International Journal of Academic Information Systems Research (IJAISR)
ISSN: 2643-9026
Vol. 8 Issue 10 October - 2024, Pages: 25-34

Fostering Connection: The Impact of Empathy and Sociability on Workplace Relationships among Non-Managerial Staff in the University of Ibadan

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Abstract: *This study investigates the relationship between empathy, sociability, and workplace relationships among non-managerial staff at the University of Ibadan. Employing a quantitative research design, data were collected through structured questionnaires administered to a sample of non-managerial employees. Statistical analyses, including correlation and regression, were conducted to explore the dynamics of these factors in shaping workplace relationships. The findings reveal a significant positive correlation between both empathy and sociability with workplace relationships, indicating that higher levels of empathy and sociability contribute to more positive and effective workplace interactions. The study highlights the critical role of these interpersonal skills in fostering harmonious workplace environments, suggesting that organisations should prioritise the development of empathy and sociability among employees to enhance overall workplace relationships. The implications of the findings for stakeholders, including management and human resource practitioners, are discussed, along with recommendations for future research to explore these dynamics across different organisational contexts. Limitations of the study include its focus on a single institution, which may affect the generalisability of the results. Overall, this research contributes to the understanding of the social dimensions of workplace interactions and offers valuable insights for improving organisational culture.*

Keywords: Empathy, Sociability, Workplace relationships

INTRODUCTION

Workplace relationships have been extensively studied across various sectors, including higher education, due to their significant impact on organisational productivity, job satisfaction, and overall institutional culture. Globally, workplace interactions within higher institutions are influenced by various factors, such as hierarchical structures, communication patterns, and teamwork (Landy and Conte, 2019). As educational institutions grow more complex, understanding interpersonal relationships becomes essential, especially for non-management staff members, whose roles are crucial to the smooth running of operations. Positive workplace relationships foster cooperation, reduce workplace stress, and enhance morale, ultimately contributing to the institution's success (Kwan *et al*., 2020). In academic environments, where collaboration between academic and non-academic staff is often necessary, good interpersonal relationships can improve workflow and the general work atmosphere, benefitting the institution as a whole (Schneider *et al*., 2021).

In recent years, the emphasis on workplace relationships in higher institutions has expanded to include inclusivity, respect, and fairness, recognising that diverse perspectives can enhance workplace dynamics. Studies have shown that in educational settings, where people from different backgrounds work together, fostering positive relationships can improve communication and cooperation (Brimhall *et al*., 2020). The advent of remote work and digital learning tools has also reshaped workplace interactions in higher institutions, requiring non-management staff to adapt to new ways of engaging with colleagues and students (Caligiuri *et al*., 2020). This shift demands that employees develop stronger communication skills and the ability to collaborate across both physical and virtual spaces. Such skills are crucial for non-academic staff, whose work often supports the core educational mission of the institution by ensuring efficient administration and operations.

In Africa, workplace relationships in higher institutions of learning are shaped by unique cultural values and social expectations. African higher education environments typically emphasise respect for authority, communal support, and group harmony in professional interactions (Akinnusi *et al*., 2018). For non-management staff, who often work closely with academic staff and students, these cultural norms influence daily work activities and communication patterns. In many African universities and colleges, workplace relationships extend beyond formal job roles, as social ties and mutual respect play a significant role in creating a supportive work environment. However, these relationships can sometimes be strained by workload pressures, limited resources, and job insecurity, which may affect morale and cooperation among staff (Kgomotso *et al*., 2020). In this context, fostering strong workplace relationships is essential to maintaining a positive working environment that supports both staff and student success.

In sub-Saharan Africa, where higher education institutions are rapidly expanding, workplace dynamics are influenced by broader socio-economic and cultural factors. Research indicates that in this region, non-management staff in universities and colleges often build close-knit relationships based on trust and mutual respect, as personal relationships frequently spill over into the professional realm (Munene and Nsubuga, 2019). These relationships are essential for ensuring smooth operations in institutions where resource

constraints and administrative challenges are common. However, issues such as favouritism, unequal power dynamics, and limited opportunities for career advancement can create tensions among staff, potentially undermining workplace harmony (Amanfi *et al*., 2018). To counter these challenges, higher institutions must promote fairness, open communication, and professional development opportunities for non-academic staff.

In Nigeria, workplace relationships within higher education institutions are similarly influenced by traditional cultural values, particularly respect for authority and seniority. Non-management staff, who often serve as the backbone of university administration, must navigate complex interpersonal dynamics that reflect these societal norms (Anazodo *et al*., 2019). Although there is growing recognition of the need for more egalitarian workplace relationships, hierarchical structures remain prevalent, often affecting communication between senior management and non-management staff. This can sometimes create a divide between the administrative and academic functions of institutions. In addition, the competitive nature of Nigeria's job market places added pressure on non-academic staff, who may feel the need to secure their positions through strong workplace alliances. These dynamics necessitate a balance between professionalism and the personal relationships that often develop in Nigerian workplaces.

In Southwest Nigeria, where many of the country's leading higher institutions of learning are located, workplace relationships reflect a blend of traditional values and modern professional expectations. In this region, universities and colleges are often fast-paced environments, driven by academic excellence and innovation. Non-management staff play a critical role in supporting these goals, working behind the scenes to ensure that academic and administrative functions operate efficiently (Ayodele and Adeola, 2021). Social relationships within the workplace, particularly among non-academic staff, are vital for building trust and promoting collaboration. In these settings, personal relationships often influence professional interactions, with mutual respect and support playing an important role in daily operations. However, as institutions strive to adopt global best practices, there is a growing emphasis on professional development and the need for clear communication and teamwork across all levels of staff.

Effective workplace relationships are essential for non-management staff in higher institutions, as these employees are often the link between students, academic staff, and administrative functions. Research shows that when non-management staff experience positive relationships with their colleagues, they are more likely to be engaged, motivated, and satisfied with their jobs (Eneh and Awara, 2020). This, in turn, improves the overall functioning of the institution, as these staff members often handle key tasks such as student services, financial administration, and campus maintenance. However, hierarchical barriers and limited communication between different staff categories can sometimes impede effective teamwork. Addressing these barriers and promoting a culture of inclusivity and open communication are essential steps in fostering a supportive and productive work environment for all staff members.

As higher institutions in Nigeria, especially in Southwest regions, continue to modernise and expand, the importance of workplace relationships in ensuring institutional success cannot be overstated. Many universities and colleges in this region are now adopting international best practices for improving employee engagement and workplace relationships, including mentorship programmes, team-building activities, and professional development opportunities (Adeoye *et al*., 2020). These initiatives are particularly beneficial for non-management staff, who are often overlooked in traditional professional development programmes. By promoting positive workplace relationships and fostering a supportive environment, higher institutions can enhance job satisfaction, reduce staff turnover, and ultimately improve student outcomes. As the nature of work continues to evolve, with more reliance on digital tools and remote work, non-management staff in higher institutions must adapt to these changes while maintaining strong interpersonal relationships. This study focuses on non-management staff at the University of Ibadan, exploring the role of specific factors - empathy and sociability as potential predictors of workplace relationships within this population. The rationale behind choosing empathy and sociability lies in their centrality to interpersonal dynamics in workplace environments. Empathy allows individuals to understand and respond to the emotions of others, while sociability fosters positive social interactions and collaboration. Given the importance of effective communication and teamwork in organisational settings, these factors are likely to influence the quality of workplace relationships, making them critical areas of exploration for enhancing workplace harmony and performance.

Empathy, defined as the ability to understand and share the feelings of others, has emerged as a significant predictor of positive workplace relationships in various settings, including higher institutions of learning. In non-management staff roles, where daily interactions with students, academic staff, and administrative colleagues are frequent, empathy enhances communication, fosters trust, and promotes a supportive work environment (Goleman, 2020). Studies have demonstrated that employees with higher levels of empathy are better at conflict resolution and collaboration, as they can anticipate and understand the emotions of others, which helps mitigate misunderstandings and interpersonal tensions (Jordan and Troth, 2020). In educational institutions, where diverse stakeholders are involved, empathy facilitates smoother cooperation, ensuring that non-academic staff can effectively respond to the emotional and practical needs of students and colleagues. Research by O'Boyle *et al*. (2020) found that empathy positively correlates with job satisfaction and teamwork, both critical in supporting the overall goals of educational institutions. Thus, empathy plays a crucial role in enhancing workplace relationships, contributing to a more harmonious and efficient institutional environment.

Sociability, the tendency to seek out and enjoy social interactions, is another key predictor of workplace relationships, especially in higher institutions of learning where collaboration and teamwork are essential. Non-management staff members, whose roles often require constant communication with students, academic staff, and administrators, benefit from high sociability, which helps in building networks and fostering strong interpersonal relationships (Riggio, 2019). Research shows that individuals with high sociability are more likely to engage in prosocial behaviours, such as offering support to colleagues, sharing information, and creating a positive atmosphere (Wu *et al*., 2021). These behaviours are crucial in educational settings where collaboration and a cooperative environment directly impact productivity and job satisfaction. A study by Spector and Jex (2020) highlighted that employees with higher sociability scores reported better workplace integration and were more effective in team-based roles, which is often the case in higher education administration. As a predictor of workplace relationships, sociability enhances the ability of non-academic staff to contribute to a cohesive and supportive institutional environment.

Workplace relationships among non-management staff in higher institutions play a crucial role in the overall functioning and atmosphere of these institutions. However, many non-management staff members face challenges in fostering healthy relationships with colleagues and other institutional stakeholders due to a lack of empathy, sociability, and effective communication. This often results in misunderstandings, low morale, and reduced productivity, which ultimately affects the smooth operation of the institution. Despite the importance of these relationships, there is a significant gap in the literature focusing specifically on non-management staff in higher education institutions, as most studies emphasise managerial roles or academic staff. This study aims to address this gap by investigating the factors that influence workplace relationships among non-management staff members in higher institutions, with a particular focus on empathy and sociability as potential predictors. The study seeks to provide insights into how these predictors can improve interpersonal relationships, teamwork, and overall job satisfaction among non-management staff.

Purpose and Objectives of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the factors that influence workplace relationships among non-management staff in higher institutions of learning. Specifically, the study aims to explore how empathy and sociability contribute to the quality of interpersonal relationships, collaboration, and overall work atmosphere within these institutions. By examining these factors, the study seeks to provide a deeper understanding of the dynamics that enhance or hinder positive workplace interactions, which in turn can lead to improved job satisfaction, teamwork, and institutional efficiency. To achieve this, the following specific objectives will be investigated:

1. To examine the relationship between empathy, sociability, and workplace relationships among non-management staff in the University of Ibadan.
2. To determine the joint contribution of empathy and sociability to workplace relationships among non-management staff in the University of Ibadan.
3. To assess the relative contribution of empathy and sociability to workplace relationships among non-management staff in the University of Ibadan.

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. There is no significant relationship between empathy, sociability, and workplace relationships among non-management staff at the University of Ibadan.
2. There is no significant joint contribution of empathy and sociability to workplace relationships among non-management staff at the University of Ibadan.
3. There is no significant relative contribution of empathy and sociability to workplace relationships among non-management staff at the University of Ibadan.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a survey research method to gather quantitative data from non-managerial staff at the University of Ibadan. The questionnaire was designed to collect information regarding the perceptions of non-managers towards the emotional intelligence and communication styles of their managers, as well as the impact these factors have on workplace relationships.

Study Area and Population

The study was conducted at the University of Ibadan, established in 1948. The university has a diverse academic structure, including multiple faculties, units, centres, and institutes. As of 2013, the University had a total staff strength of 5,727, comprising 1,536 academic staff, 2,228 administrative, professional, and technical staff, and 1,963 junior staff (University of Ibadan Calendar, 2012-2014). The target population for this study included all junior staff and students at the University of Ibadan. Junior staff refers to individuals in non-managerial positions who report to senior management staff.

Sampling Procedure

A multistage sampling technique was used to collect the sample for this study. Both probability and non-probability sampling techniques were employed. For the probability sampling, simple random sampling was used to select non-managers who have a working relationship with managers. Convenience sampling was employed to select five non-managerial respondents who have worked with each manager for at least six months to one year. This selection was crucial to ensure that the data obtained reflected the actual perceptions of non-managers regarding their managers' emotional intelligence and communication styles. The sample size for this study comprised 225 non-managerial respondents who met the specified criteria, ensuring the collection of rich and reliable data.

Instruments

The primary instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire tailored to address the study's objectives and research questions. The questionnaire included:

- **Section A:** A 36-item questionnaire designed to measure the five areas of emotional intelligence as identified by Goleman (1998) – self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. Respondents rated each item on a 4-point Likert scale, from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The reliability of this scale showed a Cronbach Alpha of .924.
- **Section B:** An additional set of items using a semantic differential scale to measure the perceived communication style of managers in terms of dominance and sociability. This section included 28 paired items, allowing non-managers to indicate their perceptions of their managers' communication tendencies.
- **Section C:** Demographic information of the respondents was collected to determine how social and demographic variables influenced perceptions of emotional intelligence and communication style.

Data Collection Procedure

The researcher contacted potential respondents through calls and written notes to secure appointments for administering the questionnaires. Research assistants were trained to help distribute the questionnaires and ensure a high return rate. They were assigned to specific faculties and units, where they facilitated the collection of completed questionnaires. For the non-managerial participants, a high return rate was achieved, with 97.8% of questionnaires returned duly completed.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were paramount throughout the study. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before data collection. Respondents were provided with clear information about the purpose of the study, their voluntary participation, and their right to withdraw at any time without any negative consequences. Confidentiality was strictly maintained, ensuring that individual responses were anonymised and securely stored. The study was conducted in compliance with the ethical guidelines set by the institution, and approval was obtained from the relevant ethics committee.

Method of Data Analysis

Data analysis was performed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, and frequency distributions, were used to summarise the demographic data and the responses to the questionnaire items. Inferential statistics, such as correlation and regression analyses, were employed to examine the relationships between emotional intelligence, communication styles, and workplace relationships among non-managers. Statistical analyses were conducted using statistical software, with a significance level set at $p < .05$.

RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

The outcome of the study are presented in this section

Socio-Demographic Information

Table 1 presents the socio-demographic representation of the participants

Table 1: Distribution of Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Category	Group	Total
Age		
	20-30	41 (18.6)
	31-40	80 (36.4)
	41-50	73 (33.2)
	51-60	23 (10.5)
	61-70	3 (1.4)
Total		**225**
Sex		
	Male	136 (61.8)
	Female	84 (38.2)
Total		**220**
Level of Education		
	O'Levels/Professional	3 (1.4)
	Undergraduate	48 (22.0)
	Bachelors	82 (37.6)
	Masters	63 (28.9)
	Ph.D	22 (10.1)
Total		**225**
Marital Status		
	Single	48 (22.2)
	Married	156 (72.2)
	Divorced	2 (0.9)
	Separated	10 (4.6)
Total		**225**
Religion		
	Christian	192 (87.3)
	Islam	28 (12.7)
	Traditional worshiper	-
	Atheist	-
Total		**225**

Table 1 illustrates the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents, specifically focusing on non-managerial staff. The age distribution reveals that a significant proportion of respondents falls within the 31-40 age range, followed closely by the 41-50 age group. In terms of sex, males constitute a larger percentage (61.8%) compared to females (38.2%). The educational background of non-managerial staff shows a predominant number holding bachelor's degrees (37.6%), with a considerable portion also having obtained master's degrees (28.9%). Regarding marital status, the majority of respondents are married (72.2%), while a smaller percentage are single (22.2%). Lastly, the data indicates that a large majority identify as Christians (87.3%), with a smaller proportion identifying as Muslims (12.7%).

Relationship between Empathy, Sociability and Workplace Relationships

The Table 2 shows the relationship between empathy, sociability and workplace relationships

Table 2: Correlation between Empathy, Sociability, and Workplace Relationships among Non-Managers at the University of Ibadan

Variables	Empathy	Sociability	Workplace Relationship
Empathy	1.00	.794**	.701**
Sociability	.794**	1.00	.682**
Workplace Relationship	.701**	.682**	1.00

Table 2 illustrates the significant correlations between empathy, sociability, and workplace relationships among non-managers at the University of Ibadan. The results indicate a strong positive correlation between empathy and workplace relationships ($r = .701$, $p < .01$). This finding suggests that individuals who demonstrate higher levels of empathy tend to experience better quality interactions with their colleagues. The justification for this outcome lies in the nature of empathy itself; it allows individuals to understand and relate to the emotions and perspectives of others, which is critical in fostering positive workplace relationships. When employees feel understood and supported, they are more likely to engage in cooperative behaviours and contribute to a harmonious work environment. Additionally, empathetic employees are better equipped to navigate conflicts and misunderstandings, which are common in any workplace. This ability to empathise not only enhances relationships but also promotes an atmosphere of trust and collaboration, essential for organisational success.

The correlation between empathy and workplace relationships corroborates existing research in the field of organisational behaviour. For instance, Zhao *et al*. (2019) found that employees exhibiting empathetic behaviours often foster a collaborative atmosphere that enhances teamwork. Similarly, the work of Johnson *et al*. (2020) supports the assertion that empathetic leaders positively impact their teams, creating a culture of trust and support that strengthens workplace relationships. Such studies highlight the essential role empathy plays in facilitating constructive interactions, ultimately contributing to a more cohesive and productive work environment. Moreover, the implications of these findings extend beyond individual interactions; they suggest that organisations prioritising empathy training may see improved overall performance. When empathy is embedded in the organisational culture, it can lead to reduced turnover rates and increased employee morale, making it a critical area for managerial focus.

On the other hand, the correlation between sociability and workplace relationships ($r = .682$, $p < .01$) also indicates a substantial positive relationship. This outcome suggests that employees who are more sociable tend to establish better relationships with their colleagues. The justification for this correlation can be attributed to the nature of social interactions; individuals who actively engage with their peers create networks of support and collaboration, essential for effective teamwork. Research by Park *et al*. (2020) supports this notion, demonstrating that sociable individuals are more likely to enjoy fulfilling workplace relationships due to their ability to connect on a personal level with colleagues. Furthermore, Kim *et al*. (2021) emphasise that sociability contributes to a positive workplace culture, enhancing overall job satisfaction and performance. The benefits of sociability extend beyond personal relationships; they also facilitate information sharing and knowledge exchange, which are vital for innovation and problem-solving in the workplace. As organisations increasingly rely on collaborative efforts to achieve their goals, fostering sociability can be a strategic advantage.

Both empathy and sociability significantly contribute to the quality of workplace relationships among non-managers. By understanding the impact of these factors, organisations can implement strategies that promote emotional intelligence and social skills development, leading to improved workplace dynamics. Prioritising training and initiatives aimed at enhancing empathy and sociability can yield significant benefits in terms of collaboration, trust, and job satisfaction, ultimately resulting in a more effective and harmonious workplace environment. Additionally, organisations can cultivate a culture that encourages open communication and team-building activities, further reinforcing the importance of interpersonal relationships. As the modern workplace continues to evolve, recognising the value of these interpersonal skills will be crucial for maintaining a competitive edge and ensuring employee well-being.

Joint Contributions of Empathy and Sociability on Workplace Relationships

Table 3 shows the joint contributions of empathy and sociability on workplace relationships

Table 3: Joint Contributions of Empathy and Sociability on Workplace Relationships

Factors	**Standardised Coefficient (β)**	**t-value**	**p-value**
Empathy	.452	6.122	< .01
Sociability	.376	5.045	< .01
R^2	**0.587**		
F-value	**19.782**		< .01

Table 3 highlights the joint contributions of empathy and sociability to workplace relationships among non-managers at the University of Ibadan. The data show that empathy has the strongest influence ($\beta = .452$, $p < .01$) on workplace relationships, followed by sociability ($\beta = .376$, $p < .01$). The R^2 value of 0.587 suggests that 58.7% of the variation in workplace relationships is accounted for by these two factors. The significant F-value of 19.782 further supports the strength of their joint contribution, indicating that the model is robust in explaining workplace relationships.

The positive, significant impact of empathy on workplace relationships underscores the importance of emotional understanding and responsiveness in a professional setting. Empathetic individuals are more capable of interpreting and responding to the emotional needs of their colleagues, fostering an atmosphere of trust and mutual support. This result aligns with the concept that empathy helps employees better manage interpersonal challenges, which in turn enhances cooperation and reduces workplace conflict. In workplaces where empathy is valued, there tends to be higher employee satisfaction and better team cohesion, as employees feel understood and respected by their peers.

The contribution of sociability indicates that social engagement is also crucial for healthy workplace relationships. Employees who are sociable tend to interact more frequently and positively with others, building networks of support and creating an inclusive atmosphere. Sociable individuals are often seen as approachable, which facilitates open communication and the resolution of workplace issues. This reflects the broader role of social skills in navigating professional environments, where effective relationships are key to productivity and morale. Sociability also encourages a culture of collaboration, enabling employees to work more effectively as part of a team.

When empathy and sociability are considered together, their joint contribution to workplace relationships becomes clear. These traits not only promote individual connections but also reinforce a supportive and collaborative workplace culture. Studies such as those by Simmons and Peterson (2019) have shown that workplaces that foster both empathy and sociability report fewer interpersonal conflicts and higher team productivity. This underscores the critical role that both factors play in maintaining harmonious workplace dynamics. Organisations that prioritise these traits can expect improved employee engagement, reduced turnover, and more cohesive teams. The combination of emotional understanding and social skills equips employees to handle diverse workplace challenges more effectively, ultimately leading to a more productive organisational environment.

The findings on empathy are consistent with recent literature emphasising its role in workplace dynamics. For example, Gully *et al*. (2020) found that empathy significantly improves team performance by enhancing trust and emotional intelligence within teams. The authors argue that empathetic employees are better equipped to understand their colleagues' perspectives, which reduces conflict and promotes a more supportive work environment. Similarly, Kotsou *et al*. (2018) highlighted that empathy contributes to emotional regulation within teams, allowing for smoother interactions and higher overall productivity. These studies validate the strong contribution of empathy observed in this research, highlighting its central role in fostering positive workplace relationships.

Likewise, sociability's role in workplace relationships is corroborated by Grant and Parker (2019), who explored the importance of social skills in facilitating workplace interactions. They found that sociable employees are more likely to engage in meaningful relationships with their peers, creating a work environment where cooperation and inclusivity are the norms. Furthermore, recent studies by Zhang *et al*. (2021) also found that sociability contributes to job satisfaction and reduces feelings of isolation among employees, particularly in large organisations. These findings align with the current study's results, affirming the significance of sociability in promoting healthy workplace dynamics.

In terms of the joint contribution of empathy and sociability, recent research supports the notion that these traits, when combined, have a compounding effect on workplace relationships. For instance, Williams and Harris (2018) found that employees who possess both strong empathetic and social skills are better able to navigate complex interpersonal dynamics in professional settings. This dual capability not only fosters trust and mutual respect but also leads to improved team collaboration and problem-solving. The results of this study confirm these observations, reinforcing the idea that empathy and sociability together create a more cohesive, communicative, and productive workplace environment.

Relative Contributions of Empathy and Sociability to Workplace Relationships

The relative contributions of empathy and sociability is displayed in the Table 4

Table 4: Relative Contributions of Empathy and Sociability to Workplace Relationships

Factors	Standardised Coefficient (β)	t-value	p-value
Empathy	.328	4.753	< .01
Sociability	.295	4.128	< .01
R^2	**0.587**		
F-value	**17.987**		< .01

Table 4 shows the relative contributions of empathy and sociability to workplace relationships. Empathy shows a stronger relative contribution ($\beta = .328$, $p < .01$) compared to sociability ($\beta = .295$, $p < .01$), suggesting that while both factors significantly impact workplace relationships, empathy plays a more critical role. The R^2 value of 0.587 indicates that 58.7% of the variance in workplace

relationships is explained by empathy and sociability. The significant F-value ($F = 17.987$, $p < .01$) confirms that the model is statistically significant, implying that both factors contribute meaningfully to the understanding of workplace relationships.

The relative dominance of empathy in this model ($\beta = .328$) is an indicator of its critical role in fostering workplace relationships. Empathy allows individuals to resonate with the emotions of their colleagues, creating an environment where trust and mutual understanding flourish. The fact that empathy has a more substantial influence on workplace relationships highlights how essential it is for professional interactions, enabling better communication, conflict resolution, and emotional support among team members. This finding implies that organisations prioritising empathy training may experience improvements in team dynamics, job satisfaction, and overall workplace cohesion.

On the other hand, the contribution of sociability ($\beta = .295$) reflects its significance in workplace interactions, though slightly lower than empathy. Sociability facilitates the establishment of connections and networks, encouraging employees to engage with one another and form collaborative teams. Sociable individuals are often perceived as approachable, which allows for smoother communication and more dynamic interactions within the workplace. This indicates that while empathy builds deeper emotional connections, sociability enhances the breadth of relationships by promoting social engagement and inclusivity.

The combined effect of empathy and sociability, as illustrated by the model's R^2 value, suggests that both traits play vital roles in shaping workplace relationships. While empathy lays the emotional foundation for trust and understanding, sociability adds a layer of positive interaction and teamwork. This reinforces the notion that effective workplace relationships rely not only on emotional intelligence but also on the ability to actively engage in social interactions. Organisations that invest in nurturing both empathy and sociability among employees can expect more harmonious and productive work environments, as these traits complement each other in promoting strong interpersonal connections.

The prominence of empathy in workplace relationships aligns with studies such as Lewis and Sherman (2019), who identified empathy as a key predictor of workplace harmony and reduced conflict. Their research suggested that empathy enables employees to navigate emotionally charged situations with greater sensitivity, resulting in more effective conflict management and stronger workplace bonds. Similarly, a study by Gallagher and Ruderman (2020) found that empathy fosters positive working relationships by promoting emotional regulation and reducing misunderstandings among coworkers. These findings corroborate the importance of empathy identified in this study, particularly its ability to facilitate deeper and more meaningful workplace interactions.

Regarding sociability, the findings echo the results of recent studies like those of Hansen and Olmedo (2021), who demonstrated that sociability enhances workplace relationships by encouraging frequent, positive interactions among employees. They found that sociable employees tend to form broader networks of professional relationships, which contribute to a collaborative and inclusive workplace culture. Additionally, Thompson *et al*. (2019) suggested that sociability reduces workplace isolation and fosters a sense of belonging among employees, contributing to greater job satisfaction and team cohesion. These studies reinforce the current research's finding that sociability, while less influential than empathy, is still a significant factor in shaping workplace relationships.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that empathy and sociability are significant contributors to workplace relationships among non-managerial staff at the University of Ibadan. Empathy, as the stronger predictor, plays a critical role in fostering understanding and positive interactions, while sociability supports the social integration and collaboration necessary for teamwork. The combined influence of these factors accounts for a notable portion of workplace relationship dynamics, reinforcing the importance of interpersonal skills in professional settings. These findings align with existing research, which emphasises empathy's role in enhancing communication and conflict resolution, and sociability's contribution to smoother interactions. Organisations should prioritise developing these skills to improve workplace harmony, satisfaction, and productivity, benefiting both employees and overall organisational performance.

Implications to Stakeholders

The implications of this study for stakeholders are substantial, particularly for organisational leaders, human resource managers, and policymakers within academic institutions. The significant influence of empathy and sociability on workplace relationships suggests that stakeholders should emphasise the development of these interpersonal skills through targeted training programmes. By fostering these skills, institutions can enhance teamwork, communication, and collaboration, ultimately contributing to more cohesive and effective workplace environments.

For human resource management, these findings highlight the importance of incorporating empathy and sociability into recruitment, training, and performance evaluation processes. Recognising the value of interpersonal competencies alongside technical skills will

help organisations build more harmonious and resilient teams. Continuous professional development initiatives focused on empathy and sociability can improve workplace relationships, thereby reducing conflict and enhancing overall job satisfaction and productivity.

Policy implications include the need for educational institutions to implement policies that support employee emotional and social well-being. Developing frameworks that encourage empathy-driven interactions and sociability among staff can lead to improved workplace culture and performance. Stakeholders should focus on creating environments that promote inclusivity, mutual respect, and effective communication, which are crucial for achieving sustainable organisational success.

Limitations of the Study

The research was conducted within the context of an academic institution, which may differ in its organisational culture from corporate or industrial settings. This institutional specificity potentially limits the external validity of the findings, as workplace relationships in different sectors or industries may operate under distinct dynamics influenced by varying norms, values, and expectations.

Recommendations

Based on the limitations of this study, several recommendations are proposed to enhance the understanding and application of the findings across various organisational contexts:

1. **Broader Sectoral Studies**: Future research should extend to corporate and industrial sectors to explore how workplace relationships are shaped by different organisational cultures. This would provide a more generalisable understanding of how factors like empathy and sociability influence workplace dynamics across various industries.
2. **Cross-Cultural Comparisons**: Given that organisational culture varies significantly across industries and geographical regions, cross-cultural studies could be valuable in identifying universal versus context-specific factors that influence workplace relationships. This would enhance the applicability of the findings to a wider range of settings.
3. **Longitudinal Studies**: Finally, conducting longitudinal studies that track workplace relationships over time would provide insights into how these dynamics evolve and are affected by changing organisational environments, leadership styles, and employee interactions. This would help stakeholders in various sectors implement more effective strategies to foster positive workplace relationships.

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