



Multicultural Synergy and Team Performance: The Mediating Role of Cultural Integration In Malaysian Universities

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Abstract: This study examines the relationship between team performance and subjective well-being in multicultural organizational contexts, and the mediating role of cultural integration in these relationships. Existing research highlights that understanding well-being is essential in enhancing team outcomes, yet limited studies have explored this link across diverse work settings. These findings support using well-being as a significant predictor when evaluating performance, helping identify how subjective well-being contributes to improved team performance through cultural integration. This study produced 400 valid responses using a quantitative survey. Descriptive statistics, multiple regression analysis, and mediation analysis were used to test the hypotheses and validate direct and indirect interactions between the variables. The well-being framework, rooted in capabilities approaches and examined by international experts, was used in this study to understand subjective well-being. The study's findings reveal that the well-being variables Life Satisfaction, Flourishing, and Domain Evaluation significantly affected Team Performance. The mediation analysis results indicated that cultural integration mediates the relationships among all four constructs of well-being and team performance. Overall, the findings confirm that team performance is strengthened when employees experience high levels of subjective well-being and cultural integration is effectively fostered within the team. This study adds to the knowledge corpus by offering suggestions for predicting the effectiveness of a multicultural workforce by providing empirical evidence supporting the integration of well-being and cultural diversity in organisational performance models.

Keywords: Multicultural Synergy, Team Performance, Cultural Integration, Multiculturalism, Well-Being, Malaysian Universities

1. Introduction

In today's highly competitive, rapidly changing environment, employees not only contribute to an organization's success but also perform tasks faster, better, and more intelligently than their competitors. Organizations are expanding internationally and creating diverse work teams composed of people from various cultural backgrounds in this age of globalization and borderless operations (Tronina, 2020; Kharroubi, 2021). Despite extensive global research, there remains a limited empirical understanding of how well-being influences performance within culturally diverse teams, especially in higher education institutions. While well-being has been extensively studied as an individual construct with strong ties to productivity, creativity, and interpersonal relationships, its role within culturally diverse team settings remains underexplored. As organizations, especially universities, face increasing globalization, understanding how well-being affects team performance and cultural integration within multicultural environments becomes essential.

Given the existing disparities in findings on the link between cultural diversity, team performance, and well-being (Obsuwan et al., 2021; Stahl & Maznevski, 2021), this study offers a novel contribution by empirically integrating the well-being framework with the Theory of Cultural Intelligence (CQ) to explain team outcomes in the underexplored context of Malaysian private universities. This highlights a key research gap in explaining how subjective well-being can enhance multicultural team performance through cultural integration, particularly in academic settings. Investigating this dynamic can provide tailored insights into how to promote well-being and cultural cohesion. Although almost all workplaces recognize the importance of teamwork and its significant role in organizational success, many do not effectively implement practices beyond merely promoting teamwork (Warrick, 2016). Studies have identified traits and attributes that influence the performance, productivity, and efficiency of multicultural organizations (Di Fabio, Cheung & Peiró, 2020; Wu et al., 2020). Success at the professional, personal, and interpersonal levels has been associated with well-being, as it contributes to higher productivity, learning, and creativity (Ruggeri et al. 2020). Therefore, it is essential to investigate how team well-being affects performance, as well as the mediating role of cultural integration in teams with diverse cultural backgrounds.

Different definitions of well-being give rise to different frameworks, concepts, and indices. This study aimed to explore how various conceptualizations of well-being affect team performance and influence cultural integration. One study contends that performance, cultural diversity, and team well-being are positively correlated. For instance, Lu et al. (2018) found that teams with higher cultural diversity had better team well-being, which in turn improved

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team performance. Similarly, Balakrishnan et al. (2020; 2024) found that team well-being moderates the association between cultural diversity and performance, showing that team members are more likely to perform better in diverse teams when they experience high levels of well-being. A meta-analysis by Obsuwan et al. (2021) found no relationship between cultural diversity and team performance.

Furthermore, Stahl and Maznevski (2021) identified conflicting findings: some research has shown a negative impact of cultural diversity on performance, while other research has found no discernible association. These contradictory results indicate a nuanced interaction among team performance, cultural diversity, and well-being. The inconsistencies observed across contexts and methods highlight the need for new empirical evidence. Therefore, to provide a more thorough understanding of its dynamics, additional research is needed to elucidate the mechanisms and variables underlying this relationship (Balakrishnan et al., 2024). This inconsistency further strengthens the rationale for the present study.

Additionally, by applying the Theory of Cultural Intelligence (CQ) as proposed by Balakrishnan et al. (2024), this study contributes to the notion of an individual's capacity to effectively comprehend, adjust to, and collaborate across many cultural contexts that affect their ability to integrate culturally as well as their well-being and performance in multicultural teams. Integrating CQ provides a novel theoretical contribution, positioning this study within a cross-cultural psychological framework that links well-being and team outcomes.

By fostering a positive work environment, encouraging cultural integration, and mediating the link between well-being and performance, academics at private universities in Malaysia can enhance team well-being. They ought to prioritize initiatives such as effective communication, professional growth, and encouraging policies. Private educational institutions can establish a positive and effective work environment by addressing the well-being of multicultural academic staff.

Malaysian universities typically showcase a diverse range of cultures, mirroring a nation's dynamic multicultural society. The society is primarily composed of three main ethnic communities: Malays, Chinese, and Indians. Malays, including indigenous peoples, make up the largest share at 69.1 percent of the population, followed by Chinese at 23 percent and Indians at 6.9 percent (Karpudewan, 2021; Aminuddin, 2020; Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2023). Malaysian universities, with diverse populations from different ethnic backgrounds, languages, and cultures, serve as miniature representations of Malaysian society. They provide a setting in which individuals from all backgrounds collaborate to pursue academic and professional goals. This context provides a unique, underexplored empirical setting for investigating the combined influence of well-being and cultural integration on team performance.

The distinct attributes of Malaysian institutions pose challenges and opportunities for cultivating organizational well-being and improving performance. A diverse workforce contributes to the academic environment by bringing a range of viewpoints, experiences, and talents, which, in turn, fosters innovation. Conversely, managing cultural disparities and ensuring inclusiveness can pose significant challenges that affect staff morale, collaboration, and overall efficiency. In this context, this study is particularly significant, as it aims to investigate the complex relationship among well-being, cultural integration, and team performance in Malaysian universities. By focusing on demographic diversity and cultural integration, this study aims to generate practical insights to enhance academic staff well-being and institutional performance. To address the identified research gap and achieve the study aim, the following research questions are presented earlier in this section to provide a clearer direction:

1.1. Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated based on the identified research problems:

- What are the relationships between the well-being constructs of the happiness core, life satisfaction, flourishing, domain evaluation, cultural integration, and team performance?
- What is the mediating role of cultural integration in the relationship between well-being and team performance?

1.2. Research Objectives

The following research objectives guide this study:

- To identify relationships among the well-being constructs of the happiness core: life satisfaction, flourishing, domain evaluation, cultural integration, and team performance.
- To analyze the mediating effect of cultural integration on the relationship between well-being factors and team performance.

1.3. Well-being and Cultural Integration

Well-being and its pursuit have long been a subject of interest to researchers, thinkers, intellectuals, and philosophers. Texts such as Dhammapada and traditions such as Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism have long emphasized the importance of pursuing one's well-being (Sun, 2021). Philosophers have defined a good life as a morally sound and happy life. Aristotle described happiness as the pursuit of happiness as the ultimate purpose and single most vital aim of one's life. He explained well-being (happiness) as the essence of a balanced, coherent self, giving life meaning and purpose (Holst, 2022). The topic of well-being is not new; however, its meaning has evolved over the years. Ruggeri et al. (2020) believe that the subject, definition, and terminology of well-being are still young. In this study, the term "well-being" is used alongside subjective well-being. Well-being is defined as high-quality-of-life factors and constructs that lead to subjective well-being (Durand, 2015; OECD Better Life Index). Recent studies have shown growing concern among researchers about respondents' subjective well-being. Subjective well-being, which encompasses overall happiness, life satisfaction, and positive emotions, was analyzed to examine its relationship with cultural identity integration and performance. Researchers have defined well-being in different ways (Ngamaba et al., 2020), have associated well-being with happiness, growth, and satisfaction, and have related well-being to a feeling of satisfaction, pleasure, and a desirable psycho-emotional state (Zijlstra and Verhetsel, 2021).

In most cases, well-being and happiness are used interchangeably, as subjective well-being is regarded as a scientific term describing one's state of happiness (Jiao, Kim, & Pitts, 2021). Cognitive management of integrative cultural identities is necessary to maintain one's general sense of self. Malaysian workplaces are culturally diverse, and members of different cultures must understand and appreciate one another and build effective relationships to achieve common work goals. This would minimize racial divide and promote a sense of belonging, better acceptance, higher satisfaction, and improved performance.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Well-Being

2.1.1. Concept and Theoretical Foundations

Subjective well-being draws on concepts from the existing literature and major theoretical approaches to well-being, followed by the factors of well-being used in this study. Leung et al.'s (2023) review of subjective well-being (SWB) found that youthful, healthy, well-educated, well-paid, extroverted, cheerful, worry-free, religious, married, have good self-esteem and job morale, modest aspirations, and a wide range of intellect levels are usually happy. Since then, three decades of research have identified several processes of happiness beyond demographic factors in SWB. Research has highlighted the importance of well-being across various aspects of individuals' lives (Balakrishnan et al., 2021, 2024). Recent research (Miñarro et al., 2021; Jebb et al., 2020) emphasizes that well-being frameworks must be understood in context, particularly in multicultural work environments where cultural values shape how life satisfaction and flourishing are perceived.

2.1.2. Definitions and Contextual Understanding

Well-being refers to the overall state of one's physical, mental, and emotional health, encompassing feelings of happiness, life satisfaction, and fulfilment. Numerous studies have demonstrated the positive impact of well-being on various domains, including work performance, job satisfaction, and overall quality of life (Diener et al., 2017). For instance, individuals with higher well-being tend to be more engaged, motivated, and productive at work, leading to better outcomes for both themselves and their organizations. However, many of these studies focus primarily on Western or high-income nations (Bryson et al., 2017; Guest, 2017), leaving a gap in understanding how subjective well-being operates within developing, multicultural academic environments such as Malaysia.

2.2. Psychological and Ecological Perspectives

Well-being is a combination of psychological and physiological factors that can lead to feelings of satisfaction and pleasure and affect one's work life and overall life. The term 'wellness' in the literature refers to the development of society that directly affects the quality and satisfaction of life, as well as subjective well-being rooted in psychology. Dalton et al. (2001) presented seven core values of psychology: individual wellness, sense of community, social justice, citizen participation, collaboration and community strength, respect for human diversity, and empirical grounding. Diener et al. (1999) called for further study to develop a more sophisticated approach to identifying causal direction, interactions between internal and external factors, adaptation processes, and refined theories of happiness, and recommended that specific components of SWB be assessed differently from global happiness measures using multi-item scales.

2.3. Historical and Measurement Approaches

Lewin (1890-1947, as cited in Totikidis, 2003) introduced the concept of psychological ecology, highlighting the interaction between the inner and outer environments. Bronfenbrenner (1979) expanded this ecological perspective. Cowen and Work (1988) further developed the concept of wellness by linking it to psychology through a situation-focused approach and competence-enhancement strategy. They emphasized competence, resilience, social system modification, and empowerment. In a 1994 study, Cowen identified positive attachment, competence development, positive settings, empowering conditions, and coping skills as essential pathways to wellness. A study by Cowen (2000) found a relationship between education and psychological wellness. Prilleltensky (2001) also focused on psychological well-being, and their findings aligned with research by Ohio State University (2001), which proposed nine key elements in their wellness model. Myers et al. (2000) later proposed a model at personal and relational levels. Deiner et al. (1995) identified predictive factors of subjective well-being across 55 nations and found that salary, individualism, and human rights were strong predictors. In the education sector, Deiner et al. (1995) used subjective well-being to extract four domains of happiness and satisfaction. Lee, Park, Uhlemann, and Patsula (1999) extracted factors of happiness as family, wealth, peace, recognition, and spirituality.

2.4. Instruments and Indices of Well-Being

The Experience Sampling Method (ESM), introduced by Csikszentmihalyi and Hunter (2003), is a widely used method for assessing individuals' subjective well-being. This method is not as lengthy as the Day Reconstruction Method (DRM); however, it only captures participants' momentary feelings at a given time. A comprehensive description of time and context remains unexplained. The Day Reconstruction Method (DRM) was developed by Nobel Laureate Daniel Kahneman and his team of academics to gather richer data on individuals' subjective well-being by capturing their daily experiences and feelings (Kahneman et al., 2004). Participants were asked to report on their activities and social settings from earlier life episodes and to reflect on their feelings in those situations. The entire procedure of data gathering and data reporting is rather lengthy. It requires higher-order cognitive abilities, takes about three-quarters to one hour, and involves transcription and analytical techniques to convert qualitative data for reporting purposes.

Miñarro et al. (2021) broadly categorized SWB into life evaluations, positive emotions, and negative emotions. Mehrsafari et al. (2021) assessed the effects of mood and income on life satisfaction. Researchers have measured SWB based on mood (Fosco & Lydon-Staley, 2019, 2020), an extension of the Day Reconstruction Method (DRM), which is used to measure feelings at different times of the day. Several countries and organizations have developed well-being indexes, the most well-known of which are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Well-being Indexes

Well-being Index Name	Origin Country
ONS-UK Measures of National Well-being Dashboard	United Kingdom
World Development Index	United Nations
Happy Planet Index	United Kingdom
Legatum Prosperity Index	United Kingdom
Gross National Happiness Index	Bhutan
Canadian Index of Well-being	Canada
World Database of Happiness	Netherlands
OECD Better Life Index	OECD Countries

Source: Self-developed

The inclusion of indices in Table 1 shows how different well-being frameworks operate globally, underscoring the importance of using a multidimensional tool like the OECD Better Life Index that considers various life domains affecting both subjective and objective well-being. Bryson et al. (2017) proposed a conceptual framework based on hedonic and eudaimonic approaches at the individual, social, and organizational levels to explain the relationship between subjective well-being and work performance (Balakrishnan et al., 2020, 2024). The World Database of Happiness, a commonly used instrument worldwide, assesses subjective well-being from a broader perspective. This study captures one's overall subjective well-being. Moreover, this reporting system monitors and provides a quick assessment of one's subjective well-being without requiring the researcher or participant to put in much time or effort. However, it fails to provide substantial information to explain the discrepancies in the specific details. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (Trewin, 2001) acknowledged the OECD dimensions.

Table 1 particularly emphasises the World Database of Happiness as a broad yet less detailed instrument. In contrast, the OECD Better Life Index aligns with this study's discussion of subjective well-being dimensions that affect quality of life at both the individual and societal levels. This distinction further strengthens the rationale for using the OECD's multidimensional approach to assess subjective well-being, providing more detailed insights and aligning with established frameworks (Durand, 2015). Table 1, therefore, situates the OECD Better Life Index within a broader context of international indices, thereby supporting its adoption in discussions of societal well-being.

2.5. OECD Well-Being Framework

Based on the OECD Better Life Index, subjective dimensions of quality of life are defined as those that affect society (Durand, 2015), and an improved, high-level construct leads to higher objective and subjective well-being. The term "well-being" refers to a person's present level of pleasure and enjoyment in life (Durand, 2015). Objective and subjective well-being are the two types of well-being. Indicators such as chronic health conditions or sleep quality indicate objective well-being. In contrast, this study focuses on subjective well-being, which is sometimes confused with happiness and refers to positive emotions, high life satisfaction, and a sense of meaning (OECD, 2013). The physical or health conditions of an individual account for a subdimension of well-being (Nielsen et al., 2017) and were not examined in this study.

Over the past decade, the OECD has been developing well-being measures, culminating in the OECD Better Life Initiative (2011b). The OECD well-being framework is rooted in the capabilities approach (Dalziel et al., 2018) and underpins the Better Life Initiative, which was reviewed by international experts. Durand (2015) thought of it as universal in dimension and comprehensively described the criteria for selection and evolution of the well-being indicators measured by How's Life? Indicators of income and wealth, education, environmental quality of life, subjective well-being, and sustainability. Its indicators are regularly tested in several research projects (Durand, 2015) and benchmarked through interactive online applications, such as How's Life? Materialist quality of life has 11 dimensions of objective well-being (income and wealth, jobs and earnings, housing, health, work-life balance, education, social connections, civic engagement, environmental conditions, personal security, and subjective well-being). The OECD has released a set of guidelines and modules for international agencies to measure and analyze SWB, including SWB variables alongside other factors known to contribute to SWB outcomes. Although OECD indicators have universal applicability, they can be adjusted to reflect each population's well-being priorities and specific conditions. These indicators are widely recognized as having adequate face validity and are accepted by academic communities (Durand, 2015).

2.6. Constructs of Well-Being in this Study

Drawing on these theoretical perspectives, this study applies the OECD Better Life Index framework to assess well-being among multicultural academics, focusing on happiness, life satisfaction, flourishing, and domain evaluation as contextually relevant constructs. Well-being in multicultural contexts is scarce (Jaiswal & Dyaram, 2020), and almost none are found in academic settings, especially in Malaysia. This scarcity underscores the need to explore subjective well-being across ethnically diverse academic populations, where psychological well-being is likely influenced by cultural integration and institutional context (Balakrishnan et al., 2024).

Inner happiness, or the happiness core, is a type of contentment that originates internally rather than through direct contact with or validation from others. This inner contentment serves as the foundation for joyful experiences arising from situational or external factors. Life satisfaction, a form of subjective well-being, reflects an individual's overall assessment of their quality of life, encompassing positive emotions and meaningful experiences. It goes beyond momentary happiness by involving a holistic evaluation of life circumstances, personal achievements, and fulfilment, resulting in a sense of contentment. The flourishing domain is a social-psychological construct of subjective well-being that assesses personal flourishing by evaluating positive functioning components such as meaningful engagements, contributions to others' well-being, and feelings of respect and capability. The domain evaluation construct captures individuals' satisfaction judgments across various life domains, focusing on perceived satisfaction rather than the objective assessment of each area.

2.7. Cultural Integration

Malaysia holds salient identity constructs based on racial categorization, which is typically judged based on one's skin color (Tan & Stephen, 2019). It is important to note that individuals of the same racial group can have different ethnicities (Balakrishnan, Harji & Angusamy, 2020). Some studies have found that values differ across ethnic groups (Gom et al., 2015; Abu Bakar & Mohamad, 2017). Ghazali et al. (2019) applied the value-belief-norm (VBN) theory and found that ethnic groups are heterogeneous. Similarly, Tamam and Krauss (2017) found differences in intercultural sensitivity among Malaysians. In a study of racial and religious inequality in Malaysia, Aminnuddin (2020) reported that ethnic groups differ in their values of religion, achievement, wealth, and creativity.

The role of Malaysian universities in fostering racial integration, bridging ethnic differences, uniting cultural diversity, and promoting ethnic collaboration has been criticized (Said, 2017; Thye, 2018), and they have been found to breed intolerance, ethnocentrism, and segregation (Segawa, 2007). Wahab et al. (2018) observed that managing cultural diversity was not recognized as a major challenge for educators at the beginning of their teaching careers, highlighting the lack of training and instruction on multiculturalism (Balakrishnan et al., 2020, 2024). Hence, academics in Malaysian tertiary education must develop multicultural integration to overcome the challenges that affect well-being and performance. Prior work (Tamam & Krauss, 2017; Aminnuddin, 2020) largely describes diversity outcomes, but few provide empirical analyses linking cultural integration to psychological well-being, which this study addresses. Building on these discussions of cultural identity, the next section explores how team performance relates to both well-being and cultural integration in multicultural universities.

2.8. Team Performance

Team performance refers to the collective effectiveness and productivity of a group of individuals working together towards a shared goal. Several studies have examined factors influencing team performance, including communication, coordination, cohesion, and leadership (Marques-Quinteiro, Rico, Passos, & Curral, 2019). Effective team performance is crucial for an organization because it enhances creativity, problem-solving, and decision-making, ultimately improving organizational outcomes.

Simkhovych (2006) provided a comprehensive review of the literature on workplace team performance, covering work by various authors from 1951-1991. According to Simkhovych (2006), performance is the final stage of group development, during which employees are dedicated to accomplishing their jobs and objectives effectively (Balakrishnan et al. 2020; 2024). The Integrated Model for Group Development, developed by Wheelan (2013), effectively measures group development stages and has been thoroughly validated and shown to be reliable (Khaled, 2016).

According to Warrick (2016), an organization's ability to function as a cohesive unit is essential to its success, and failing to capitalize on its competitive advantages would be a waste of resources and potential, potentially harming productivity. Therefore, teamwork needs to be prioritized and taken seriously in all businesses. However, managers, policymakers, and leaders have done absolutely nothing to increase team productivity (Savage, 2016). Warrick (2016) examined various models, documented individual experiences, and developed a high-performance team prototype to improve performance. He proposed five fundamental concepts to improve team performance and developed a model that describes the characteristics of high-performance teams. These five essentials are effective team leadership, capable and committed team members, team norms that create a high-performance culture, structuring the team for results, and organizing ways to improve team processes. Montaudon-Tomas, Pinto-López, Montaudon-Tomas, and Muñoz-Ortiz (2020) and Paul et al. (2018) tested this model in academic settings with a diverse group. Multicultural team performance, especially in Malaysian universities, has not been studied, and there are few examples in academia.

This study aims to address this gap, particularly in Malaysian universities that employ academics from diverse cultural backgrounds to meet the needs and demands of their multicultural learning communities. This is because Malaysia aspires to be a world-class educational center and a dynamic global education hub. Therefore, universities must embrace transition for achieving success and performance, and academics, as leaders, must enhance their performance (Hussein, Omar, Noordin & Ishak, 2016). In universities, performance is highly dependent on educators who are empowered to collaborate regularly, use available resources, and communicate effectively to ensure the effective transfer of knowledge. While extensive research has been conducted on performance in corporate settings (Warrick, 2016; Savage, 2016), there remains limited evidence from multicultural academic contexts, particularly where diverse teams collaborate across cultural lines (Montaudon-Tomas et al., 2020).

2.9. Relationship between Well-being and Performance

Research suggests that individuals with higher well-being are more likely to experience positive emotions, greater motivation, and improved cognitive functioning, all of which contribute to better performance (Al-Ali et al., 2019; Adnan Bataineh, 2019). Furthermore, recent studies emphasise that well-being, satisfaction, and trust in supervisors collectively play crucial roles in enhancing job performance, with trust in leadership acting as a supportive element that strengthens employee commitment and motivation (Yang et al., 2024). Moreover, individuals with high well-being are more resilient and better equipped to cope with stress and challenges, leading to improved job satisfaction and performance (Balakrishnan et al, 2021 & 2020). Conversely, poor well-being, such as burnout or high stress levels, has been associated with decreased performance and productivity (Darvishmotevali & Ali, 2020).

Numerous studies have explored the association between well-being and performance at the individual, team, organizational, and national levels. More contemporary studies include Hmieleski and Sheppard (2019), who investigated how men and women, with their respective attributes, perceive themselves as a good fit at work, which enhances their well-being and leads to higher organizational performance. Among other factors, performance and well-being are positively correlated (Athota et al., 2019). A relationship between performance and well-being was also investigated by Cooper et al. (2019) and Guest (2017) from a social and human resource management perspective. Happiness and well-being are recognised as catalysts for positive psychology and, as a result, have a positive effect on performance.

However, there is limited insight into the experiences of academics from different ethnic backgrounds, which affect their work performance. Despite the unique advantages of multicultural education in Malaysia, as noted in past literature (Pacquiao, 2018; Benediktsson & Ragnarsdottir, 2019; Paksoy & Çelik, 2019; Rizvi, Naqvi & Batool, 2019), few have examined the relationship between well-being and performance. Huettermann and Bruch (2019) and Bakker and Demerouti (2018) also pointed out the paucity of research on enhancing employees' well-being, which in turn supports better performance. Nielsen et al. (2017) rightly state that a happy worker is a productive worker, although organizations are yet to understand how to keep their employees happy to ensure higher productivity. Thus, well-being can be perceived as a predictor of performance. Yang et al. (2024) support this view by demonstrating how well-being, coupled with trust in supervisors, significantly influences job satisfaction and performance, emphasizing the role of supportive management in fostering an environment conducive to both personal well-being and job performance.

Research suggests that higher levels of well-being, as measured by the four variables of core happiness, life satisfaction, flourishing, and domain evaluation, can positively impact team performance. Specifically, teams with members with higher levels of well-being tend to have better communication, collaboration, and problem-solving skills. They are also likely to be creative, innovative, and adaptable. Additionally, there is a reduced risk of conflict and turnover in teams whose members are more contented and happier in life. Recent studies (Yang et al., 2024; Bialowolski et al., 2023) reaffirm the positive link between subjective well-being and team outcomes but highlight cultural variability, underscoring the need for regional testing of these associations. Overall, promoting team members' well-being can lead to better team performance and outcomes.

Previous surveys on global happiness indicate that most people are happy, and factors such as wealth, human rights, and political stability are good indicators of increased well-being. Individuals' happiness also varies over time and across countries (Helliwell et al., 2019; Jebb et al., 2020). According to Clifton et al. (2022), although previous surveys have shown high levels of happiness, data from the Gallup World Poll indicate that less than a quarter of the world's population is thriving, based on their current and future life evaluation ratings. Additionally, there has been a significant increase in negative emotions worldwide, particularly in nations that have undergone societal and political changes.

Bialowolski et al. (2023) provided the following arguments in their recent study. According to this study, investigating the ranking of domains within and across contexts may be of significant interest, even if the average scores are not always directly comparable. The results presented by Weziak-Bialowolska et al. (2019b) provide some reassurance that with the measurement invariance established for well-being domains (as well as satisfactory reliability and criterion validity), the universal nature of the indices and the comparability of their latent scores in the five culturally distinct populations examined in this study (except Poland) is largely supported. Evidence validating a reliable interpretation of scores on the multidimensional measure of well-being has also been identified in various workplace environments (Weziak-Bialowolska et al., 2019b) and across multiple cultures globally (Höltge et al., 2022). Additionally, analyzing averages across domains in different settings can be valuable for benchmarking and interpreting future data collection efforts and summaries.

Additionally, altruistic behaviour positively influences self-reported positive feelings globally (Jebb et al., 2020). Prosocial behavior refers to actions intended to benefit others, such as helping, sharing, or cooperating. Research has shown that engaging in prosocial behavior can positively affect an individual's self-reported positive emotions and mood (Miles et al., 2022). This effect has been observed across cultures worldwide, suggesting a connection to feelings of belonging. Therefore, engaging in prosocial behavior can have multiple benefits for both the recipient and the giver, including improving well-being.

Universities can maintain sustainable competitiveness and reduce turnover by improving well-being to enhance job performance. Hence, this study aimed to highlight how multicultural workplaces primarily resource their cultural diversity to recognize the effect of well-being on performance. Well-being indicators, as suggested by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2013). Questions on happiness and life satisfaction covered the core modules, as well as the life evaluation (flourishing) and domain evaluation modules.

The limited understanding of the relationship between well-being and performance in multicultural workplaces among multi-ethnic groups of academics, the specific domains and ordering of well-being within diverse contexts, the impact of prosocial behavior on well-being and job performance, and the exploration of indicators of well-being in the context of multicultural academic settings constitute the theoretical gap in the existing literature. Closing this gap would give organizations, notably universities, insights into how to promote well-being and improve job performance among diverse academic staff. Building on the above empirical and theoretical foundations, this study proposes that subjective well-being, measured through four distinct constructs, significantly influences team performance within multicultural academic environments and proposes the following hypotheses:

H1: *Well-being constructs of happiness core, life satisfaction, flourishing, and domain evaluation have a significant and positive effect on team performance.*

2.10. Relationship between Well-being and Cultural Integration

As workplace diversity increases, the relationship between well-being and multicultural integration has gained attention. However, while prior research (Osborn et al., 2020; Tasheva & Hillman, 2019) establishes general links between inclusion and well-being, empirical studies exploring these dynamics among academic staff in Southeast Asia remain scarce. Multicultural integration is the process of effectively incorporating individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds into a cohesive and harmonious work environment. Research suggests that individuals who perceive their workplace as inclusive and supportive of multiculturalism experience higher levels of well-being (Tasheva & Hillman, 2019). Furthermore, organizations that prioritize multicultural integration and create a culture of inclusion tend to have employees with better mental health, job satisfaction, and overall well-being (Osborn et al., 2020).

A team is a collection of people with clearly defined duties and responsibilities, mutual dependency, and a shared desired outcome (Salcinovic et al., 2022). A team is part of an organizational structure that has boundaries and connections to a larger well-being context (Huettermann & Bruch, 2019). Multicultural integration enhances psychological wellness and improves the ability to contribute to the community they serve (Miller & Garran, 2017). This clearly implies that cultural integration fosters

constructive cooperation among multicultural communities, thereby improving the quality of life and well-being. Fallon et al. (2023) also suggested an institutional structure that encourages cultural self-awareness, offers culturally responsive support networks, and promotes cultural responsiveness to improve the well-being of multicultural groups.

Although previous studies have established a positive relationship between well-being and multicultural integration, it remains unclear how domain evaluation, flourishing, life satisfaction, and happiness specifically contribute to the development of multicultural integration. Organizations trying to develop inclusive work environments that promote well-being and efficient collaboration among diverse individuals may find it helpful to understand how these factors interact and affect the mechanisms of intercultural integration. Studies have also highlighted the significance of cultural self-awareness, culturally responsive support networks, and cultural responsiveness in fostering and boosting multicultural groups' well-being and capacity to contribute to the workplace they serve. However, the specific contributions of the four well-being factors to these critical elements for growth and maintenance have not been completely investigated. The four variables of well-being can affect multicultural integration, the process of bringing together people from diverse cultural backgrounds to create a cohesive society. Hence, based on the literature connecting subjective well-being and inclusive organizational climates, this study hypothesizes that higher well-being fosters stronger cultural integration in multicultural universities. This leads to the following hypothesis:

H2: *Well-being has a significant and positive effect on cultural integration.*

2.11. Relationship between Cultural Integration and Team Performance

The impact of multicultural integration on team performance has also been explored. Studies have shown that diverse teams, when effectively managed and integrated, can exhibit superior performance outcomes compared with homogenous teams (Homan et al., 2015). Diverse perspectives, knowledge, and skills can enhance creativity, problem-solving, and decision-making within teams (Furukawa, 2016). Effective multicultural integration strategies, such as promoting intercultural communication, fostering mutual respect, and creating a shared identity, have been found to positively influence team cohesion, collaboration, and ultimately, team performance (Garrido et al., 2020).

Cultural diversity often affects people subconsciously and is often used to categorize and stereotype them (Balakrishnan et al., 2020, 2021). Stahl and Maznevski (2021) believed that this type of diversity has a greater effect than other diversity factors. Most studies, and their theoretical and managerial implications, have focused on demographic diversity. This provides an indication of the extent to which organisations are stepping up their efforts to address racial and ethnic imbalance (Dobbin and Kalev, 2016; Mathieu, Hollenbeck, Van Knippenberg & Iligen, 2017). According to McKinsey's report, companies most anchored in ethnic and racial diversity are 35% more likely to achieve better financial outcomes (Rock & Grant, 2016).

Jamaludin and You (2019) reported that educators have pessimistic attitudes toward the people they collaborate with, that their lack of fulfilment leads to poor performance, and that ethnic achievement differences occur (Saw, 2016). Haque et al. (2017) examined lecturers' knowledge and understanding of multiculturalism and found that the significance of cultural competence revealed disparities between disadvantaged populations and the suggested faculty development (performance). In other words, cultural congruence (integration) enhances efficiency (Sarwari & Abdul Wahab, 2017; Bhatti, Alshagawi, Zakariya, and Juhari, 2019). Ladegaard and Jenks (2015) reported that 'culture' is likely to be viewed as a more important factor for 'minority' in the workplace. Consequently, educators should follow a non-ethnocentric, inclusive, and anti-racist policy. Another study (Lucky & Yusoff, 2017) found that lecturers' distinct multi-ethnic characteristics and psychological states influenced their performance.

The current body of research has largely ignored the individual effects of multicultural integration on educators and their performance in favor of organizational goals, such as financial performance. According to previous studies, educators' attitudes, sense of fulfilment, and knowledge of multiculturalism all contribute to their performance and discrepancies in student achievement. However, there is a scarcity of research examining the connection between educators' effectiveness and cultural congruence (integration). The literature also stresses the importance of educational institutions adopting a non-ethnocentric, inclusive, and anti-racist approach. However, further research is needed to develop specific strategies and commands that support educators' intercultural integration and performance. Recent empirical works (Stahl & Maznevski, 2021; Garrido et al., 2020) suggest that integration quality, rather than diversity alone, predicts team effectiveness, yet studies in academic contexts remain limited. Drawing from social integration and diversity management theories, this study posits that cultural integration enhances team performance and mediates the influence of well-being on performance outcomes. Finally, all the above discussions and justifications lead to the following hypotheses:

H3: *Cultural integration has a significant and positive relationship with team performance.*

H4: *Cultural integration mediates the relationship between well-being and team performance.*

2.12. Summary of Hypotheses Development

Despite the breadth of prior studies, few have systematically examined how subjective well-being and cultural integration jointly influence team performance within multicultural higher education institutions. The latest literature (Höltge et al., 2022; Bialowolski et al., 2023) highlighted the importance of localized measurement to capture cultural nuances in well-being and teamwork. Therefore, this study contributes novel insights by integrating these constructs within Malaysian academia, offering a model that connects well-being, cultural integration, and team performance to advance both theory and practice in multicultural organizational research.

2.13. Research Framework

The literature review section summarizes the construction of research hypotheses to form the study's conceptual framework. The relationships among the independent variables that contribute to team performance are presented in the conceptual framework (Figure 1). Four constructs of subjective well-being were identified as independent variables influencing team performance as the dependent variable. Multicultural integration was used as a mediating variable in this relationship.

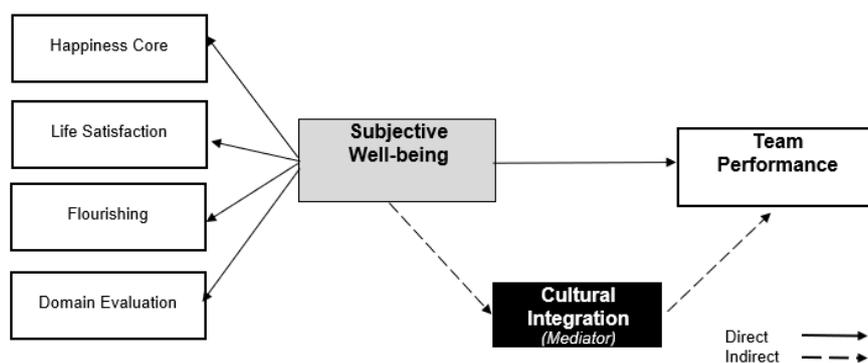


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

3. Methods

Diener (2000) believed that subjective well-being is associated with a higher quality of life. According to the, European Commission. (2013), well-being refers to respondents' positive development and satisfaction levels. Buecker et al.,(2023) also referred to subjective well-being as life satisfaction and affective balance in employed individuals. Diener et al. (2010)) describe well-being as a multidimensional, complex measure of happiness and affluence. Disabato et al. (2016) referred to subjective well-being (hedonia) as a positive emotional and satisfaction state. For this study, the term "well-being" refers to factors and constructs that lead to a comprehensive and scientific understanding of the "subjective well-being" of Malaysian academics who demonstrate learning needs and are directly responsible for ensuring that students imbibe the true meaning of education and learning outcomes.

A quantitative research design was used to test the hypotheses and measure the variables, followed by data analysis and hypothesis verification. Following Sekaran and Bougie (2016), the study used G*Power to determine the sample size (288); however, 400 valid responses were used for data analysis. Ten private and 13 public universities were selected by drawing lots. A purposive sample of respondents was used to identify the population's demographic characteristics. The purposive sampling technique involves selecting participants based on an understanding of the population and research objectives, aiming to gather rich information about the phenomenon under study (Taherdoost, 2022). Purposive sampling was deemed appropriate because it enabled the selection of participants based on criteria such as academic field, years of teaching experience, and involvement in higher education practice. This helped provide individuals with valuable information who could offer rich descriptions of the phenomenon under investigation. However, because it is a non-probability sampling technique, purposive sampling limits the generalizability of the findings.

The questionnaire comprised four sections: Section A on demographic information, Section B on Subjective Well-being. The happiness core scale was obtained from the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire developed by Argyle and Hills (2002). It is one of several measures of "subjective well-being (i.e., happiness) constructed by scientific research psychologists. Life satisfaction scales from the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS; Diener et al. 1985), Flourishing Scale from the Flourishing Scale (FS; Diener et al. 2010), and domain evaluation scale from the Domain Evaluation Questionnaire (OECD 2013). Section C analyzed team performance using Warrick's (2016) modified version of the team performance questionnaire. Finally, Section D on cultural integration was measured using the Multicultural Identity Integration Scale (MULTIIS), which specifically measures the "integration" construct. The constructs were assessed on a scale of 1 to 7, with 1 indicating 'Strongly Disagree' and 7 indicating 'Strongly Agree.' The questionnaire was distributed online to respondents, facilitating remote data collection and ensuring confidentiality and anonymity.

A total of 400 responses were collected. The collected data were analyzed using SPSS, which was chosen over SmartPLS due to the nature and size of the dataset. With a sample of 400 responses, SPSS provided robust capabilities for descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, and multiple linear regression. This research was granted ethical clearance by the Technology Transfer Office at Multimedia University, Malaysia (Approval Number EA0302024). All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were conducted in accordance with the Institutional Research Committee's ethical standards. In accordance with the ethical standards and guidelines governing research involving human participants, informed consent was obtained prior to data collection.

4. Results and Findings

A deeper understanding of the context and the generalization of the results is enabled by the participants' demographic profile (as shown in Table 2), which provides crucial information about the study's sample. This study included 400 academics from public and private universities in Malaysia.

Table 2: Demographic Profile

Category	Frequency	Percent	Category	Frequency	Percent
Gender			Education Level		
Female	241	60.25	Bachelor's Degree	95	23.75
Male	159	39.75	Doctorate Degree	152	38.0
Race			Master's degree	153	38.2
Chinese	131	32.75	Academic Position		
Indian	119	29.75	Assistant Lecturer	15	3.75
Malay	150	37.5	Associate Professor	40	10.0
Age			Dean / Director	19	4.75

Category	Frequency	Percent	Category	Frequency	Percent
21-25	32	8.0	Deputy Dean / Deputy Director	14	3.5
26-30	69	17.25	Lecturer	172	43.0
31-35	68	17.0	Professor	12	3.0
36-40	70	17.5	Senior Lecturer	109	27.25
41-50	111	27.75	Tutor	19	4.75
50>	50	12.5			
Education Level			Years of Service		
Bachelor's Degree	95	23.75	0-5	140	35.0
Doctorate Degree	152	38.0	6-10	59	14.75
Master's degree	153	38.2	11-15	82	20.5
			16-20	41	10.75
			20>	76	19.0

Source: Self-developed

4.1. Validity and Reliability Tests

The results of the validity tests are presented in Table 3. The KMO for all variables exceeds 0.8; larger Chi-square values and p-values less than 0.001 for Bartlett's test confirm the validity.

Table 3: KMO and Bartlett's Validity Test Results

Constructs	Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy	Approx. Chi-Square	Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	
			df	Sig.
Happiness Core	0.585	378.071	3	<0.001
Life Satisfaction	0.817	991.991	6	<0.001
Flourishing	0.829	772.752	6	<0.001
Domain Evaluation	0.821	796.292	6	<0.001
MCI	0.889	935.295	15	<0.001
Performance	0.885	1232.183	15	<0.001

Table 4 presents the results of the reliability analysis. Since Cronbach's alpha for all variables exceeded 0.7, the items were reliable and consistent.

Table 4. Reliability Analysis

Variables	Cronbach Alpha	Number of Items
Happiness Core	0.732	3
Life Satisfaction	0.897	4
Flourishing	0.871	4
Domain Evaluation	0.874	4
MCI	0.86	6
Performance	0.892	6

Source: Self-developed

4.2. Multiple Linear Regression Analysis

The model summary in Table 5 shows an R-squared of 0.54, indicating that 54% of the variation in performance is explained by the independent variables: Domain Evaluation, Happiness Core, Life Satisfaction, and Flourishing. Other external factors accounted for the remaining 46% of the variation in performance. Furthermore, Cohen's f^2 value of 0.418 (> 0.35), which is calculated based on R-square, indicates a large effect.

Table 5: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	f^2
1	.540 ^a	.291	.284	.84459	0.418

a. Predictors: (Constant), Domain Evaluation, Happiness Core, Life Satisfaction, Flourishing

Source: Self-developed

Table 6: ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	115.914	4	28.978	40.624	<.001 ^b
	Residual	281.763	395	.713		
	Total	397.677	399			

a. Dependent Variable: Performance

b. Predictors: (Constant), Domain Evaluation, Happiness Core, Life Satisfaction, Flourishing

Source: Self-developed

The ANOVA results in Table 6 show an F-value of 40.624 and a p-value < 0.001 , indicating that the overall regression model is significant at the 0.1% level. Based on the coefficient table (Table 7), the variables Life Satisfaction (Beta = 0.176, $p < 0.001$), Flourishing (Beta = 0.17, $p < 0.05$), and Domain Evaluation (Beta = 0.13, $p < 0.05$) have a significant effect on performance. Furthermore, the confidence interval does not contain zero. Therefore, the hypotheses H_1 , H_2 , and H_3 are

substantiated. However, the p-value for Happiness Core is greater than 0.05, and the confidence interval includes zero; therefore, it does not have a significant impact on performance. Thus, H_4 is not supported.

Table 7: Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
		B	Std. Error			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1	(Constant)	2.413	.235	10.285	<.001	1.916	2.834
	Happiness Core	.069	.046	1.499	.135	-.027	.155
	Life Satisfaction	.176	.042	4.193	<.001	.075	.240
	Flourishing	.170	.066	2.572	.010	.021	.269
	Domain Evaluation	.130	.063	2.061	.040	.056	.314

Source: Self-developed

4.3. Mediation Analysis by SPSS Process Macro

SPSS Process Macro Version 4.2 is used to perform mediation analysis. The results summarize the direct and indirect effects for each simple mediation model, with independent variables coded as X, dependent variables coded as Y, and mediators coded as M, as illustrated in Figure 2. The indirect effect was estimated using 5000 bootstrap samples. A bootstrapping confidence level that did not include zero indicated a significant mediation effect.

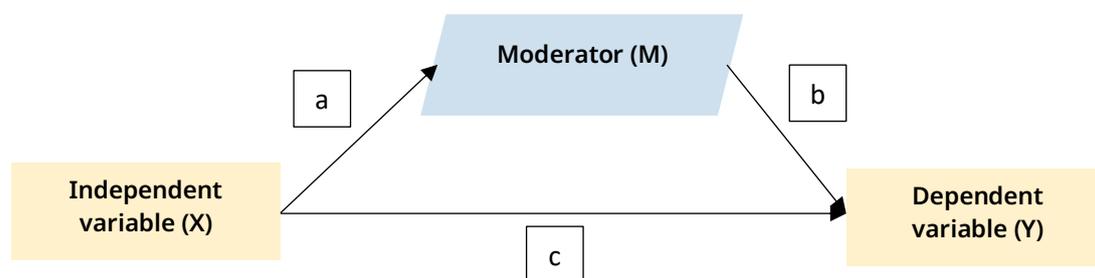


Figure 2: Mediation Model

Table 8 presents the results of the mediation analysis for Happiness Core (HC) on Multicultural Integration (MCI) and Team Performance (TP). For the path 'a,' HC to MCI, the coefficient value β is 0.1619, t-value of 3.6639, and a p-value of $0.0003 < 0.01$, the 95% confidence interval does not contain zero, which indicates that HC is positively related to MCI. The coefficient value β for the path 'b,' MCI to TP is 0.3741 with a t-value of 8.7878, p-value of $0.0003 < 0.01$, and 95% confidence interval that does not contain zero, which shows that MCI is positively related to TP. The results of the direct effect for path 'c' reveal a p-value of less than 0.0001, which indicates that HC is significantly related to TP. Finally, the results of the indirect effect mediation based on 5000 bootstrap samples yielded a 95% confidence interval of (0.0236, 0.1051), which does not include 0, indicating that MCI mediates the relationship between HC and TP.

Table 8: Mediation Analysis 1 (HC→MCI→TP)

Variable/ effect	β	SE	t	p	95% Confidence Interval	
					LLCI	ULCI
HC → MCI (path 'a')	.1619	.0442	3.6639	.0003	.0750	.2487
MCI → TP (path 'b')	.3741	.0426	8.7878	.0000	.2904	.4578
Effects						
Direct (path 'c')	.2650	.0382	6.9458	.0000	.1900	.3400
Indirect*	.0606	.0211			.0236	.1051
Total	.3255	.0410	7.9481	.0000	.2450	.4061

* Number of bootstrap samples for percentile bootstrap confidence intervals: 5000. Source: Self-developed

The results of the mediation analysis of Life Satisfaction (LS) on the TP with MCI are presented in Table 9. For the path 'a,' Life satisfaction to MCI, the coefficient value β is 0.2138, t-value of 5.781 with p-value < 0.0001 , the 95% confidence interval does not contain zero, which indicates that LS is positively related to MCI. The coefficient value β for the path 'b,' MCI to TP is 0.3263 with a t-value of 7.6951, p-value of $0.0003 < 0.01$, and 95% confidence interval that does not contain zero, which shows that MCI is positively related to TP. The results of the direct effect for path 'c' show a p-value of less than 0.0001, which indicates that LS is significantly related to TP. Finally, the results of the indirect effect for mediation based on 5000 bootstrap samples revealed a 95% confidence interval of (0.0407, 0.1053), which does not include zero, indicating that MCI mediates the relationship between LS and TP.

Table 9: Mediation Analysis 2 LS→MCI→TP

Variable/ effect	β	SE	t	p	95% Confidence Interval	
					LLCI	ULCI
LS → MCI (path 'a')	.2138	.0370	5.7810	.0000	.1411	.2865
MCI → TP (path 'b')	.3263	.0424	7.6951	.0000	.2430	.4097
Effects						
Direct (path 'c')	.2793	.0326	8.5730	.0000	.2152	.3433

Variable/ effect	β	SE	t	p	95% Confidence Interval	
					LLCI	ULCI
Indirect*	.0698	.0167			.0407	.1053
Total	.3491	.0335	10.4195	.0000	.2832	.4149

* Number of bootstrap samples for percentile bootstrap confidence intervals: 5000. Source: Self-developed

Table 10 shows the results of the mediation analysis of flourishing (FS) on TP with MCI. For path 'a,' FS to MCI, the coefficient value β is 0.3424, t-value of 8.0777, and p-value < 0.001; the 95% confidence interval does not contain zero, which indicates that FS is positively related to MCI. The coefficient value β for the path 'b,' MCI to performance is 0.2899 with a t-value of 6.5659, p-value < 0.0001, and 95% confidence interval that does not contain zero, which shows that MCI is positively related to TP. The results of the direct effect for path 'c' reveal a p-value of less than 0.0001, which indicates that FS is significantly related to TP. Finally, the results of the indirect effect mediation based on 5000 bootstrap samples yielded a 95% confidence interval of (0.0604, 0.1410), which does not include 0, indicating that MCI mediates the relationship between FS and TP.

Table 10: Mediation Analysis 3 FS→MCI→TP

Variable/ effect	β	SE	t	p	95% Confidence Interval	
					LLCI	ULCI
<i>FS → MCI (path 'a')</i>	.3424	.0424	8.0777	.0000	.2591	.4257
<i>MCI → TP (path 'b')</i>	.2899	.0442	6.5659	.0000	.2031	.3768
<i>Effects</i>						
Direct (path 'c')	.3344	.0403	8.3006	.0000	.2552	.4136
Indirect*	.0993	.0206			.0604	.1410
Total	.4337	.0393	11.0441	.0000	.3565	.5109

* Number of bootstrap samples for percentile bootstrap confidence intervals: 5000. Source: Self-developed

The results of the mediation analysis of the Domain Evaluation (DE) on TP with MCI are shown in Table 11. For the path 'a,' DE to MCI, the coefficient value β is 0.187, t-value of 3.9845 with p-value < 0.001, the 95% confidence interval does not contain zero, which indicates that DE is positively related to MCI. The coefficient value β for the path 'b,' MCI to TP is 0.3552 with a t-value of 8.6118, p-value < 0.0001, and 95% confidence interval that does not contain zero, which shows that MCI is positively related to TP. The results of the direct effect for path 'c' show a p-value less than 0.0001, which indicates that DE is significantly related to DP. Finally, the results of the indirect effect for mediation based on 5000 bootstrap samples revealed a 95% confidence interval of (0.0282, 0.1089), which does not include zero, indicating that MCI mediates the relationship between DE and TP.

Table 11: Mediation Analysis 4 DE→MCI→TP

Variable/ effect	β	SE	t	p	95% Confidence Interval	
					LLCI	ULCI
<i>DE → MCI (path 'a')</i>	.1870	.0469	3.9845	.0001	.0947	.2793
<i>MCI → TP (path 'b')</i>	.3552	.0412	8.6118	.0000	.2741	.4363
<i>Effects</i>						
Direct (path 'c')	.3525	.0394	8.9497	.0000	.2750	.4299
Indirect*	.0664	.0205			.0282	.1089
Total	.4189	.0420	9.9688	.0000	.3363	.5015

* Number of bootstrap samples for percentile bootstrap confidence intervals: 5000. Source: Self-developed

5. Discussions

This study aimed to examine the impact of well-being variables on team performance while considering the mediating role of multicultural integration. These variables included core happiness, life satisfaction, flourishing, and domain evaluation. The results of this study offer substantial insight into the significance of these well-being dimensions and the mediating role of multicultural integration in their relationship with team performance.

5.1. Well-being Factors and Performance (H1)

Our findings are consistent with prior literature on the relationship between well-being and improved performance outcomes (Diener et al., 2017; Ruggeri et al., 2020) and confirm that psychological flourishing and satisfaction contribute positively to team success. Specifically, life satisfaction, flourishing, and domain evaluations significantly predicted team performance. This is further supported by a recent study (Yang et al., 2024) that emphasizes the role of well-being, alongside trust in supervisors and satisfaction, as critical factors enhancing job performance, indicating that supportive leadership enhances resilience and motivation. This aligns with previous research (Helliwell et al., 2019; Jebb et al., 2020; Balakrishnan et al., 2021), indicating that higher levels of well-being enhance motivation, cognitive functioning, and resilience, which, in turn, improve job performance.

Contrary to our expectations, Happiness Core did not show a significant effect on team performance. This result contrasts with earlier studies (Al-Ali et al., 2019; Adnan Bataineh, 2019), suggesting that happiness might be context-dependent and subject to different operationalizations. Our results therefore contradict studies conducted in homogeneous cultural settings, suggesting that transient happiness may not directly translate into sustained team performance in multicultural environments. The complex relationship between happiness and performance warrants further investigation to understand the contextual factors that influence this dynamic.

5.2. Well-being Factors and Cultural Integration (H2)

The result extends past evidence by linking subjective well-being to cultural integration. Employees with higher well-being, particularly those with greater life satisfaction, flourishing, and favorable domain evaluations, were more likely to experience and contribute to effective cultural integration. Yang et al. (2024) similarly emphasized that well-being, in conjunction with a supportive leadership environment, contributes to a cohesive and inclusive work environment, thereby promoting greater team cohesion and satisfaction. This finding is also consistent with previous studies (Tasheva & Hillman, 2019;), suggesting that inclusive and supportive work environments foster higher levels of well-being. Hence, a reciprocal relationship is observed, partially aligning with Stahl and Maznevski (2021), who reported mixed outcomes in multicultural team functioning.

Furthermore, our results underscore the importance of holistic well-being indicators beyond happiness for promoting cultural integration. Individuals who feel satisfied with their lives and experience personal growth are more likely to engage positively in multicultural environments, enhancing their sense of belonging and cohesion within diverse teams. This finding highlights a key contribution of the study: identifying life satisfaction and flourishing, not transient happiness, as primary determinants of successful multicultural integration.

5.3. Cultural Integration and Team Performance (H3)

The hypothesis that cultural integration is positively and significantly related to team performance was supported. Effective multicultural integration strategies, such as promoting intercultural communication and mutual respect, have been found to enhance team cohesion, collaboration, and overall performance. This aligns with previous research (Homan et al., 2015;) highlighting the benefits of diversity for creativity, problem-solving, and decision-making. Our results confirm and extend these studies by showing that integration quality, and not just diversity, determines enhanced performance. Earlier meta-analyses (Obsuwan et al., 2021; Stahl & Maznevski, 2021) found inconsistent relationships between diversity and performance, attributing variations to contextual moderators. This study provides evidence that cultural integration serves as the missing mediator, explaining why some multicultural teams outperform others. These findings justify the need for strategic organizational practices that move beyond symbolic diversity initiatives and integrate cultural intelligence and inclusive management as central to enhancing performance in higher education institutions.

5.4. Cultural Integration as a Mediator (H4)

Finally, this study confirmed that cultural integration mediates the relationship between well-being and team performance. This finding suggests that well-being indirectly contributes to better team performance by enhancing multicultural integration. Employees with higher well-being are more likely to feel included and supported in a multicultural workplace, which, in turn, improves their performance. This study's findings uniquely situate this model within Malaysian academia, showing how collectivist cultural norms amplify the mediating influence of integration.

This mediation effect underscores the interconnectedness between well-being and cultural integration in terms of achieving high team performance. Organizations should, therefore, focus on promoting both employee well-being and effective multicultural integration to optimize team performance. This dual-focus framework constitutes the study's distinctive theoretical contribution, integrating subjective well-being and cultural intelligence under a single performance model.

5.5. Theoretical Implications

The theoretical implications of our findings address notable gaps in existing literature, particularly concerning the interplay between well-being and performance in multicultural work environments, an area often overlooked in studies of multi-ethnic communities. Past research (Ruggeri et al., 2020; Di Fabio, Cheung & Peiró, 2020; Wu et al., 2020) has largely explored well-being factors in homogenous groups, leaving a gap in understanding their role within diverse cultural contexts. This study bridges this gap by demonstrating that well-being dimensions not only enhance performance but also strengthen intercultural integration, a mediating effect that has not been previously tested. This contribution extends the well-being performance framework by incorporating multicultural dynamics, offering a theoretical synthesis supported by the Cultural Intelligence (CQ) perspective (Le, Jiang & Radford, 2021; Setti, Sommovigo & Argentero, 2022). Unlike prior models that treat cultural diversity as an external moderator, this study conceptualizes it as an active psychological and social process linking individual well-being to team performance. This insight advances CQ theory by contextualizing it in academic institutions where cultural diversity is structural rather than incidental. Our study contributes to this area by investigating how different conceptualizations of well-being can uniquely impact team performance and cultural integration, offering a novel perspective on the importance of multicultural dynamics in workplace outcomes (Leifels & Bowen, 2021; Sarwar et al, 2020)

Additionally, our study reinforces the impact of cultural diversity on individual psychology and behaviour, which is an essential consideration in organizational settings (Shiraeve & Levy, 2020; Schwarzenhal et al., 2020). Cultural diversity influences stress, engagement, and overall well-being, elements that are directly tied to performance outcomes (Sarwar et al., 2020; Garg & Singh, 2020). Organizations that prioritize cultural diversity and inclusion foster more positive environments, which, in turn, enhance performance and employee satisfaction (Kaur & Arora, 2020; Alexandra, Ehrhart & Randel, 2021). This aligns with existing research that highlights the psychological benefits of inclusive workplace cultures, and our study further contributes by examining these benefits in the unique context of Malaysian universities, where multicultural dynamics are pronounced.

Our findings further emphasize the strategic importance of fostering inclusive cultures and implementing effective interventions to improve employee satisfaction (Durand, 2015; OECD, 2013). By centering on Malaysia's multicultural academic environment, the study provides valuable insights into promoting well-being and cultural integration, supporting the notion that these aspects are critical for achieving organizational success in multi-ethnic contexts (Le, Jiang & Radford, 2021; Setti, Sommovigo & Argentero, 2022)

Moreover, our study advances the discourse on diversity and inclusion by emphasizing cultural diversity as a pivotal factor in shaping organizational well-being and performance. While most previous studies have focused on demographic diversity, this study highlights the broader dimension of cultural diversity and underscores its strategic role in organizational success.

Organizations that actively promote ethnic and racial diversity tend to see superior financial and operational outcomes, reinforcing the importance of intercultural integration (Corritore, Goldberg & Srivastava, 2020; Inegbedion et al., 2020).

Hence, this study provides critical insights into the correlations between well-being, cultural integration, and team performance in multicultural work settings. The findings underscore the need for organizations to prioritize employee well-being and cultural integration to optimize performance outcomes. Future studies should explore the mechanisms underlying these relationships across diverse organizational contexts and develop targeted interventions to further enhance well-being and cultural cohesion.

5.6. Practical Implications

Our findings provide actionable insights for higher education leaders seeking to align well-being and diversity strategies to improve staff productivity and cohesion. Universities should prioritize initiatives that enhance staff well-being, such as workshops, counselling services, and stress management resources, to improve cognitive functioning, resilience, and motivation (Helliwell et al., 2019; Jebb et al., 2020; Balakrishnan et al., 2021).

Cultural Intelligence (CQ) training can help employees adapt to diverse cultural backgrounds, promoting a cohesive, inclusive setting that enhances team performance through mutual understanding and cooperation (Le, Jiang & Radford, 2021; Sun, 2021; Jiao, Kim & Pitts, 2021). Supporting cultural integration in the workforce is crucial for enhancing teamwork in multicultural settings. This finding aligns with the CQ-based interventions suggested by Setti et al. (2022), which emphasize that developing cultural awareness and empathy among staff enhances collective well-being and reduces interpersonal conflict.

Cultural diversity has a direct, positive impact on well-being and performance. By promoting inclusive practices that foster equal participation and belonging, universities can boost employee satisfaction, support innovation, and problem-solving, key components of academic success (Durand, 2015; OECD, 2013). Ensuring diverse voices are respected enhances individual well-being and team productivity (Shiraev & Levy, 2020; Schwarzenthal et al., 2020). Universities can also integrate intercultural competence-building initiatives, like cross-cultural projects and reflective workshops, directly into academic development frameworks. These practical applications offer a roadmap for academic institutions to create an inclusive environment that promotes individual and team success, aligning with their strategic goals in diverse societies (Leifels & Bowen, 2021; Sarwar et al., 2020). The study's unique contextual contribution lies in providing an empirically tested model of well-being – integration – performance specifically for multicultural higher education settings.

6. Conclusion

This study contributes to the existing literature by highlighting the nuanced effects of well-being factors on team performance and the mediating role of multicultural integration. At the same time, Happiness Core shows no direct relationship with team performance. The mediating effect of multicultural integration emphasizes the importance of fostering inclusive workplaces that value and celebrate diversity.

7. Limitations and Future Directions

This study had a few limitations that are worth noting. The data were first gathered using a self-administered method, which may be susceptible to common-method bias. To strengthen the validity of the findings, future studies could use triangulation or multi-source data collection techniques. The study focused on a particular workplace (academia); therefore, it is important to investigate further whether the results can be applied to other contexts. Additionally, the cross-sectional design limits causal inference; longitudinal studies would capture the directionality of relationships among well-being, multicultural integration, and team performance. Moreover, the sample was confined to Malaysian academic staff, which limits generalizability. Broader samples from other sectors and cultural contexts would provide comparative insights.

Future research should broaden the sample across industries and organizational settings to enhance generalizability and to understand how cultural contexts influence the relationships among well-being, cultural diversity, and team performance. Employing mixed-method research designs that combine quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews and case studies can capture a comprehensive understanding of these phenomena and explore the underlying mechanisms and contextual nuances. Longitudinal studies are needed to track changes over time and to investigate the long-term effects of cultural diversity and well-being initiatives as teams become more integrated and culturally intelligent. Studies should also explore mediating and moderating variables, such as leadership styles and team cohesion, using advanced statistical techniques, such as structural equation modelling, to examine how cultural intelligence and integration efforts mediate these effects. Finally, designing and testing intervention programs, such as cultural competency training and well-being initiatives, using experimental or quasi-experimental designs will help evaluate their effectiveness in enhancing team outcomes.

Finally, the findings offer actionable insights for organizations, particularly universities, seeking to enhance employee well-being and productivity. By fostering multicultural integration and supportive environments, institutions can promote collaboration and cohesion among diverse academic staff.

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