



## Bridging Cultural Diversity Gaps at Luhonono Police Station: Police Leadership Role

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### ABSTRACT

This study investigates the pivotal role of police leadership in mitigating cultural diversity gaps within the Luhonono Police Station, utilizing an exploratory qualitative approach. The study's sample comprises four police leaders with station experience and five non-management police officers. Data collection involves individual semi-structured interviews, recorded to aid data interpretation, with thematic analysis employed for data analysis. The findings underscore the significance of effective police leadership in improving relationships, minimizing turnover, ensuring fairness in decision-making, enhancing performance, and motivating the police force. The study recommends that the selection of police leaders should prioritize their commitment to embracing cultural diversity. Furthermore, it advocates for the development of policies supporting cultural diversity, provision of training, and promotion of awareness among the team to foster an inclusive and respectful workplace. The study argues that, although police leaders play a pivotal role in addressing cultural diversity, their effectiveness is impeded without standardized institutional policies or strategies to manage such issues.

Keyword: Cultural Diversity, Police, Leadership, Role, Performance, Diversity Management, Namibian Police Force

### INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary workforce, police organisations increasingly seek collaboration among diverse ethnic groups, a dynamic that positively and negatively impacts team performance (Mennicke *et al.*, 2018; Miles-Johnson, 2021). The notion of cultural diversity in this study refers to the visible traits within a group of employees sharing a similar racial background, creating distinctions between minority and majority groups (Gotsis & Kortezi, 2015). This intercultural interaction is now a necessity for improved performance not only in the police but in other organisations, prompting an upsurge in studies examining management's role in handling cultural diversity (Martin, 2014; Saxena, 2014; Hofhuis, Van der Zee, Otten, 2015; Davis, Frolova, Callahan, 2016; Sharma, 2016; Mateescu, 2018). These findings may be well explained when examining a recent study by Bikos (2023), who elaborates on the need for a diverse police organisation. The author notes a law enforcement institution with a balanced composition of officers from diverse backgrounds, including both minority and majority groups, is better equipped to comprehend and relate to the entirety of the community it serves (Bikos, 2023). With this, it is undoubtedly that such an organisation is more likely to possess a unified and inclusive workforce that mirrors the population it serves.

In the Namibian police force, diversity is a common aspect, aligning with the constitutional provisions governing recruitment in the police service (Republic of Namibia, 1990). Mandated recruitment quotas aim to ensure a diverse representation across regions and backgrounds (Namibian Police Force Human Resource, 2022). Consequently, the deployment at Luhonono police station reflects this diversity, as it follows the demographical distribution of various ethnic groups. While this diversity aims for inclusivity and the effective utilisation of different skills, knowledge, and experiences, there remains a risk of suboptimal performance due to ineffective diversity management by those entrusted with leadership.

This issue has been identified in the study area, necessitating an urgent need to effectively address these concerns, which formed the basis for the present study. Considering the profound

connection between effective management of cultural diversity by police leaders and high-performance Miles-Johnson and Fay (2022), the study aimed to investigate leadership's role in managing cultural diversity among employees at Luhonono Police Station. The context of this study lies at Luhonono police station, where concerns of infighting among employees, strongly linked to cultural diversity, persist. Presently, the station hosts 57 members from 11 different tribes and languages. The station's 2022/2023 annual report revealed a doubling in employee resignations compared to the preceding fiscal year (Namibian Police Force, 2023). Increased incidents of infighting and transfers to other ministries further worried the station commander during a meeting on February 24, 2023. While there is a considerable amount of police research focused on diversity management worldwide McLeod (2018); Miles-Johnson and Linklater (2022), there is still a need for more studies examining the influence of police leadership on improving performance through effective management. This gap is substantiated by the prevalent absence of policies and formalised guidelines within most police organisations to aid leaders in handling diversity issues. Consequently, this study argues that while police leaders play a crucial role in addressing cultural diversity in any policing environment, their effectiveness is hindered in the absence of institutional standardised policies or strategies to manage cultural diversity issues.

The study utilized an exploratory qualitative research method to investigate the impact of social contract and stakeholder theories on the maintenance of internal security in Namibia. Qualitative research was deemed appropriate for exploring intricate issues that resist easy measurement and necessitate the inclusion of diverse perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The interpretive paradigm was applied, considering the constitutional obligation of the Namibian Police Force in ensuring internal security and the relevance of social contract and stakeholder theories in comprehending this responsibility. The research population comprised individuals with leadership backgrounds within the station, including the station commander, unit commander, and two shift commanders, alongside five non-management regular police officers stationed at Luhonono police station, all with a minimum of three years of experience. Data collection involved individual semi-structured interviews, audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis, alongside the gathering of secondary data outlined in the literature review. Following the steps recommended by Du Plooy-Cilliers et al. (2014), the researcher prepared raw data, transcribed recorded interviews, defined coding units, and developed categories and coding schemes, which were tested for clarity and consistency. Common keywords were grouped into themes based on similar meanings, streamlining information and avoiding repetition (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). Thematic analysis was applied to interpret the data, discern significant themes and perspectives, aligning with the guidelines of thematic analysis to provide a comprehensive understanding of the study's focus.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Leadership Role and Cultural Diversity**

There is no doubt that the role of managers in the police organisation is to ensure that recruitment is inclusive to accommodate diverse people from different backgrounds, beliefs, genders and transgender (Ward, Prenzler & Drew, 2020; Stenersen, Thomas & McKee, 2022; Giwa et al., 2022). This is evident in McLeod's (2018) study, where it was noted that the police, similar to other organisations, are experiencing a rise in diverse employees. This diversity is depicted through noticeable attributes like gender, race, ethnicity, and age, as well as less apparent characteristics such as sexual orientation, abilities, educational attainment, and religious background. In contemporary workplaces, Tajfel (1981) explores the impact of cultural diversity on employee performance, drawing from three theories: Similarity-Attraction, Social Identity and Social Categorization, and Information-Processing theories. These theories propose that when individuals share similar values and beliefs (Williams & O'Reilly, 1998), their cooperation enhances productivity and service delivery. Moreover, embracing cultural diversity leads to integrating diverse groups facilitating the attainment of organisational goals (Lai & Lisnek, 2023). Global studies also highlight that managing cultural diversity improves relationships between employees and employers, fostering problem-solving, creativity, and adaptability (Daft & Marcic, 2016).

Cultural diversity management offers various benefits to organisations and individuals, especially in the global market that demands multicultural insights (Saxena, 2014). Decision-making, innovation, and improved workplace relations are all facilitated by effective cultural diversity management (Chigudu, 2016; Wambui, 2013).

Leadership plays a crucial role in managing cultural diversity. Leaders who effectively manage cultural diversity promote engagement, motivation, and improved morale among employees (Mazibuko, 2017; Kurniawan, Rosita & Lubis, 2023). However, leadership also faces challenges in managing cultural diversity, such as multitasking, discrimination, and inadequate attention to diverse employees amid external forces (Irina, 2017; Hofhuis et al., 2015). Leadership roles in managing cultural diversity emphasise the significance of leaders in guiding and mentoring employees, thereby aligning them with organisational values and principles (Gotsis & Kortezi, 2015). Effective leadership, coupled with support for cultural diversity, can significantly enhance productivity and service delivery (Nicholson-Crotty & Li, 2023).

Police leaders who consider a balanced composition of officers from diverse backgrounds, including both minority and majority groups, are better equipped to comprehend and relate to the entirety of the community it serves. More importantly, they are likely to possess a unified and inclusive workforce that mirrors the population it serves. It was with this understanding that police leaders should not be discriminated against and ought to manage cultural diversity effectively. This is based on the fact that leadership with bias significantly affects how employees behave and detrimentally impacts the solidarity among the workforce (Nazir, Khadim, Asadullah & Syed, 2023). The pivotal role police leaders play in members' performance is widely recognised. As highlighted by Daft and Marcic (2016), poorly performing organisations often correlate with low productivity, largely attributed to leadership decisions. Therefore, inadequate management of cultural diversity by police leaders can lead to diminished performance, potentially escalating perceptions into conflicts that hinder police organisational goal achievement.

### **Finding**

To populate this section, the researcher utilised an identification coding method to present responses from participants distinctly. This approach safeguards participant anonymity should responses be directly linked to individual names. Themes were formed based on response similarities from the participating interviewees. Codes like **L1**, **L2**, **L3**, and **L4** represented leadership interviewees, while **S1**, **S2**, **S3**, **S4**, and **S5** signified subordinates members. Further detailed analysis of the outcomes is typically confined to the Discussion segment.

### **Findings on research question one.**

On ascertaining the leadership role in managing cultural diversity, the following themes emerged, which were further discussed in the separation section:

#### ***Theme 1: Improves relationships***

All participants **L1**, **L2**, **L3**, **L4**, **S1**, **S2**, **S3**, **S4**, and **S5** indicated that one of the leaders' roles in terms of police context is to improve relationships among the employees at the station as pinpointed below:

**L1**, "At the Luhonono Police Station, there appears to be disunity among members to a larger extent from different backgrounds affecting the station's performance. It is with this thinking that I can indicate that effective police leadership have a pivotal role in bridging cultural diversity gaps to improve relationship."

**L3**, "It is the duty of the station commander to foster understanding and respect for various cultural backgrounds within the community; this, in return, leads to improved performance."

**S2**, "Current at Luhonono Police Station, it appears that those entrusted with leadership responsibilities do not institute necessary cultural sensitivity training for improved relations among members which affects...[performance] of the entire police station."

An extended explanation was provided by **S5**, as shown below:

“The performance at Luhonono Police Station could be better due to the persistent lack of cohesion, primarily attributable to the failure of those in leadership roles to unify station members. This issue extends beyond solely blaming the station management; it is evident that the regional management at headquarters is cognisant of the discord within the station, leading to a [palpable] fatigue in performance. Despite this awareness, there is an alarming absence of any concerted efforts to restructure or reorganise the station management. One might wonder if this lack of action is because we are categorised as a rural area police station, and the regional police management does not prioritise the concerning performance levels in such locations. However, I am still determining this assumption. From my perspective, the responsibility of police leaders is pivotal not only to foster better relations but also to effectively manage the cultural diversity present, which is [inherently linked] to achieving a desirable level of performance.”

***Theme 2: Reduce Turnover***

Additionally, respondents, excluding **S4**, unanimously believed that effective cultural diversity management by police leaders might lead to reduced turnover (**L1, L2, L3, L4, S1, S2, S3, and S5**)

**L1**, “Police leaders have a role in creating a conducive work environment and a bonded team; in this way, their influence leads to fewer employees seeking transfers.”

The above theme is well presented by **L3**:

“In my view, police leaders ought to inspire their team recognising the challenges linked to cultural diversity, potentially decreasing police officers' resignations. However, presently, even those us [sic] in leadership roles need a profound understanding of national diversity policies. [Additionally], there needs to be more training on cultural diversity. Consequently, expecting efficient management from us [sic] might be unrealistic. Perhaps this deficiency could be a key reason why effective cultural diversity management is a challenge, leading to high resignation rates not only within our station but also across the entire Namibian police force.”

**S3**, "An important role of police leaders is reducing staff turnover at the station by ensuring that there is a conducive working environment that promotes free exchange of ideas and accommodates every cultural background. Otherwise, the disunity at the station will continue."

***Theme 3: Fairness in decision-making***

Five participants, **L1, L4, S1, S2 and S4**, stated that fairness in decision-making is the fundamental role police leaders perform to manage cultural diversity effectively.

**L1**, "Effective police leadership requires a deep understanding and acknowledgement of diverse cultural backgrounds within the force. Embracing these diversities through fair decision-making leads to a stronger, more cohesive team."

**L4** noted: "Cultural awareness and sensitivity are key traits of a successful police leader. It is our responsibility to ensure that cultural diversity is not just recognised but celebrated within the department with sound decision-making. When we [sic] actively promote understanding and respect for all cultures, it creates an environment where our [sic] feels appreciated."

**S1**, "Leadership plays a pivotal role in setting the tone for inclusivity. When our leaders respect and value our diverse backgrounds in their decision, it fosters a sense of belonging and encourages better teamwork, [consequently] this might improve performance."

At our [sic]...police station, it is disheartening to observe decisions being influenced by tribal affiliations, nepotism, and leaders favouring certain members rather than considering their capabilities or the situational requirements. [Ultimately], this significantly contributes to the station's inefficacy...and drains the workforce's morale. In my [sic] view, effective police leaders prioritise decisions that serve the best interests of the police organisation. When this occurs, it elevates morale and garners respect from other officers towards these leaders.

#### ***Theme 4: Elevating Performance***

All the participants **L1, L2, L3, L4, S1, S2, S3, S4** and **S5** are convinced that police leaders are mandatory in improving performance through effective cultural diversity within any given police topography.

**L2** elaborates

Desired performance in the police can only be achieved when a station member shares specific skills and competencies. [Therefore], leadership promote mutual dependence on shared goals and underlies improved performance as a joint responsibility. This, to a...[more worrisome extent], is not the case at Luhonono Police Station, where some of those in leadership positions portray defiance in effectively managing cultural diversity. This explains why there is [a] disorder at the station in terms of promoting ethnic groupings.

#### ***Theme 5: Motivating the team***

**L1, L2, L3, L4, S1, L1, S2, S3, S4**, and **S5** highlighted the significant role of leaders in inspiring their teams. In the endeavour to foster a positive and productive working environment for themselves and their subordinates, the capacity to motivate subordinates through effective management of cultural diversity stands out as crucial.

**L3** simplifies this idea: When the team recognises that we do not practice what we expect from them regarding cultural practices in the workplace, they will not take our guidance seriously. This puts [us] in the challenging position of motivating them to maintain appropriate behaviour and team cohesion, thereby fostering a healthy and interdependent workforce.

**S2**, "To be honest, police cannot work well without the diverse culture which is also linked to the diverse community we [sic] serve. [Nonetheless], if a diverse station population is not well managed like in our [sic] case, officers remain unmotivated, which affects the service delivery."

**Findings on the second research question.**

The study aimed to draw recommendations for dealing with challenges in cultural diversity. When respondents were asked about addressing these challenges, their responses were as follows:

***Theme 1: Leadership Appointment***

Six of the participants, **L1, L3, S1, S2, S3** and **S4**, recommend that the appointment should be made based on merit as clarified below:

**L1**, "I [sic] believe that police leaders including Station Commander should be appointed based on their commitment to embracing...cultural diversity. Our [sic] success hinges on police leaders who value inclusivity and respect for all cultures within our force."

**S3**, "One of the qualities that should be considered when appointing leaders should be interpersonal relationship attribute with subordinates. Since police leaders chosen for their ability to bridge cultural divides will foster a more cohesive and understanding environment within our police station set up."

**S4** elaborated more that: "It is recommended that leadership placement should prioritise individuals who display a genuine dedication to understanding and addressing cultural diversity challenges within the Luhonono Police Station. Choosing a police supervisor, including the station commander, the community liaison officers, the crime prevention commander, the operation commander, the community service centre supervisor or the shift commander, who exemplify the principles of cultural sensitivity will pave the way for a more harmonious and respectful work environment. Appointing police leaders committed to upholding cultural diversity not only promotes inclusion but also sets a precedent for respectful and unbiased decision-making in policing undertaking."

***Theme 2: Policy on Cultural Diversity***

In the absence of strategies on diversity within the station, all participants **L1, L2, L3, L4, S1, S2, S3, S4**, and **S5** recommend crafting a policy that will regulate cultural diversity undertaking.

**L2**, "It is times we [sic] should craft policies that actively support and celebrate cultural diversity within the entire police organisation, not only at Luhonono Police Station, to foster an inclusive and respectful workplace."

**L4**, "We [sic] need policies that reflect a commitment to embracing cultural diversity, ensuring fair and equal treatment for all members regardless of cultural background."

**S3** provide in-depth illustration:"It is unrealistic to expect only police leaders to manage cultural diversity alone effectively. [Undoubtedly we [sic] subordinates...should also be involved since in fights are always within ourselves not necessary with station management. [Nonetheless], this could be more effective if there are strategies that every police officer needs to follow regarding cultural diversity. In this way, it becomes a consented effort between the station management and police subordinates. Institutionalising policies prioritising cultural diversity is key to creating a supportive environment that appreciates and respects different cultural perspectives."

**S4**, "I believe establishing comprehensive station strategies that promote cultural diversity will guide our actions and decision-making, creating a more cohesive and open-minded workforce."

***Theme 3: Training and Awareness***

**L1, L3, L4, S2, S3, S4, and S5** think training and awareness could be essential to enhance a leader's role in managing diversity.

**L1**, "Training programs focusing on cultural sensitivity are fundamental to nurturing a workforce that respects and values cultural diversity."

"Raising awareness through dedicated training on cultural diversity will equip our members with the necessary skills to navigate differences respectfully." (**L3**).

"Mandatory training on cultural diversity will enable our force to better understand and appreciate the various cultural nuances within our community." (**S2**).

**S4**, "Awareness campaigns and training sessions are essential in instilling a deep understanding of cultural diversity, leading to more empathetic and informed policing practices."

**S5**, noted: "I recommend regular training programs focused on cultural diversity to raise awareness throughout the workplace regarding its impact on organisational performance. Training needs to encompass subordinates and leaders, as not all current leaders are sufficiently attuned to the nuances of cultural diversity."

**Discussions**

The first question was aimed at the role of police leadership in handling cultural diversity at Luhonono Police Station. The study found that ineffective police leadership is crucial in improving relationships among employees at the police station. The focus here is on fostering understanding respect for diverse cultural backgrounds, and bridging cultural diversity gaps. This theme underscores the importance of police leaders in promoting unity and cohesion among station members. Together, this result provides important insights into an understanding that leaders have the responsibility to enhance the broken relations among the subordinates in relation to addressing cultural diversity. Therefore, this result emphasises that enhanced relations are key to circumventing challenges associated with strained cultural diversity.

On the other hand, similar to expectations, the study found that effective cultural diversity management by police leaders can reduce turnover. Surprisingly, in the present literature reviewed, this finding was not observed. This observation underscores the crucial link between how leadership handles cultural diversity and its impact on retaining employees within the police force. It is encouraging to compare that when leaders proactively and competently address cultural diversity issues, it creates a more inclusive, supportive, and welcoming work environment. The preceding may be further explained by the fact that police officers tend to feel valued and respected when they realise those in leadership handle cultural diversity matters effectively, which can lead to increased job satisfaction and a sense of belonging. These results corroborate the findings of much of the previous work (Miles-Johnson & Fay, 2022).

Consequently, this positive atmosphere contributes to a reduced desire among employees to seek transfers or resign from their positions. Fairness in decision-making was identified as a fundamental role for police leaders in managing cultural diversity effectively in the study area. There are several possible explanations for this result; firstly, police leaders with sound decision-making celebrate diverse cultural backgrounds to promote unity. Secondly, when police leaders proactively and competently address cultural diversity issues, it creates a more inclusive, supportive, and welcoming work environment. Lastly,

fairly done decisions cultivate a positive atmosphere and contribute to the consented efforts of police officers at any given station, unifying and embracing cultural differences. This is mainly because leaders influence followers' behaviour to a greater degree. In accordance with the present result, previous recent study have demonstrated that leadership with biases significantly affects how employees behave and detrimentally impacts the solidarity among the workforce, hence the need for fair decisions at all times (Nazir *et al.*, 2023)

The study also found that another role that police leaders ought to play in relation to managing cultural diversity within the police station is promoting a high-performance culture among the subordinates. There are several possible explanations for this result. To begin, effective management of cultural diversity entails focusing on promoting ethnic diversity and using it as a means to enhance station performance. In addition, this involves promoting a work culture where police officers from diverse backgrounds feel equally valued and where their differences are seen as strengths rather than hindrances. Furthermore, by fostering mutual dependence and shared goals, police leaders are seen as instrumental in creating a high-performance team. Moreover, the emphasis on better management of cultural diversity suggests that police leaders should actively address and manage potential conflicts or issues arising from cultural differences to prevent performance gaps.

There was an anticipated finding in the study that police leaders are recognised as essential motivators of their members in the context of cultural diversity. The recognition of police leaders as crucial motivators is significant as it highlights their influence over the team in navigating cultural diversity issues. A possible explanation for these results may be that those in police leadership positions are seen as pivotal figures in creating a positive work atmosphere and inspiring their subordinates to understand, respect, and effectively navigate cultural differences within the Luhoonono Police Station. This indicates that the actions and attitudes of leaders have a profound impact on the overall motivation and behaviour of their subordinates in handling diverse cultural backgrounds. This finding broadly supports the work of Rosita and Lubis (2023), who also found that police leaders have the role of motivating diverse police personnel. This result may further explain the performance gap that is associated with the Luhoonono Police Station operation, in particular, citing the lack of proper leadership with effective diversity management. Understanding the role of police leaders in this way, there can be no doubt that only motivated police officers are likely to give their best in attaining any police departmental goal. Another possible explanation of this result is that the police leader's behaviour set the tone for how team members perceive and respond to cultural diversity issues. Therefore, by demonstrating respect for diverse cultural backgrounds, police leaders can motivate their team members to do the same, nurturing a more cohesive and understanding policing arena.

On the second research objective was aimed at establishing what can be done to enhance cultural diversity at Luhoonono Police Station; firstly, the study established that the appointment of police leaders, in particular station commanders, should be based on merit and commitment to embracing cultural diversity. This result perhaps now makes it clear that police leaders who prioritise members and who genuinely understand and address cultural diversity challenges within the police force are those who understand the facts surrounding culture. In return, they further comprehend cultural diversity management impacts on service delivery if not well managed. In understanding this result within the study area, a note of caution is due here since because the possibility cannot be excluded that those appointed in station leadership/supervisory positions are not well cognisant of cultural diversity management. Therefore, placing committed police leaders in upholding cultural diversity is crucial for promoting inclusion and respectful decision-making. Another strategy suggested is the adoption of a policy that actively supports and celebrates cultural diversity. It is clear in the study that policy could ensure fair and equal treatment for all members regardless of their cultural background. The institutionalisation of policy and strategies within not only Luhoonono Police Station but the entire Namibian Police Force that could prioritise cultural diversity can be key to creating a supportive environment that respects different cultural perspectives. Although the adoption of policies and strategies that could actively support and celebrate cultural diversity, it is also important to note that implementing such policies and strategies could be equally important. In particular, taking into account that some of the performance dearth in the police organisations is related to poor policy implementations.

Lastly, on the measure to enhance and promote cultural collaboration, the research suggests the



importance of training programs and awareness campaigns that focus on cultural sensitivity. There is a likelihood that the programs could equip both those in station management and subordinates with the necessary skills to navigate cultural differences respectfully. This result coincides with the researcher's experience with the fact that by providing education and skill-building opportunities, the station members may develop a better understanding of diverse cultural backgrounds and promote respectful interaction and collaboration among themselves as police officers. It can be noted in this study that the study was confined to the Luhonono Police Station; the findings may apply to the entire Namibia Police Force for two primary reasons. Firstly, the police do not have any policy that regulates cultural diversity despite the study's small sample frame. Secondly, the Namibian police still need to implement training programmes or awareness that emphasise cultural diversity. Consequently, there is a possibility to conclude that such a gap may imply the ineffective management of cultural diversity implications resulting from lack of training can be felt in the entire police organisation.

## CONCLUSION

The paper has argued that police leaders are critical in addressing cultural diversity gaps. The findings clearly indicate the significance of effective leadership in fostering relationships among employees, reducing turnover, ensuring fairness in decision-making, improving performance, and motivating the team. The second major finding was that cultural diversity management by police leaders was crucial in creating a more inclusive and cohesive work environment. In general, fair decision-making, supportive policies, training programs, and ongoing awareness campaigns were identified as pivotal in addressing cultural diversity challenges within the police force. To bridge the observed cultural diversity gap, the study recommends that the Luhonono Police Station and similar organisations prioritise specific actions. This includes appointing leaders committed to embracing cultural diversity, crafting policies that actively support diversity, establishing training programs focused on cultural sensitivity, and emphasising fair decision-making practices that recognise and celebrate diverse cultural backgrounds. These measures, when effectively implemented, can significantly contribute to a more cohesive and efficient police force, fostering a supportive and respectful work environment.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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