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## Competencies needed for managing a multicultural workgroup

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*This study was designed to assess the competencies needed for a manager to manage a multicultural group of subordinates. Given the multicultural nature of today's workforce, it has become increasingly important for managers to take into account how cross-cultural differences may affect their management practices. Open-ended semi-structured interviews were conducted in order to derive the competencies used by managers who are already managing a multicultural group. From content analysis, five key themes emerged comprising 27 sub-themes. The results suggest that the competencies needed are cultural empathy, learning on the job, communication competence, general managerial skills, and personal style. Hence, selection, training and development, and performance appraisal practices may be focused on identifying and/or developing these competencies, in order for managers to effectively manage a multicultural workforce.*

**Keywords:** communication, competencies, content analysis, cultural empathy, multicultural

## Introduction

As the Australian workforce becomes more culturally diverse, the issues of managing a multicultural workgroup have become important for those involved in the management of human resources (Cope and Kalantzis 1997;

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Cope, Pauwels, Slade, Brosnan, and Kalantzis 1994; Karpin 1995; National Multicultural Advisory Council (NMAC) 1999; Fish and Wood (1997). Australia is becoming increasingly multicultural, with a large migrant population (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2002). In total, 18.8 percent of Australian residents speak languages other than English at home (ABS 1997a). In addition, statistics (ABS 2000) show that 24.6 percent of the Australian labour force was born overseas. With a culturally diverse group of workers participating in the workforce, managers increasingly need to take into account the impact of different cultures within their workgroups. Karpin's (1995) report to the Commonwealth government recognised the need for Australian industries to train and develop managers to be competent in managing a multicultural workforce. In addition, the NMAC report (1999, 54) argued strongly that within both the public and private sectors, organisations had to 'provide responsible leadership in promoting the values of anti-racism, tolerance, and equity'.

The competencies needed to manage a multicultural workgroup become crucial for the human resource function of any organisation if it is to gain competitive advantage. Cox (1991), Herriot and Pemberton (1995), and Joplin and Daus (1997) suggested that organisations should capitalise on the diversity of skills within the workforce to gain competitive advantage. For example, Gilbert and Ivancevich (2001) examined organisational level policies such as training programs and involvement of minority groups in top-level management, and found that the organisation with a stronger diversity policy and more active program on managing diversity had subordinates who reported greater organisational commitment and group attachment, as well as lower absenteeism. Milliken and Martins (1996) in their review of the research on diversity in organisational groups also suggested that diversity in workgroups (including multicultural workgroups) may affect outcomes such as turnover and performance through its impact on communication processes. For the managers of multicultural workgroups, Cox (1993) suggested that the manager's competencies in dealing with diversity issues may have an impact on affective outcomes such as how people feel about their employers and their jobs.

Previous studies have looked at the skills needed for successful cross-cultural interactions of expatriates (Black, Mendenhall, and Oddou 1991; Cui and Awa 1992; Tung 1998), at policy formulation to empower a diverse workforce (Cope and Kalantzis 1997; Simons, Vasquez, and Harris 1993), and at effective intercultural communication in the work and social environment (Gudykunst 1994; Lustig and Koestner 1993). Research has thus been done on effective communication and leadership across cultures and national boundaries (i.e., of expatriates, and joint ventures), policy advancement for a diverse workforce, and the international experience of workers, resulting in lists of skills that all managers should have if they are to succeed in a diverse workforce. However, there appears to be no indication given of the compe-

tencies may need to be applied on a day-to-day basis to help a manager manage a multicultural workgroup. Therefore, the current study focuses on competencies for managers who manage multicultural workgroups rather than on the broader topic of diversity management. Tung (1993) indicated that despite the frequency of multicultural groups in the workforce, little research evidence exists on the nature of the competencies needed for managing a multicultural workgroup, beyond a list of skills. Thus, it is important to assess what constitute effective competencies for managing a multicultural workforce.

### **Managing a multicultural workforce**

In this study, the term 'multicultural' refers to a situation in which three or more different ethnic cultures exist, and where subcultures may exist, rather than just two cultures (Hodgetts and Luthans 1997; Jandt 1995). In addition, the ethnic cultures of the respondents within the study refer to how the respondents view their own cultural identity and where they perceive themselves to be culturally. Wills and Barham (1994) stated that being able to manage a multicultural workforce refers to the ability to manage, communicate, and lead people from across a range of cultures simultaneously.

### **Competencies for managers**

Kanungo and Misra (1992) defined managerial competencies by adapting Boyatzis' (1982) seminal work in the field. Kanungo and Misra (1992) suggested that competencies take the form of generic cognitive activities that lead to adaptation to different contexts, rather than being overt behavioural sequences (e.g., skills). Masters and McCurry (1990) indicated that it is the capability to appropriately integrate and apply the skills one has that leads to managerial competency. Yukl, Wall, and Leipsinger (1990) and Wallace and Hunt (1996) have provided lists of generic managerial competencies, but competencies have not been given for managing multicultural workgroups.

Past research on intercultural effectiveness among expatriates has identified some basic skills and characteristics that are essential for successful cross-cultural interactions (Cui and Awa 1992; Dodd 1987; Ronen 1989; Wills and Barham 1994). The characteristics have included cultural empathy (Cui and Awa 1992; Rogers 1983) and tolerance for ambiguity (Gudykunst and Kim 1984; Ronen 1989). Current literature also refers to cognitive factors that may affect the ability of managers to manage across cultures. Cognitive factors include the management of personal stereotypes (Loden and Rosener 1991; Thiederman 1991) and cognitive complexity, or the ability to look at things from different perspectives (Gudykunst and Kim 1984; Ronen 1989; Wills and Barham 1994). As indicated by Tung (1993), the literature on expatriates may be relevant to a multicultural workforce because of the similarities associated

with managing across cultures. In addition, Gudykunst's (1994) work in the area of competence in intercultural communication also provides a list of 14 competencies, including motivation, knowledge, and skills for successful communication across different cultures. Hence, research and theory in the different areas such as diversity management, the expatriate experience, and intercultural communication form the basis for the questions asked in the current study. Specifically, the contribution of this study is to explore what the competencies are that may be needed by managers who manage a multicultural workgroup.

## Method

The study had two parts: Study 1 and Study 2. In Study 1, open-ended interviews of 20 managers experienced in managing a multicultural workgroup were conducted to allow competencies to emerge from content analysis of answers. Study 1 identified five main themes that were then used as the basis for designing the semi-structured interview questions for Study 2. In Study 2, 20 subordinates of the managers from Study 1 were interviewed using semi-structured interviews to derive the competencies needed by managers from the subordinates' perspective. Content analysis of the data from the second set of interview questions yielded the competencies suggested by subordinates. The studies were complementary to assess if a set of competencies existed for managers of a multicultural workgroup were relevant to both managers and subordinates.

## Sample and procedure

The sample of Study 1 comprised managers experienced in managing a multicultural workgroup, drawn from the industries (ABS 1997b) with large concentrations of workers from differing cultures and migrants. The industries were health and community services, education, property and business services, restaurants, construction, and manufacturing, with only the retail industry omitted of the top seven industries with the greatest number of migrants (ABS 1997b). Letters were sent to the CEOs of 35 companies from the industries with the greatest numbers of migrants to obtain managers who satisfied the following criteria:

1. recognition by the CEOs that they managed a multicultural workgroup well, in order to ensure that only competent managers were interviewed;
2. responsibility for a workgroup where workgroup members came from no fewer than two different ethnic backgrounds.

The sample in Study 2 comprised the subordinates of 12 of the 20 managers from Study 1. The managers who chose not to participate in Study

2 cited restructuring and bad timing as the main reasons, and were willing to let their subordinates be involved at a later time. Twelve of the managers provided researchers with a list of subordinates who given their consent to be interviewed. The first author randomly picked subordinates from the lists provided by managers. In some instances, two subordinates were interviewed for the corresponding manager. In total, 20 subordinates were interviewed. The first author conducted all the interviews and assured all interviewees that their answers would be completely confidential and not accessible by their managers. This was to encourage all interviewees to answer the questions in an honest and non-intimidating environment. The managers' and subordinates' characteristics are outlined in table 1.

The interview questions in Study 1 were open ended and relatively broad, asking about actual behaviours used at work (to reduce socially desirable answers) rather than asking about what managers think should be done, or

Table 1 **Demographic characteristics of respondents**

Variables	Percentage of respondents	
	Study 1 ( <i>n</i> = 20)	Study 2 ( <i>n</i> = 20)
Ethnic background		
Anglo-Saxon Australian	65	20
Italian	10	5
Anglo-Celtic European	5	10
South-eastern European	15	20
South-eastern and East Asian	5	35
South Asian	0	10
Age range		
20 years to 29 years	0	50
30 years to 39 years	45	15
40 years to 49 years	20	20
50 years to 57 years	35	15
Gender		
Female	35	50
Male	65	50
Workgroup size		
Fewer than 10 employees	15	40
Between 10 and 20 employees	40	30
Between 20 and 50 employees	20	15
More than 50 employees	25	15
Industry		
Health and community services	35	35
Education	25	40
Property and business services	15	5
Restaurants and hospitality	10	10
Construction	10	0
Manufacturing	5	10

their attitudes. A pilot study was carried out with four managers who managed multicultural workgroups to pre-test the interview questions for managers' understanding and appropriate use of terms and key words. Based on the pilot study some changes were made to the questions to clarify certain terms. The interview questions for Study 2 included exploratory questions as well as questions that addressed the competencies identified in Study 1. Table 2 gives the questions for both studies that asked about behaviours and not attitudes. The answers were transcribed verbatim from tape recordings, giving 402 pages for Study 1 and 385 pages for Study 2.

Table 2 Questions for the interview schedule (Studies 1 and 2)

Areas	Questions
Demographic (Studies 1 and 2)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Which ethnic background do you identify with?</li> <li>2. How old are you?</li> <li>3. What is your position in the organisation?</li> <li>4. How long have you been in this position?</li> <li>5. How many are there in the work team you manage?</li> <li>6. How many of your work team members are men and how many are women?</li> <li>7. Do you have work team members whom you manage directly who are from different cultures?</li> <li>8. What are the different cultures? How many are there from which of the cultures? (a list of various national cultures is given)</li> </ol>
Study 1: Competencies	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>9a. Could you tell me what are the important skills you use when managing a multicultural group?</li> <li>9b. What skills do you need that are different when you are managing people from different cultures than when you are managing people from the same culture as yourself?</li> <li>9c. As a manager relating to your workgroup, what are the key specific functions you need to display as a manager to manage your multicultural workgroup?</li> <li>9d. Each day, when you manage subordinates from other cultures, what are the important characteristics you need to have?</li> <li>9e. What other areas of your managing your workgroup do you think are affected by difference in the cultures within your workgroup?</li> <li>9f. Are there any other comments you would like to make in terms of your experiences in managing a multicultural workgroup?</li> </ol>
Study 2: Competencies	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>10a. Each day when you interact with your manager, what are the important skills that your manager has in dealing with your multicultural work team?</li> <li>10b. You work in a team of people from different cultures. When you and your work team members interact with your manager/supervisor, how does your manager deal with the cultural differences that your team may have?</li> <li>10c. What are some of the ways in which your manager communicates with you and your work team members from day to day?</li> <li>10d. How does your manager learn about you and your work team members each day, when you work together?</li> <li>10e. Can you tell me a little more about your manager and his/her management of your multicultural workforce? What are some of the strong points your manager has in managing a multicultural work team?</li> <li>10f. What are some of the strategies your manager uses in dealing with your multicultural work team?</li> <li>10g. Are there any other comments you would like to make about your manager's skills in dealing with your multicultural work team?</li> </ol>

## Content analysis

We used the two main approaches recommended for analysis of qualitative data: sorting and clustering the data to arrive at emergent key themes; and frequency counts of how strongly the themes were manifested (Dougherty and Hardy 1996). Two independent researchers, one the first author and the second a postgraduate student, initially searched for emergent themes and secondly scored the frequency of the identified themes in the data. To identify the key themes and sub-themes, the two researchers independently read through all the transcripts. The researchers first independently derived sub-themes first and, second, clustered them according to main themes (i.e., the competencies) that best reflected the groups of sub-themes. The two researchers used the answers to all the competencies questions to derive themes (see table 2 for all the questions).

In Study 1, both researchers arrived at five similar main themes that comprised 21 similar sub-themes. However, 15 other sub-themes arose that one of the researchers had while the other did not. After discussion and exploration of any discrepancies, the researchers agreed on 31 sub-themes that comprised the same five key themes. The five key themes/competencies were cultural empathy, learning on the job, communication competence, managerial skills and personal style. The sub-themes were coded as 1, yes, present; and 2, no, not present in each interview. The two researchers conducted a preliminary round of scoring of the 31 sub-themes using a sub-sample of 8 of the 20 transcripts. Interrater reliability using Goodwin and Goodwin's (1985) method was calculated on the 31 sub-themes, giving interrater reliabilities ranging from 0.45 to 0.95 for the sub-themes. According to Dougherty and Hardy (1996), this variation is too great. Subsequently, the researchers made clearer definitions of the sub-themes, and greater distinctions between each sub-theme. Eventually, 27 sub-themes arose from these discussions that constituted the five key themes and had high interrater reliabilities ranging from 0.85 to 1.00.

A similar approach was adopted in Study 2. Twenty-two sub-themes were identified in Study 2 (the subordinates) that were also identified in Study 1 (the managers). The five sub-themes that did not emerge in Study 2 were various managerial functions that were mentioned by the managers but not by their subordinates. As a period of ten months elapsed between the completion of content analysis for Study 1 and the start of content analysis for Study 2, both researchers had to start again in deriving sub-themes and themes for Study 2 without recalling clearly those of Study 1. Therefore, they did not attempt to derive the same themes or different themes for Study 2, but kept an open mind. After a clarification of each sub-theme and examples of each, the researchers then independently coded all the transcripts to derive the frequencies. The average interrater reliability was 0.96 for both Studies 1 and 2, which is high (Goodwin and Goodwin 1985).

Due to the small sample size of only 20 managers and 20 subordinates, it was not possible to calculate correlations, to assess if managers and subordinates gave similar competencies. Therefore, observation of the frequencies of competencies for each sample was used to assess if the managers and subordinates reported similar frequency of competencies. The percentages of respondents who gave each of the competencies for managing a multicultural workforce are shown in table 3, giving an indication of their relative frequency for these samples of respondents.

Table 3 Themes and sub-themes coded from responses to interview

Themes and sub-themes	Study 1		Study 2	
	Percentage of respondents	Interrater reliability	Percentage of respondents	Interrater reliability
<b>Cultural empathy</b>				
1 Cultural awareness	100	1.00	100	1.00
2 Cultural understanding	95	1.00	90	1.00
3 Respecting other values	88	.95	88	.94
4 Treating people as individuals	88	.95	95	1.00
5 Using different perspectives	70	1.00	68	.93
6 Experience in other cultures	60	1.00	73	.93
<b>Learning on the job</b>				
1 Adapting to the context/flexibility	90	.90	88	.94
2 Curiosity	88	.85	85	1.00
3 Willingness to learn	75	.95	73	.93
4 Tolerance for ambiguity	68	.95	75	.88
5 Being observant	53	.95	45	1.00
<b>Communication competence</b>				
1 Listening	90	1.00	90	1.00
2 Open-door policy (being open)	80	.90	95	1.00
3 Clear expression	75	1.00	88	.94
4 Non-verbal nuances	55	.90	58	.92
5 Knowing other languages	30	1.00	45	1.00
<b>Generic managerial skills</b>				
1 Motivating	88	.95	25	1.00
2 Consulting	88	.95	78	.94
3 Human resource functions	80	1.00	0	0
4 Conflict resolution	73	.95	0	0
5 Planning	68	.95	0	0
6 Goal/task focus	58	.95	0	0
7 Budgeting	45	1.00	0	0
<b>Personal style</b>				
1 Emotional stability	85	1.00	88	.94
2 Focusing on commonalities	50	.90	88	.94
3 Being frank/honesty	38	.85	83	.94
4 Sense of humour	30	1.00	90	1.00

Note. There were five major themes. The sub-themes are given under each major theme. A sub-theme was scored as present or absent. If any sub-theme was mentioned or discussed in the interviews, it was scored as present.

## Results

As shown in table 3, five main themes emerged from the interviews: cultural empathy, learning on the job, communication competence, generic managerial skills, and personal style. Managers and subordinates gave similar competencies, which could mean that for this sample, they both hold similar views on what represents good management of a multicultural workgroup. The results from both studies are reported together. The quotes that are used to illustrate the sub-themes are verbatim and have not been edited.

### Cultural empathy

Cultural empathy (with six sub-themes) emerged as the most frequently mentioned competency for managing a multicultural workgroup by both managers and subordinates (see table 3). Cultural empathy reflected managers' ability to put themselves in their subordinates' positions. The first sub-theme of cultural empathy was reported by all managers and subordinates (100%) and was *cultural awareness*. This included being aware of the way people from other cultures may interact and the values they placed on various aspects of work.

The second sub-theme, *cultural understanding* by managers of their subordinates, showed the need to be understanding of the differences that may arise. In particular, it was essential to understand that people do come from different backgrounds, and not necessarily have a full knowledge of how different cultures may function. For example, a manager from Study 1 said: 'You need to...have a basic understanding without having the whole knowledge of having to understand every culture.'

The third sub-theme of *respecting other values* (table 3) indicated that it was essential to respect the difference and the values of the other cultures. One manager indicated that there has to be a real respect and appreciation for the differences: 'ability to appreciate differences, not just understand them but to appreciate them, to more than to accept them, but to really enjoy them, to really like the difference'. Subordinates could tell the difference between superficial token practices and a real respect for cultural differences: 'She does come up to you personally and does talk to you about your cultural background and also, other than the festivities, it's not just a token thing.'

The fourth sub-theme of cultural empathy was *treating people as individuals*. The way to manage stereotypes was to treat people as individuals first, rather than as members of a culture. For example, one subordinate maintained that managers should not stereotype their subordinates: 'I don't feel like I am treated like a Malaysian Chinese or as Asian but rather as myself and the sets of skills I bring...'

The fifth sub-theme of cultural empathy was *using different perspectives* in dealing with people (table 3). Managers indicated that 'putting yourself in

someone else's shoes' was relevant. Therefore, managers needed to be able to apply different perspectives in managing a multicultural workgroup.

As shown in table 3, about two-thirds of the managers indicated *experience in another culture* (the sixth sub-theme) was relevant for managing a multicultural workgroup. The managers indicated that part of coming to understand and respect the differences stemmed from their own experience in having been involved in another culture. The subordinates indicated that managers who were effective in managing a multicultural workgroup were 'used to being in the minority, and not just the minority on a holiday, but being a minority in a workplace environment'.

### Learning on the job

The interview data also indicated that learning on the job was an important competence for managing a multicultural workforce (table 3). Learning on the job reflected a motivation on the part of managers to learn about their subordinates and to develop the skills to find the information that they may not have, and to adapt accordingly to new situations. The first sub-theme under learning on the job was *flexibility/adaptability* (table 3). Nearly 90 percent of the managers indicated that the ability to adapt what one has learned to the context was relevant for managers who manage multicultural workgroups. Subordinates could also tell when their managers adapted to new situations, as indicated by one subordinate: 'I think ... the more he [the manager] learns about each of the culture, the more he adapts to the specific needs.'

Respondents also reported that *being curious* (sub-theme 2) and having a *willingness to learn* about subordinates and the way they carry out tasks (sub-theme 3) were important. Most respondents in both studies acknowledged that managers did not have full knowledge of their employees' cultures. However, subordinates appreciated their managers' efforts in showing their interest in the subordinates' cultures as one subordinate also indicated: 'one of the most important thing is that he [the manager] actually asks questions about ... whether somethings are acceptable culturally or not.'

Both managers and subordinates also reported that *tolerance for ambiguity* was relevant to managing a multicultural workgroup (table 3). It was important as it facilitated managers' ability to learn and adapt to new cultures. One subordinate indicated that '[the manager's] not afraid to ask questions. Not afraid to admit that she's human either'.

Finally, with respect to the learning on the job competence, the fifth sub-theme of *being observant* reflected that some managers actually spent time observing the nuances and undercurrents of other cultures in the workplace. Subordinates were appreciative of the fact that their managers noticed the nuances between workgroup members and learn about their workgroup.

## Communication competence

The third major competence was communication competence, which reflected the manner in which managers communicated with their multicultural workgroup members. Five sub-themes comprised communication competence. Foremost among the sub-themes was *listening*. As shown in table 3, up to 90 percent of both managers and subordinates indicated that listening carefully and actively to what their employees told them was important, either from solicited or unsolicited comments. One subordinate indicated that 'listening and also, maybe, joining' was important for managers to do. Managers indicated that they had to listen to what their subordinates had to say about work practices and their perspectives on various issues because as managers, they had to understand what their subordinates were telling them.

The second sub-theme of communication competence was the need to have an *open-door policy*, and to be approachable. Managers indicated that there was a need to be an 'open access manager', as one manager pointed out: 'try and facilitate a safe place for people to speak'.

In their communication with subordinates from other cultures, many of the managers also indicated that they had to use *clear expressions* as shown in sub-theme 3 of the communication competence (table 3). The managers pointed out that it was essential to use simple straight language, which may even seem formal. The need to clarify roles and expectations, and to be clear about what employees are telling them as managers, were all important aspects of that communication process in a multicultural work environment.

Only about half of the managers and the subordinates indicated that the fourth sub-theme of communication competence, which was *non-verbal nuances*, was relevant. More of the managers preferred to rely on clearly worded conversations than on non-verbal nuances. Finally, only about one-third of managers and fewer than half the subordinates indicated that *knowing another language* was an advantage (sub-theme 5).

## Generic managerial skills

Generic managerial skills emerged mostly for the managers in Study 1. A number of the managerial skills Yukl et al. (1990) proposed emerged with regards to managing a multicultural workgroup (table 3). Among the managerial skills, *motivating* and *consulting* were most frequently reported. The subordinates in Study 2 also reported the relevance of motivating and consulting but did not significantly discuss any other generic managerial skills.

It is also interesting to highlight one other sub-theme reported by the managers. About three-quarters of the managers in Study 1 indicated that they spent time on *conflict resolution* between employees from different cultures (sub-theme 4). In doing so, they needed to use all their other skills and

knowledge about differences in cultural values to ensure that a fair settlement was reached.

### Personal style

The study also yielded some other sub-themes, overall labelled as the competency of personal style. Personal style reflected the styles used by managers in managing their workgroup. The sub-themes emerged from answers to all questions of the interviews. The majority of both managers and subordinates indicated by the first sub-theme of personal style that *emotional stability* was important for managing a multicultural workgroup (table 3). The importance of providing a stable work environment by being calm, patient, and stable themselves seemed to be important for most of the managers and subordinates. This seemed important because, as one manager reported, there might be 'culture tensions that are alive and kicking and they just stay alive'.

In addition, 50 percent of the managers and up to 88 percent of subordinates indicated that, beyond looking at and respecting differences generally, a need also arose to *focus on the commonalities* with and between employees (sub-theme 2). One manager indicated: 'well yes, children, ... we have cooking, clothes, female things that we have in common ... and I think that overcomes a number of boundaries as well you see. I think that's an advantage'.

Up to 83 percent of subordinates and 38 percent of the managers indicated, in the third sub-theme of personal style, that *being frank* was essential in a multicultural work environment, although others indicated that some cultures have a more circuitous way of approaching issues. Finally, as shown in the fourth sub-theme of personal style, about a third of the managers, and 90 percent of subordinates indicated that it was important for managers to have a *sense of humour* when managing a multicultural workplace, to keep the mood 'jocular' when needed. At the same time, some subordinates indicated that 'sense of humour could be very culture specific'. However, the subordinates in Study 2 indicated that they were tolerant of 'failed jokes', as long as managers were able to acknowledge that their jokes had failed and were able to laugh at themselves.

### Discussion

The current studies addressed the question: what are the competencies used in managing a multicultural workgroup? and sought responses from both managers of multicultural workgroups and their subordinates who observe these competencies each day. Broadly, the results indicate that subordinates and managers believe that the competent multicultural manager is one who has good communication competence and continually learns on the job by being flexible and interested in his/her workgroup. In addition, the manager should be culturally sensitive and respectful when interacting with the multi-

cultural workgroup, and use humour, honesty and emotional stability as tools to help them in their interactions. Hence, it seems that the competencies identified in the studies may assist in profiling a competent multicultural manager.

First, cultural empathy emerges as a competency for this sample. The results indicate that cultural empathy is more than the skill of being able to empathise as was previously suggested by Gudykunst (1994). When compared to the work done by Cui and Awa (1992) and Wills and Barham (1994), an expanded view of the construct of cultural empathy is presented here. Beyond cultural awareness and understanding, cultural empathy includes a respect for cultures, recognition of different perspectives, and efforts not to stereotype members from various cultural groups. The ability to use different perspectives is considered important by Bartunek and Moch (1987) and Gudykunst and Kim (1984) as it involves setting aside of habitual processes of information and exercising new frames of reference when interacting with different cultures. So, cultural empathy is relevant for managing a multicultural workgroup.

Second, respondents report that being able to adapt to different situations, being curious about other cultures, and having a willingness to learn assist managers in learning about their subordinates. In a multicultural setting, managers need to learn on the job because they consistently encounter different values and ideas. Gudykunst (1993) also maintained that the ability to tolerate ambiguity and to accommodate new behaviour are essential for effective information gathering and communication across cultures. This is especially relevant in a multicultural setting where there is potential ambiguity about different attitudes towards work practices between workgroup members and their managers. Whereas prior evidence has suggested that tolerance for ambiguity is a separate competency for managing and communicating across cultures (Gudykunst 1993; Ronen 1989; Wills and Barham 1994), the results here indicate that it may also be an important part of the learning process for the manager of a multicultural workgroup.

Third, the competence of communication found in this study is generic and differs from past studies (Gudykunst, Ting-Toomey, Hall, and Schmidt 1989), which specifically looked at intercultural communication. The results support Wills and Barham's (1994) suggestion that active listening is an essential aspect of managing across cultures. As pointed out by Poortinga (1992), basic managerial skills and expectations can vary substantially from culture to culture. Hence in communicating with a multicultural workgroup, the managers' ability to listen actively and to be clear in their communication with subordinates seem important because of the potential for misunderstanding and misrepresentation of what is said.

Fourth, generic managerial skills are reported mainly by managers as relevant to managing a multicultural workforce. The managerial skills include motivating, consulting, and conflict resolution, similar to Yukl et al.'s (1990) skills. The results are consistent with Lobel's (1990), and Ronen's (1989) suggestions that a manager of multicultural workgroups must still have good technical and man-

agerial skills. The subordinates in Study 2 rarely mention them possibly because they may not be aware of the full range of their managers' roles. However, subordinates did highlight the importance of their managers' ability to motivate and consult. Yukl et al. (1990) indicated in their study of managerial competencies that these two skills were important where subordinates are unclear about their role within the workplace. In a multicultural workgroup, where there may be some uncertainty regarding expectations, it is not unexpected that motivating and consulting are the two skills that subordinates have highlighted.

Finally, both managers and subordinates also indicate that there are some personal styles that may be relevant for managing a multicultural workforce. Personal style includes emotional stability, focusing on commonalities, being honest, and having a sense of humour. The majority of both managers and subordinates confirm Wills and Barham's (1994) suggestion that the emotional stability may be an important aspect of managing a multicultural workgroup.

One of the other aspects of personal style is focusing on commonalities. Bar-Tal's (1997) study indicates that stereotypes can be changed through direct contact that focuses on common goals in intercultural interactions. The commonalities reported by respondents often refer to personal interests and similarities both at work and beyond work. However, only half of the managers report the relevance of focusing on commonalities compared to most of the subordinates. This may indicate that subordinates value discussions beyond work more than do their managers.

A third of the managers also report that honesty and a sense of humour are important aspects of managing a multicultural workforce. The result in regard to honesty is consistent with Fox's (1997) assertions that being truthful is vital for effective intercultural communication. The subordinates in Study 2 recognise these qualities in their managers, even when managers do not indicate or acknowledge the competencies in their self-report.

Overall, this research indicates that a set of competencies may exist which managers and subordinates agree are needed to manage a multicultural workgroup. The results give an insight into how Tung's (1993) assertion that it is essential for managers to attain some form of 'unconscious competence' in dealing with people from different cultures can be achieved. The results from this study suggest behaviours by which the acknowledgment, understanding, valuing and integration of the cultural differences can be applied to the multicultural workgroup.

## **Limitations**

Despite the in-depth information collected from the interviews, this study was limited by the small sample size. A larger number of managers than 20 who are known to be effective, as well as corresponding subordinates, are needed to assess if the competencies found here are valid and generalisable, and to calculate a quantitative estimate if the similarity of managers and subordinates

derived competencies. It may also be important to develop a survey instrument to measure the competencies found in this study and assess if they hold across large numbers of managers and subordinates.

Another limitation was that self-report does not allow an assessment of whether the managers in the sample behave the way they say they do. This problem was alleviated by reports from subordinates. However, the subordinates may have felt that they could not be completely honest in their answers if they felt that the answers could get back to their managers. In addition, the subordinates were selected from lists provided by the managers. Managers may have selected only subordinates they believe would give favourable information on their managers. The authors did, however, try to minimise this possibility by assuring and guaranteeing confidentiality of the answers from subordinates, and encouraged subordinates to be as honest as possible. Some of the managers from Study 1 were not represented by corresponding subordinates. Whereas the managers who opted out cited bad timing and restructuring as the reasons for not allowing their subordinates to participate, it may also be due to the fact that they did not want their answers verified or disproved by their subordinates. However, the managers who opted out did assure the authors that they would be willing to let their subordinates participate in similar interviews at a later time.

In addition, more research is also needed to assess the relative importance of the various competencies identified to how effective managers are in managing a multicultural workgroup. This may be important for human resource management practices such as selection and training, as it could mean that some competencies are more important in a managing a multicultural workgroup than others.

## **Practical implications**

Where generalisable, the competencies could point towards more effective management of a multicultural workgroup. Possible implications arise from the studies in regards to managing a multicultural workforce in areas of selection, training and development, and performance appraisal.

First, the competencies can be used as part of the selection criteria when searching for the right candidates to manage a multicultural workgroup. Hence, it may be important to develop scales to measure the competencies identified for both selection and development purposes. Where it is found that managers lack these competencies, training and development programs may have to address the listed competencies. However, the results may indicate that cross-cultural training programs that traditionally focus on providing ethno-specific information to trainees may be only partly relevant (Cope, Pauwels, Slade, Brosnan, and Kalantzis 1994). Ethno-specific training programs tend to focus on cross-cultural comparisons in the way people from different cultures behave. The provision of ethno-specific information can assist in increasing an

awareness and understanding of practices and values of specific cultures, but may not address the other competencies identified here. Therefore, there may be a need to reassess the content of training programs that aim to increase the competence of managers in managing a multicultural workgroup.

Second, the competencies here may have implications for competency-based performance appraisal and feedback. Hearn, Close, Smith, and Southey (1996) suggested that identified lists of competencies, where generalisable, should be incorporated into performance appraisal systems within professions or organisations. The competencies in this study form a potential criteria against which the performance of multicultural managers may be appraised. The set of competencies in this study may also be the basis for feedback to the manager on their supervision performance. Feedback from subordinates based on the set of competencies may assist in the development of the multicultural manager.

In conclusion, this research sheds some light on what the competencies are for managing a multicultural workgroup. Whereas some of the themes that emerged from the content analysis have been identified in previous research in similar areas of study, the emergent sub-themes serve to further clarify existing constructs that have been consistently used in research of intercultural interactions (Cui and Awa 1992; Lobel 1990). Respondents in the current sample acknowledge that managers have to continually learn on the job as the situations and contexts may vary across time and cultures. In addition, the managers' competencies in cultural empathy, communication, and learning on the job may be applied across a range of general managerial duties and functions (such as motivation and consultation) as indicated by Yukl (1994). Finally, the research indicates that there may be some personal styles that may be relevant for managing a multicultural workgroup, including emotional stability, a focus on similarities, honesty, and a sense of humour. The results from the current study reflect the themes identified in previous empirical studies in the areas of intercultural effectiveness, the expatriate experience, and diversity management.

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