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## **The Experience of Humanitarian Leaders in Managing Cultural Diversity**

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The Experience of Humanitarian Leaders in Managing Cultural Diversity

by

Mohamed Salih Idris

A Dissertation

Submitted to:

Department of Organization Development and Change

University of St. Thomas

In Partial fulfillment of the requirements

For EdD in Organization Development & Change

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UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS

We certify that we have read this dissertation and approved it as adequate in scope and quality.  
We have found that it is complete and satisfactory in all respects, and that any and all revisions  
required by the final examining committee have been made.

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## ABSTRACT

The world is becoming increasingly more diverse, particularly in the workplace. Existing literature on diversity tends to focus on the visible types of diversity such as gender, race, and color from the for-profit business perspective. There is little research on the impact of the invisible type of diversity such as culture and national origin. Cultural diversity has rarely been studied in the context of non-profit international humanitarian organizations. These organizations face unique management challenges due to their volatile and chaotic environment with limited power and resources. Applying a control-oriented and normative management approach proved to be ineffective. Thus, there is a need for further research tailored to international humanitarian non-governmental organizations (IHNGOs). This study aimed to highlight the role of IHNGOs' leaders in cultural diversity management. The study found cultural diversity management is a very challenging process. It identified five components for successful cultural diversity management. When diversity is managed properly the study found it pays off. Developing a critical mind and broadening perspective are some of the impacts of long-time exposure to different cultures. Another finding of the study is that dominant culture has a negative impact on leaders from a minority background. This qualitative research of narrative inquiry used interviews as an exclusive data collection method to capture the unique experiences of seven CEOs of IHNGOs. The implication for the practice of this study shows the challenging nature of the cultural diversity management process, thus it prepares leaders mentally. In addition, it provides a formula for success and a list of needed skills and competencies to succeed in managing culturally diverse teams.

## **Dedication**

To my father Sh. Adam Majawray, who instilled in me the value of education at an early age and continued to inspire me.

To my loving and caring wife Amina, thank you for standing beside me during this long journey.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **Topic Significance**

One of the most significant changes taking place in today's work environment is globalization (Arnett, 2002). It is the “defining political economic paradigm of our time” (Bratton & Gold, 2007, p. 120); constant and irreversible (Raikhan et al., 2014). As the world is becoming more interconnected, witnessing intensive mass migration, along with the proliferation of multicultural corporations (Raikhan et al., 2014), the world is entering an era Romanenko (2012) called “Inevitability of Diversity” particularly in the human resources (HR) world. Empirical research evidence largely proves diversity is a focal point of the strategic human resource management (Romanenko, 2012; Wright & McMahan, 2016). Many leading companies realized diversity enables companies to gain a competitive advantage through one of its most important assets—people (Richard, 2000).

In the new global age, workforce diversity has become widespread (Roberson, Mustafa et al., 2013) and the 21<sup>st</sup> century has been characterized by greater diversity in the labor force, particularly for employees with diverse ethnic backgrounds (Langdon et al., 2002). Not only is the workforce increasingly becoming diverse, but also companies that are not diverse have to deal with diverse customers and clients across borders because business trends have “dismantled barriers that influence the nature and amount of interaction among employees” (Kozlowski, 2012, p. 2).

The murder tragedy of George Floyd, an African American man in the hand of police in my hometown Minneapolis, Minnesota, not only sparked a global outrage toward police brutality and systematic racism in the United States (US) but also

highlighted the importance of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) on a society level. Many US businesses felt there is a need for more to be done to address the gap in equity and systemic racism. In addition to speaking out against racism and police brutality, many companies made promises at the level of CEOs and senior management to reform their practices or to invest in efforts to fight racism in the community (Repko & El-Bawab, 2021).

It is imperative for organizations' leaders to understand diversity and how to lead, manage, and navigate the process of unifying diverse groups of people to work effectively (Ricardo et al., 2017). In their reflections on the future of organization development (OD), Worley and Feyerherm (2003) predicted change in the nature of the workforce, being more diverse, more educated, and more temporary, is going to be one of the challenges that organizations' leaders and OD practitioners would encounter and need to adapt to. Studies on diversity tend to focus on the visible type of diversity or surface-level diversity such as gender, race, and religion (Jackson et al., 2003; Kozlowski, 2012). There is little research that examines the deep-level types of diversity such as the influence of culture (Kozlowski, 2012). Existing studies on diversity are not global in nature, rather they are based on limited single-nation knowledge (Jonsen et al., 2011; Roberson, 2013).

I chose to focus on leadership and cultural diversity in the context of international humanitarian non-governmental organizations (NGOs) for three reasons. First, existing literature tends to focus on domestic diversity management and visible type of diversity such as gender, race, ethnicity, and age. There is less research on global diversity management and non-visible type of diversity such as national origins, cultures, and

norms (Kozlowski, 2012). Second, diversity management literature tends to reflect the perspective of for-profit corporations; a perspective that views diversity management as a business case and focuses only on business benefit, rather than the human benefit (Erolin, 2016). In other words, it is a standpoint that sees diversity from a financial returns point of view than seeing it from the moral position or the right thing to do (CIPD, 2018). My study sought to bring attention to diversity management from the perspective of non-profit humanitarian organizations, a perspective that gives priority to human dignity and well-being more than maximizing profit.

Third, the role of international humanitarian organizations in global security is crucial in our interconnected, borderless world today (Irrera, 2011). Despite the significant role NGOs play in the world today locally, nationally, and internationally, and the increasing demand by both governments and citizens for NGOs services to fill the gap of need, there is a scarcity of research about how NGOs work and how their internal structures and processes operate (Lewis, 2003). The context in which many NGOs operate has cultural dimension management that needs to be researched further according to Lewis (2003). This makes international humanitarian organizations a good environment in which to study cultural diversity since they are diverse by default due to the nature of their work across different cultures and borders. Many international NGOs “work with communities very different from themselves and may increasingly combine staff from a wide range of different backgrounds” (p. 330).

Most of what we know about NGOs “tends to be informed more by practitioner anecdote and the scattered consultancy reports of funders than by systematic research” (p. 335). Erolin (2016) identified some of the gaps in the literature particularly “research on

the possible intersection between context and diversity perspectives/attitudes [which] would aid professionals in formulating effective diversity initiatives” (p. 76).

This study aimed to shed light on the experiences of international humanitarian NGO’ leaders in managing cultural diversity. The study informs our knowledge about leaders' perspectives/attitudes on diversity and the impact of organizational context, hoping to aid professionals in developing and formulating effective diversity education.

### **Personal Significance**

I was always fascinated by the phenomenon of diversity and the role of leadership in making it a blessing, an advantage, an enrichment, and a source of strength or turning it into a curse, disadvantage, and source of weakness, conflict, and trouble. I realized this first-hand in politics in my country of origin, Eritrea. Eritrea is a small country in East Africa that achieved its independence from Ethiopia in 1991. Despite its small population and size compared to neighboring countries like Ethiopia and Sudan, Eritrea is a very diverse country. Its six million population speaks nine languages, and has different religions, sects, and traditions. Its people are divided into highlanders, and lowlanders, with one of the longest coastal borders over the Red Sea. Rich with many resources such as minerals, fishing, livestock, fertilized lands, and over 126 islands on the Red Sea. Some of the populations live as farmers, others nomad, while some mix both lifestyles. These are in addition to the normal diversity of any society in gender, age, disability, education, etc.

Managing such a diverse society is a very difficult challenge. Diverse populations have different and sometimes contradicting interests, history, experiences, goals, perceptions, and attitudes. Only leaders have the power to embrace such diversity, share

power, wealth, resources among all components of the society and use diversity as a source of enrichment, growth, prosperity, and opportunities. They also have the power to reject diversity and instead use it as a source of division, conflict, and trouble. They have the power and the recipe to make a society live in peace, harmony, economic growth, and prosperity or make the society live in continuous instability, conflict, and civil war. It all depends on how they manage diversity. Unfortunately, the current political leadership in Eritrea failed in this task resulting in one of the most oppressive regimes in the world calling it even the “North Korea of Africa.” (T.G, 2018). Make no mistake, this is not an issue of one isolated country. Leaderships in many countries in Africa and other parts of the world have failed miserably in managing diversity in their countries resulting in these countries being failed states.

The reason for choosing humanitarian organizations and their leadership as the subject of my study was that I have a deep appreciation for the role humanitarian organizations play in our chaotic and conflicted world today. I have an intensive experience in the humanitarian sector from the perspective of an aid recipient as well as the perspective of an aid giver and aid director. On one hand, I have witnessed and survived the horror of war for independence between Eritrea-my birthplace-and Ethiopia in the 1970s. My family and I were forced to flee home at a moment’s notice and cross the border to Sudan after walking for several days. So, I am deeply conscious of the experiences and needs—both material and emotional—of those subjected to hardship and suffering and who need the help of humanitarian organizations. Later in my life, I co-founded the American Relief Agency for the Horn of Africa (ARAHA) to help people who are victimized by war, starvation, illiteracy, and disease—the same path I survived.



ARAHA is a registered nonprofit organization based in Columbia Heights, Minnesota, and works in the Horn of Africa region including Somalia, Sudan, Ethiopia, Kenya, and Djibouti to deliver life essentials and develop opportunities for those in need.

On the other hand, I have been working in the humanitarian sector for the last 20 years in different capacities including as an executive director and as a board member for several humanitarian organizations. In addition, I served and still serve as a board member of Interaction; one of the largest umbrellas for US international NGOs, which allowed me to see the big picture, and challenges of the sector, as well as meet and listen to many CEOs who are leading large and small humanitarian organizations. Being the Executive Director of ARAHA allowed me to experience and manage diversity not only within the US Headquarters offices represented in board, staff, volunteers, and supporters but also in the areas of our operations and with the culturally diverse people we serve. The diversity I have experienced first-hand covers a wide range of diversity aspects from age, gender, ethnicity, and race to religion, culture, languages, education, and occupations.

The long-time experience I had in the field, particularly in the leadership and management aspects, and the network and relationships I have built over the years put me in an advantageous position compared to other researchers who may not have the same experience and relationship to the sector. Being an insider gives more legitimacy and weight to my voice as a contributor to this topic.

Having said that, however, I must acknowledge, as a researcher, the disadvantages can come with being an insider. As an insider, it can be difficult to detect weaknesses, biases, and blind spots in the field. I believe leaders of humanitarian

organizations have unique experiences and stories to be told. People who work in humanitarian organizations, generally speaking, are good-hearted people who believe in and work for the well-being of humanity. I am positive they will be receptive to the idea to participate in this research and share their experiences.

### **Relevance to Organization Development**

Non-governmental organizations play an essential role in society today. According to the Global Leadership Bulletin (2015), there are an estimated 10 million NGOs worldwide. The US Bureau of Labor Statistics (2014) estimated there are more than 1.4 million NGOs in the United States alone and they employ 11.4 million Americans. The presence of NGOs in conflict areas to provide relief assistance and protect human rights and minorities started even before the time of the Cold War (Irrera, 2011).

Most NGOs work to eliminate extreme poverty, advocate for human rights and citizen participation, protect a sustainable planet, promote peace, and ensure dignity for all people (Interaction, 2020). This is stated by the mission statement for Interaction; the largest alliance of international NGOs in the United States that works in over 100 countries around the world. Humanitarian organizations, in particular, serve those with the most need. They save lives during natural disasters like earthquakes, hurricanes, and famine as well as intervene to minimize casualties in human-made crises such as wars and conflicts (Interaction, 2020). Since the OD field focuses on leaders as change agents and instruments of change, this study is very relevant to the OD field. Studying the experience of humanitarian leaders in navigating cultural differences across borders and managing cultural diversity in their organization allows for a greater understanding of

leaders' role in diversity management from the perspective of those who lead across borders and cultures. Diversity consciousness and the ability to manage diversity are part of the competencies executives of non-profits need to succeed according to Carter (2016).

Organization development practitioners strive to ensure their actions are consistent with their values. For any organizational change to be successful and sustained, it should be conducted based on OD core values, humanism, participation, and development. According to Worley (2003), these core values can be broken down to include “democracy, social justice, and emphasis on human development, fairness, openness, choice, and balancing between autonomy and constraint” (p. 6). Applying these OD values and principles may become challenging for OD practitioners in a diverse workforce according to Erolin (2016):

OD practitioners might find it difficult to promote the principle of democracy—which emphasizes participation and openness—to employees who were raised in a culture of high-power distance (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010).

Similarly, with the principle of humanism—defined in terms of fairness, justice, equality, diversity, and respect—how could an OD practitioner effectively address integration of the different members’ cultural orientations and still maintain consistency in the organization? (p. 77).

Steele (1977) found a culture in the UK in which avoidance of "unsuitable topics," is a norm, favoring security and stability over the unknown result of "rocking the boat." This is an example of how OD values—such as openness in this case—could contradict with a national culture. In another example, Jaeger (1986) reported a North American consulting firm in Japan excluded assertiveness training as part of its training

program, even though the firm carried out such training successfully elsewhere. The consulting firm recognized that even though theoretically it could be carried out,

it would make the Japanese individual a "deviant in his own society" and would thus be counterproductive. Indeed, assertive behavior would be in direct conflict with the combination of large power distance, strong uncertainty avoidance, high masculinity and low individualism found in Japan. (Jaeger, 1986, p. 183)

Jaeger (1986) called upon practitioners of OD to be "thoroughly familiar with the culture in which they are operating, and to evaluate interventions to guard against fundamental conflicts between the intervention technology and its underlying values, and a societal culture" (p. 189). This study aimed to help leaders and OD practitioners to increase their understanding of cultural diversity and its management through the lens of humanitarian leaders' who have longtime experience in the field.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The existing literature focuses on diversity management from a single country and for-profit business perspective that focuses on visible demographic characteristics, or surface-level diversity such as gender and race (Erolin, 2016; Roberson, 2013). There is little literature that discusses deep-level types of diversity and diversity management across national borders and cultures (Kozlowski, 2012). After a review of diversity literature and cultural diversity literature, I found most diversity management research focuses on for-profit companies (Erolin, 2016). There is even more scarcity of research that sheds light on the unique experiences of humanitarian leaders in navigating cultural differences across borders and managing cultural diversity in humanitarian organizations (Lewis, 2003). What makes their experiences more unique than other leaders is they lead

across borders and cultures. While leaders in multi-national corporations may do the same, however, humanitarian leaders are not motivated by maximizing profits but motivated to do social justice and care for humanity overall.

### **Statement of the Purpose**

The purpose of this narrative inquiry was to describe the experiences of international NGO leaders navigating and managing cultural diversity. This study focused on leaders who lead international humanitarian organizations to further investigate and clarify the role of organizations' leaders in diversity management.

### **Research Question**

The research question that guided this study was: What are the experiences of international humanitarian leaders in managing and navigating cultural diversity?

### **Definitions of Terms**

**Humanitarian Organization:** defined as an organization that “promote[s] human welfare and social reform” (“Humanitarian Organization,” 2020). Other similar words commonly used are relief or charitable.

**Humanitarian Leaders:** “The word humanitarian is used as a very broad concept to qualify the specific issue of helping people in any troubled context” (Irrera, 2011, p. 92). In this specific study, humanitarian leaders mean senior management of humanitarian organizations (e.g., chief executive officer, chief operating officer, executive director, or program director).

**Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs):** “[A]n organization which is neither a government department nor a business operating for profit. NGOs are often paid for by the government and may work with government departments, but they are

independent of the government” (“Non-Governmental Organization,” 2020). The term “non-governmental organization” was created in Article 71 of the Charter of the newly formed United Nations (UN; 2020) in 1945. Non-governmental organizations can be categorized into various types of groups; they can be national developing country organizations, international NGOs, self-help organizations, or local grassroots membership organizations. “NGO is often used interchangeably with “voluntary,” “nonprofit,” “civil society,” and “community-based” organization, each of which has distinctive 29 cultural and ideological roots.” (Lewis, 2014, pp. 293–294).

**Cultural Diversity:** Defined by Roberson et al. (2013) as the “differences within and between individuals based on both subjective and objective components of culture” (p. 2). However, Cox (1993) defined cultural diversity as “the representation, in one social system, of people with distinctly different group affiliations of cultural significance” (p. 16).

**Diversity Management:** Cox and Blake (1991) gave a fairly general definition, whereby it refers “to a variety of management issues and activities related to hiring and effective utilization of personnel from different cultural backgrounds” (p. 45). Diversity management focuses primarily on organizational practices of recruitment, training, and promoting underrepresented groups and “maximizing the unique skills and abilities of each employee in an organization” (Hollowell, 2011, p. 51). Ozbilgin et al. (2013) summarized the definition of diversity management as “recognizing and leveraging differences at work” (p. 1).

**Cultural Diversity Management:** Romanenko (2012) broadly defined cultural diversity management as the companies' ability "to give chances to and utilize resources of people from diverse cultures, whereas culture could mean nationality or ethnic group" (p. 16).

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

In this chapter, I highlighted first what the existing literature tells us about the definition, origin, and scope of diversity management. Then I sought answers to key questions in this study such as: What is the impact of diversity on groups?; Why does diversity management matter?; Why focus on cultural diversity?; What are the theoretical perspectives that explain cultural diversity management?; and Why there is a need for global diversity management? Then I tried to make the case for why I chose to study diversity management in an international NGO context and the reason for focusing on the role of leaders in diversity management implementation. Underscoring the role of leaders in diversity management brings an ongoing debate in the literature about the motivation of leaders for managing diversity.

### **Definition and Origin of Diversity Management**

The concept of “diversity management” has emerged from the US federal programs and initiatives created to address employment discrimination in organizations (Kozlowski, 2012).

In the 1960s, the civil rights movement spawned employment legislation, such as Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, which made discrimination unlawful and required organizations to design programs to engender equal opportunity in the workplace. Equal employment opportunity and affirmative action (EEO/AA) initiatives soon developed into diversity management. (Kozlowski, 2012, p. 16)

By the late 1980s, organizations began adapting and tweaking EEO/AA programs as part of efforts to manage increased diversity in organizations (Kozlowski, 2012).



Because of this historical beginning, most diversity management studies originated in the United States and some developing countries calling it “the Anglo-Saxon domination of diversity management theorization” (Özbilgin et al., 2013, p. 3).

Özbilgin et al. (2013) found most of the studies cited:

Remain limited to single national contexts, although they are falsely considered “international,” from a North American and Eurocentric approach. In other words, single-country studies continue to dominate the new literature on diversity management. While diversity management theory is often presented as universally applicable, its key assumptions, evidence, and prescriptions remain limited to single countries in which the empirical data were gathered. (p. 3)

While the concept of diversity management originated in the United States and consequently, most of the earlier literature is focused on the US and North America context, the concept of diversity management has grown and broadened to be a global need and global phenomenon (Özbilgin et al., 2013). The need for proper diversity management is no longer a matter of righting past wrongs of one nation or addressing the under-representation of a specific group (Mor-Barak, 2017). Rather, “emerging diversity efforts are focused on managing and engaging a company’s heterogeneous workforce in ways that give it a competitive advantage” (p. 11).

Cox and Blake (1991) gave a fairly general definition, whereby diversity management refers “to a variety of management issues and activities related to hiring and effective utilization of personnel from different cultural backgrounds” (p. 45). Diversity management focuses primarily on organizational practices of recruitment, training, and promoting underrepresented groups and “maximizing the unique skills and abilities of

each employee in an organization” (Hollowell, 2011, p. 51). Özbilgin et al. (2013) summarized the definition of diversity management as “recognizing and leveraging differences at work” (p. 1).

### **Scope and Impact of Diversity**

Ollapally and Ghatnagar (2009) described the term “diversity” as an umbrella for many different groups. “While some like gender, race, disability, ethnicity, language, and age are commonly known, religion, sexual orientation, education, and experience are becoming more important” (p. 456). Emphasis on some groups over others may vary from country to country. In India for example, there is more emphasis on gender and disability, while here in the US, race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation are given importance beside gender and disability (Ollapally & Ghatnagar, 2009). Hofstede (2015) described the impact of culture on people:

The culture each of us is born and raised into, is the pervasive influence in shaping our social world in terms of perceptions, attributions, and actions. It provides the rules of the status-power game that social life constitutes. It thus sets the boundaries for the social identities we perceive and create in our professional lives, and for the organization cultures we create and support. The practices of life in organizations are thus deeply influenced by the deep culture of their members. (p. 566)

Diversity has both positive and negative effects on group and firm performance (Jackson et al., 2003; Mannix & Neale, 2005). From a positive perspective, on one hand, Konrad (2003) suggested demographic diversity brings about creativity, innovation, and enhanced problem-solving, which increases organizational competitiveness. From a

strategic human resource management perspective, diversity can be considered a strategic resource since it is about the utilization of a firm's human capital, or the combined knowledge, skills, and abilities in its workforce (Wright & McMahan, 1992). Another advantage mentioned by Kozlowski (2012) is diversity may serve as a source of sustained competitive advantage, given the specific demography of an organization cannot be perfectly duplicated by competitors and can facilitate competencies that develop from complex social relationships. Matching the demographics of organizational workforces with that of consumers helps firms gain access to, and legitimacy in, diverse markets (Thomas & Ely, 1996).

Diversity enhances group decision-making (Cox et al., 1991; Kozlowski, 2012; Mannix & Neale, 2005; Williams & O'Reilly, 1998). More specifically, this perspective establishes diversity can create value and benefit for groups since individuals in heterogeneous groups have a broader range of knowledge, skills, and abilities than homogeneous groups (Hoffman & Maier, 1961). With this larger pool of cognitive resources, diverse groups are assumed to have greater access to a variety of task-relevant information and expertise. Further, diversity in groups may provide access to a larger and more varied social network from which to draw additional resources (Ancona & Caldwell, 1992). Research suggests such diversity in informational resources may also enhance group problem-solving, as different opinions, approaches, and perspectives give rise to task conflict and dissent (Jehn et al., 1999; Pelled, 1996). Exposure to minority viewpoints may expose and may motivate the consideration of more creative alternatives and solutions (Ancona & Caldwell, 1992; Nemeth, 1986). Research suggests error detection (Davis, 1969), brainstorming (Paulus & Nijstad, 2003), and overall higher

performance (Bantel & Jackson, 1989) tend to be associated with greater information diversity in teams.

Multicultural teams have the potential to far surpass culturally homogeneous teams in their ability to prevent, detect, and manage errors because of their cultural diversity (Gelfand et al., 2011). In a study conducted by Mauro et al. (2009), the researchers compared the performance of three groups composed of locomotors (individuals oriented toward action), assessors (individuals oriented toward evaluation), or both locomotors and assessors. These researchers found groups containing a mix of locomotors and assessors were as fast and accurate as the teams composed only of either locomotors or assessors.

On the other hand, from the negative perspective on diversity, research suggests observable demographic attributes, such as gender and race, are likely to be salient in group contexts (Kanter, 1977), and influence feelings of group identification (Tsui et al., 1992). As such, demographic attributes are a likely basis for intergroup differentiation (Nelson & Klutas, 2000). Such differentiation is likely to impair social processes, such as communication and cohesion, within groups (Williams & O'Reilly, 1998). Kahneman (1973) and Stephan and Stephan (1985, 1996) noticed when working in cross-cultural settings where objective components of cultural diversity are salient, anxiety and threat can arise and can narrow the focus of attention. Working in a diverse setting can restrict information processing according to Dutton et al. (1981). Many multicultural teams can be characterized as having high levels of ethnocentrism (Cramton & Hinds, 2005) and task and/or emotional conflict (El-ran, 1997; Von Glinow et al., 2004). In other words, research suggests visible demographic characteristics, or surface-level diversity, will give

rise to relationship conflict (Pelled, 1996), informational diversity will increase task conflict within groups, and social category diversity will bring about higher levels of relationship conflict (Kozlowski, 2012). In summary, diversity is like a double-edged sword. Organizations need diversity management to maximize the potential benefits, and minimize the potential disadvantages, of diversity (Kozlowski, 2012).

### **Why Diversity Management Matters**

As organizations' diverse workforces continue to grow, leaders of these organizations have realized the need for diversity management programs. In a 2005 SHRM survey report of human resource professionals, 76% of organizations surveyed have organizational practices dealing with workplace diversity. Ninety-four percent of large organizations ( $\geq 500$  employees), 71% of medium-sized (100-499 employees), and 60% of small-sized companies ( $\leq 99$  employees) have some form of diversity initiatives that address gender, ethnicity, race, age, disability, religion, sexual orientation, and language (Esen, 2005). Romanenko (2012) emphasized the importance of properly applied diversity management initiatives and according to his view, it represents a win-win enterprise: companies profit from creating constructive working environments for their employees and increasing their business and stock market performance, whereby employees benefit from increased self-efficacy, job satisfaction, and better communication and relations with their colleagues. (p. 105)

Proper diversity management helps create competitive advantages for organizations, in addition to the possible benefits of cultural diversity by using all the potentialities their workforce has to offer (Romanenko, 2012). Accepting cultural

diversity management has been promoted as a strategic success factor by many top companies (Romanenko, 2012). For example, “European Diversity Research & Consulting, 2009 Report refer to 86% of Top 50 Companies for Diversity naming Diversity as a strategic success factor” (Romanenko, 2012, p. 20).

Amaram (2007) pointed out the mixed findings from research about the impact of cultural diversity on organizations, and the social and legal requirements for organizations to accommodate multi-cultures. Amaram (2007) concluded diversity management matters and leaders have the responsibility “in deciding not whether, but when and how to exploit and capitalize on the positive attributes of cultural diversity while avoiding its downsides” (p. 5). Diversity opens greater access to new markets, greater access to talent, improved organizational performance and ultimately increases revenue and profits. A diverse organization representative of its market would have a better understanding of the diverse needs, tastes, and preferences of consumers leading to better products and services to meet diverse consumer demands (Erolin, 2016). A diverse organization would have wider access to different perspectives leading to more innovative ideas and better decision-making (McCuiston & Wooldridge, 2004; Ollapally & Ghatnagar, 2009).

### **Theoretical Perspectives on Cultural Diversity Management**

The theoretical basis for understanding cultural diversity, its psychological mechanisms, and the reasoning behind its outcomes can be categorized under two main perspectives: the pessimistic and optimistic perspectives. The pessimistic perspective is rooted in social identity theory (Tajfel, 1981), the similarity-attraction paradigm (Byrne, 1971), and uses self-categorization processes to explain the harmful outcomes of cultural

diversity on workgroup performance (Romanenko, 2012). As a result, many multicultural teams can be characterized as having high levels of ethnocentrism (Cramton & Hinds, 2005) and task and/or emotional conflict (El-ran, 1997; Von Glinow et al., 2004). This explains why anxiety and threat can rise and narrow the focus of attention when objective components of cultural diversity are salient in cross-cultural settings (Kahneman, 1973; Stephan & Stephan, 1985, 1996). Confirming this theory, Roberson et al. (2013) wrote “Relational demography studies show how dissimilarity and heterogeneity in workgroups result in less psychological attachment, reduced intention to stay in the company, higher absenteeism, and high emotional conflict” (pp. 61–62).

The optimistic perspective understands cultural diversity as generally beneficial, based on the standpoint of value in diversity (Cox, 1991), and uses information processing and Allport’s contact hypothesis to explain the positive diversity outcomes. Cox and Blake (1991) argued though heterogeneity could cause less cohesion in the decision-making process, the multitude of perspectives and diversity in opinions generally creates less emphasis on conformity, reduces groupthink (creativity argument, e.g., Aronson, 2002), leads to better problem-solving, and more informed decision-making through a wider range of perspectives, facilitated information processing, as well as learning (problem-solving argument; Cox et al., 1991; Ely & Thomas, 2000). Roberson (2012) called for greater diversity in conceptualizations, theoretical approaches, and methodologies about diversity. “Such diversity in our research resources may subsequently enhance our problem-solving around diversity research questions and may stimulate even more creative ways of exploring diversity-related phenomena. Thus, the “value” in diversity research may also be found in diversity” (Roberson, 2012, p. 29).

### **Why Cultural Diversity?**

With globalization, companies and organizations are challenged to adjust their operating practices to accommodate the cultural styles, norms, and preferences of the regions of the world in which they operate (Kozlowski, 2012). Most scholars and current studies on diversity have highlighted the globalization of business as a motivation for studying diversity in organizations. Yet, they approached diversity from a US perspective focusing on equal employment opportunity and prohibition of discrimination based on certain protected categories (Kozlowski, 2012). However, there is little research that “examined the effects of national origin diversity. More important, however, scant diversity research has given attention to the influence of culture” (p. 20).

Some scholars and practitioners assert US diversity policies are built upon a national culture, which overlays a variety of subcultures and therefore may be applicable across a variety of contexts (Egan & Bendick, 2003). However, because other continents are a combination of countries, which give rise to different cultures, norms, and languages, conceptualizations of diversity must incorporate these differences (Kozlowski, 2012).

Hofstede (1991) created cultural dimensions theory that can be used as a framework to understand the differences in cultures based on national origins. According to Hofstede (1991), culture is “the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another ... it is learned, not inherited. It derives from one’s social environment, not from one’s genes” (p. 5). Hofstede identified six key dimensions including power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism-collectivism, masculinity-femininity, and short vs. long-term



orientation. Roberson et al. (2013) recognized “the overview of research illustrates that cultural diversity research has focused primarily on comparative country analysis and that research on cultural diversity in multicultural teams is much more scarce” (p. 19).

Roberson (2012) called for further research on diversity and cultural diversity, in particular, by not focusing only on easily measured diversity attributes salient within a US context. Roberson (2012) pointed out:

By disregarding cultural differences and the germane assumptions (e.g., values, norms, etc.) that might be present within research contexts, there are inherent boundary conditions to the findings of diversity research. Thus, diversity typologies that incorporate culture and related attributes (e.g., geographic location, language, religion) are needed. (pp. 25–26)

### **Intercultural Competency**

This section was added later to the literature review after I discovered the significance of intercultural competency theory for this study and uncovered the strong connection between the theory and some of the components of successful cultural diversity management in the emerging themes. Hammer (2009) introduced a theoretical framework of intercultural competence, the intercultural development continuum (IDC). The IDC begins with a monocultural mindset described as denial and polarization where people from different cultures are separated as “us” and “them.” The continuum ends with a mindset of acceptance and adaptation where differences are accepted and valued. The transitional phase between the two mindsets is called minimization. According to Hammer (2012) “The capability of deeply shifting cultural perspective and bridging behavior across cultural differences is most fully achieved when one maintains an

Adaptation perspective” (p. 118). Hammer later developed the intercultural development inventory (IDI). According to the Intercultural Development Inventory (n.d.), IDI “assesses intercultural competence—the capability to shift cultural perspective and appropriately adapt behavior to cultural differences and commonalities”

### **The Need for Global Diversity Management**

Diversity management can be categorized into domestic and global diversity management (GDM). Özbilgin et al. (2013) stated, “while domestic diversity management is about leveraging individual differences to generate positive organizational outcomes, GDM is about transcending national differences to arrive at workable solutions for the international coordination of domestic diversity management initiatives” (p. 5). While it is normal and expected to see such domination in the field from the US and European countries because

Most of the earlier works on Global Diversity Management (GDM) were motivated by organizations moving from developed countries to set up branch networks—that is, a network of national branches of an organization that operates in different countries around the globe. (Özbilgin et al., 2013, p. 6)

However, “single-nation knowledge is insufficient to deal with the complexities of coordinating diversity management efforts across national borders” (p. 3).

Dass and Parker (1999), among others, challenged the idea of presenting this single-nation knowledge as the best way to manage diversity in the literature. The concept of single-nation knowledge here refers to the diversity management approaches that have outgrown from the US domestic agenda and policies (Ferner et al., 2005). Jonesn et al. (2011) explained it even better when they indicated definitions of diversity

as well as the field as a whole have been dominated by U.S.-centric research and concluded “the diversity field itself is not very diverse” (p. 35).

Ferner and colleagues (2004) agreed diversity management approaches obtained from the United States are often judged as unsuitable when applied to other national contexts, leading to organizational resistance in terms of cultural and institutional aspects. As many companies from countries such as China have started expanding their operations worldwide, Özbilgin et al. (2013) argued for the need for global diversity management because “domestic diversity management approaches are not adequate to capture the demands of managing diversity in the global context” (p. 5). One of the challenges facing GDM today is building the capacity of leaders as change agents to manage and navigate global diversity (Roberson, Mustafa et al., 2013). According to Hailey and James (2004) leadership development programs that intend to increase the capacity of leaders in navigating global diversity should “focus on both the values and identity of individual leaders while also assisting leaders understand and proactively respond to their rapidly changing external environment” (p. 343).

### **Why Study Diversity Management in International NGOs?**

Knapp and Sheep (2019) argued international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) face unique management challenges compared to for-profit organizations and even nonprofit organizations in a more stable and homogeneous environment. These management challenges might make the use of normative management strategies ineffective in INGOs. Three unique challenges have been identified by Knapp and Sheep (2019). First, INGOs have limited power and authority since much of their work is accomplished through cooperation with volunteers, partner organizations, governments,

militaries, and other stakeholders. Second, they work in a dynamic and continuously changing environment. Third, their stakeholders are inherently diverse in terms of function, culture, socioeconomic status, and degree of influence and authority. Such diversity makes it easier for members of INGOs teams to perceive little common ground among themselves. Therefore, Knapp and Sheep (2019) claimed INGOs cannot rely on control-oriented and normative management practices, and there is a need for more studies of diversity management on INGOs to develop a complementary approach to the normative management more flexible and reliable on social capital to influence the discretionary behavior of INGOs internal and external stakeholders.

### **The Role of International Humanitarian NGOs in the World Today**

As conflicts and crises increase around the world, the role of humanitarian NGOs is becoming more crucial, not only in reducing human suffering but also in reducing conflicts and promoting global security (Irrera, 2011). Global security cannot be achieved alone by stressing exclusively on national security, armaments, or through territorial security. Rather, it is more attainable when we shift our focus more on people's security, human development, food, employment, and environmental security (Knight, 2000).

The role of humanitarian NGOs in providing relief efforts, development, and peacebuilding has increased since World War II (Irrera, 2011). As a recognition of their important role in bringing world peace and promoting global security, accredited NGOs have been allowed to participate in UN conferences and dialogue practices with the other UN bodies including the Security Council (Irrera, 2011).

It was the beginning of an informal mechanism of consultation with NGOs on the issues of peace and international security called the 'Arria Formula'. In 1995, the

'Working Group of NGOs on the Security Council was created with the aim of meeting delegations, the Permanent Representatives and the President of the Council. (Irrera, 2011, p. 88)

In today's interconnected world, the world has become a small village. If a humanitarian crisis hits any part of the planet, people and governments from all over the world feel obligated to respond and contribute to the rescue efforts. Non-governmental organizations played an essential role in responding to natural and human-made catastrophes around the globe from the famine in Ethiopia in 1984 where one million people died, to the Rwanda Genocide in 1994, to the 2010 Haiti Earthquake where over 200,000 people died, and to the largest Ebola outbreak in West Africa between 2014-2016 where over 11,000 people died (CDC, 2016). The US citizens and government are considered the largest donors and the most generous in providing humanitarian aid. According to the USAID report (2018), the total US aid to the world through USAID from 1946 to 2018 has exceeded over one trillion dollars. In 2018 alone the US provided over 20 billion dollars of aid to the world through USAID. According to Raj Shah (2017) who served as USAID administrator under President Barack Obama, most of the aid is given in the form of contracts and grants to US International NGOs. Then, these organizations implement projects in countries of need, employing a combination of American and foreign staff members (Shah & Gerson, 2017).

### **The Role of Leaders in Diversity Management Implementation**

There is limited research that sheds light on the role of NGO leaders and the dynamics of leadership in international NGOs. Much of the existing leadership research is not relevant to the context in which NGO leaders work. As a consequence, there is

little understanding of the different roles and responsibilities of NGO leaders as well as the needed skills and competencies (Hailey & James, 2004). The leadership of NGOs has distinct challenges from those encountered by governments and for-profit companies. This is due to the volatile, chaotic, and limited resources environment they work in while serving the most vulnerable and marginalized communities (Hailey & James, 2004).

Hailey and James (2004) recognized the important role of NGO leadership, the highly personalized nature of leadership, and the powerful influence individual leaders have in these organizations. They identified unique attributes NGO leaders need such as the personal integrity, political acumen, and managerial ability to balance the competing pressures they face from the environment in which they work, the communities with whom they work, the donors who fund their work, and the staff or volunteers with whom they work. (p. 9)

Hermann and Page (2016) studied and compared leaders of humanitarian organizations and leaders of development organizations in terms of leadership styles and the way they perceived their work environment. They found leaders in charge of humanitarian organizations tend to challenge the constraints in their chaotic environment and have the interest to influence the outcome of what is happening around them.

Having diversity in an organization's mission statement, offering individuals access to the job market and career opportunities, or having policies and rules in place are not sufficient to bring proper diversity management. They may help in setting a minimal, legal standard for avoiding discrimination at best. However, they are not designed to change people's mindsets and promote people's attitudes toward diversity. It is a leader's role to ensure all individuals within the organization feel accepted and respected (Jin et

al., 2017). Given that, “the focus should be on preparing managers and leaders to become effective coaches in a diverse workplace” (Jin et al., 2017, p. 314).

Stewart (2013) highlighted the significant impact leaders have as they establish the identity of the organization as well as define its strategic goals. They determine which organizational initiatives receive resources and the amount of such resources. They have “an instrumental role in molding the organizational culture, as they determine the acceptable conduct within the organization” (p. 113). Adler and Jelinek (1988) highlighted the reasons why senior managers are viewed as having a significant influence on the implementation of diversity management programs “they are responsible for creating, sustaining, and altering the organizational culture, which influences how employees think and behave in the organizational culture” (p. 82).

Ollapally and Ghatnagar (2009) concluded, “Diversity management can be a useful tool to better organizational performance, provided the top management of the organization is convinced of its benefits” (p. 456). Due to the significant influence of leaders on the implementation process, Stewart (2013) called for leaders’ motivations for implementing diversity management programs “to be analyzed to determine if their reasons influence their levels of support for such programs ... Further research could gauge whether leaders’ reasons for supporting the implementation of diversity management programs have an influence on their levels of support” (pp. 111–112).

Roberson et al. (2013) studied multicultural teams, where cultural values, norms, and cognitions vary among team members, and they found, “leaders may have the potential to shape team functioning and performance” (p. 17). The role of leaders in developing a strong culture of inclusion is more than preaching about diversity and

inclusion. Jin et al. (2017) stressed the idea leaders “must practice inclusive leadership from being sensitive to the needs of each follower to recognizing their performance in a meaningful way, regardless of their social, cultural, and/or physical backgrounds” (p. 314).

Ollapally and Ghatnagar (2009) emphasized “A holistic approach to diversity management needs to be established, where not only are initiatives introduced but attitudes to them and the people are also managed” (p. 467). Amaram (2007) listed seven steps researchers found important for leaders and managers to adopt for proper diversity management:

1. Show support and commitment to diversity.
2. Train on diversity to appreciate organizational barriers that impede full contributions from all members.
3. Include diversity as a part of your organization’s planned business objectives rather than mere compliance with legally mandated activity.
4. Hold managers accountable for meeting diversity goals by including it in the performance evaluation process.
5. Establish open communication lines that allow for the transmission of new ideas, grievances, and feedback.
6. Make room for such things as religious holidays, diet preferences, and dress modes as part of organizational rituals and rites in a way that does not interfere with organizational activities.



7. Requires managers to unlearn wrong practices rooted in an old way of thinking including unlearning the ways organizations operate, organizational culture, policies, structures, and human resource systems.

### **The Debate on Diversity: Good for Business or it is the Right Thing to Do?**

Should organizations embrace diversity for the benefits that come out of diversity or because it is the right thing to do? This is an ongoing debate between diversity advocates on one hand, whose rationale in supporting diversity is based on the benefits diversity brings to business such as access, legitimacy, and focus on matching workforce demographics with those of key consumer groups (Dietz & Petersen, 2005; Thomas & Ely, 1996). Demographic changes and globalization mean it is becoming increasingly important to increase the spectrum of employees. One reason is the pool of “traditional” ethnic-majority men graduates is shrinking. Another reason is that today’s key stakeholders’ requirements and expectations are different. Trading partners and governments in many emerging markets are more inclined to look at what the business can do to help improve the state and development of their nation (Roberson, Mustafa et al., 2013). Having a diverse workforce that is effectively managed can be a source of competitive advantage for the organization (Mor-Barak, 2017).

Özbilgin et al. (2013) argued:

The business case is not wrong but rather incomplete ... If the traditional business case is an inappropriate and perhaps even ineffective approach to the “selling” of workforce diversity, what, then, is a better one? What will move global organizations in the direction of increased diversity? Fundamentally there is a recognized need and trend for fairness in employment relations (Poster, 2008) and

a radical humanism in business (Melé, 2009), as only then we will survive, flourish, and emancipate ourselves, collectively and individually (Aktouf & Holford, 2009) (p. 23).

Similarly, Mor-Barak (2017) argued despite phrases such as “diversity is good business” and “diversity make business sense” do suggest a useful and practical direction, their use implies exclusion of ethical consideration and the need for major long-term organizational changes that “may not be immediately linked to the bottom line” (p. 12). Therefore, she advocated organizations embrace diversity as part of their belief in inclusion, equal opportunity, fair treatment, and focuses on the degree to which individuals feel like full contributors to critical organizational processes (Mor-Barak, 2017).

The debate whether “embracing diversity good for business or it is the Right Thing to Do” is a critical debate since it questions the motive behind leaders' actions. The reactions of many people and organizations to the murder of George Floyd in 2020 brought this debate to the center. While many people and organizations demanded justice and policy reforms, the motivation to do so may differ. Some demanded justice and an end to police brutality for their safety and to avoid riots that rocked their cities and caused loss to their businesses. Others demanded justice, inclusion, and equity for all because they believe this the right thing to do. Reflecting and responding to CNBC report “One Year After George Floyd Death,” Doug McMillon, CEO of Walmart, America’s largest employer, explained how businesses should be viewing the issue of diversity, inclusion, and equity: “We have a moral imperative to ensure our associates and customers are

treated fairly in our justice system, and our communities are safer as a result” (Repko & El-Bawab, 2021).

Erolin (2016) saw a problem in viewing diversity from the lens of performance and financial outcomes. Embracing diversity and presenting it as “a competitive advantage to improve a company’s bottom line” (p. 73) implies treating “workforce diversity as a tool for goal implementation ... as objects whose utility to the organization is limited to their intended purpose” (p. 73). Erolin (2016) went even further to consider diversity a natural feature of the world not a new or foreign phenomenon. “Just as bio-diversity stabilizes the ecosystem, socio-demographic diversity serves a similar purpose in the social world ... Diversity is not a problem to be solved, but a natural condition of a world in which we live” (p. 78). Erolin (2016) called for the current metaphor of “managing diversity” to be changed in favor of “managing in diversity.” since the latter implies “adaptability to a changing environment, which is key to survival” (p. 78).

### **Summary**

The world has never been more diverse, interconnected, and borderless than it is today. As a result, we are experiencing a proliferation of multi-national companies and the workplace has become more diverse in the workforce composition and the customers to be served. Diversity management has emerged in the United States as part of the federal government’s efforts to address the discrimination against African Americans, colored people, other minorities, and women. As globalization increased, the scope of diversity studies increased from addressing visible demographic characteristics, or surface-level diversity such as gender, race, and religion to addressing more deep-level types of diversity such as culture, beliefs, norms, professions, and preferences.

Diversity is like a double-edged sword, which has both positive and negative impacts. Good diversity management enables organizations to harvest the potential benefits of diversity while minimizing the negative impact that comes along with diversity. International NGOs face unique management challenges that make the use of control-oriented and normative management practices ineffective. There is a need for further research on diversity management that is tailored to and address the challenges of INGOs.

Having a policy about diversity or offering equal access to the job market and career opportunities is not sufficient to bring proper diversity management. It is a leader's role to ensure proper diversity management is applied and progress is monitored. This study intends to add to the research body that further investigates and clarifies the role of organizations' leaders in cultural diversity management.

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

### **The Research Paradigm**

A combination of the researcher's belief about reality, what is ethical and valuable, and their role during the research process determines the research's specific paradigm (Terrell, 2016). This study required that I, as the researcher, become the key instrument to gather information and interpret it. Therefore, the paradigm that guided my study is interpretivism. Methodologies based on an interpretive epistemology claim multiple meanings exist depending on the experiences people have with a phenomenon (Borg et al., 2007; Creswell, 2007; McMillan, 2004).

### **Research Design**

The purpose of this study is to describe the experiences of international humanitarian leaders in managing and navigating cultural diversity. Since the focus of this study was to capture the phenomenon of humanitarian leaders of international organizations and their life experiences, I chose the qualitative research methodology of narrative inquiry as a good method for this type of research. Narrative research is a design of inquiry from the humanities in which the researcher studies the lives of individuals and asks one or more individuals to provide stories about their lives (Riessman, 2008). Narrative inquiry "focuses on the structure and content of stories people tell that help them make sense of their experiences" (Rossman & Rallis, 2017, p. 87). Telling stories is "an important means for representing and explaining personal and social experience" (p. 86). Narrative inquiry allows us to make a "meaning of a lived experience" (Terrell, 2016, p. 155). I followed Terrell's (2016) narrative study methodology framework to guide the steps of this chapter. This study was intended to

answer the research question using interviews with the individuals of interest as a tool to collect data.

### **Sampling**

Narrative inquiry is a way of understanding and inquiring into experience through collaboration between the researcher and participants (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Qualitative sampling is generally purposive; you identify the group you want to work with, then select participants of that group to interview (Terrell, 2016). I interviewed seven leaders of international humanitarian organizations to capture their unique experiences including their thoughts, views, feelings, and challenges they have faced relevant to cultural diversity at their work. According to Terrell (2016), the sample size in narrative research does not need to be large. It is sufficient to have a sample of “One or more individuals who want to share their life history” (p. 162). A sample of seven participants is reasonable taking into consideration how difficult it is to reach CEOs and other senior leaders as they represent the top leadership in organizations. It is even more difficult to convince them to commit and find time for an interview within their busy schedule.

### **Participants and Selection Criteria**

The humanitarian leaders chosen in this study met three criteria to ensure sampling was purposive:

1. They hold senior leadership positions in their organizations and oversee the overall operations and personnel including the process of developing and adapting policies. Since the term “senior” can vary from one organization to another, the following positions have been determined to be the definition for

“senior leaders” in this study: chief executive officers (CEOs), executive directors (ED), chief of operating officers (COOs), or program directors (PD).

2. Participant senior leaders must have a minimum of five years of leadership experience in the humanitarian sector to ensure participants have sufficient experience. Senior leaders with fewer than five years of experience may not have a good grasp of people, interactions within the organization, and the overall system.
3. Participant’s humanitarian organization must work internationally and have field staff that are mainly nationals (locals) or mixed of nationals and expatriates to ensure a culturally diverse workforce.

### **Data Collection**

I used interviews exclusively as my technique to collect needed data for this research. In qualitative interviews, the researcher can conduct face-to-face interviews, telephone interviews, or choose to engage in focus group interviews (Cresswell, 2018). A research interview is “an interview, where knowledge is constructed in the interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee” (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 4). I conducted face-to-face 60 minutes interviews to collect data. However, since the impact of the coronavirus pandemic continued during the time of this study, my interviews were held via Zoom. These interviews allowed me to elicit opinions and participants’ views when they answered my open-ended questions. Identifying and inviting humanitarian leaders to participate in this study required a good network and insider knowledge about the humanitarian sector. Being a board member of an umbrella organization for more than 180+ US international NGOs gave me the privilege to be among those leaders and

made it less difficult to solicit their participation. In addition to my personal and professional network with CEOs and senior management staff of many international humanitarian organizations, I took advantage of my participation in the annual CEOs retreat of Interaction, the largest alliance of international NGOs and partners in the United States, to recruit participants.

### **Research Procedures**

A consent form (see Appendix A) was provided and obtained prior to conducting the interviews to ensure respect for participants' choice to be in the study or not and to assure participants there would be no harm caused by participating in the study. An invitation letter was sent to participants after obtaining Institutional Review Board approval to commence with the research. The invitation letter provided a description of the study, the criteria of participants, and a participation request.

### **Interview Questions**

Cresswell (2018) wrote, "interviews involve unstructured and generally open-ended questions that are few in numbers and intended to elicit views and opinions from the participants" (p. 187). I prepared the following questions to capture the experience of international humanitarian leaders navigating and managing cultural diversity. The questions were open-ended questions and gave participants the opportunity to tell their experiences without influencing their answers in any direction. The questions were:

1. What has been your experience in working across borders and cultures?
2. Can you think of an experience related to cultural diversity that was particularly challenging?
3. Can you think of a positive experience related to cultural diversity?



4. What have you used to deal with/ manage/ address cultural diversity?
  - a. What has been most effective?
  - b. What did you try that didn't work?
5. How does a culturally diverse workforce impact the organization's effectiveness?
6. What kind of mindset, skills, and competencies are necessary for leaders to properly manage cultural diversity?
7. What is your experience as a leader in developing a culture of inclusion among your culturally diverse workforce?
8. What should leaders do to ensure all individuals within the organization feel accepted and respected?
9. How do you change people's mindsets and promote people's attitudes toward cultural diversity?
10. What recommendations do you have for leaders in managing cultural diversity?

### **Data Analysis**

Creswell (2018) recommended the following six steps for a successful data analysis process. My first step in preparation for data analysis was transcribing and writing down all recorded interviews, then I sent back the transcripts to those interviewed to offer them a chance to check and confirm the content and accuracy of the transcript. Once those interviewed confirmed the transcript, I began analyzing the interviews' data following Creswell's (2018) steps below:

1. Organizing and preparing data for analysis: this includes transcribing interviews and sorting them according to the sources of information.
2. Reading and looking carefully at all the data and taking notes about my first impression.
3. Coding the data: by labeling and coding relevant pieces of information. This could be themes, words, and phrases.
4. Generate a description and themes: by categorizing and organizing coded data. This could be processes, differences, similarities, and objects.
5. Representing the description and themes: by labeling categories and deciding on the most important and relevant collected data.
6. Interpreting the meaning of the Themes/Descriptions you have presented: This includes summarizing findings and deciding if there is any relationship between the different categories and how they are connected. Interpretation of data may include comparing the findings to the literature, stating limitations, lessons learned, and needed future research.

### **Reflexivity**

Having 20 years of work experience in the humanitarian sector was an asset for this study. I share and relate to the experiences of the participants in this study. However, my personal experience could have turned out to be harmful if I allowed let my biases and assumptions intertwine with collected data in a way that affects the data collection and analysis. Creswell (2018) called qualitative research inquirers to reflect on “how their role in the study and their personal background, culture, and experience hold potential for shaping their interpretations such as the themes they advance and the meaning they

ascribe to the data” (p. 182). Sufficient reflexivity can be achieved when “researchers record notes during the process of research, reflect on their own personal experiences, and consider how their personal experiences may shape their interpretation of results” (Creswell, 2018, p. 184).

### **Validity**

The validity of qualitative research is determined by the accuracy of the findings from the standpoint of the researcher, the participants, or the readers (Cresswell, 2018). To ensure collected data are valid from the participants’ points of view, I sent the transcript of each interview to the respective participant to review the collected data for accuracy. Then I followed that with a conversation and discussion with each participant to get their feedback on the study’s findings and conclusions. Once I had their responses, I reviewed and adjusted the collected data as appropriate.

### **Plans for Presenting the Findings**

Once the data were analyzed and verified, all findings were presented and discussed in Chapters 4 and 5 of this dissertation. Reporting findings does not simply mean restating the views of the interviewees and the researcher’s viewpoints (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015), rather, it is a social construction in which the researcher presents “a specific view on the subjects’ lived world” (p. 301).

### **Summary**

The purpose of this study was to describe the experiences of international humanitarian leaders in managing and navigating cultural diversity. The paradigm that guided this study was interpretivism. I chose the qualitative research methodology of narrative inquiry as a good method for this type of research. I interviewed seven senior

leaders of international humanitarian organizations who have a minimum of five years of experience in the field to capture their unique experience. Data collected from the interviews were validated, analyzed, and reported.

## **Chapter 4: Participants' Narratives**

Most diversity management research focuses on for-profit companies and there is a scarcity of research that focuses on non-profit. There is even more scarcity of research that sheds light on the unique experiences of humanitarian leaders in navigating cultural differences across borders and managing cultural diversity in humanitarian organizations. The purpose of this narrative inquiry is to describe the experiences of international NGO leaders navigating and managing cultural diversity by focusing on the experience of international humanitarian organizations leaders in cultural diversity management. My research question is: What are the experiences of international humanitarian leaders in managing and navigating cultural diversity?

In this chapter, I describe the results and findings of my study. At the start, I provided demographic information of participants and then provided a story of each participant before showing the themes that were developed from the data collected. Table 1 below provides demographic information of the participants.

### **Participant Stories**

The participants' stories uncover the essence of their individual lived experiences. Reading these stories will allow the reader to learn more about each participant. To cover their identities, I told their stories using pseudonym that I assigned to each participant. The table below shows some demographic data of the participants.

**Table 1***Demographic Information of Participants*

Name	Age	Gender	Race/ Ethnicity	Education	Organization Size per Revenue	Role	Years in the Sector
Amy	50-60	Woman	White	Masters	107 million	CEO	30
Steven	60-70	Man	White	Masters	9.5 million	CEO	36
Peter	60-70	Man	Black/West African	Masters	100 million	CEO	30
Edward	40-50	Man	White	PhD	1.5 million	CEO	20
Nabil	50-60	Man	Black/East African	Masters	200 million	CEO	27
Hani	60-70	Man	Asian	Masters	13 million	CEO	20
Tracy	50-60	Woman	Latina	PhD	68 million	CEO	30

**Amy**

Amy was born in Northeast USA. After graduating from high school, Amy moved to Colorado to finish her bachelor's degree in history and political science. She was interested in the world outside of the country she called home. When Amy completed her undergraduate degree, she joined the Peace Corps Volunteers, a path many interested people in the humanitarian sector take when they start their journey to discover the world.

In the 1980s, at an early age, she was assigned to work in Lesotho; the southernmost landlocked country in the world, entirely surrounded by South Africa. Amy described her first cross-cultural experience: "Having spent my formative years in the United States but going internationally in search of how I could use the Agency and privilege I have to do better somewhere in the world." However, the world she was entering during that time was full of conflicts and crises. A lot of things were happening around the world. The apartheid was still strong in South Africa, HIV disease (AIDS)

was just at the beginning of its spread, the horn of Africa was going through severe drought, and famine was looming. Amy lived and worked in South Africa from 1988 to 1994. She worked in post-genocide Rwanda from 1995 to 1997 and went on to work more than a quarter of a century outside of the United States. She worked as NGO professional in different capacities, positions, and regions including: East Africa, the Middle East, Asia, Geneva, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Lesotho, Zimbabwe, Haiti, Latin America, and the Caribbeans.

From her volunteering position in the peace corps volunteers, Amy worked at different management and leadership positions. She moved from a country director to deputy regional director where she oversaw offices in several countries, to vice president for international programs and operations, to a member of the global governance team for a large international organization, to being elected to serve as vice-chair of an umbrella organization that has over 180+ member organizations, to finally being selected to serve as president and CEO in one of the largest US international NGOs. Not only did she live outside of her own culture, but she also took strong language training as well. Being young helped her to pick up and learn foreign languages quickly. Therefore, Amy found the topic of diversity “near and dear to my heart, because it has really covered my formative years and my professional journey.”

Traveling overseas and seeing different cultures made her question the colonial and decolonizing mindset, yet she was still a deep believer in multiculturalism and the importance of humanitarian work. Amy considered herself “a third country citizen.” She emphasized the importance of continuing to be inquisitive: “I think not being inquisitive

and asking those questions is the dangerous thing.” She experienced the shock of being exposed to other cultures for so long and then in returning to her own culture,

I spent the bulk of my career learning what do I need to understand to be connected and effective and have trust to be effective, as a leader in another culture and then coming back to my own culture and the US centrism of the work.

Amy presented as a well-qualified person to talk about cultural diversity. She not only has a long work experience in different cultures, but she also holds a bachelor's degree in the field of history and political science and a master's degree in intercultural management. Despite the knowledge and experience she acquired, she seemed like a humbled leader.

I don't have any of the right answers, unless I am listening so deeply and trying to unpack and understand how I can support, almost be a servant, trying to understand, learn, and figure out ways for shared prosperity, which is part of my own vision. A vision of a bit more just, equal, and a fair world without poverty and inequality.

When Amy was asked about the most effective approaches to managing cultural diversity, she emphasized listening, being accessible, and making sure the board and leadership team are diverse to ensure a plurality of voices are informing her leadership and management.

Amy shared she always asks herself at any role or position she finds herself in, “What is my role relevance and impact on what happens in the world on inequality or global poverty so cultural diversity and then diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) and anti-racism in my own context at this moment in time.” She believed in action even if it is



not perfect, “if you don't take a step. If you wait until everything is right, you will never take a step further.”

### **Hani**

Hani was, at the time of this study, the CEO of a faith-based humanitarian organization in the US. He had been serving in the humanitarian sector for over 20 years. He holds a master's degree in nonprofit management, and expressed a love of history. Hani was born and grew up in southwest Asia in a multicultural society with people from different ethnic groups and religions. This formed his early learning about what it means to live in a diverse society. Hani speaks several languages, and he is an author of a book. Referring to his upbringing, he commented, “[it] taught me how to live in a multicultural society and to know what is acceptable and what is not acceptable.”

Before coming to the US, Hani lived in Europe for many years. He not only he believed in diversity, but he also lived it. His wife is an African American and his kids are mixed. Hani read a lot of books about other cultures and religions. His circle of friends were from different parts of the world. As a result, he reflected being very respectful of other cultures, well versed in his knowledge of other cultures, and had many interesting perspectives to share. He summarized his belief about cultural diversity in the following words: “I think diversity only makes us better human beings.”

Hani had a tradition in his organization where he made sure his staff read about the cultures of the 40 countries his organization served. For Hani, this is the way to develop respect for other cultures. He expressed being grateful for the opportunity to serve humanity: “I think humanitarian work is a blessing that almighty God picks for

certain people to do the service to humanity.” His 20 years of service to humanity taught him the best thing to be in this universe is “a human being.”

Despite his organization being a faith-based organization, his staff was diverse from different religions, ethnicities, and backgrounds. Hani believed recruitment should be based on performance and better qualifications. Hani shared, “When you hire you don't look for person's color, faith, culture, and background but you look for his/her qualifications. Those who are qualified should be selected for the job.” Additionally, from his Islamic tradition, Hani shared a fascinating story:

When the prophet of Islam conquered Mecca, he took the key of KAABA; the holiest house of God in the Arabian Peninsula from a tribe that used to be historically the custodian and in-charge of water distribution to the visitors of KABAA. Since they were not Muslim at the time, he took the key from them and gave it to a Muslim tribe. The order of God came down and told Prophet Mohamed that he has to give the key back to the tribe who used to take care of the KABAA despite not being a believer. The reason is because they were much better qualified to do the job. According to the Qur'an (2007), the revelation that came down was “Indeed, Allah commands you to render trusts to whom they are due and when you judge between people to judge with justice. Excellent is that which Allah instructs you. Indeed, Allah is ever Hearing and Seeing” [4:15].

Hani highlighted being a strong believer in the importance of creating a culture within the organization so everyone knows what is acceptable and what is not. He shared: “employees should know what the CEO reaction is going to be toward certain behaviors.” He recalled the incident when one of his women staff members did not feel comfortable

being touched and hugged by another woman representative from a large company his organization dealt with to distribute food. Once the staff member raised a complaint, her supervisor immediately communicated the issue to the company. She told the company straightforward “If the accused person comes again, our organization will stop distributing food. Period.” She told them

once we report the incident to our HR department, the HR will share that with the CEO, and our CEO will stop our trucks coming to your company and we will not be able to pick food from you. The company, knowing our strict policies- stop that person from coming to the food distribution.

Hani was appreciative of what each culture and civilization brought to the lives of mankind: "They have contributed a lot to our lives, and we learned from them. Without all these [cultures] that would be no civilization. We would not be who we are today.”

### **Edward**

Edward is a white American who grew up in the Midwest in a fairly culturally diverse place. He grew up in a way of thinking “all people, regardless of their differences, live in one world and that requires they live according to the golden rule that you treat other people—regardless of who they are—nicely as you want to be treated.” Edward was interested in his early age in the idea of working internationally. But the picture was not clear for him on what that meant. So, while early-on he was interested in diplomacy, he later realized he did not want to be a diplomat. However, he recognized there are other tracks to diplomacy like international development, which education is part of it. His first job outside the US after graduating from a university was an English teacher in Japan for a semester at a junior high school.

A turning point in his life came when Edward later realized “these nonprofits, these NGOs that are out there do what sounded like exciting work, going working in different difficult contexts.” He ended up loving humanitarian aid which ended up to be his career later. Since Edward started his career in 1995, he had been in 90 countries around the world working at different locations and positions including conflict zones like Somalia, Burundi, and Afghanistan. He spent close to 18 years or so overseas living in different places.

Edward has a unique experience. Not only did he work as a senior leader in a CEO position, but he also worked in the field as director of program development and emergency response. This provided him with the opportunity to live and work with people from different cultures. His longtime experience with many cultures offered him the opportunity to see the world differently and to see that similarities among people of different cultures are more than the differences: “you really expect things to be different and then you're pleasantly surprised about the things that are similar.” To the contrary of this, Edward pointed out the big assumption people make about similar cultures such as the US and UK, and how they assume all communicate the same way because people of both cultures are native English speakers. Hence there is a lot of miscommunications between British and American people because “it's not just the words, it's everything else.”

Working across different cultures allowed Edward to see the flaws and to question some of the mindsets and behaviors he grew up with in his own culture. Edward had a unique perspective when it came to how we should view cultural diversity. He thought there are two groups of people who think “we all have our own culture, and we are going

to drive it through ... [while] others think cultural diversity is one way and we have to fully do whatever is appropriate.” Edward advocated in favor of something in between that acknowledge:

there is cultural diversity, that we have to be open, [but] also its two ways, and that there are good practices around it. Then manage it right, and do things that are culturally appropriate that encourage inclusion and build trust between people.

Edward believed, “culture goes two ways and it's not all the time you have to do it according to the locals.” He gave an example of a woman from outside the local culture wearing a headscarf out of respect, but that does not mean everything local people expected of others does not necessarily apply so equally pointing out the importance of diversity of perspectives and making sure we include everyone.

His long-time international experience taught him the importance of localization and the local perspective.

I always like to go to a meeting with a local counterpart. Whether it's [a meeting] with the government, with a donor, with whatever, not as a translator. Not as an assistant, or something, but as if I was the country director, this is the most senior person. because there's so much, I don't know.

Explaining this point further, Edward recognized and acknowledged the fact that the local person has lifelong experience of the local context; something expatriates cannot bring regardless of how interculturally competent they are: “I didn't grow up in these places like somebody who is 35 years old. I can't replace that knowledge.”

Edward turned his long-time experience in the international humanitarian and development sector into a book where he provided an operational guide to NGOs. In

addition to his international work experience, he studied diplomacy at the graduate level on international relations and eventually a Ph.D. in international development.

### **Nabil**

Nabil is originally from east Africa. His experience with multiculturalism and navigating different cultures started at an early age when he experienced displacement from his home due to war and conflict. After a journey to several countries, he settled in the UK in the 1980s. Since then, he has overcome many challenges to educate himself and build his career as many immigrants do. Nabil holds a master's degree in business administration and worked for a faith-based humanitarian organization for over 25 years at different levels until he was elected to be the CEO.

He shared an interesting personal experience about how a leader becomes accessible and approachable. His experience climbing the career ladder taught him that expectations grow as a person climbs the career ladder. Nabil shared

[being] a senior managing director exposed me to more and more diverse views.

Now, at the CEO level, [I'm] expected to lead by example. They're expecting [me] to hear and understand the concerns of various individuals. Their expectations are a lot higher than when [I was] a director, or even less as a manager.

Even when he encountered a situation, before making a decision, he would analyze it and think about the impact on people, and how it would be seen by others; not only by people like him and people who are from the same background, but also people from different cultures.

Learning from the time when he was a regular staff member or a low-level manager, he once asked to meet the CEO. "I was told to give a list of reasons why I want

that, and why no one else can solve that problem.” Nabil eventually was not allowed to meet the CEO. Instead, he was given an opportunity for a 10 minute call with the CEO. Nabile declined that call. He said, “if a CEO does not want to meet me I don't.” From that experience he learned the importance of adopting an open-door policy and listening to people. He highlighted the significance of active listening for leaders. One of the habits he adopted to increase his active listening skills as a leader and to give the people he meets with the importance and the attention they deserve “I would actually get up from my desk and sit on the table with the Chair, so we are equal, stay away from my computer, No interruptions, Mobile is off or is on mute.”

Nabil reflected on his journey as an immigrant and observed the changes that happened to his culture of origin over time. He observed the good and bad of both his culture of origin and culture of settlement. Instead of thinking about cultural diversity in terms of good and bad, he preferred to look at it as different approaches that may work best for different goals or audiences. Some cultures are very good at documentation, planning, processes, and system, while others tend to have more verbal communication, and are better at relationship building, communication, emotional intelligence, and understanding. He noticed these differences sometimes exist even among different generations of the same culture. The question for him was more on how to use these diverse abilities to advance the organization’s mission.

Nabil realized many CEOs come with very ambitious agendas. However, they find themselves faced with realities such as a lack of resources or a lack of people willing to do them. This is in addition to the reality of a time limit and the many distractions on the way. He recommended reducing their goals to be more realistic and manageable.

Then review the list of goals and re-prioritize them: “you don't want it to be shortened by external forces,” said Nabil. Once you have a focused list of what you think is the most important for your organization, “Don’t take your eyes off the ball” along the journey.

One of the recommendations he highlighted was for leaders to identify “champions” within their organizations who believe in diversity. Nabil highlighted leaders cannot do it alone and they need these champions in working groups and committees to “bring in leadership that supports your vision. it's almost like change management. If we don't surround yourself with people who believe in this vision in this cultural diversity, you will not be able to implement it on your own.” Nabil conducted regularly leadership and executive coaching and training. He was a licensed trainer on Myers Briggs Personality Type Indicator and speaks three languages fluently.

### **Steven**

Steven is a white American who was born in the eastern part of the US and his family moved overseas when he was two years old. He grew up on three continents and worked in over 50 countries. He was not just living as an expatriate but actually, he went into the Swiss and French school systems before he learned English in fourth grade. At one point in his life in South America, he worked at a local factory for \$ 1.26 an hour. Steven speaks four different languages fluently.

This upbringing

gave me a deep understanding of just the similarities and differences of people, that culture is uniquely organized people to cope with things, to provide answers to life, to provide norms and that, in some ways, as a slight outsider I could always accept some of these and reject some of these, recognizing that most



people didn't even see that they were in their culture, it also gave me an appreciation, because, in essence, I was a minority, I never had the majority cultural group.

Steven described culture as

a sort of a fish in the water, you think everyone is swimming in the same water.

Then there's a fish over there, that is in salt water and they're swimming in very different water than you and they're having a different experience.

Therefore, Steven reiterated the importance of having

the ability to break with your own culture, to see beyond your own culture, to begin to appreciate the fact that there are blinders associated with that culture that there are privileges that come with it, that you may not see.

According to Steven, there is some value in walking in another person's shoes and what that feels like. Because he was fortunate to go to all sorts of places and see lots of different cultures, he thought he had a better appreciation of what someone might be living through. This early exposure to different cultures allowed him to see the nice and ugly aspects of these cultures. Steven describes how some countries are clean, beautiful, and everything is in order, but they just don't know how to have fun. While other countries are messy and dirty but have a lot of fun and know how to have a party.

At an early age, Steven did not appreciate being exposed to many cultures and languages. However, later in his life, he realized

this was actually an amazing gift that I've been provided, which was an ability to listen to understand and recognize, that I was coming through with the cultural lens that I could remove or not, that I could understand someone else's lens. And

that each culture brings us incredible wealth and diversity and thinking with it, both in terms of language but also ways of thinking.

The reasons why it is difficult to change people's mindsets and promote people's attitudes toward cultural diversity according to Steven is because “part of it, is seeing the other person is fully human so it is not about why they're so different, but why they are similar. There has to be some common ground that you're finding with each other.” The way people approach this according to Steven is “some are pretty empathetic and can see this or they're visiting or they're doing something outside their own comfort zone, and this person has helped them and so forth.” He thought people “need to shake themselves up a little bit to be able to move towards a sort of more inclusive cultural view.” He understood that some people are threatened by that. He considered,

slapping them and saying need to change is not going to do anything”. It is how you remove the threat; how do you make it about “you and I are totally different but let's talk about food over dinner and dinner food we both like and you like a different type of food that I like and so let's try to humanize the conversation.

This background qualified Steven to manage diverse global international NGOs for many years. Not a lot of people have the same experience Steven had, and it is not an easy job. Steven described the difficulties:

I would often find myself as the only American in the room, with multiple different types of countries in my own background and different languages. And then I would find myself trying to find common ground in a room of 27 different nationalities recognizing all the cultural differences that existed in the room.

He stressed the importance of respecting each culture's way of doing things differently. Commenting on how things are done in a more orderly fashion in some countries, Steven shared:

I understand that you can get things done that way, fine and so forth, but Italy has been around for 2000 years and, yes, it's messy and complicated and everyone talks and they have their hands in the air like I do right now but it actually works quite well, so that your orderly Germanic or English structure of things isn't necessarily the smartest way to do something.

Steven worked as a CEO for a couple of large US organizations including an umbrella of organizations and was a board member of several other organizations including the UN Inter-Agency. Steven holds a master's degree in international studies. He is also a recipient of numerous awards including an honorary doctorate. When not reading a book or enjoying city life, Steven has a deep personal affinity for high alpine ridges and healthy coral reefs.

### **Peter**

Peter is a Black African and was born and grew up in west Africa. He started his humanitarian career as a language trainer and a cross-cultural trainer working with the peace corps; an organization created by former US President John Kennedy to engage Americans with the outside world. Peter has high regard for President Kennedy who was "very much a global citizen in his mind." According to Peter, the goal of President Kennedy in creating the peace corps was not only about helping other countries but also about helping Americans understand other cultures and other cultures understand Americans. Peter put a lot of emphasis on the importance of developing cultural

competency, particularly for those who are working for INGOs. He commented, “you cannot do global work or global health work by being culturally blind. it's just not going to work.” You need to have a worldview that allows you to accept that this world is rich in culture and that richness is not an issue “if you are from that camp that thinks that cultural diversity is a problem, then you don't belong here” Peter followed.

Embracing cultural diversity and cultural competence was a must for Peter. He did not see it as just something limited to the United States, rather he believed it is a humanity issue and here to stay. He explained what he meant by embracing: “I mean appreciated, cultivated, and create an environment for those—even if they are not the specialist- they create room for that work to go on.” As other participants pointed out, Peter thought people need to work on themselves and need to “individually take stock of where they are personally as a leader stand on the subject. We need to prepare ourselves, that's not an easy task, either.” Being aware of it is not enough. Peter shared,

You need to be a player in the field, you need to do your part, you need to be able to say “Yes, I'm going to put pressure on my board to have a diverse board and have diverse leadership,” so you have to embrace that, it was not a necessity, maybe a few years back, but it has absolutely become a necessity.

It has been Peter's passion to understand the dynamics of working internationally and he believed very strongly in global citizenry “the world is maybe getting more complex, but whether we want it or not, we have to find a way to work in a world which is made up of different cultures and different people.

Peter lived diversity at home where he was involved in an intercultural marriage since he was married to a white American.

Because I'm in a cross-cultural family. My child was raised in a diverse cultural environment so much that when we came back to the US he really had a hard time adjusting because he was always raised in an international environment.

Peter led a global health nonprofit that has worked in over 100 countries. "Since I joined as the CEO I've had an opportunity to work in about 40 countries around the globe with a big focus on sub-Saharan Africa."

Peter's experience as a Black African and as a CEO of a global organization is an example of the experience people of color and minorities go through in a dominant culture. His first experience of discrimination was when he came to the US and tried to find a place to live. I remember having a hard time when I arrived in Los Angeles, which is where I was doing my studies. I found myself being rejected, after being told that apartments were available when I came in contact physically with the person, they quickly said that it was no longer available. After having to simulate experiences like that I decided to call upon some friends to test to see if what I thought was a problem was the problem and it turned out that I was being discriminated against and, on the basis, just of how I end up probably.

He talked about the challenges and microaggression he encountered when he was elected to be the CEO of a global organization. "I felt at the beginning before people knew what my title was or my responsibility that kind of had to remind people ... I have to tell people twice that I was the CEO of this organization." On several occasions,

I had to do extra work to get my opinion listened to ... I would be with a colleague that was my supervisee and I saw people address him as the boss, rather than me assuming that he has the higher position.

Peter speaks French, English, and some Spanish in addition to his native African language.

### **Tracy**

Tracy is an American of Hispanic origin. She had been in the international development and humanitarian space for over 30 years. Tracy started her career as an economist dealing mainly with numbers, and later she continued advancing in her career to a senior management position dealing mainly with people. Reflecting on her journey as an economist to becoming a CEO of a humanitarian organization and stressing the importance of leadership training on cultural diversity, Tracy shared “we came into the industry because we’ve got a technical area around which we’re passionate about ... then we happen to get into management. But that wasn't taught. Nobody told me anything about people or anything like that.” This is one of the reasons she advocated for training on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), particularly for senior management.

Speaking on diversity, Tracy cautioned about the definition and application of diversity.

[E]ven if we have a racially diverse board let's say, they all tend to be from the same socio-economic status. Are they really diverse? or they just look diverse? Because what you want, is that diversity of perspective that comes with different lived experiences, and if everybody had more or less the same thing that it really doesn't matter If you're African American or Indian American or something else. You've got common experience and so you're not getting the full value of that diversity.

She advocated for bringing a youth member to the board of one of the organizations she worked with as a CEO to help to diversify, not just the age, but the socio-economic status as well since the youth member would bring a different perspective.

Tracy's stories regarding working in conflict zones and dealing with cultural diversity during intense times were very insightful for this study. She described the emotional intensity of professional staff in conflict zones. It is indeed very difficult to manage cultural diversity and maintain professionalism as humanitarians in an environment where your coworkers are a mix of Israelis and Palestinians or Bosnyak and Serbs or Black South Africans and White Afrikana. Tracy offered great insights into some of the most effective approaches to managing a culturally diverse staff. She believed leaders have to be intentional about diversity management and give it the attention it deserves because it is about organizational effectiveness. She recommended efforts and initiatives of diversity, equity, and inclusion be led by staff to be more effective.

One of the most effective approaches, Tracy highlighted, is to have clear shared goals. can we rally around the mission? can we rally around the objectives? and for that to work the objectives, the mission, and the metrics all have to be crystal clear so that everybody understands how they relate to it and how their work is contributing to it.

Team building activities are another recommendation from Tracy. It strengthens bonding between team members and creates good memories and common experiences as a team. According to Tracy, it is about "creating common memories, common goals, common experiences, and to see the teams sort of grow around that." Another effective approach

in managing cultural diversity is to create a culture "where you can have sort of productive candid conversations and people feel okay about surfacing [issues] rather than just let them simmer."

Being sincere, consistent, genuine, and a role model when it comes to managing cultural diversity is crucial according to Tracy. Indeed, Tracy commented, any kind of inconsistency is

going to be picked up and then it's going to be seen that you're lying, or you're not sincere, or you didn't mean what you said. That's terrible because at that point you will come across as tone-deaf and there's nothing worse for a leader than being seen as tone-deaf; you don't get me, you don't realize how stupid you come across.



## Chapter 5: Results and Findings

### Theme#1: Cultural Diversity Management is a Challenging Process

The experience of managing culturally diverse people is by nature a tough, difficult, and continued struggle process. Participants described the process as hard, complex, expensive, painful, messy, and challenging. The sub-themes for this overall theme that I discuss in this section include the process being: hard and uncomfortable, sensitive, complex and messy, and a long-haul journey. Table 2 below provides some detail.

**Table 2**

*Themes and Sub-Themes*

Themes	Sub-theme	Participant	Quotes
Cultural Diversity management is a challenging process	Hard and uncomfortable	Peter	It is not always easy to change people's minds about the issues ... The mindset piece is the most difficult one. That is when people are alone with their own consciousness and that's what they deeply believe in. That is the stuff in the end only they can do [change].
	Sensitive	Tracy	We had Croats, Bosniaks, and Serbs all in one office all in one team, and this was a traumatized population that had Literally family members blown up by the other side. Our diverse staff tried to be professional in the office environment but right underneath the surface there is so much stuff going on.
	Complex & messy	Nabil	We had about 25 different nationalities and maybe at least three or four religions; Muslims,

		Christians, Jews, Hindus, Sikhs, so that adds to the complexity.
A long-haul journey	Amy	It is the ground game. It is a hard long game. It is the hard day in and day out in building trust, communication, and mutual understanding.
	Tracy	There is no a magic recipe. It is a journey, it is part of a broader process and long-term objectives.
	Steven	Achieving inclusion does not come easily and it takes time.

### **Hard and Uncomfortable**

Having a diverse workforce is a big achievement; however, that is only the beginning. “The real work begins after that” said Amy. “You have to learn how to work together and make decisions differently,” she added. What makes cultural diversity management hard is that it is about understanding and accepting people regardless of their national origin, cultural background, race, ethnicity, gender, language, politics, and religious affiliation.

Dealing with people is challenging on its own, let alone dealing with people of different languages, cultures, religions, norms, and values. Edward described the communication challenges he encountered working with expatriates from different parts of the world in Afghanistan. In one incident, he found himself in a heated conversation with an engineer from Latin America. The engineer was talking loudly and yelling. For Edwards, who grew up in the Midwest, this was “very disrespectful.” He asked the engineer, “could you stop arguing” but for the engineer, this was a “normal conversation”

and he replied, “I’m not arguing.” A colleague from New Zealand who was listening to the conversation pointed out the difference in cultures they were having.

In another incident, Edward recalled the communication challenges he had during his work in Burundi; a francophone country where French is the official language. Edward spoke very little French at the beginning, but a year later, his French was passable. Towards the end of his time in Burundi, Edward realized a lot of the miscommunications were not because his French was not good, rather “they were literally meaning different things, when we were communicating .... It is not only about understanding the language only, it is everything else.” Pointing to another example of a communication challenge, Edward added,

the difference between ... the UK and the US, ... a lot of people assume it's quite similar ... they're both English speaking ... there's a big assumption that we're all communicating the same way, because we're all native English speakers, when in fact the words are not. There are a lot of miscommunications between the British and American [language] because ... it's not just the words, it's everything else. If you are sharing something with a British person, and they say “oh that's interesting” they don't mean it's interesting. That's probably bad news.

However, it is not only about the communication challenges, but also about dealing with people who have different work cultures, values, and priorities. Nabil, who is originally from East Africa and worked as a CEO of a UK NGO, remembered the frustrations he had when he was dealing with an NGO from the middle east that had different work cultures and priorities. He summarized the issue:

When you send them a proposal [for a project], you find a very strange thing.

One, they are in a rush to receive the proposal, so they want it yesterday, but they want a quality proposal since this is going to be a half-a-million or a million-dollar proposal. They tend to pressure you to get that information quickly.

Obviously, you try to meet the requirements, and then all of a sudden, they got quiet. If they were in a rush what happened? Sometimes you don't hear from them, sometimes they don't call you for a long time, and then they come back all of a sudden, they want to implement it. When can you do it? You really get confused. What is going on? We rushed it so much to prepare it. We had to bend some rules, or we had to drop other work to do their work. And now all of a sudden, they disappear, but then they come back and then they want you to drop other work that you're doing.

Another example Nabil shared was their “insistence on pictures of the project” while the data did not matter to them. He added

You can get pictures and they don't make any value ... [you] can show them some nice pictures of a child crying or a woman receiving food or ... etc. However, the most important thing, is the data, to see how your program is impacting. They have very little interest in that.

What makes cultural diversity management even harder is that it involves changing people's minds to accept other people who are different from them in language, culture, religion, norms, and ways of thinking. Changing people's minds requires that they give up on views, concepts, ideas, opinions, and impressions that they had grown up with and have been holding for a long time. According to Peter, “The mindset piece is the

most difficult one. That is when people are alone with their own consciousness and that's what they deeply believe in. That is the stuff in the end only they can do [change]."

Confirming what Peter said, Hani added, while "It is not always easy to change people's minds about the issues," he found encouraging people to learn and be aware of other cultures' contributions to humanity a very effective method.

Hani encouraged his staff to read the history and geography of the countries they serve. According to Hani,

one of the jobs of a leader is making sure for the inclusiveness. Not only does he learn but also makes sure that people around him read and learn about other cultures. If we are talking about Kashmir if you know nothing about Kashmir. If we talk about Somalia. If the only thing you know about Somalia is the war, it is a lost cause; it is a shame.

He reminded his staff about the contributions countries like Iraq, Yemen, Somalia, and Afghanistan made to humanity and the civilizations founded in these countries so that they do not see them only as refugees and displaced people. Hani gave an example of Yemen.

If you see Yemen only through the violence and the war, you have to know that Yemen was not always like this. Yemeni were not beggars. Yemen used to be described by the Romans as Felix of Arabia means the most beautiful place. Yemen was a Center of civilization. People used to pass through Yemen. The Quran talked about it, the Torah talked about it, and the Bible talked about it. It is one of the most beautiful and sophisticated civilizations ... They contributed [for example] the coffee you drink every day called Mocha.

Steven explained why management of cultural diversity is challenging: “People feel threatened by other cultures because they are different, they are the other, they are the wrong.” He argued you can remove the threat by humanizing the conversation and by focusing on similarities, not the differences. “You and I are totally different but let us talk about food over dinner and dinner food we both like. Let us humanize the conversation which we don’t always have the chance to do.” The challenge is not about “presenting the facts and convincing people [to embrace cultural diversity]” said Edward, rather it is about “transitioning them gradually and taking them to a place where they don’t feel they are giving up everything. It is not a zero-sum game.”

### **Sensitive**

Managing cultural diversity is a sensitive process since it concerns people’s culture, religion, and self-pride; things people hold dear and hold close to their hearts. It is a process that requires leaders to be careful and watch every word they utter. It is sensitive because, as a humanitarian leader, you would be working with diverse people who may have different priorities, interests, and sometimes in a conflict between each other, particularly in conflict zones. Meeting people where they are—as human beings—and not judging them based on the labels they carry, is another challenge that is not easy for people to do according to Tracy. Recalling the various places she worked and lived in, particularly conflict zones such as the Israelis/Palestinians conflict, the Bosnians/Serbs conflicts, and the South African Blacks/Afrikanas, Tracy shared

willing to meet people where they are and not being persuaded or blinded by labels ... and to try to understand the person, that's a lot more work because labels are useful, they allow you to take, perhaps, shortcuts, but if you're dealing

particularly with very fraught, intense situations that are going to get you in a whole lot of trouble very quickly.

It is very easy to fall into “the trap of confusing the label with the person” added Tracy arguing “To a certain extent, everybody has to be given the benefits of the doubt until they prove you wrong.”

Tracy described the challenges of managing culturally diverse staff in an active conflict zone where team members are from both sides of the conflict such as a mix team of Palestinians and Israelis or a team comprised of Bosnians and Serbs. Working on these areas requires dealing with the feelings and emotions of traumatized staff from the impact of the conflict. Tracy recalled the time when she worked on a project based in Sarajevo, Bosnia right after the peace agreement was signed.

[W]e had Bosniaks and Croats. Then we opened up another sort of similar project in the Republic of Serbs so then we had Croats and Serbs all in one office all in one team, and this was a traumatized population that had Literally family members blown up by the other side. Our diverse staff tried to be professional in the office environment but right underneath the surface there is so much stuff going on.

Religious sensitivity is another challenge in managing culturally diverse people. What some think is a universal act of love and harmony could turn into a violation of religious boundaries and a moment of awkwardness for others. This what happened to Hani who led a Muslim faith-based organization in the US. Hani was mobilizing the communities around Chicago to collect food, clothes, and other needed items to send to help the people in Afghanistan. A church from the suburb of Chicago filled a van with

clothes and other needed items and brought them to where Hani's organization was collecting these items in front of one of the mosques. An excited reporter from a local TV channel, who attended the event wanted to show the solidarity among American Muslims, Christians, and Jews in supporting the needs of Afghanistan, so the reporter said, "since you guys Christian and Muslim working so hard together to support these people give a hug to each other to show how love is in action." Hani recalled the embarrassing moment:

While I'm standing next to this lady from the church delegation ... Before I could say just one second or have another Muslim lady standing next to them to hug them ... the lady [who] was taller than me just grabbed me. It was too late.

In the Muslim tradition, hugging someone of the opposite gender who is not a close relative is not permitted.

### **Complex and Messy**

The cultural diversity environment is complex and messy. You are not only dealing with different cultures that have different norms, values, communication styles, and priorities, but also there are subcultures within a culture. In many countries, there is no unified typical culture for the whole country. Rather, you will find the southern subculture of the country is different from the north, is different from the west or the east. Even if two cultures share the same language, the words may be the same, but the meanings could be different. Add to the complexity of our world the fact that within one culture, you may have different religions and within one religion, you may have different cultures. Because of this complexity, the road for leaders to bring understanding,



cohesiveness, and the ability to work together despite all these differences is a y and messy road.

Describing the complexity in his organization, Nabil, who led a Muslim faith-based organization in the UK, shared, “we had about 25 different nationalities and maybe at least three or four religions; Muslims, Christians, Jews, Hindus, Sikhs, so that adds to the complexity.” Another layer of complexity mentioned by Nabil was the differences in worldview, way of thinking, and preferred styles of communication between younger and older generations within a culture as well as a culture of origins adopted culture. This requires “treating people carefully in terms of what you say, what you do, and how you think” added Nabil.

Nabil shared an example he experienced during his work:

we had an employee who is a Sikh. So, when we had a staff gathering and we asked people what they want to eat, he said, “Non-Halal food.” Now for a Muslim can be offensive but we looked at it, this is his religious teachings. They teach them not to eat Halal food. Which is quite strange. Normally you can eat Halal, vegetarian, Kosher, or vegan. But this one is “Non-Halal” food. Basically, as long as it is not Halal food, he is ok with it.

Peter explained the complexity of our world from the humanitarian perspective, how the problems we are dealing with today are more complex than before and why cultural diversity and having a diverse workforce is crucial to understanding the different perspectives. Peter shared,

in the humanitarian world, it is not only about hunger, and poverty, there is health, and even in health, it has gotten more complex it's noncommunicable diseases, it's

also the financial access to financial services, it's access to agriculture. It used to be simple: you just deliver food. Now you want to deliver food, you want to make sure that it's delivered in a good environment. You want to take care of the environment, so the number of problems that we're trying to deal with to solve is much more complex.

Additionally, Edward gave an example of a challenge he encountered when he was in the field when the culture of expatriates clashed with the local culture they are serving:

Where there are outside foreigners coming to a place, it's not unusual for expatriates who are in a country, they're not with their families and so when dinner time comes, you're no longer working so it's not uncommon to go out to dinner. Now whether people are drinking alcohol or not that's another thing, but the local culture may say everyone goes to their house in the name that's it for the night, but these internationals don't have families to go to so they may go out drinking or dancing maybe all these other things. That's part of their culture and you have to respect it as long as no one's hurting anyone else. so, your ex-pats may, especially on a weekend, have gone to do something else that the local people do and or wouldn't do and that's what you have to understand and respect.

### **A Long-Haul Journey**

The process of understanding and accepting people regardless of their differences and changing people's minds to embrace diversity is not something that can be done in a matter of days and weeks. It requires staying the course for the long haul. Amy stated, "It is the ground game. It is a hard long game. It is the hard day in and day out in building trust, communication, and mutual understanding."

In agreement with Amy, Tracy acknowledged, “There is no magic recipe. It is a journey, it is part of a broader process and long-term objectives.” In concurrence with Amy and Tracy, Steven added, “Achieving inclusion does not come easily and it takes time.” Peter also agreed adding that everybody’s journey is different “it’s a journey because it’s very contextual.”

However, that can be seen as a “distraction when you are dealing with giant deliverables, deadlines, and milestones” cautioned Tracy, urging leaders to understand its importance and to be patient and warning that if you do not handle it “your ability to drive results will be hugely compromised. You may gain some short-term gains at the expense of long-term gains.”

### **Theme#2: Requirements for Successful Cultural Diversity Management**

Due to the challenging nature of the process of managing culturally diverse people, there are some requirements, important steps, and qualities of leaders that participants saw as essential for success. The components of successful cultural diversity management include: intercultural competency, exemplary leadership, investment in training, diversifying leadership team, and a culture of inclusion (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1***Components of Successful Cultural Diversity Management***Intercultural Competency**

Leung, K., Ang, S. and Tan, M.L. (2014) defined intercultural competence as the ability to function effectively across cultures, to think and act appropriately, and to communicate and work with people from different cultural backgrounds – at home or abroad. The following are important elements of intercultural competency.

***Self and Social Awareness***

Self and social awareness are about understanding yourself and your limitations (self-awareness), as well as understanding people around you and their limitations (social

awareness). Cultural diversity management is about meeting people where they are regardless of their labels, stereotypes and not judging them based on the labels they carry. To do that successfully we need to understand ourselves first, practice self-awareness, and be mindful of our own biases and limitations. All participants emphasized the importance of self-awareness for leaders. Tracy described self-awareness as “being aware of who you are and sort of where you've come from, how that has shaped your thinking and how that might be biasing your understanding. So, being hyper-aware of your own limitations.” Steven elaborated further in defining Self-awareness, which is being “aware that you come from a particular cultural context and norms that create boundaries to who you are.”

Nabil shared a practical example of one aspect of being aware of who you are:

I'm the type of person who likes to have it closed, make a decision now, finish.

But I got trained as well, and you might have heard of the Myers Briggs type indicator ... my type was the type of person called a J that likes to close on projects now, and every decision has to be made now. When I realized that could be a weakness, I created a self-awareness, I don't have to do that all the time.

### ***Active Listening***

For the circle of awareness to be completed, we need to understand people and the dynamics around us. This requires active listening, creating a safe space to welcome tough conversations, and making ourselves accessible. Listening is “number one and is very important,” said Nabil responding to a question about the most effective approach in his cultural diversity management experience. Nabil explained the type of needed

listening: “Not pretending to listen, but genuinely have an active listening and understand what they're saying and where they are coming from.” He added,

Part of active listening is to reflect back on what the other person said just to make sure you have understood what they said. This will give them confidence [that] you're paying attention when you repeat what they said or reflect back. It also gives you confirmation as well, did you hear them properly, or you just misunderstood them? Or you just assumed they were saying one thing and then you find out they meant something else.

This means “you have to be willing to invest the time to talk and listen,” said Tracy. It also requires that you are an accessible and approachable leader. Understanding the importance of this aspect, Amy commented, “I tried to make myself accessible though time management is a problem.”

Nabil shared an amazing commitment as a leader in making sure he is accessible to his employees. Not only that he adapted an open-door policy that allows any staff member to schedule an appointment with him, no question asked, but also, he took proactive steps.

The first thing I do the first hour or so [every day], is to go around the building say hello to everyone, asking about their personal situations and what their families are about, the type of work [they do]. I clear my calendar for this, and I don't make appointments during this hour. Amazingly I learned a lot from this, more than the meetings. Because some staff might be busy, and they don't bother to come to see me, some may look at the appointment [schedule] and see me busy

or some of them might rank administratively 3 to 4 levels below me and might say why should I bother and try to meet with the CEO.

Quality of listening is a critical quality for leaders to help them make the right decisions. Stressing the significance of listening, Amy urged leaders to always ask themselves “how do I really make sure, have a diversity or plurality of voices who are informing my leadership and my management?” Drawing attention to the value of having all perspectives in decision-making, Steven added “if everything [is] from ... [men] and I don't have enough women listening ... I am going to lose a perspective on a particular issue that is simply not there.” Nabil believed gender perspectives, as well as the perspectives of ethnicities or different nationalities, are essential parts of a leader's worldview. Quoting a verse from the Quran (the Muslim holy book):

O mankind! We have created you from male and female and have made you nations and tribes that ye may know one another. The noblest of you, in the sight of Allah, is the best in conduct. Allah is Knower, Aware. (49:13)

Nabil commented this is an indication that “genders male [men] and female [women] and different backgrounds of ethnicity or geographical locations have different views of the world.” Pointing out the positive impact of listening, Nabil concluded “After that, you can take any decision you want, because you have a better understanding.” Additionally, Amy reminded leaders about the challenge of listening in diversity management: “listening to all opinions and still asking those whom you did not take their opinions to follow you and not pull against it”

## *Humility*

Amy defined humility as “sort of the opposite of Hubris ... You think you know everything.” If we do not have humility, we risk “missing such important things” said Amy. “Even when I try to keep my mind open if I’m lucky I’m only absorbing, a percentage of what I really should, as I listen, learn, and understand,” Amy explained further.

Steven reflected on the connection between humility and listening “there's a certain humility about self because if you're always sure you have all the answers you are not going to be listening and looking for others.” Steven noticed American culture tends to:

tell people what to do because you have a strong personality, a strong leader to do this, but to me that type of leadership is not someone following [you] and working with you, it's your view pushing and driving something forward.

Peter believed, in our diverse world today, there is no alternative to humility.

I think people need to embrace humility ... I just think the world is very quickly passing this stage when people think that they can do it themselves or they are powerful enough, I think that mode is likely to fail in this new environment.

A similar statement was echoed by Tracy “I think it's particularly important that you sort of seating your power to others and acknowledge with some humility that there's just no way you've got all the answers.”



### *Respect and Open-Mindedness*

In his response to the question “What kind of mindset skills and competencies are necessary for leaders to properly manage cultural diversity?,” Peter was convinced the first mindset for a leader working in a culturally diverse environment is to “embrace a worldview that is made up for which cultural diversity is an integral part because that's the world we live in.” According to Hani, it is to “create a culture of respect and understanding and remove prejudice and see people as human beings like yourself.” Answering the same question, Edward argued, “there is hard to say anything really universal. Mostly come back to basic things like acting with respect and trying to understand where people are coming from.”

Hani talked a lot about respect and showing respect to other cultures. According to Hani, reading and learning more about other people's cultures is one of the most effective ways to learn how to respect other people. He added,

We are grateful to Sumerians, Babylonians, Southeast Asian cultures, and the Chinese, and we are grateful to each civilization. They have contributed a lot to our lives, and we learned from them. Without all these [cultures] there would be no civilization. We would not be who we are today.

Nabil clarified, “Respecting cultural diversity and being open-minded does not mean you compromise an organization's values and principles. These are red lines.” He gave an example of someone within a Muslim organization saying, “we need to have a party and we are going to bring alcohol.” He added, “Anybody who walks into the organization will realize there is a certain type of culture that fits with the faith of the organization and [that] has to be accepted.”

### ***Being Comfortable with Ambiguity***

When you work across cultures and borders, ambiguity and walking into unknown territories becomes part of the journey. This demands you to live with ambiguity, to have some tolerance for ambiguity, and to have an ability to adapt and change. As Steven put it “if you are comfortable with multiple cultures, it means you are comfortable in adapting and that you have a comfort level of ambiguity and that you have a comfort level in moving change and taking part of the change.”

### **Exemplary Leadership that Models the Way**

Leaders who believe in and trust diversity and inclusion, who are ready to set the tone, walk the talk, are prepared to lead by example, and be role models are essential in diversity management (use of self). All participants in this study stressed the detrimental role of leaders in the success or failure of cultural diversity management. They all believed it starts with leaders. “It starts with you,” said Hani, you have to “Show them how leadership is, encourage them, and make them leaders ... Work on yourself and remove prejudice ... Show respect, no tolerance for discrimination, openness, and that you are a learner. Live by your values not empty words.” Nabil added “Lead by example ... Be the role model. You have to be seen that you believe and accept diversity.” Steven thinks leaders “have to believe and recognize that input of different perspectives and views is inherently a healthy thing to do.”

Steven has spent a large portion of his career leading an umbrella of international organizations and humanitarian leaders from all backgrounds and cultures. He shared his leadership experience and how he was able to lead such highly educated, highly

experienced, and highly diverse leaders with competing and sometimes conflicting interests.

You've got all these different organizations all have different interests to do something. If I come in with a bias like we must end up here, very rapidly people will see Steven as a bias, he is trying to move it in this direction and so forth. Whereas if I come in, I bet have some ideas where this may end up but, let's see where the group goes and trust the diversity of the group, most of the time the group sort of ends up where you would like them to end up anyway, but they got there, you didn't get them there, and so this trust that others will—if you provide the right tools—will walk to conclusions or similar conclusions on their own without you trying to force, manipulate.

### **Invest in Training and Ask for Help**

Get help and identify champions and alliances who support you. Leaders do not have all the answers and cannot do it alone. As reported by Tracy, we all come to our work environment with a huge number of implicit biases that we do not even question since they are second nature. Therefore, raising awareness along with implicit bias training can go a long way. Tracy shared, “You have to be able to invest in training, awareness raising, and so on.”

Sharing her organization's experience in this area, Tracy commented, we did that, with our board, so they would understand sort of their own implicit biases. In our own organization, we've got DEI Council that's entirely Staff led, and my commitment is to make sure that they have the budget for some of these training and that they have a plan and that they understand the sort of mutual

accountability, but at the end of the day it's effective because I'm not the one that's deciding what's the next thing. the Leader doesn't have to have all the answers all the time.

Tracy recognized many CEOs need training:

this is probably an area where all of us can use a little bit more help and resources, external consultants ... particularly for CEOs because if you're a CEO where do you go ask for? Who do you ask for support? you don't want to ask your board, those are your bosses, they think you know what you're doing.

Reflecting on her journey to becoming a CEO of a humanitarian organization,

Tracy said

look I'm an economist and in our industry, I think we all tend to be technical people. That's why we came into the industry because we've got a technical area around which we're passionate about ... then we happen to get into management. But that wasn't taught. I spent a lot of time trying to figure out economics, nobody told me anything about people or anything like that. You kind of learn that, as we go along.

Therefore, Tracy thought organizations

have to be willing to invest more in our managers because, by in large, people haven't come -at least in our industry- into management because that's what they wanted to be. No. They wanted to do good in the world and they've got a technical area.

Nabil concurred “diversity and inclusion training is important, especially for leaders, how do you deal with a person that's different from you whether it be color, faith, gender, a different tribe.”

### **Diversify your Leadership Team**

Tracy acknowledged that we, as a community or sector, are struggling with DEI and are still far away from diversifying leadership teams.

[W]e like to think that we're all for it, but in fact, we've got a long way to go to get to be more diverse and inclusive, from the very top from the governance on, and we're not quite there and I think it's been shocking to the Community to put a mirror to itself and go gosh you are white.

Diversifying her board was one of the changes Amy strived to make when she took the CEO position. Her organization was led by

an incredible person for 22 years but all decisions were really made by a group of white men for a long, long time. My senior leadership team was not very diverse they had just recruited their first woman of color six months before I arrived, and that was it.

However, now she was proud that 50% of her leadership team included people of color.

When Nabil took over, the board was already diverse. However, there was no diversity at the senior level, particularly gender diversity. "What I did was, I deliberately targeted individuals to apply to join to get a job within the leadership team, so that diversity aspect can be done," said Nabil adding that you can be deliberate and be intentional about it calling it “positive discrimination ... we went to recruitment agencies,

and we said for this position, we want the female director.” Nabil, having said that, cautioned not to hire only for the sake of diversity:

they have to be qualified ... you don't want to set them up to fail by thinking only, for the sake of diversity, but they don't have the requirements of that leadership [position], because their weaknesses will be exposed ... you have to be careful because some people just push diversity, for the sake of diversity.

### **Create a Culture of Inclusion**

When participants were asked about the most effective way to manage successful cultural diversity, they all emphasized the importance of creating a culture of inclusion supported by enforceable policies that encourage diversity, provide safe space for tough conversations, and do not tolerate any kinds of discrimination as the most effective approach to managing cultural diversity. Hani summarized it by saying, “Create a culture of what is acceptable and not acceptable.” He added the organization's leadership should create a culture for the organization where everyone knows making jokes concerning somebody's gender, race, or physical appearance is not tolerated, and you could lose your job. Hani recommended leadership should adopt policies that protect such culture and then enforce them. He also reiterated the significance of leadership examples and that “your staff should know that you as a CEO will not tolerate these behaviors.” In agreement with Hani, Nabil confirmed the importance of creating a culture where hate speech and racism are not tolerated. The reason creating a culture of inclusion is so important, per Peter, is because “You have to create conditions for people to thrive. If you can achieve that you have gone as far as you can go. Because if you have a bigot eventually, they are going to go or not be effective.”

Another essential quality for leaders who are managing cultural diversity is to create a safe space for tough conversations. Tracy urged all leaders to always ask themselves, “How do we create a culture that welcomes these conversations that makes it safe to have them?” She warned, “letting things be under the surface, without being questioned, and so on until they somehow explode that's not good for anybody.” Amy echoed what Tracy said and advocated for creating a space “Where voices who express difference can be heard.” However, Amy cautioned on what she called “Hijacking the process.” She explained it “if a minority want to make sure we're understanding, but also the loudest voice doesn't have to necessarily be the dominant voice and so it's a constant work in progress.”

Steven highlighted the challenges leaders face today in balancing between creating a culture of inclusion where all voices are heard and the concern of turning the organization's culture into what he called a “culture of grievances.” He explained, the more you get into environment of my historical wrong the more it becomes a culture of grievance. It works towards the bottom and it's sort of like my grievances and ... I've seen this interaction of sort of like okay we're doing a race-based lens and someone's going (to say) “but that doesn't take into account the LGBT Q community and this community,” and in each case, it was sort of like well who has the greater suffering.

Steven added,

I think this is the challenge of how to accept people for where they are, but to recognize that, as an institution, it is not my job to solve all societal problems. I can't solve 400 years of slavery within the US cultural context, I can create an

institution that allows different voices to feeling strong and heard. But I will also keep them very focused on the mission.

### **Theme#3: Proper Cultural Diversity Management Pays Off**

Despite the challenging nature of the cultural diversity management process, all participants agreed cultural diversity makes organizations better and stronger if it is managed properly. The following are some of the benefits and advantages mentioned by the participants:

#### **Drive Creativity and Innovation**

“Plurality of viewpoints and different perspectives are driver of innovation,” said Edward. This is because “greater diversity around you will give you more options, ideas, and thoughts than you will have on your own” said Steven validating what Edward mentioned. Tracy confirmed, “There are a lot of data out there that measure overall productivity and creativity.”

#### **Improve the Decision-Making Process**

According to Hani, proper cultural diversity management improves the decision-making process because diversity brings a “wealth of experience and wealth of solutions to problems.” From Steven's perspective, “Having diversity, especially in your leadership gives you different perspectives that are brought to the solutions of your problems.” Nabil went even further to say that

70 - 80% of the time or even 90% of the time, the initiatives are not from the leaders. The ideas s from the workforce across the organization. Because you're a leader, they come [to you], all of them talk to you, and then you pick up and choose Some of these initiatives and implement them.



Here he was pointing out that many leaders take the credit for these initiatives without reference to the original initiators.

Nabil highlighted the need for diversity at all organizational levels. He shared two practical examples of the value of women's voices to understand women's needs from a higher level such as the board of directors to a committee on the ground in charge of designing a relief package. When it comes to safeguarding and women's safety, "You cannot ask your males [men] in the organization if females [women] colleague[s] in the organization feel safe. Women have comfort talking to other women." On an operational level, Nabil added:

If you have a committee that is in charge of designing a relief package for families in disastrous zones. If all committee members are males, most probably they may not include Sanitary pads and other women's needs in the relief package.

In another example, he wondered, "If you're building latrines or toilets very far away from the [refugee] camp, how women are going to use them at night?"

### **Increases Organizations' Effectiveness**

For Amy, the story of creating and establishing a safety net program in Ethiopia a decade ago for eight million people who were chronically food insecure is a highlight and a great example of when multicultural coordination and cooperation are used for good.

She remembered how

International donors, the host government, the multi-lateral institutions, local actors and international NGOs worked together in a multicultural setting, looked

systemically and structurally on the issue, learned from the history of 1984 famine and from science to address the issue of chronic food insecurity.

She was inspired “To see what we can do that's bigger collectively than anyone.

Peter believed “A diverse workforce will make the delivery of the service or the goods more efficient ... and will help design a more efficient and a longer lasting solution.” He thought this is because “By understanding the perspective of the beneficiary, you can get the products much better to them.”

### **Efficiency and better positioning to deal with the complexity of our world**

Peter considered the problems we are dealing with today to be “more complex than before, and therefore, they require a diverse workforce to understand the different perspectives.” Explaining this point further, Peter added,

As the world is moving toward more patient/client/customer human-centered, the humanitarian work is also about serving people. To serve the people you need to get the right perspective. The more diverse workforce you have, the better your chances of understanding your beneficiaries.

Sharing an example from the humanitarian sector, Peter followed,

it is not only about hunger, but it is also about poverty, access to financial services, and health. It used to be simple: you just deliver food. Now, you have to deliver in a good environment – you want to take care of the environment.

Having spent many years internationally in the field, Edward witnessed the benefits of diversity during ethnic and tribal conflicts. Referring to the internal conflict in Ethiopia where the federal government was at war with one of its regions causing mistrust and conflict among the diverse communities of Ethiopia, Edward shared,

“Having an expatriate in your team is a good thing because if you bring somebody from the same country could be perceived as the enemy like right now happening in Tigray.”

Having a diverse organization is essential to the task at hand according to Tracy. She tried to imagine her organization not being diverse and concluded,

You couldn't possibly be managing the projects that we were managing in the environments that we were managing if we just had one side of the equation, you really had to figure out how you brought everybody together. It does have to be that way and I can't imagine doing a project or an activity without it.

#### **Theme#4: The impact of long-time exposure to different cultures**

The participants of this study are very diverse in many aspects including culture, background, national origin, faith, occupation, gender, and ethnicity. However, they all shared one thing: exposure to other cultures for long periods in their lives outside their original cultures. As a result, participants identified a cultural gap, identity confusion, and struggle to reconnect with their own culture. They also developed a critical mind and found that the long exposure to different cultures has broadened their perspectives (See **figure #2**). Here below are further descriptions of these impacts.

**A cultural gap and struggle to reconnect with their own culture:** Steven was born in the US but left the US at an early age. He read and wrote English at an early age then added Spanish and French. He spent so much time in Europe and South America and then eventually came to the US. "My understanding of culture was very confusing. Because first where am I from? Was always a difficult and remains a difficult question to answer." He explained further his feelings when he returned to the US as a teenager.

In the back of my mind, I thought I have a US passport, I must be American, but I never lived here and then coming to live here and realizing I'm not sure about this culture. None of the TV or the things that typical Americans had considered normal. So, realizing that I did not fit in was sort of a complicated thing for a teenager.

Steven shared a different kind of struggle to reconnect as a white American to his original US culture.

I have spent all my life trying to build bridges, helping people to understand different cultures. Yet, when it comes to America and talking about race in America, people see me as a white male of power. I can't say I'm an immigrant. My family has been here forever. I could explain all I want but I can't. I'm already (labeled), people see me as that. I can't change that. I can't say I'm coming from third cultural stuff and a different world. Most people don't understand what I'm saying.

**Developing a critical mind:** one of the impacts resulting from long-time exposure to different cultures is the development of a critical mind that notices changes and questions things from their own cultures and their way of thinking overall. “Having spent my formative years in the US then going internationally to do good, made me question the colonial and decolonization mindset,” said Amy. Edward experienced the same thing: “Coming back to your own culture after being exposed to different cultures helps you develop a critical mind and start asking questions like why do we do it that way? Why is that strange?”

Nabil shared,

After settling for a while in the west, we changed our own culture and our way of thinking. Yes, you are African or Asian, but you have quite a big element of the western way of thinking. You don't realize it until you are challenged by the other culture.

Describing the detachment between his culture of origin and his newly adopted culture, Nabil added, "I find myself I'm not part of that region anymore ... I just realized how probably British I became." Reflecting on the story he shared highlighted earlier in this dissertation about the middle eastern NGO that had shown different work cultures and priorities, Nabil commented, "I just realized how probably British I became. I lived in these cultures, and it was normal for me to do the same."

**Broadened perspectives:** Another positive aspect for those who returned to their own cultures after being exposed for a long time to different cultures is that their experience broadened their perspectives and made them understand other people's perspectives better. Steven recalled the time he spent in small rural villages and how that experience impacted him:

I have been in a small rural village working and so forth. I will never be from a small rural village, but that experience gives me at least some understanding of what it's like to be from a small rural village.

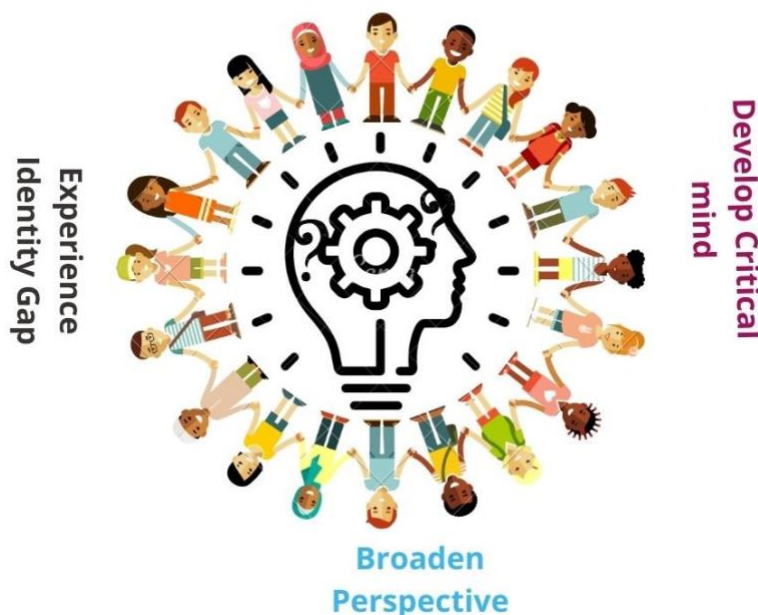
Tracy, who is Cuban American, reflected on herself being bicultural and found that was helpful for her in her international work while navigating today's multicultural world. "It created more empathy and helped me to understand other people's perspectives." Comparing her daughters who live in the more diverse Washington city to

their cousins who live in Oregon and have friends who are exactly like them, Tracy concluded “my daughters have broader perspectives than their cousins as a result.”

**Figure 2**

*Impact of Long-Time Exposure to Different Cultures*

**THE IMPACT OF LONG-TIME EXPOSURE TO DIFFERENT CULTURES**



**Theme#5: The Impact of a Dominant Culture on Leaders from a Minority**

**Background**

Peter’s experience as a successful Black African CEO leading a global INGO in the US is a great example that illustrates the impact of dominant culture on minorities. You do not have to be a low-paid staff in a low-ranking position to experience discrimination. Even leaders who occupy the highest positions in companies and organizations experience the reality of discrimination and micro-aggression in a dominant culture. When Peter came to the US for the first time, he found himself being rejected—after being told an apartment was available—when he came in-contact face-to-face with

the landlord. He had to call some white friends to test what was going on, to find out he was being discriminated against because of the color of his skin. Peter shared his experience when he first became a CEO of a large US INGO. “I have to tell people twice that I was the CEO. I have several examples of people addressing my supervisee as the boss rather than me assuming they have the higher position” said Peter explaining that he had to do “extra work to get [his] opinion listened to.”

The impact of the dominant culture and being a minority affected Peter.

I was hesitating. I did not feel comfortable or feel the level of trust in the room to be able to express myself. I felt the power dynamic was such that it was not my place to be more forceful.

Like any victim of domination and power, he wondered, “how much was my own fault and how much was the fault of others.”

The reconciliation between Peter’s cultural background and what the dominant culture expects from him as a CEO was another struggle. In the US, CEOs are well respected and usually the first to speak at any gathering. Peter’s upbringing in the West African culture was different. As Peter explained, “I was elevated in a way that you don’t just start speaking, you need to respect certain things for example elderly in the room.”

The feeling of being a minority does not have to be due to your skin color, it could happen because of the label you are carrying. This label could be a race, an ethnicity, a tribe, or another type of affiliation. Steven, who is white, spent most of his life overseas and lived in different cultures and places trying to build bridges, and helping people to understand different cultures. However,

when it comes to America and talking about race in America, people see me as a white male of power. I can't say I'm an immigrant. My family has been here forever. I could explain all I want but I can't. I'm already (labeled), people see me as that. I can't change that. I can't say I'm coming from third cultural stuff and a different world.

He added, "Most people don't understand what I'm saying."

### **Summary**

Participants described the experience of the cultural diversity management process as challenging. They said it is hard, uncomfortable, sensitive, complex, expensive, painful, messy, and requires patience. To manage cultural diversity successfully, the study identified certain essential elements: First, understanding yourself and your limitations (self-awareness), as well as understanding people around you and their limitations (social awareness). Second, exemplary leaders who are humble, good listeners, respectful, open-minded, and comfortable with ambiguity. Third, investment in training since leaders cannot do it alone. Fourth, diversifying organizational leadership teams, and finally creating a culture of inclusion within the organization so staff feels they are accepted and respected. The study concluded proper cultural diversity management will pay off in terms of increasing creativity, innovation, organizational effectiveness, decision-making, efficiency, and developing organizational capacity to deal with the complexity of our world today.

One of the study's findings is the impact of long-time exposure to different cultures on humanitarian leaders. The study identified three areas of impact. First, a cultural gap, identity confusion, and struggle to reconnect with their original cultures.



Second, they developed a critical mind, noticed changes in their way of thinking, and started questioning things from their own cultures. Third, the experience broadened their perspectives and made them understand other people's perspectives better.

Another finding was the negative impact of a dominant culture is not limited to people of low-paid jobs and low social status, it affects even influential people with higher positions and status as long as they belong to minority groups. The impact of a dominant culture on higher-status persons of a minority group is manifested mainly in the form of microaggressions.

## **Chapter 6: Discussion and Conclusion**

The problem this study sought to address was most diversity management research focuses on for-profit companies and there is a scarcity of research that focuses on the non-profit sector. There is even more scarcity of research that sheds light on the unique experiences of humanitarian leaders in navigating cultural differences across borders and managing cultural diversity in humanitarian organizations. Therefore, the purpose of this narrative inquiry was to describe the experiences of international NGO leaders while navigating and managing cultural diversity by focusing on their experience in cultural diversity management. The research question that guided this study was: What are the experiences of international humanitarian leaders in managing and navigating cultural diversity? In this chapter, I further discuss the findings of this study.

### **Overview of Key Findings**

I believe I was able to capture the experiences of international humanitarian leaders in managing and navigating cultural diversity. I had the honor to interview some of the most experienced humanitarian leaders of our time. The average life experience of participants in the study was over 27 years, and their accumulative experience was about 200 years. The sample of participants was intentionally selected to represent distinct aspects of diversity (e.g., gender, race, color, faith, culture, and background) in addition to the size, and type of led organizations.

The findings of this study are incredibly significant for the research body since there is a scarcity of literature that highlights the experience of INGO leaders and humanitarian organizations in particular. This study's findings have practical applications and recommendations and inform professionals on how to effectively manage cultural

diversity and how to develop criteria for candidates applying for jobs that require dealing with culturally diverse people.

### **Cultural Diversity Management is a Challenging Process**

Participants described the process as hard, uncomfortable, sensitive, complex, messy, and a long-haul journey that requires patience. What makes the process challenging particularly within the context of humanitarian NGOs is the nature of the environment where NGOs operate and this has been confirmed by the existing literature. Knapp and Sheep (2019) acknowledged the challenging environment of NGOs and identified three reasons that explain it. First, INGOs have limited power and authority since much of their work is accomplished through cooperation with volunteers, partner organizations, governments, militaries, and other stakeholders. While leaders of an army, for example, can use the power of authority and command to mobilize soldiers, leaders of NGOs have only the power of their ability to win the hearts and the minds of the people they lead. Second, is the dynamic and continuously changing work environment. Third, is their inherently diverse stakeholders in terms of function, culture, socioeconomic status, and degree of influence and authority. Such diversity in many aspects makes it harder for leaders to manage and find common ground.

### **Requirements for Successful Cultural Diversity Management**

While the above finding shows how challenging the process of cultural diversity management is, existing literature shows little understanding of the different roles and responsibilities of NGO leaders as well as the needed skills and competencies (Hailey & James, 2004). Pointing to the need for further studies of diversity management on INGOs, Knapp and Sheep (2019) claimed INGOs cannot rely on control-oriented and

normative management practices, and there is a need for more studies of diversity management on INGOs to develop a complementary approach to the normative management more flexible and reliable on social capital to influence the discretionary behavior of INGOs internal and external stakeholders. Hailey and James (2004) identified unique attributes NGO leaders need such as the personal integrity, political acumen, and managerial ability to balance the competing pressures they face from the environment in which they work, the communities with whom they work, the donors who fund their work, and the staff or volunteers with whom they work (p. 9). However, there is little research that clarifies the specific qualities that leaders need to have to overcome the challenges of cultural diversity management. Therefore, this study fills a gap in the literature and helps provide an understanding on what is required to succeed in cultural diversity management, particularly within the non-profit humanitarian INGOs.

### **Intercultural Competency**

Interculturally competent leadership with specific qualities such as self and social awareness, active listening, humility, respect, open-mindedness, and being comfortable with ambiguity is one of the components of successful cultural diversity management. This finding is aligned with and confirmed by the well-established intercultural competency theory introduced by Hammer (2009). According to Hammer (2012) “The capability of deeply shifting cultural perspective and bridging behavior across cultural differences is most fully achieved when one maintains an Adaptation perspective” (p. 118). Hammer later developed the intercultural development inventory (IDI); a premier cross-culturally valid assessment for building cultural competence. According to the Intercultural Development Inventory (n.d.) website, the IDI “assesses intercultural

competence—the capability to shift cultural perspective and appropriately adapt behavior to cultural differences and commonalities.” Additionally, Hermann and Page (2016) studied and compared leaders of humanitarian organizations and leaders of development organizations in terms of leadership styles and the way they perceived their work environment. They found leaders in charge of humanitarian organizations tend to challenge the constraints in their chaotic environment and have an interest to influence the outcome of what is happening around them. Hailey and James (2004) described the environment where NGOs work as volatile, chaotic, and with limited resources while serving the most vulnerable and marginalized communities. This substantiates the finding of “being comfortable with ambiguity” as one of the important qualities for leaders working in dynamic and rapidly changing environments.

### **Exemplary Leadership**

Exemplary leadership models the way, walks the talk, and is a role model for others. Participants unanimously highlighted the essential role of leaders in setting the tone and in the creation of an inclusive culture within the organization. They all asserted it starts with leadership. This validates what Hailey and James (2004) recognized as the important role of NGO leadership, the highly personalized nature of leadership, and the powerful influence individual leaders have in these organizations. Further, Kouzes and Posner (2017) wrote about the “exemplary leadership” model in their book *The Leadership Challenge*. They emphasized the role of leadership to pave the way, set the tone, and be the example that subordinates follow:

One of the toughest parts of being a leader is that you are always on stage. People are always watching you, always talking about you, and always testing your

credibility. That is why setting the right example is so important, and why it is essential to make sure of all the tools you have available to do it. Leaders send signals in a variety of ways, and constituents read them as indicators of what's okay and what's not okay to do. (Kouzes & Posner, 2017, p. 91)

### **Investing in Training and Asking for Help**

Existing literature affirms the need to increase leaders' capacity, particularly those working globally. Zbilgin et al. (2013) argued for the need for global diversity management because “domestic diversity management approaches are not adequate to capture the demands of managing diversity in the global context” (p. 5). One of the challenges facing GDM today is building the capacity of leaders as change agents to manage and navigate global diversity (Roberson, Mustafa et al., 2013). According to Hailey and James (2004) leadership development programs that intend to increase the capacity of leaders in navigating global diversity should “focus on both the values and identity of individual leaders while also assisting leaders understand and proactively respond to their rapidly changing external environment” (p. 343). Amaram (2007) listed training on diversity and unlearning wrong practices rooted in an old way of thinking as one of the seven steps researchers found important for leaders and managers to adopt for proper diversity management.

Investment in training, particularly in areas like implicit biases or training on how to handle tough conversations is expensive but it is needed to prevent repeating ineffective methods and wrong ways of thinking. Another reason why training is important is that the team sometimes may be diversified racially and gender-wise; however, they all come from the same socio-economic status. The whole team tends to

have a common experience. So, group thinking may prevent them from identifying implicit biases. CEOs are vulnerable in this area as they do not have all the answers and they do not have someone to go to within the management of the organization since they are the highest-ranking persons. Despite the board of directors being considered the boss for CEOs, in reality, most boards seek answers from the CEOs.

### **Diversifying Leadership Team**

Leaders do not work alone, and they need to surround themselves with people who can provide a plurality of views and mirror the diverse world of today. Participants acknowledged the reality that they cannot make the needed changes themselves. This aligns with one of the first required steps for leading any change by John Kotter (1996), “building a coalition.” Kotter (1996) warned of thinking that because

Major transformations are often associated with one highly visible individual ... one might easily conclude that the kind of leadership that is so critical to any change can come only from a single larger-than-life-person. This is a very dangerous belief. Because major change is so difficult to accomplish, a powerful force is required to sustain the process. No one individual, even a monarch like a CEO, is ever able to develop the right vision, communicate it to large numbers of people, eliminate all the key obstacles, generate short-term wins, lead and manage dozens of change projects, and anchor new approaches deep in the organization's culture. A strong guiding coalition is always needed. (p. 51)

Ollapally and Ghatnagar (2009) emphasized “A holistic approach to diversity management needs to be established, where not only are initiatives introduced but attitudes to them and the people are also managed” (p. 467). Leaders may have the ability

and the authority to introduce initiatives, but the question is who will change the minds of staff and turn these initiatives into a practiced reality on the ground? As one of the participants articulated, leaders need to identify “champions” at all levels of the organization who believe in diversity and who can advocate and defend these initiatives in their departments and teams. It is even more powerful when initiatives about diversity come from staff and are led by staff, making the role of leadership focused on support and empowerment.

### **Creation of a Culture of Inclusion**

The creation of inclusive culture and setting proper conditions for people to thrive is a kind of making a systematic change than just correcting and addressing individual incidents and wrongdoing acts here and there. In other words, it is about the creation of boundaries for what is acceptable and what is not acceptable. Part of this culture is to create policies that encourage diversity and discourage and punish any type of discrimination within the organization. It is about setting diversity goals for human resource departments to reach and holding these departments accountable if these goals are ignored. It is about a set of policies, activities, initiatives, and goals pursued to create proper conditions for all employees to thrive despite their diverse backgrounds.

Stewart (2013) highlighted the significant impact leaders have as they establish the identity of the organization as well as define its strategic goals. They determine which organizational initiatives receive resources and the amount of such resources. They have “an instrumental role in molding the organizational culture, as they determine the acceptable conduct within the organization” (Stewart, 2013, p. 113). Adler and Jelinek (1988) highlighted the reasons why senior managers are viewed as having a significant



influence on the implementation of diversity management programs “they are responsible for creating, sustaining, and altering the organizational culture, which influences how employees think and behave in the organizational culture” (p. 82).

The role of leaders in developing a strong culture of inclusion is more than preaching about diversity and inclusion. Jaeyong et al. (2016) stressed the idea leaders “must practice inclusive leadership from being sensitive to the needs of each follower to recognizing their performance in a meaningful way, regardless of their social, cultural, and/or physical backgrounds” (p. 314).

### **Proper Cultural Diversity Management Pays Off**

Existing literature acknowledges the fact that diversity is a double edge sword. However, it confirmed organizations can attain the positive side, if diversity is managed properly. The findings of this study confirmed proper management of cultural diversity will drive creativity and innovation in the workplace, improve the decision-making process, increases organizations’ effectiveness, and make the organization more efficient and better equipped to deal with the complexity of the world today. In alignment with existing literature, McCuiston and Wooldridge (2004) and Ollapally and Ghatnagar (2009) found diverse organizations would have wider access to different perspectives leading to more innovative ideas and better decision-making.

Diversity can be considered a strategic resource since it is about the utilization of a firm's human capital, or the combined knowledge, skills, and abilities in its workforce (Wright & McMahan,1992). Kozlowski (2012) echoed what Peter mentioned about the advantage of diversity and considered diversity a source of sustained competitive advantage, given the specific demography of an organization cannot be perfectly

duplicated by competitors and can facilitate competencies that develop from complex social relationships. Matching the demographics of organizational workforces with that of consumers helps firms gain access to, and legitimacy in, diverse markets (Thomas & Ely, 1996).

### **The Impact of Long-Time Exposure to Different Cultures**

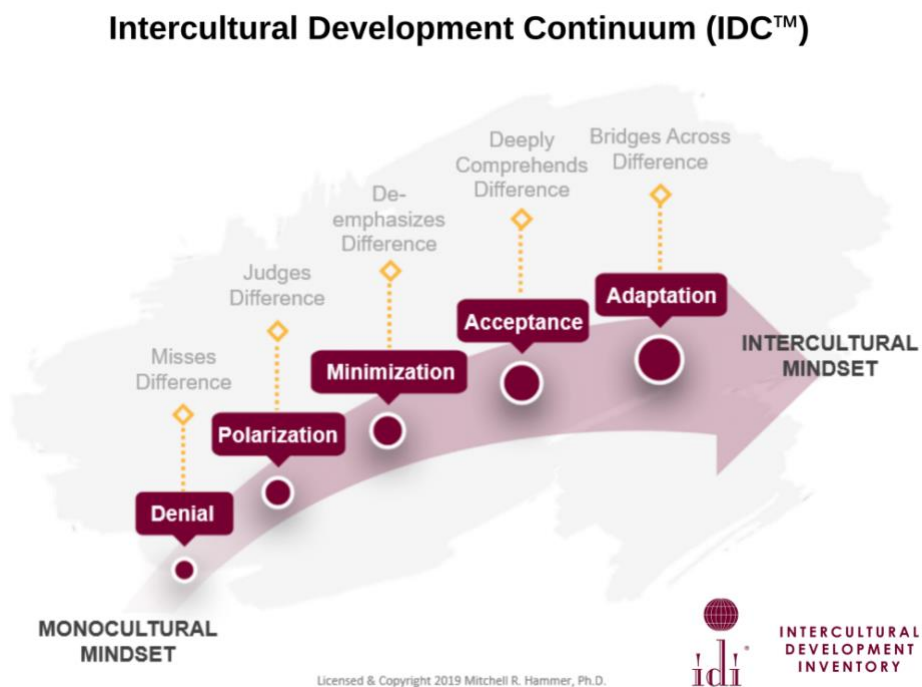
The study found that long-time exposure to different cultures has an impact on humanitarian leaders once they return to their original cultures. Experiencing a cultural gap, identity confusion, and struggles to reconnect with their own culture is a common experience immigrants feel in their early years of settling in a new land and a new culture. Winkelman (1994) defined cultural shock as “a feeling of impotence from the inability to deal with the environment because of unfamiliarity with cognitive aspects and role-playing skills” (p. 121). According to Winkelman (1994), cultural shock derives from both the challenge of new cultural surroundings and from the loss of a familiar cultural environment. The experience of Peter provided a great example of the struggle between what the new culture demands and what the immigrant original culture taught him. One of the things Peter reported was that he did not feel comfortable or feel the level of trust in the room to be able to express himself—as a CEO—because he felt the power dynamic was not allowing him to be more forceful due to the presence of elderly in the room. This is a result of his upbringing. He was raised in a culture that respects the elderly and gives them the priority to talk first.

Another impact of long-time exposure to different cultures mentioned by participants is developing a critical mind, noticing changes in their way of thinking, questioning things from their own cultures, and developing a broadened perspective and a

better understanding of other people's perspectives. This is another common experience many immigrants will relate to after many years of settling in a new culture. Hammer (2009) developed the Intercultural Development Continuum (IDC™) which describes orientations toward cultural difference and commonality arrayed along a continuum from the more monocultural mindsets of denial and polarization through the transitional orientation of minimization to the intercultural or global mindsets of acceptance and adaptation (see the illustration of Figure 3 below). Developing a critical mind is an advanced stage in the continuum where immigrants feel they are in a more stable and balanced stage between their original culture and the new culture they adopted. . It is a stage that allows people to see and appreciate the good and the bad of each culture from a minimum biased position toward any of the two cultures.

**Figure 3**

*Intercultural Development Continuum*



### **The Impact of a Dominant Culture on Leaders from a Minority Background**

Leaders from minority backgrounds may experience microaggressions despite their higher status in the society they live in including among the dominant culture members. Social identity theory confirms and explains why we have dominant groups and minority groups. According to Tajfel (1979), social identity is a person's sense of who they are based on their group membership(s). Humans tend to divide the world into groups "us" and "them" through a process of social categorization. Based on the social identity theory, people —while doing social categorization—tend to exaggerate the differences between groups and the similarities of things within the same group. This is how prejudice's views and racism are created.

### **Relationship Between Emerging Themes**

There is a relationship between the nature of the cultural diversity management process and the suggested requirements to succeed in cultural diversity management. In other words, because the process is challenging, messy, complex, and takes time, only leaders with specific qualities and training can overcome these challenges. On the other hand, there is a correlation between proper management diversity and the benefits of diversity. The more diversity is properly managed, the less likely potential disadvantages of diversity in communication, cohesion, and relationship will surface, and the more positive aspects of diversity will be gained in the form of innovation, creativity, efficiency, effectiveness, and improvement in the decision-making process

Another correlation found in the study is between the time of exposure to diverse cultures and the impact of the exposure on humanitarian leaders once they return to their original cultures. The longer the exposure to different cultures, the more likely leaders are

expected to experience identity confusion, development of a critical mind, and broadness of perspectives. For example, a stay of a few days in another country may not create an identity shock or gap in a person, while staying for several years is more likely to develop an identity gap and the struggle to reconnect with the original culture.

### **Implications for Practice**

This study informs professionals, particularly in the humanitarian field, about the nature of the cultural diversity management process so they are prepared for the task mentally. The study provides HR departments with the characteristics needed for positions that handle culturally diverse people and what qualities they should include in the job description and the characteristics of leaders they should be looking for. It informs and encourages organizations to invest in leadership training, particularly in areas of cultural diversity management. It promotes diversification of the leadership team and the importance of identifying champions within the organization at different levels who believe in diversity and support leadership initiatives. More importantly, this study advocates for the creation of a culture of inclusion among culturally diverse workforces.

### **Implications for Research**

This research study enriches current literature and sheds light on the role of humanitarian leaders in managing cultural diversity. However, it also triggers additional research questions for future research. Reflecting on the components of successful cultural diversity management and required characteristics of humanitarian leadership, it seems humanitarian leadership cannot be classified entirely under one of the current leadership models such as transformative, authentic, servant, and adaptive leadership models. From the characteristics and qualities identified by the participants, it seems

humanitarian leaders who are successful in cultural diversity management have one or more qualities from each of the mentioned models. An area of need for further research includes what type of leadership models humanitarian leaders should be categorized. Another research question that needs further research is related to the finding that the cultural diversity management process is challenging. Are all types of diversity management challenging as well, or is this only specific to cultural diversity? Which type of diversity management is the most challenging?

### **Conclusion**

Cultural diversity management is a challenging process. It is hard, uncomfortable, sensitive, complex, messy, and a long-haul journey that requires patience. Success in managing cultural diversity requires intercultural competence, exemplary leadership that models the way, diversification of the leadership team, investment in training, and more importantly, creation of a culture of inclusion. Proper cultural diversity management drives creativity and innovation, improves the decision-making process, increases organizations' effectiveness and make organizations more efficient and better equipped to deal with the complexity of our world today.

The impact of long-time exposure to different cultures on humanitarian leaders after returning to their original cultures includes experience of a cultural gap, Identity confusion, and struggle to reconnect with their own culture. On the positive side, it helps them develop critical minds, changes their ways of thinking, and questions things from their own cultures. Additionally, they develop a broadened perspective and a better understanding of other people's perspectives. Leaders from people of color and minorities may experience microaggressions and always feel they have to do more than

their peers from the dominant culture to prove themselves against the perceptions society has about them.

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## Appendix A: Consent Form

<b>Research Participation Key Information</b>	
<b>Dissertation proposal on Cultural Diversity</b>	
<b>What you will be asked to do:</b>	<b>Participating in this study has risks:</b>
We ask participants to answer interview questions.	No Risks in this Study
The time commitment is about 45-60 minutes and the study will take place at Zoom/google meet.	

Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

You are invited to participate in a research study about the experience of international humanitarian leaders in managing cultural diversity as part of my doctoral dissertation at the University of St. Thomas. The title of this study is:

### **The experience of Humanitarian Leaders in Managing Cultural Diversity**

You were selected as a possible participant and are eligible to participate in the study because you are a leader of an international humanitarian organization that has a diverse workforce. The following information is provided to help you make an informed decision whether you would like to participate or not.

#### **What will you be asked to do?**

If you agree to participate in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:

- To be available to meet virtually for 45-60 minutes to answer questions related to the study. The meeting will be recorded for research purposes. You are one of seven participants in this study.
- To allow me to follow up with you later to ensure I have captured your perspective correctly

#### **What are the risks of being in the study?**

This study has no known risks.

Here is more information about why we are doing this study:

This study is being conducted by Mohamed Idris, and Rama Kaye Hart, a chair of my dissertation committee at the University of St. Thomas organization development doctoral

program. This study was reviewed for risks and approved by the Institutional Review Board at the University of St. Thomas.

The purpose of this study is to describe the experience of international humanitarian leaders in managing cultural diversity.

We will use the information we collect to write a doctoral dissertation on the researched questions. There are no direct benefits to participating in this study.

While we can never guarantee complete confidentiality in research, we believe your privacy and confidentiality are important. Here is how I will do my best to protect your personal information:

Your privacy will be protected while you participate in this study. You will have control over the date and time of the study, the location, and what you choose to share. Your personal name, as well as your organization's name, will not be identified, and I will provide you with an opportunity during and after the interview to delete anything that you do not want to be on the record.

The records of this study will be kept as confidential as possible. We save your information in the most secure online location available to us at the University. We cannot guarantee confidentiality because data security incidents and breaches may occur. In any reports I publish, I will not include information that will make it easy to identify you. The types of records I will create include:

- Consent Form
- Audio/Video recording
- Transcripts

All identifiable data will be stored in one Drive (under Stthomas.edu). I can only access it with my own secure password. I'm planning to scan all hard copies and audio recording/video recording and upload them to my account in One Drive, lock them in a secure location in my house until I finished my dissertation. Then all physical copies and recordings will be destroyed one year after completing my dissertation.

All signed consent forms will be kept for a minimum of three years once the study is completed. Institutional Review Board officials at the University of St. Thomas have the right to inspect all research records for researcher compliance purposes.

This study is voluntary, and you have the right to withdraw from the research with no penalties of any kind.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Your decision whether to participate or not will not affect your current or future relations with me, ARAHA, or the University of St. Thomas. There are no penalties or consequences if you choose not to participate. If



you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without penalty. Should you decide to withdraw, data collected about you will be destroyed unless it is already de-identified or published and I can no longer delete your data. You can withdraw by calling me at +1 763 228-3307 or via email at [msaidris@gmail.com](mailto:msaidris@gmail.com). You are also free to skip any questions I may ask.

Who you should contact if you have a question:

My name is Mohamed Idris. You may ask any questions you have now and at any time during or after the research procedures. If you have questions before or after we meet, you may contact me at +1 763 228-3307 or via email at [msaidris@gmail.com](mailto:msaidris@gmail.com) or call Dr. Rama Kaye Hart, at 651-962-4454. Information about study participant rights is available online at <https://www.stthomas.edu/irb/policiesandprocedures/forstudyparticipants/>. You may also contact Sarah Muenster-Blakley with the University of St. Thomas Institutional Review Board at 651-962-6035 or [muen0526@stthomas.edu](mailto:muen0526@stthomas.edu) with any questions or concerns (reference project number 1739413-1).

#### STATEMENT OF CONSENT:

I have had a conversation with the researcher about this study and have read the above information. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction and I consent to participate in the study. I am at least 18 years of age. I give permission to be audio/Video recorded during this study.

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

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Signature of Study Participant

Date

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Print Name of Study Participant

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Signature of Researcher

Date

## **Appendix B: Interview Protocol**

I would like to talk to you about your experience as international humanitarian leaders. I have prepared the following questions in order to capture the experience of international humanitarian leaders in managing cultural diversity. As you may notice, all these questions are open-ended questions in order to give you the opportunity to share as much of your experience as possible and to avoid influencing your answers toward any direction. Please provide as much details as possible for every question. If you don't feel comfortable about any question, please do not hesitate to say so. I would like to assure you that your answers will be confidential and anonymous. I will be tape-recording our interviews and your identity will be known to me only. As soon as I transcribe the tapes, a code name or number will be assigned to you to keep your answers in complete confidence and anonymity:

1. What has been your experience in working across borders and cultures?
2. Can you think of an experience related to cultural diversity that was particularly challenging?
3. Can you think of a positive experience related to cultural diversity?
4. What have you used to deal with/ manage/ address cultural diversity?
  - What has been most effective?
  - What did you try that didn't work?
5. How does a culturally diverse workforce impact the organization's effectiveness?
6. What kind of mindset, skills, and competencies are necessary for leaders to properly manage cultural diversity?

7. What is your experience as a leader in developing a culture of inclusion among your culturally diverse workforce?
8. What should leaders do to ensure all individuals within the organization feel accepted and respected?
9. How do you change people's mindsets and promote people's attitudes toward cultural diversity?
10. What recommendations do you have for leaders in managing cultural diversity?