



**RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN POWER DISTANCE AND COMPLIANCE TO AFFIRMATIVE ACTION POLICIES
AMONG GOVERNMENT STATE DEPARTMENTS IN KENYA**

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ABSTRACT

The main objective of this study was to determine the relationship between power distance and compliance to affirmative action policies among government state departments in Kenya. The study was guided by Rawls' Theory of Justice. The study was limited to heads of human resource management and development and forty (40) government state departments; and the affirmative action aspects of gender balance, regional balance and persons with disability. Descriptive research design was applied. The target population was 40 Heads of Human Resource Management and Development and 40 Heads of Administration in the various Government State Departments in Kenya who were sampled using census. Primary data was collected using self-administered questionnaire. Data was collected using questionnaires that were tested for validity and reliability. Data was analysed using SPSS version V26. Analysis was based on frequency, percentage, mean, correlation, regression and presented in tables. Findings showed that; there was a significant strong correlation between power distance and level of compliance to affirmative action policies. The recommendations included: redesigning and enriching of the affirmative action approach to fully realize the initial aspirations of the proponents; management and leadership of the various state departments to work on strengthening of the existing adaptive cultural norms and values.

Key Words: Power Distance, Adaptability, Innovative, Hierarchical Cultural, Affirmative Action

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INTRODUCTION

Organizations are like living organisms; they grow from simple forms to complex forms (Dombrowski et al. 2007). They undergo changes within their systems necessitated by market demands and customer preferences and they also die. Just like mankind, organizations have cultures that dictate modalities of their existence and performance. Talking of organization culture, it is evident from the immense works of scholars and academicians that the concept of culture carries with it different definitions and explanations. What is common however is that culture appears to separate one group from another based on a shared set of values, beliefs, behaviors, and attitudes that are shared, interpreted and passed down over time. Culture gives collective identity and separates it from other groups (Bik, 2010).

Affirmative action practices have been and are being implemented in most countries across the world. Studies on the different cultures and how such cultures influence adherence to affirmative action practices have also been done and some have exhibited unfavorable practices as regards affirmative action. Hwang (2003) and Jeong (2005) have highlighted the glaring situation in South Korea where women are viewed as secondary earners who do not deserve equal pay. According to the two scholars, in the South Korean society's cultural image, the more powerful a position is the more discrimination it faces if it is held by a woman.

Tanzania has anchored affirmative action initiatives in its policies and legislation as is evident in the National Development Vision and strategies (World Bank, 2007). In the 2006 World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap report, Tanzania was recognized as leading among the East African countries in addressing gender disparities and advancing the agenda of granting minority groups access to employment opportunities in the economy (World Bank, 2007).

In Kenya, the push for affirmative action picked up its fame in mid 1990s when legislators, common society gatherings, social activists, non-

governmental organizations and religious groupings agitated for the recognition of the girl child. Affirmative action initiatives were applied during college admission where the grades for students from minority groups were lowered with the goal that they may likewise have the chance to join these esteemed establishments (Kaimenyi, 2013). Currently Kenya has anchored affirmative action initiatives in its legal framework as is evident in the current Constitution (2010) and other Acts of parliament. The Enactment of the Disability Act for instance has shielded interests of people living with disabilities (PLWDs) so that they are not seen as being lesser human beings. National Government Affirmative Action Fund has also been established to boost the engagement of minority groups in addition to setting aside exceptional seats for ladies, youth, and PLWDs in the National Assembly.

The conclusion of the general election in October, 2017 paved way for reorganization of government by the Head of State through Executive Order No. 1 of 2018. In this reorganization, 21 Ministries and 40 State Departments were formed. The Order also highlighted the specific mandate of each State Department as well as those of State Corporations. There have been several reviews that have been done on this executive order some of which have seen the merger of some State Department and creation of others. As it stands now, Kenya has 40 State Departments. The State Departments are headed by Principal Secretaries who are also the accounting officers and chairpersons of the Human Resource Management Advisory Committee (HRMAC) and the Performance Management Committee (PMC) among others. The Principal Secretaries are deputized by Heads of Administration who are also the heads of support services in the respective government state departments. The support services include Human Resource Management, Finance and Accounts, ICT, Records Management, Procurement among others. The divisions within the technical establishment are dependent on the specific mandate of the State

Department as stated in the aforementioned Executive Order.

The role of implementing affirmative action is vested on the Human Resource Management and Development divisions in the various state departments since they are the ones mandated to execute the human resource function with support from the heads of administration. This being the case, vital information necessary in the study was gathered from the human resource divisions and the administration departments within the state departments. The study therefore targeted all heads of human resource management and development and heads of administration in the various State Departments as key respondents and primary source of data to help the researcher draw the appropriate conclusions.

Statement of the Problem

Kenya has made remarkable strides in implementing affirmative action practices as exhibited in Article 10, 54, 55 and 232 of the current constitution (2010). Acts of parliament have been developed such as the Disability Act, the National Cohesion and Integration Act among others. Institutions such as the National Gender and Equality Commission, the National Cohesion and Integration Commission and the National Government Affirmative Action Fund have also been established. The intentions were to remedy historical injustices; provide level playing ground and equal opportunities to all; promote inclusive participation by all in decision making; provide special assistance to the marginalized communities and ensure dignity, equality, justice and unity (Katiba Institute, 2009).

Despite all these efforts, the problem was still rampant. A report by the National Cohesion and Integration Commission dated August, 2012 showed that Over 50 per cent of Kenya's ethnic groups were only marginally represented in the Civil Service with 23 communities having less than 1% presence. Some Ministries and government departments also had a single ethnic community representation of over 30% contrary to the

provisions of the National Cohesion and Integration Act (2012). For instance, State House had 45.31%, Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure 33% among other government agencies. Data from the Public Service Commission of Kenya showed that out of the 7,379 people appointed to different ranks in the public service within the 2018/2019 financial year, it was only 17 persons who were living with disabilities. This accounted for only 1.1% against the constitutional threshold of 5%. The Commission also indicated that, out of the 40 government State Departments, it was only one State Department that had met the 5% constitutional threshold.

Gender balance among staff in the State Departments was still a challenge. Although the affirmative action on gender dictated that not more than two-thirds of employees of a public organization should be of the same gender, the male gender was still dominant in most of the government agencies contrary to the provision of Article 232(1) (i) of the Constitution of Kenya (2010) and indicator 16.7.1(a) of Goal 16.7 of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals which called for balanced appointment of job ranks by gender, age, PWDs and population groups in public institutions relative to the national population distribution (Public Service Commission of Kenya, 2019).

The above statistics provided a clear indication that there was a problem of compliance with affirmative action policies by public service organizations in Kenya. The study therefore sought to examine whether the existing power distance could by any chance influence compliance to the affirmative action policies the government had put in place.

Research Objectives

The study's objective was to establish the relationship between power distance and compliance to affirmative action policies among government state departments in Kenya.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Review

Rawls' Theory of Justice

The prominent proponent of this idea was John Rawls, who lived from 1921 to 2002. In a liberal democracy, Rawls theory of justice addresses general notions that consider how the criminal justice system should behave and function in a diverse and liberal society. Rawls' theory is geared toward liberalism and serves as the foundation for what law enforcement and the criminal justice system should aspire for. Rawls visualizes a society whereby the ideas of justice are rooted in a social contract, drawing on some concepts from social contract theory. Rawls, on the other hand, sees flaws in the social contract that prevent fairness and equality among society members and recommends a social contract negotiated behind a "veil of ignorance." So that the social contract is fair, the negotiating contestants who are not aware of their ethnicity, sex, literacy, medical, sexual orientation, or other characteristics. Rawls eventually contends that justice's primary concern is fairness. Each person should have an equal right to the greatest broad basic liberty consistent with a commensurate liberty for others, according to Rawls" (Rawls, 2006). In addition, social and economic inequities should be addressed in a way that benefits everyone.

According to Rawls, these principles should be followed to make sure that underprivileged are eliminated and that everyone obtains the same benefits of justice. As regards to affirmative action, Rawls theory of justice provides a basis for equal employment opportunity, fair treatment and non-discriminatory employment practices (Garcelon, 2015). Affirmative action policies are intended to provide protection for people who have been harmed by a breach of either of the above principles, and a solution for the consequences of their deprivation. The appropriate remedy for the unjust action would therefore be recruitment of the victims of injustice and giving members of disadvantaged groups after successful qualification, with a view to compensating them by having their disadvantaged status reversed (Garcelon, 2015).

The theory has put a lot of emphasis on the tenets of affirmative action however it has not shown how these tenets are anchored in an organization's cultural practices neither has it demonstrate the existence of any relationship between the affirmative action tenets and compliance to affirmative action policies. The theory therefore cannot suffice to give a vivid insight on whether a relationship does exist between the hierarchical, innovative, power distance and adaptability cultures of public service organization and compliance to affirmative action policies.

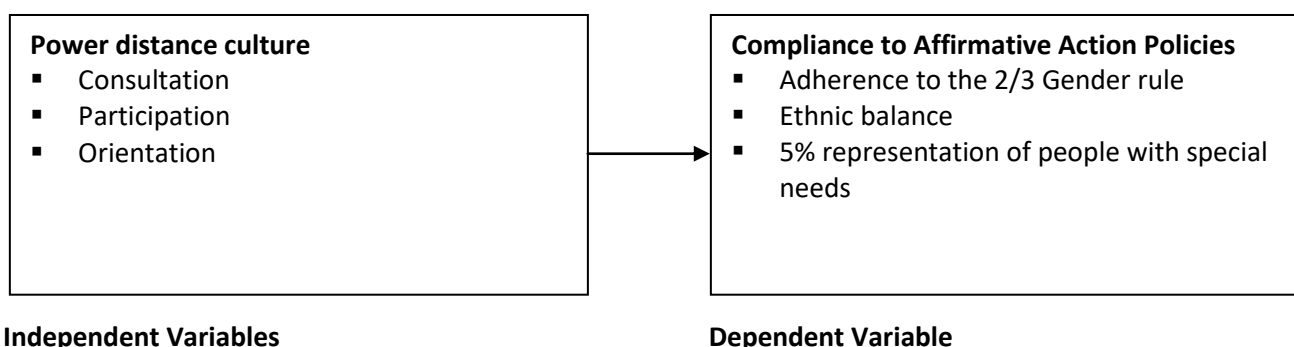


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Source: Researcher, 2022

Power Distance Culture:

In organizations, power values are amongst the most commonly used cultural values. The extent to which staff, managers, and society accept inequalities in power, position, and money is referred to as power distance. In the organizational area, it is described as the unequal allocation of authority in organizations. The level of centralization, the hierarchical structure, and the decision-making methods in organizations are all influenced by power distance (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2010). Subordinate employees expect and follow commands from their superiors. In organizations with short power gaps, sub-officers are expected to participate in decision-making. Managers in such firms are concerned about employee equality and empowerment, there is a fair distribution of authority, and sub-units are allowed to make decisions on matters that affect them (Soyaln, 2019). In organizations with large power distances, employees' judgments of justice, trust in the organization, job satisfaction, and performance are poorer (Daniels & Greguras, 2014).

While people from cultures with a high-power distance are thought to respect authority and willingly accept an unequal distribution of power, those from cultures with a low power distance are suspicious of those in positions of authority, quick to question authority, and want to be involved in making decisions that affect them (Helpap, 2016). Power distance is an important consideration in the effectiveness of critical organizational processes, including the organizational transformation process (Rao & Pearce, 2016). In businesses, the power distance is also linked to internal communication. The amount and manner in which information is shared between organization leaders and staff is determined by the extent of power distance.

Distance is at the heart of leadership effectiveness, according to Anand, Vidyarthi, and Rolnicki (2018), since it determines how followers perceive and react to their leader's traits, reactions, and behavior during organizational processes like organizational change. One of the most effective ways of

comprehending leader-follower social distance and its effects on organizational processes is to have a clear awareness of the power distance orientation inherent in a leader. Power distance is critical for the proper functioning of manager-employee relationships, exchanges, and communication. Low power distance improves the quality of manager-employee relationships, interactions, and communication, whereas high power distance degrades them.

Compliance to Affirmative Action Policies

Affirmative action, according to Vaughn (2008), is a technique of atoning for or eliminating discrimination based on gender, race, or ethnicity. It usually takes the shape of government-mandated policies and initiatives aimed at bringing about the necessary reforms in businesses, colleges, and other organizations. Affirmative action, according to Rossouw and van Vuuren (2010), is a brief intervention of preferential treatment designed to mitigate the effects of prejudice and allow people to compete on an equal footing for opportunities. They added that this description is normative since it lays out the criteria and components that must be met in an affirmative action program. Affirmative action is a government program aimed at redressing long-standing prejudice against specific racial, ethnic, and gender groups, as well as women. Affirmative action is best understood as a broad notion that encompasses a variety of policies and procedures designed to address specific context-based discrimination and unfairness issues (Eboni, Galleher, Green, Brown, & Stovall, 2009).

In Kenya, President Hon. Mwai Kibaki proclaimed that women will be given 30 percent of all job openings. In Nairobi, an affirmative action campaign was begun to persuade Kenya's government to implement affirmative action before the 2007 General Elections. Women from civil society, as well as women leaders and political hopefuls from around Kenya, embarked on a campaign to gather one million signatures to ask the government to adopt the Affirmative Action Bill in time for the 2007 General Elections (Manyala, 2007).

Empirical Review

Kim and McLean (2014) sought to find out effect of cultural factors on knowledge sharing in organizations. This study was based on extensive literature review. Employees and their leaders are less open in organizations with high power distance, and employees automatically follow directions from their leaders, with communication tending to be one-way. Furthermore, personnel from a culture with a high-power distance anticipate their bosses to act autocratically, and they may feel uneasy if supervisors consult them.

Raquel, Grettel, and Torres-Carballo (2016) studied effect of power distance on staff performance in a multinational company. The target population was 551 staff. Data was collected using questionnaires. Findings showed that most power distance diverse workgroups adversely affected staff behavior, selflessness and civic value. It was concluded that power distance had negatively affect teamwork in an organization. Ldama, Tumba, and Pembi (2020) assessed effect of power distance on organizational commitment in Mubi polytechnic, Nigeria. The study adopted a survey research design. The targeted populace was 536 academic and non-academic staff. Yamane formula sampling formula was used to sample 346 staff. Findings showed an insignificant relationship between power distance and organizational commitment.

Dotse and Asumeng (2014) investigated how power distance moderated the relationship between leadership and staff attitude in Accra, Ghana. The sample size comprised of 238 employees. Data was collected using questionnaires. Findings showed that the cultural component of power distance moderates the association between apparent organizational leadership styles and employee work attitudes. Nkando (2021) studied effect of power distance on organization change in Kenya. The sample was ten key informants. Data were collected using interviews conducted through telephone calls. The findings demonstrated that the cultural feature of power distance influences numerous aspects of cross-border organizational change, including

hierarchy, connections and relationships, power balance, organizational structure, and change communication.

The above studies have failed to link power distance culture to compliance with affirmative action policies in an organization. The focus of the scholars has been on other organizations rather than public service organizations making it unnecessary to make informative and reliable references regarding existence of a relationship between the cultural aspect of power distance and compliance to affirmative action policies. This has however been addressed in the current study.

Kurtulus (2015) studied role of affirmative action in improving equity in employment among firms in U.S.A. The study used a pane data form 100,000 companies. The results indicated that the main beneficiaries of the affirmative action were black American females and males. Sisamu (2015) investigated effect of Affirmative Action Policy in the public sector in Namibia. Questionnaires, interview guides, and document analysis were the data collection tools. Although the policy's execution has placed previously disadvantaged groups in major and strategic managerial positions, it has also blocked the lower ranked staff resulting in career path diversions, according to the findings. Affirmative action is also seen as unfair because it prevents qualified employees from being promoted because companies must follow the policy.

Makhubele (2015) examined extent to which staff complied with Employment Equity Act through practicing affirmative action in South Africa. The data was collected through intensive literature review, legislation, and policy documents on employment equity. According to the findings, affirmative action was not implemented properly by majority of staff. Busanda (2015) assessed affirmative action practices at workplace in Tanzania. The sample was 58 respondents obtained through purposive and snowball sampling procedures. Data were obtained using questionnaires interview, and documents review. Major findings of the study were that women

participation at workplaces increases because of special initiative and priority given to them in training and recruitment. Also, the government prohibits discriminatory practices at workplaces based on sex through legal and policy frameworks of affirmative action. Furthermore, despite existence of legal and policy frameworks for increasing degree of women participation in employment opportunities at public workplaces, there are some challenges that hinder women's participation in those opportunities.

Wambui (2012) examined the public opinion on affirmative action, female employment and skills development in Eldoret, Kenya. This study employed Expost Facto Survey research design. Total sampling technique was used to obtain 255 respondents. Questionnaires were used for data collection. The findings revealed that there is a bizarre discrepancy in employment, with men outnumbering women in practically every job category. Affirmative action is also seen as the most ambitious attempt to address the lengthy history of gender discrimination, with women lagging behind their male counterparts in terms of job advancement. Ochieng (2019) analyzed gender based affirmative action policy in Kenya.

According to the findings of this study, aggressive affirmative action is not the best strategy to address gender discrimination in Kenya. It was also discovered that Strong Affirmative Action (SAAP) programs frequently fail to achieve their goals, and that the compensation provided in the form of jobs and schooling is frequently unrelated to any offenses committed, making it ineffective as a remedy for the specific injuries of identifiable plaintiffs.

METHODOLOGY

The study used descriptive research. The targeted population for this study was 40 Heads of Human Resource Management and Development and 40 Heads of Administration in the various Government State Departments in Kenya. This made a total of 80 respondents. The sampling frame was a list of 40 Heads of Human Resource Management and Development and 40 Heads of Administration in the various Government State Departments in Kenya. The list was sourced from the Ministry of Public Service and Gender affairs being the administrators of the scheme of service for the Human Resource Management and Development personnel in the civil service. The primary data gathering tool for this study was a self-administered questionnaire. The researcher collected primary data using questionnaires. The researcher used SPSS version (V26) to analyse quantitative data collected from the study samples. The study used a multiple linear regression analysis to assess the relationship between the independent and the dependent variables.

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics

Power Distance

The objective of the study was to establish the relationship between power distance and compliance to affirmative action policies among government state departments in Kenya. Respondents indicated their level of agreement/disagreement with statements related to power distance. Findings were presented in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Power Distance

Key: SA=Strongly Agree, A=Agree, NS=Not Sure, D=Disagree, SD= Strongly Disagree, M=Mean, SDe=Standard Deviation,

| Statements | SD % | D % | N % | A % | SA % | M | SDe |
|---|---------|--------|--------|--------|---------|-------------|--------------|
| Managers make most decisions without consulting subordinates. | 1.5 | 1.5 | 7.4 | 66.2 | 23.5 | 4.09 | 0.707 |
| Consultations regarding employment matters is very minimal | 1.5 | 4.4 | 5.9 | 61.8 | 26.5 | 4.07 | 0.798 |
| Managers use authority and power when dealing with subordinates | 1.5 | 2.9 | 4.4 | 60.3 | 30.9 | 4.16 | 0.765 |
| Managers use authority and power when employing new employees | 2.9 | 2.9 | 5.9 | 58.8 | 29.4 | 4.09 | 0.859 |
| Employees are not allowed to disagree with human resources management decisions | 7.4 | 5.9 | 8.8 | 61.8 | 16.2 | 3.74 | 1.045 |
| HR Managers do not ask for the opinions of employees. | 0 | 0 | 11.8 | 58.8 | 29.4 | 4.18 | 0.622 |
| Average | | | | | | 4.05 | 0.799 |

Source: Researcher, 2022

Results in Table 1 showed that 66.2% agreed that managers make staff were not consulted when managers are making decisions, 61.8% agreed that consultations regarding employment matters is very minimal, 60.3% agreed that leaders are authoritative when dealing with staff, 58.8% agreed that leaders are authoritative when employing new employees, 61.8% agreed that staff are prohibited from questioning any decision made by the human resource manager, and 58.8% agreed that HR Managers do not ask for the opinions of employees. This implies that the government agencies can be described as high-power culture organizations. Power and influence are concentrated in the hands of a few rather than diffused throughout the people in cultures with a large power distance. Superiors and subordinates in a high-power distance

workplace regard each other as existentially unequal. Findings concur with Kim and McLean, (2014) employees from a culture with a large power distance anticipates their bosses to act autocratically, and may even be uncomfortable if supervisors consult them. The findings clearly demonstrate how power distance culture negatively influences compliance to affirmative action policies.

Compliance to Affirmative Action Policies

In order to measure state departments' compliance to affirmative action policies, respondents were asked to tick on the extent to which they agree with listed statements on compliance to affirmative action policies. Findings were presented in Table 2 below:

Table 2: Compliance to Affirmative Action Policies

Key: SA=Strongly Agree, A=Agree, NS=Not Sure, D=Disagree, SD= Strongly Disagree, M=Mean, SDe=Standard Deviation, F=Frequency

| Statements | SD % | D % | N % | A % | SA % | M | SDe |
|--|---------|--------|--------|--------|---------|------|-------|
| The organization has fully adhered to two-third gender rule | 26.5 | 50.0 | 8.8 | 10.3 | 4.4 | 2.16 | 1.074 |
| the proportion of male workers to female workers in the organization is almost equal | 17.6 | 57.4 | 7.4 | 8.8 | 8.8 | 2.34 | 1.141 |
| There is high ethnic balance in the organization workforce | 58.8 | 23.5 | 10.3 | 7.4 | 0 | 1.66 | 0.940 |
| The organization highly value ethnic diversity of staff | 10.3 | 16.2 | 4.4 | 42.6 | 26.5 | 3.59 | 1.318 |
| The organization has fully adhered to 5% representation for people with disability | 10.3 | 11.8 | 10.3 | 22.1 | 45.6 | 3.81 | 1.396 |
| The organization strict rules and policies against discriminating people with disability | 23.5 | 48.5 | 10.3 | 11.8 | 5.9 | 2.28 | 1.131 |
| The organization infrastructure are accessible to all including people with disability | 10.3 | 7.4 | 8.8 | 45.6 | 27.9 | 3.74 | 1.241 |
| The organization hires employee with disability in all positions as long they qualify | 10.3 | 5.9 | 5.9 | 19.1 | 58.8 | 4.10 | 1.351 |

Source: Researcher, 2022

Findings in Table 2 showed that 50% of the respondents disagreed that the organization has fully adhered to two-third gender rule, 57.4% disagreed that the proportion of male workers to female workers in the organization is almost equal, 58.8% strongly disagreed that there is high ethnic balance in the organization workforce, 42.6% agreed that the organization highly value ethnic diversity of staff, 45.6% agreed that the organization has fully adhered to 5% representation for people with disability, 48.5% disagreed that the organization strict rules and policies against discriminating people with disability, 45.6% agreed that the organization infrastructure are accessible to all including people with disability, and 58.8% strongly agreed that the organization hires employee with disability in all positions as long they qualify. This implies that the state departments are yet to fully comply with affirmative action policies which may lead to low staff retention as a result of employee dissatisfaction. Findings are in agreement with Makhubele (2015) that affirmative action is not implemented correctly by most

employers and that there is little enforcement. Wambui (2012) also indicated that there is perverse inequality in employment since men are more represented than women in almost all employment categories.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of the study established that there was a significant strong correlation between power distance and level of compliance to affirmative action policies ($r = 0.591$, $p\text{-value}=0.000$). Under No Consultation, most respondents believe that most managers make most decisions without consulting subordinates. From the responses, it was also evident that most managers use authority and power during the hiring process and when dealing with subordinates. Under the dimension of not allowed to disagree, most respondents agreed to the fact that most times, there is always no room for disagreeing with the human resources management decisions. On the contrary, most of the respondents disagreed when asked if Human Resource Managers never seek their opinions, this

can simply be interpreted to mean that managers do seek opinions of their employees.

The findings of the study have demonstrated that indeed government state departments have a high power distance index (PDI). In essence, this means that decisions being made are to a large extent influenced by the existing power levels (Hofstede & Minkov, 2010). Junior employees will always take low profiles; have high respect for their superiors and rarely be called upon to make meaningful contributions or even give necessary advice (Manktelow, 2010). This is likely to thwart Career progression as well as self-development initiatives of employees in the organization. The high power distance culture is likely to discourage employees from being innovative and from coining self-initiatives towards bettering and enhancing their work performance. In addition, the lack of input from lower level employees as well as poor communication and information sharing, is also likely to lower the quality of decisions being made thus dwindle the performance of the government state departments.

Based on the study findings, the researcher suggests the following: Redesigning and enrichment of the affirmative action approach to fully realize the initial aspirations of the proponents. This will include focusing on enhancement of the capabilities

of the disadvantaged public servants by designing training programs aimed at addressing key knowledge gaps and reshaping the attitude of both the management staff and leadership of the various public service organizations. Talent management should also be embraced as this provides a basis for innovation and creativity. This is likely to positively tilt the level of compliance to affirmative action policies in the organization.

Areas for Further Study

The researcher recommended the following: A similar study be conducted in Semi-Autonomous government Agencies (SAGAs) since the current study focused on government state departments. A study focusing on the impacts of cultural dimensions on employees' job satisfaction and organizational performance should also be conducted preferably in government state departments. The influence of affirmative action policies on performance of an organization is also another area the researcher would wish to recommend for further investigation.

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