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(IJMOE)**www.gaexcellence.com/ijmoe**WORKFORCE DIVERSITY AS A STRATEGIC DRIVER OF
ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE: EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE
FROM MALAYSIAN PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES**

Noor Azreen Mohd Khushairi^{1*}, Sabiroh Md Sabri², Ismalaili Ismail³, Mohd Imran Khusairi Shafee⁴, Hamidey Hamid⁵

¹Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Perlis, 02600 Arau, Perlis, Malaysia

 azreenmk@uitm.edu.my

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-0443-7103>

²Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Perlis, 02600 Arau, Perlis, Malaysia

 sabir707@uitm.edu.my

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3838-0913>

³Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Perlis, 02600 Arau, Perlis, Malaysia

 ismalaili007@uitm.edu.my

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0001-9327-4507>

⁴Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Perlis, 02600 Arau, Perlis, Malaysia

 imrankhusairi@uitm.edu.my

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0005-8192-2465>

⁵Radicare Malaysia Sdn. Bhd., Wisma UOA Damansara II, No. 6, Jalan, Changkat Semantan, Bukit Damansara, 50490, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

 hamidey@radicare.com.my

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0005-8192-2465>

*Corresponding Author

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Abstract:

To thrive in today's intensely competitive education market, private colleges rely greatly on the qualities of their faculty. While a diverse workforce is widely regarded as a strategic advantage, recent research on how this influences employee performance in higher education has yielded varied results. Our study investigates how specific diversity factors such as age, gender, ethnicity, and educational background influence academic performance in Malaysian private colleges. We also wanted to investigate if the organization's entire culture can assist bridge the gap between diversity and performance. After polling 175 academic staff members in the Klang Valley and processing the figures via structural equation modelling, the results were clear: every single diversity aspect we considered improved performance significantly. When academics work with colleagues from different backgrounds,

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they naturally share a wider range of knowledge, collaborate better, and introduce fresh ideas. Interestingly, while a solid organizational culture directly elevates employee performance, it does not actually change the way diversity itself impacts that performance. Ultimately, our findings make a strong case for university leaders to treat workforce diversity as a key driver of their institution's success, rather than just a demographic checkbox.

Keyword:

Higher Education Management, Malaysia, Organizational Culture, Private Universities, Sustainable Performance, Workforce Diversity



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Introduction

Higher education is shifting faster than ever. Universities aren't just reacting to new technology and global competition; they are also facing mounting expectations from governments, industries, and the public. They need to provide excellent teaching and research while concurrently producing graduates who can tackle the demands of a modern knowledge-based economy. Here in Malaysia, private universities play a crucial position in the country's education system by widening access to tertiary education and supporting national human capital goals. Because the sector is becoming so competitive, finding ways to help academic staff accomplish at their best has become a top priority for these institutions.

Academics are arguably the most important asset of the university. They have a direct impact on the quality of teaching, lead research efforts, mentor students and build the reputation of the institution. The demographic profiles, qualifications and life experiences of the workforce on most campuses today are wildly different. But diversity is not just about age, gender or ethnicity, it's about the unique knowledge, values and problem-solving skills those individuals bring to the table. If managed well, this melting pot of ideas can lead to real innovation, increased organisational learning and smarter decision making. Such diversity can also greatly enrich classroom learning and stimulate interdisciplinary research.

Naturally, working in a diverse setting is not always easy. Combining individuals from diverse backgrounds can occasionally hinder communication and place stress on team collaboration. As Social Identity Theory posits, individuals instinctively align with those who share visible traits, a tendency that can inadvertently generate workplace friction. Consequently, workforce

diversity can serve as either a significant asset or a frustrating obstacle, contingent entirely on how effectively the university manages it in practice.

Although extensive research has been conducted on diversity, the findings remain somewhat inconclusive. While some experts highlight significant improvements in innovation and collaboration, others raise concerns regarding communication failures and diminished team cohesion. Moreover, most existing research centers on the corporate sector, resulting in a scant understanding of how these dynamics unfold within Malaysian private universities, which function distinctly from conventional businesses.

To address this gap, our study examines how four specific dimensions of diversity age, gender, ethnicity, and education affect the performance of academic staff. We also investigate whether a supportive organizational culture reinforces this relationship. By integrating insights from Information / Decision-Making Theory and Social Identity Theory, we aim to provide university leaders with practical guidance on fostering more inclusive and high-performing academic institutions.

Literature Review

This section reviews the theoretical and empirical literature that informs the present study. It begins by defining what workforce diversity is and why it is important to modern organisations. The discussion then reviews previous findings on the relationship between workforce diversity and employee performance from the supportive and contrasting viewpoints. It also looks at the impact of organisational culture on the nature of employee relations within diverse academic settings. These discussions collectively provide the theoretical foundation for the development of the proposed research framework.

Workforce Diversity

Workforce diversity means the changes in the demographic, social, and educational attributes of the workforce. Organisational research typically distinguishes between two kinds of differences: deep-level traits such as professional experience, knowledge, skills, and educational background, and surface-level traits such as age, gender, and ethnicity (Harrison & Klein, 2007). The study looks at four dimensions of workforce diversity: age, gender, ethnicity and educational background. These components are identified as the most influential factors affecting academic interaction and teaching approach in Malaysian private university. Other aspects of diversity such as tenure, discipline and nationality were not taken into account in order to keep the focus on the most common sociodemographic and cognitive features of academic staff.

Recent studies indicate that workforce diversity can function as a strategic organizational resource when managed effectively (Shore et al.). (2021). Workforce diversity is increasingly recognized not just as a demographic difference, but as a driver of innovation, creativity, and organizational adaptability (Stahl et al.). (2020).

Workforce Diversity and Employee Performance

One of the key concerns in organizational research is the connection between employee performance and workforce diversity. Positively, diversity increases the variety of viewpoints,

experiences, and information that are available inside a company, allowing workers to come up with more original ideas, solve issues more successfully, and make wiser choices (Stahl et al., 2020). Access to a variety of perspectives also promotes better employee performance and organizational learning.

According to the Social Identity Theory, people naturally classify themselves and others into different social groups, often based on visible characteristics. These groupings influence how individuals communicate, collaborate, and build relationships in the workplace. As a result, employees may develop a sense of belonging to an "in-group" while perceiving others as part of an "out-group", which can shape everyday workplace interactions (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). However, whether workforce diversity leads to better performance largely depends on the organisational environment and the way diversity is managed. When leaders actively promote inclusion and create opportunities for meaningful collaboration, diverse teams are generally more likely to perform effectively (Nishii et al., 2020). Within higher education institutions, workforce diversity has the potential to strengthen research, teaching quality, and collaborative efforts. Nevertheless, empirical evidence on these relationships remains limited, particularly in the context of Malaysian private universities, highlighting the need for further investigation.

Organizational Culture

Organisational culture represents the shared values, beliefs, and behavioural norms that shape how employees think, interact, and perform within an organisation (Schein, 2017). These shared values influence communication, collaboration, and employees' responses to workplace diversity. In this study, organisational culture is conceptualised using the Competing Values Framework (CVF), which explains how organisational values influence behaviour and overall organisational effectiveness. A workplace culture that promotes trust, inclusiveness, and collaboration is expected to strengthen employee relationships and contribute to improved performance. Previous research has consistently shown that organisational culture plays an important role in determining whether workforce diversity produces favourable organisational outcomes (Shore et al., 2021). Within higher education institutions, where knowledge sharing and collaboration are fundamental, organisational culture may influence how effectively academics from diverse backgrounds work together and achieve organisational goals.

Theoretical Framework

This study is based on Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and Information/Decision-Making Theory (Williams & O'Reilly, 1998), both of which offer complementary explanations for workforce diversity. According to Social Identity Theory, individuals define themselves based on their association in specific social groups, such as age, gender, ethnicity, and educational background. Such group identification may influence professional interactions, as employees frequently form stronger bonds with colleagues who they consider sharing similar traits. As a result, these views can have an impact on organisational communication, cooperation, and team cohesion.

On the other hand, according to Information / Decision-Making Theory, diversity allows organizations to gain from a greater variety of experiences, information, and abilities provided by workers from various backgrounds (Van Knippenberg et al., 2020). Incorporating different viewpoints enhances information processing, facilitates better decision-making, and stimulates innovative problem-solving. These varied viewpoints could improve academic creativity,

research collaboration, and teaching quality in higher education institutions. When taken as a whole, these theories offer a well-rounded explanation by acknowledging that workforce diversity may pose interpersonal difficulties while also offering chances to enhance employee performance when diversity is handled well.

Hypotheses Development

Workforce diversity is an important organisational factor as workers from diverse educational and demographic backgrounds offer different experiences, expertise and perspectives that affect workplace performance (Roberson, 2019; Shore et al., 2021). Organisations that manage these differences well are better placed to foster information sharing, creativity and effective decision-making, and consequently achieve higher employee performance (Stahl et al., 2020). From this point of view the following theories are advanced.

Age Diversity is the diversity of employees across generations within an organisation. The strengths that people of different ages bring to the table vary. Younger workers can often bring technological savvy and new ideas. Older workers tend to have more organisational knowledge and professional experience. The combination of these complementary capabilities may reinforce organisational learning and improve employee performance (Kunze et al., 2021).

H1: Age diversity positively influences employee performance.

Gender diversity is defined as the presence of male and female workers in the work force. A gender balanced composition can provide for a broader perspective, improve communication and enhance decision making by bringing in different experiences and perspectives. Prior research has found that gender diversity promotes creativity, team effectiveness, and organisational performance (Post & Byron, 2015; Shore et al., 2021). These benefits may also be relevant to teaching, research and scholarly collaboration within higher education institutions.

H2: Gender diversity positively influences employee performance.

Ethnic diversity is the mix of employees from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Interactions with personnel with different cultural experiences in multicultural areas such as Malaysia may lead to sharing of knowledge, innovation and broader approaches to problem solutions. These benefits are more likely to be realized if organisations promote inclusive workplace practices that contribute to effective cooperation (Stahl et al., 2020).

H3: Ethnic diversity positively influences employee performance.

Educational background diversity is the differences in academic qualifications, disciplinary competence, and professional understanding of employees. Academics from different educational backgrounds bring different perspectives to the institutions and help in interdisciplinary collaboration, research efforts and enriching teaching methods. Therefore, this may result in better staff performance (Roberson, 2019).

H4: Educational background diversity positively influences employee performance.

Organisational culture influences the ways in which people interact, communicate and collaborate within an organisation (Schein, 2017). It is believed that a culture of trust, cooperation and inclusiveness encourages people from diverse backgrounds to exchange ideas and to work together more effectively. Past research has shown that organisational culture has positive effects on organisations by enhancing workplace relationships and encouraging

collaboration in different contexts (Shore et al., 2021). Thus, it is likely that organisational culture mediates the relationship between workforce diversity and employee performance.

H5: Organisational culture moderates the relationship between workforce diversity and employee performance.

Figure 1 shows the proposed research framework of this study. Workforce diversity is conceptualised in four dimensions: age diversity, gender diversity, ethnic diversity and educational background diversity. These dimensions are independent variables that are expected to affect employee performance among academic staff in private universities.

The employee performance is the dependent variable of the proposed framework. In higher education institutions, employee performance is assessed by teaching effectiveness, research output and contributions to the growth of the institution. A diverse academic staff is believed to promote knowledge sharing, widen perspectives, and foster collaborative problem-solving that can lead to better employee performance.

Organisational culture is included as the moderating variable to investigate its impact on the relationship between workforce diversity and employee performance. An organisation that has a supportive culture can help employees from diverse backgrounds to collaborate, show mutual respect and communicate openly. Therefore, it is anticipated to strengthen the positive relationship between workforce diversity and employee performance.

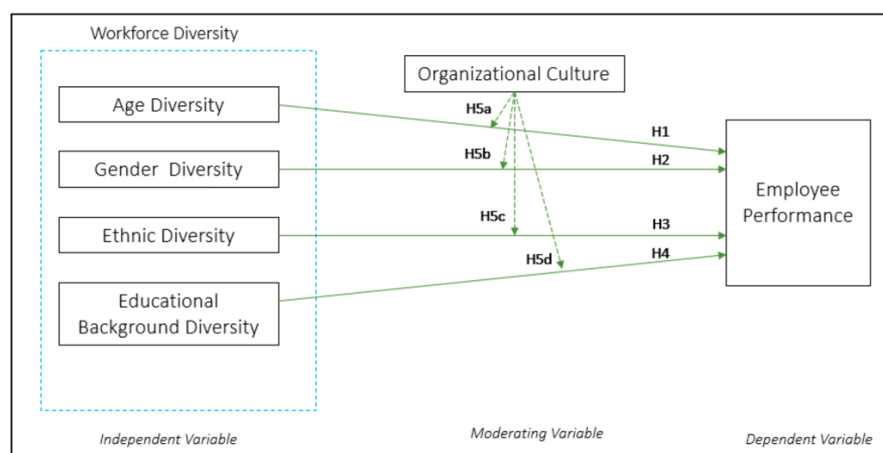


Figure 1: Proposed Research Framework

Methodology

A quantitative cross-sectional research design was used in the study to investigate the effect of workforce diversity on employee performance among academic staff in the Malaysian private universities. Workforce diversity was operationalised with four dimensions, i.e. age, gender, ethnicity and educational background. The proposed research framework incorporated organisational culture as a moderating variable and employee performance as the dependent variable.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire administered to academic staff from selected private universities in the Klang Valley, Malaysia. A total of 175 valid responses were obtained and included in the final analysis. The questionnaire items were adapted from well-established instruments used in previous workforce diversity and organisational behaviour studies. Respondents evaluated each statement using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The proposed hypotheses were analysed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM), which is appropriate for examining relationships among latent constructs and testing moderating effects.

The final sample was larger than what the 10-times rule and G*Power analysis for PLS-SEM both suggested. In order to reduce the danger of Common Method Variance (CMV), a number of procedural and statistical precautions were put in place because data were gathered from a single source using self-administered questionnaires. Reducing evaluation anxiety, guaranteeing respondent anonymity, and randomizing questionnaire items were procedural cures. Furthermore, comprehensive collinearity variance inflation factor (VIF) evaluations and Harman's single-factor test were used to confirm that CMV was not a serious concern in this investigation.

Results and Discussion

In this section, the results of the statistical analyses for the collected data are presented. First the demographic characteristics of the respondents are summarised. Then the results of the correlation analysis, hypothesis testing and multiple regression analysis are presented. The analyses were conducted to investigate the relationships between workforce diversity, organisational culture and employee performance.

The results indicate that organisational culture has a significant direct influence on employee performance. On the contrary, it did not support the moderating effect between workforce diversity and employee performance. One possible explanation is that the organisational cultures of the participating private colleges are quite similar because of common regulatory constraints and academic standards. Thus, organisational culture directly affects employee performance but does not seem to have a significant impact on the effects of workforce diversity on performance in these institutions. In summary, the results offer support for the combined perspectives of Social Identity Theory and Information/Decision-Making Theory by suggesting that diversity can be beneficial to organisational outcomes even when possible social categorisation exists among employees.

Findings and Analysis of Demographic Data

The study involved 175 academic staff from selected private universities in Malaysia. The respondents represented diverse demographic backgrounds in terms of age, gender, ethnicity and educational qualifications. Most of the respondents were between 40 and 49 years old (46.3%) and the same proportion (46.3%) were 50 years old and above. 7.4% of the sample were in the age range of 30 to 39 years. Of the respondents, 58.3% were female academics and 41.7% were male academics.

In terms of ethnicity, Malay respondents made up the majority (58.9%), followed by Indians (21.1%) and Chinese (19.4%), with a tiny proportion representing other ethnic groups. In terms of educational qualifications, most respondents (88.6%) had doctorates, with the remaining

11.4% holding master's degrees. Overall, the respondent profile represents an experienced and academically prepared sample suitable for investigating employment diversity in higher education institutions.

Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation analysis was used to determine the links between workforce diversity parameters, organizational culture, and employee performance. The data show that all four diversity aspects have a favorable and significant association with employee performance. Employee performance was positively correlated with age diversity ($r = .318$, $p < .01$), gender diversity ($r = .342$, $p < .01$), ethnic diversity ($r = .296$, $p < .01$), and educational background diversity. There was a significant positive association between organizational culture and employee performance ($r = .512$, $p < .01$). These findings indicate that a more diverse academic staff leads to increased collaboration, information exchange, and enhanced employee performance.

Table 1 Correlation Analysis Results

Variables	Mean	1	2	3	4	5	6
1 Age Diversity	3.62	1					
2 Gender Diversity	3.71	.284**	1				
3 Ethnic Diversity	3.65	.276**	.301**	1			
4 Educational Background Diversity	3.68	.298**	.322**	.315**	1		
5 Organizational Culture	3.74	.337**	.349**	.318**	.342**	1	
6 Employee Performance	3.82	.318**	.342**	.296**	.335**	.512**	1

Note: Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Hypothesis Testing

The hypothesised relationships were tested by means of Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM). Table 2 Structural model results. The results indicate that age diversity has a significant and positive effect on employee performance ($\beta = 0.229$, $p = 0.050$). Likewise, gender diversity has a significant impact on the employee's performance ($\beta = 0.281$, $p < 0.001$). Furthermore, the findings suggest that ethnic diversity has a positive significant effect on employee performance ($\beta = 0.155$, $p = 0.014$). In addition, the diversity of educational background has a significant influence on employee performance ($\beta = 0.185$, $p = 0.006$).

However, organisational culture did not moderate significantly the relationship between workforce diversity and employee performance. The interaction effects of organisational culture with age diversity ($B = -0.027$, $p = 0.764$), educational background diversity ($B = -0.045$, $p = 0.524$), ethnic diversity ($B = 0.164$, $p = 0.249$), and gender diversity ($B = 0.075$, $p = 0.377$) were not significant. However, the direct effect of organisational culture on employee performance was found to be significant ($\beta = 0.360$, $p < 0.001$).

Table 2 Summary of Regression Analysis Results

Hypothesis	Relationship	β	p-value	Result
H1	Age Diversity $\rightarrow$ Employee Performance	0.229	0.050	Supported
H2	Gender Diversity $\rightarrow$ Employee Performance	0.281	<0.001	Supported
H3	Ethnic Diversity $\rightarrow$ Employee Performance	0.155	0.014	Supported
H4	Educational Background Diversity $\rightarrow$ Employee Performance	0.185	0.006	Supported
H5	Organizational Culture $\times$ Age Diversity $\rightarrow$ Performance	-0.027	0.764	Not Supported
H6	Organizational Culture $\times$ Educational Diversity $\rightarrow$ Performance	-0.045	0.524	Not Supported
H7	Organizational Culture $\times$ Ethnic Diversity $\rightarrow$ Performance	0.164	0.249	Not Supported
H8	Organizational Culture $\times$ Gender Diversity $\rightarrow$ Performance	0.075	0.377	Not Supported

Multiple Regression Analysis

The study used multiple regression analysis to investigate the impact of dimensions of workforce diversity on employee performance. The independent variables were age diversity, gender diversity, ethnic diversity and educational background diversity while employee performance was the dependent variable.

The regression model was statistically significant indicating that the dimensions of workforce diversity explained a significant proportion of the variance in employee performance. Of the four dimensions, gender diversity was found to have the greatest positive influence on employee performance ($\beta = 0.281$, $p < 0.001$), underscoring the importance of gender balance at academic institutions. Age diversity also had a significant positive effect ($\beta = 0.229$, $p = .050$) indicating that interaction between academics of different generations promotes knowledge sharing and exchange of professional experience. Similarly, educational background diversity had a significant positive effect on employee performance ($\beta = 0.185$, $p = .006$), which indicates the value of diverse academic expertise and disciplinary perspectives. Ethnic diversity was also a significant predictor of employee performance ($\beta = 0.155$, $p = .014$) indicating that multicultural academic environments may foster more creativity, innovation, and effective decision-making.

Overall, the findings show that workforce diversity is a significant factor in the employee performance of academic staff in private universities. The detailed regression results are reported in Table 3.

Table 3 Multiple Regression Analysis Results

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p
Age Diversity	0.214	0.108	0.229	1.97	0.050
Gender Diversity	0.326	0.083	0.281	3.94	<0.001
Ethnic Diversity	0.176	0.071	0.155	2.48	0.014

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p
Educational Background Diversity	0.203	0.073	0.185	2.76	0.006

Discussion

The data shows that the diversity of workforce enhances the academicians' employee performance in private universities of Malaysia. The study revealed that the four dimensions studied i.e. age, gender, ethnicity and education background had a significant positive impact on performance of employees. These findings indicate that a diverse academic workforce leads to improved knowledge sharing, collaboration and problem-solving, which in turn enhances institutional performance.

The analysis of all diversity dimensions indicated that gender diversity had the greatest impact on employee performance. This research shows that balanced gender representation allows academics to combine different perspectives, communication styles and decision-making approaches. This diversity can enhance collaboration in teaching, research and academic leadership. This result is consistent with prior studies linking gender diversity to enhanced creativity, improved teamwork, and better organisational performance (Post & Byron, 2015; Shore et al. (2021).

Results also demonstrate that age diversity positively impacts employee performance. Universities have academics of different generations, each of whom contributes to the organization in a complementary way. Older academics bring professional experience and institutional knowledge. Younger academics tend to have technological expertise and new perspectives. This collaboration improves knowledge transfer and continuous organisational learning, as noted by Kunze et al. (2021).

The study also revealed that employee performance was positively affected by educational background diversity. Intellectual discourse is enriched, and cross-disciplinary collaboration is encouraged by the specialised knowledge contributed by scholars from a variety of academic fields and disciplines. These differences allow for the exchange of ideas and the improvement of teaching, research and institutional performance.

The data also reveal that ethnic diversity improves employee performance. In the heterogeneous context of Malaysia, the variety of experiences and perspectives of scholars of different ethnic backgrounds is the richness of knowledge sharing and collective problem solving. These interactions can stimulate creativity and innovation and support previous research that has found that culturally diverse workplaces lead to better organisational performance (Stahl et al.). (2020).

Organisational culture did not significantly moderate the relationship between workforce diversity and employee performance, unlike the direct effects of workforce diversity. Organisational culture had a great impact on employee performance, but it did not enhance the effects of diversity. One possible reason is that private colleges that participate do so in similar academic and regulatory settings, leading to largely uniform organisational procedures. It may be that professional standards already require academics to collaborate, irrespective of the organisational culture.

The results generally support both Social Identity Theory and Information/Decision Making Theory. Differences in demographics may influence the way that employees interact with each other, but the diverse knowledge, skills and experiences that academics bring to the table seem to outweigh any potential interpersonal issues. These findings highlight that workforce diversity is a valuable organisational resource that can improve employee performance if properly managed.

Limitations and Future Research

This study has significant limitations. First, the respondents were selected from private universities in Klang Valley, and this may limit the generalisability of the findings to other higher education institutions. In the future, public colleges and institutions from different regions should be included to provide more comprehensive empirical evidence. Second, the study employed a cross-sectional approach in obtaining respondents' perceptions at a particular time. Future research could employ a longitudinal approach to explore the changes of workforce diversity and employee performance over time and hence drawing stronger causal linkages.

Conclusion

This study investigated the impact of workforce diversity on academic achievement in Malaysian private universities. Findings support the positive impact of age, gender, ethnicity and educational background diversity on employee performance. Organisational culture does not confirm the moderating effect, but it has a significant direct effect on employee performance. These findings imply that staff diversity should be understood as an intentional organisational capability for academic achievement, rather than simply demographic expression. Universities are therefore encouraged to improve their inclusive hiring practices, promote interdisciplinary cooperation and foster welcoming environments where scholars with diverse backgrounds can thrive. Overall, the present study contributes to the body of knowledge on workforce diversity in higher education and provides practical advice to university administrators in their quest to improve institutional performance through effective diversity management.

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