvement of low management level employees can influence the decisions made in an institution, but their ability to make a difference can only be possible when their superiors are willing to accept their inputs and views.

The findings on this specific objective also indicated that involving low management level employees is very important because it makes decision implementation easier. According to some respondents, decision implementation becomes easier because involving the low management level employees in decision-making processes motivates the employees and gives them a sense of ownership and belonging.

5.6 Workforce diversity and institutional productivity

As discussed in the literature review, workforce diversity has an impact on the productivity and performance of a company. Likewise, the findings presented in chapter 4 indicated that workplace diversity has an impact on the productivity of an institution. The findings revealed that workplace diversity has an impact on institutional productivity in such a way that it motivates and encourages ownership of strategies among employees, hence bringing about productivity in the institution. Some of the respondents argued that the collective contributions, experiences and unique capabilities of each individual help the organization perform better. These findings resonate with the findings of Saxena (2014), who noted that workplace diversity is a strength for organizations and it improves productivity. Saxena (2014) further expounds that a diversified workforce stimulates innovation and productivity.

5.7 The impact of employee diversity cognizance on decision-making at different management levels in Malawian public institutions

The four specific objectives have provided a clear understanding of the impact of workforce diversity on the decisions made in an institution. The findings of the research indicate that employee diversity has an impact on the decisions made in an institution. As discussed in the literature review, a diversified workforce makes it easy to solve problems and make decisions since there are heterogeneous employees with

heterogeneous experiences and skills. The research has indicated that a diversified workforce has an impact on the decision-making processes at different management levels. One respondent said that a diversified workforce brings about diversified solutions to problems; hence the workplace has a broader way of looking at issues from different perspectives provided by the diverse employees. These findings agree with the findings of Cox (1994), who found that diversity makes it easy for organizations to solve problems because it avails expanded meanings and ideas from heterogeneous employees with distinct experience, perspectives and skills who feel comfortable in such a setting. These findings also relate to the conclusions of Wachira and Njeri (2016) who established that an organization comprised of employees with differences in personalities thrives because the personality differences influence employees' decision making and attitudes towards team participation, training and development.

However, other employees were of the view that workplace diversity does not really have an impact on the decision-making process of the institution. One respondent said that a diversified workforce causes conflicts that arise due to the differences between employees leading to delayed achievement of tasks and goals. According to the respondent, too many opinions result in loss of direction as one might not want to pick one in fear of favouritism. These findings relate to the findings of Saxena (2014) who found that a diverse workforce might be a disaster if not managed properly because employees find it difficult to cope with each other's differences.

The findings of this study have indicated that employee diversity awareness has an impact on the decision-making processes of an institution. The findings have also highlighted the need for managing diversity properly because if not managed well, diversity can cause a mess in an institution. In a related study, Panicker (2017) argued that hiring diverse employees is not enough for good performance but managing it well is key.

5.8 Conclusion

The chapter has provided a thorough analysis and discussion of the emerging and major issues in the findings of the study. The discussion has pointed out that the existence of diversity and its awareness has an impact on the decisions made in an institution because a diverse workforce provides diverse ideas, experiences and

knowledge which influence the decisions made in the institution. However, the discussion has also highlighted the need for proper management of a diverse workforce because if not well-managed diversity can cause chaos in the institution. The discussion has also shown a correlation between diversity and institutional performance and efficiency. The next chapter will make a conclusion on the major findings of the research and make recommendations on the necessary steps to be taken by institutions in the area of employee diversity.

Chapter 6

6.0 Conclusion and Reflections

6.1 Introduction

This study evaluated the impact of employee diversity cognizance on decision-making at different management levels in Malawi's public institutions. The study had four specific objectives and these were; examination of the perceptions of employees at different management levels on the existence of diversity in the MoGCDSW; to determine whether diversity knowledge is regarded less important from top management down; to assess the influence of frontline managers' inputs or views on decisions made in the MoGCDSW and to determine the involvement of low management level employees in decision-making processes of the MoGCDSW. The conclusion will focus on the main themes identified in the findings.

6.2 Discussion of key findings

The findings of the study have shown that employee diversity exists in the MoGCDSW; the findings also show that employees at MoGCDSW have ample knowledge of employee diversity. This is reflected in the sentiments of the employees at MoGCDSW on what employee diversity is. The majority of the employees stated that employee diversity exists in the MoGCDSW. A majority of the employees stated that they recognize that diversity exists in their workplace and that they respect the differences among the employees.

The findings of the research have also revealed that employees at MoGCDSW regard employee's diversity highly. All of the employees interviewed said that workplace diversity is necessary for a workplace. The employees linked workforce diversity to the performance and productivity of an institution. Most participants were of the view that workplace diversity brings forth a wide array of ideas, perspectives and experiences hence boosting creativity and innovations in an institution. This finding is consistent with the findings of Foma (2014), who studied the impact of workplace diversity and found that a heterogeneous workforce increases creativity, productivity and problem-solving in an institution. DiTomaso et al. (2007) also noted that diversity drives creativity and performance. On complex tasks with equally skilled leadership, diverse teams will outperform teams that are not diverse. The interviewed employees stated that a diversified workforce has an impact on the productivity of an institution

because an office is assured of a diverse set of skills, talents, experiences and capabilities when it has a diverse workforce. The diverse sets of capabilities and skills result in improved innovation and creativity, which at the end of the day contributes to good performance and productivity in an institution.

The study's findings have also established the influence that frontline manager's views and inputs have on the decisions made in an institution. All of the employees were of the view that the opinions and inputs of frontline managers influence the decisions made in an institution. Most participants said that the views and inputs of frontline managers are taken on board because they usually have first-hand experiences with workers, suppliers and other stakeholders. In addition, the employees noted that the inputs of frontline managers reflect the true situation in the establishment; hence, their views easily influence institutions' decision-making processes.

The research has further revealed that low management level employees at MoGCDSW are involved in the institution's decision-making process. The majority of the employees believed that low management level employees are involved in the decision-making process. The participants stated that the involvement of low management level employees makes a difference on the decisions made in an institution because the low management level employees develop a sense of ownership on the decisions made; hence the implementation of the decisions become easy. According to the respondents, including the employees in the decisions made makes the process accommodating and encompassing, thereby easing the implementation of the decision made and increasing the productivity of the institution. However, some of the employees noted that the involvement of the low management levels in decision-making processes does not really make a difference on the decision made in the institution. Some of the employees said that their involvement makes a difference sometimes; however, their ability to make a difference depends on the willingness of their superiors to accept new information.

The employees noted that the involvement of low management level employees is very important because the employees get motivated and they develop a sense of ownership. According to the sampled employees, the involvement of the low management level employees translates into good performance and productivity of

the organization since staff members own, accept and comprehend the decisions made in the organization; hence decision implementation is much easier.

The findings of the study have also revealed the relations between a diverse workforce and the decisions made in an institution. A majority of the employees were of the view that a diversified workforce has an impact on the decisions made in an institution. Some of the employees said that a diversified workforce brings about diversified solutions to problems, diversified skills, experiences and ideas; hence a broader way of looking at issues from different perspectives is possible. In the end, the decisions made in the organization are impacted by the diversified experiences, ideas and skills.

On the contrary, some employees were of the view that workforce diversity does not really influence the decisions made in an institution. The employees stated that a diversified workforce fuels conflicts that may arise from the differences among the employees thereby leading to delayed achievement of goals and tasks in an institution. Another employee noted that too many opinions from diverse workforces cause confusion. These findings relate to the findings of other scholars, who believed that a diverse workforce might be a disaster if not managed well. Urwin et al. (2013) observed that firms have benefited from diversified workforces but not in all contexts and times. Urwin et al. (2013) noted that workforce diversity could be a disaster if not managed well. According to Urwin et al. (2013), a diverse workforce can make an institution incur more costs than benefits if it does not manage diversity well.

These findings reveal that a diverse workforce can have an impact on the decisions made in an institution and the performance of the institution as a whole. However, the impact that can be made depends on the management of the diverse workforce. When workforce diversity is managed well the institution can benefit and vice versa.

The findings have also shown a relationship between workforce diversity and institutional productivity. All the employees were of the view that workforce diversity has an impact on productivity. Some of the respondents were of the view that a diverse workforce makes it possible for an institution to solve problems easily and simplifies the implementation of decisions. According to the participants, a diverse workforce guarantees an institution of good performance and productivity because the diverse employees offer a wide array of skills, experiences, talents and ideas, thereby affecting

the institution's operations. These findings resonate with the findings of Saxena (2014), who found out that workplace diversity is a strength for organizations and improves productivity. Saxena (2014) commended that a diversified workforce has many benefits because it stimulates innovation and productivity.

6.3 Recommendations

a) Malawi government should necessitate public institutions to organize regular training on diversity management within the public service to keep up with economic, political and cultural globalization.

b) Conduct functional reviews for public institutions to implement structures that encourage the involvement of all management levels in decision-making.

c) Malawi government to develop labour policies that are non-discriminatory in terms of age, race and sexuality.

d) Develop primary and secondary school curriculums that promote co-existence and acceptance of differences between people.

6.4 Areas of further study

a) This study looked at the impact of employee diversity cognizance on decision-making at different management levels in Malawi's public institutions. The study focused specifically on the Ministry of Gender, Community Development and Social Welfare (MoGCDSW). Future researchers can assess the relationship between the existence of employee diversity against increased nepotism within the Malawi public service.

b) Conduct a study to assess the correlation between neglectful public service delivery and existing diversity in Malawi public institutions.

c) Conduct a study to evaluate the relationship between employee diversity and the collaboration of public and private institutions in developmental projects.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Semi-structured interview questions asked

1. What is your gender?
2. Which Management level do you belong to?
3. Which age group do you belong to?
4. What is your understanding of the term employee diversity?
5. Are employees varied in terms of cultural background in the MoGCDSW?
6. Are employees varied in terms of age in the MoGCDSW?
7. Are employees varied in terms of gender in the MoGCDSW?
8. Do you recognize that diversity exists in the MoGCDSW?
9. If Yes, how do you handle the differences across gender, age and culture when working in your workplace?
10. Do you think that a diversified workforce is necessary?
11. Justify your answer to question 10
12. Have you ever had any training on employee diversity within the Ministry?
13. If Yes, how important was the knowledge imparted? And if No, would you want to be trained on employee diversity in your workplace and why?
14. Do you think that employee diversity has any impact on the productivity of an institution?
15. Explain your answer to question 14
16. Are low management level employees involved in the decision-making processes of the MoGCDSW?
17. If Yes, does their involvement make any difference?
18. How important is involving lower-level employees in the decision-making processes for an institution?
19. Do the views or inputs of frontline managers make any difference on the decisions made in the MoGCDSW?
20. Justify your answer to question 19
21. Does a diversified workforce have any impact on the decisions made in an institution at all levels of management?
22. Please justify your answer to question 21

Appendix 2: Sample

Participant	Management Level	Gender	Age Group
1	Lower Management	Male	21 to 35 years old
2	Middle Management	Female	21 to 35 years old
3	Middle Management	Male	21 to 35 years old
4	Middle Management	Male	36 to 47 years old
5	Middle Management	Male	21 to 35 years old
6	Middle Management	Female	21 to 35 years old
7	Top Management	Male	36 to 47 years old
8	Middle Management	Female	21 to 35 years old
9	Middle Management	Female	21 to 35 years old
10	Middle Management	Male	21 to 35 years old
11	Lower Management	Female	21 to 35 years old
12	Top Management	Male	21 to 35 years old
13	Lower Management	Male	21 to 35 years old
14	Middle Management	Male	36 to 47 years old
15	Middle Management	Female	21 to 35 years old
16	Top Management	Female	36 to 47 years old
17	Middle Management	Male	36 to 47 years old
18	Middle Management	Male	36 to 47 years old
19	Middle Management	Female	21 to 35 years old
20	Middle Management	Male	21 to 35 years old
21	Middle Management	Male	36 to 47 years old
22	Top Management	Female	21 to 35 years old
23	Middle Management	Female	36 to 47 years old
24	Middle Management	Male	36 to 47 years old
25	Middle Management	Male	36 to 47 years old
26	Middle Management	Female	21 to 35 years old
27	Top Management	Male	36 to 47 years old
28	Lower Management	Female	21 to 35 years old