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### Discovering How Makerere University Deans Utilize Their Psychological Capital Self-Efficacy in Managing Conflicts

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**Keywords:**

Psychological Capital Self-Efficacy,  
Conflict Management,  
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Makerere University.

This study, aimed at assessing how Makerere University academic deans utilise their psychological capital self-efficacy in managing conflicts. Adopting a qualitative approach, through a phenomenological research design, this study was conducted at Makerere University in Kampala district. Data collection involved in-depth interviews using purposive sampling techniques, targeting 14 deans from the 9 colleges within Makerere University choosing 5 females and 9 males. Thematic analysis of the data based on the study's objectives was applied where results revealed diverse dynamics in the utilisation of psychological capital self-efficacy influenced by cognitive processes, gender, academic rank, and religious background. Male deans with higher academic ranks preferred symbolising cognitive processes, and visualising conflict situations comprehensively before resolution. Female deans on the other hand favoured observational cognitive processing, enhancing self-efficacy by learning from experienced colleagues. Deans using self-reflective cognitive processing, mainly Catholics, analysed past actions to guide future strategies. Some male deans at higher academic levels employed self-regulatory cognitive processing, setting precise objectives and adjusting strategies based on feedback. The study underscores the need for gender- and culture-sensitive training programs. Future research should focus on exploring the interplay of cognitive processes, gender, educational rank, and religious background in conflict management.

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## INTRODUCTION

The concept of self-efficacy stands out as a crucial element within the realm of psychological capital, wielding a profoundly positive influence on human endeavours and subsequent success. Renowned scholars like Brent et al. (2015) and Luthans et al. (2015) emphasize its significance for organizational managers and their subordinates in attaining goals, particularly in the context of conflict management and the selection of appropriate conflict management strategies. Balyan (2018), Dorado and Llona (2019), Abobakr and Ahmed (2020), as well as Zhou et al. (2015), corroborate the link between self-efficacy, conflict management, and the choice of conflict management styles. They assert that high self-efficacy individuals tend to favour the integrating conflict management style, while those with low self-efficacy often adopt accommodating or avoidance conflict management styles. Consequently, highly efficacious individuals approach potentially stressful situations, such as conflict management processes, with confidence and assurance, demonstrating an ability to resist stressful reactions through appropriate strategies (Luthans et al., 2014).

Other scholars investigating the nexus between self-efficacy and conflict management, like Alper et al. (2012) and Luthans et al. (2014), contend that individuals with high self-efficacy are better equipped to handle conflict effectively. In contrast, those with low self-efficacy may become demoralized and ineffective in managing conflict. Türk (2018) further establishes that self-efficacy

perceptions significantly predict individuals' conflict resolution skills.

Despite the substantial contributions of self-efficacy in the conflict management process, a limited number of scholars have explored these variables together, especially within the context of higher education. Existing literature from Europe, the United States and Asian countries like Basith et al (2020); Chen et al. (2019); Daipuria (2016); Hayat et al. (2020); Rodríguez-Cifuentes et al. (2020); Smith et al. (2023) predominantly focuses on the influence of self-efficacy on the management of students' learning, primarily adopting a quantitative approach. Results from these studies emphasize the role of university managers in supporting the development of both their own and their subordinates' self-efficacy to enhance student learning and performance.

In the African region, empirical studies which mainly adopted the quantitative approach highlight the positive relationship between self-efficacy and academic performance. Scholars like Adekunle and Ezinwanyi (2022), Carpenter and Shamsoodien (2021), Edem et al. (2021), and Viviers et al. (2023) stress the positive correlation between self-efficacy, academic achievement, and university staff productivity. Mtebe (2020) specifically found that organizational support significantly affects system self-efficacy among instructors.

Empirical research in Ugandan higher education on self-efficacy and conflict management and Makerere University specifically, aims to inform management on enhancing both faculty and student

performance. Kisubi et al. (2021), for instance, identified a buffering moderating effect of entrepreneurial self-efficacy in the relationship between entrepreneurship education and self-employment intentions. Matovu (2020) revealed a significant relationship between academic self-efficacy and academic performance. In contrast, Basemera et al. (2017) found, grounded in expectancy-value and hope theories, that self-efficacy did not predict students' persistence. This suggests that university managers planning to improve individuals' self-efficacy to enhance academic progress need to consider various factors.

Summing up the discussions across international, regional, and Ugandan contexts, it is evident that while these studies are situated in higher education, none has addressed the construct of self-efficacy in relation to conflict management and its relevance in the choice of conflict management styles. This study aimed to fill this knowledge gap by employing a qualitative design and the psychological capital theory to discover how Makerere University academic deans utilize their psychological capital self-efficacy in managing conflict.

### **Purpose**

This study aimed to assess how Makerere University academic deans utilise their psychological capital self-efficacy in managing conflicts.

## **RESEARCH APPROACH**

### **Research Approach**

This study adopted an interpretivism worldview (Creswell, 2003), as it aligns with a naturalistic, subjective, and qualitative paradigm. It recognizes individuals' efforts to understand their environment. Therefore, in this study, I employed a qualitative research approach. This approach was selected to explore and understand the perceptions and actual experiences shared by participants in their natural environment (Fouché et al., 2021). It was specifically chosen to comprehend the views of

Makerere University deans on conflict management within their respective schools.

### **Research Design**

This study adopted the interpretive phenomenological research design as it allowed for the identification and understanding of the experiences of Makerere University deans (Alhazmi and Kaufmann, 2022). Further, the interpretive phenomenological research design helped in understanding and describing the universal essence of utilizing psychological capital in conflict management phenomenon, while also keeping preconceived assumptions about these phenomena (Smith and Osborn, 2015). It also offered me an opportunity to delve into the meanings that Makerere University academic deans attribute to the phenomena of conflict management in their schools (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2018) and their experiences and opinions on the utilization of psychological capital in managing conflicts (Creswell, 2018).

### **Study Population**

The Makerere University academic deans were the parent population. These make a total of 28 schools based in 9 Colleges and 1 constituent School of Law. Academic deans were the targeted population for this research specifically due to their role in overseeing an academic unit in higher institutions like Makerere University, yet they are also accountable for the overall supervision and administration of its affairs (Uganda Government, 2001). With such a mandate, they are better positioned to confront and manage both task and relationship-related conflicts in their schools.

### **Sampling Strategies and Sample Size**

#### ***Sampling of Schools***

This study used Biglan's classification of academic disciplines (Biglan, 1973a, 1973b) to purposively (Maree and Pietersen, 2016) select 14 schools from a total of 28 schools together with their respective deans. A list of colleges and schools and their

respective deans in Makerere University was obtained from the human resource department office, which guided this sampling process. Two schools were selected in some of the colleges while for other colleges, one school was selected. This depended on the number of schools in the college and the length spent in office by the sitting dean. This is in line with the assertions of Kelly (2010) and Robinson (2014) that purposive sampling is used to select respondents that are most likely to yield appropriate and useful information; give different and important views about the ideas and issues in question and therefore need to be included

in the sample. The secured list also informed us on the genders of different deans, hence this selection included 5 females and 9 males, based on the belief that experiences could vary due to biological differences (Szadvári et al., 2023). The number of female participant deans was lower than their male counterparts for several reasons: some selected schools had no female deans, some female deans had less than two months of experience in their roles, and thus lacked substantial conflict management experience, and other female deans were too busy to participate in the study.

**Table 3.1 Demographic Characteristics of Employee Participants**

<b>Participant Identification</b>	<b>Age in yrs</b>	<b>Academic Rank</b>	<b>Designation</b>	<b>Gender</b>
<b>Dean A</b>	45	Lecturer	Acting Dean	Male
<b>Dean B</b>	45-50	Professor	Dean	Male
<b>Dean C</b>	45-50	Senior Lecturer	Dean	Female
<b>Dean D</b>	45-50	Senior Lecturer	Dean	Male
<b>Dean E</b>	51-54	Professor	Dean	Male
<b>Dean F</b>	45-50	Senior Lecturer	Dean	Male
<b>Dean G</b>	52	Senior Lecturer	Dean	Female
<b>Dean H</b>	52	Lecturer	Dean	Female
<b>Dean I</b>	54	Senior Lecturer	Dean	Female
<b>Dean J</b>	41	Senior Lecturer	Dean	Female
<b>Dean K</b>	52	Lecturer	Dean	Male
<b>Dean L</b>	45-50	Lecturer	Dean	Male
<b>Dean M</b>	40-45	Lecturer	Dean	Male
<b>Dean N</b>	56	Associate Professor	Dean	Male

### Data Collection Methods

Observations by scholars such as Bernard et al. (2016) identify three broad categories of methods used in qualitative inquiries to collect data on human thought and behaviour including indirect observation, direct observation, and elicitation or engaging in dialogue with people. This study utilized the elicitation category, and the following is a description of the techniques employed for data collection activities.

For data collection, the study employed semi-structured interviews, crafted in alignment with the

objectives and research questions of the study. According to Ruslin et al. (2022), semi-structured interviews are particularly potent in qualitative research as they enable the researcher to gather comprehensive information and evidence from interviewees, capturing their perspectives from multiple angles. These interviews were predominantly conducted face-to-face in the deans' offices at their respective schools, using primarily interview guides with 16 open-ended questions.

The interview guide aided the collection of qualitative data from the university deans, allowing them to share their experiences (Creswell and

Creswell, 2018) regarding the types of conflicts they handle and their methods for managing these conflicts, which helped in exploring how they leverage psychological capital in conflict management. Additionally, the interview guide permitted deviations from the predetermined question sequence (Creswell and Plano-Clerk (2018), enabling the interviewer, to pose supplementary questions for clarification or to probe further into participants' explanations and responses.

Interview sessions were digitally recorded to capture contextual nuances beyond the spoken words, gain insight into participants' perspectives, and obtain data that cannot be directly observed, with verbatim transcripts subsequently produced. Field notes were also compiled during the interviews to supplement the recorded data.

### **Data Quality Control**

Establishing reliability in qualitative research is essential for guiding future research directions and contributing to the accumulation of knowledge. As Ahmed (2024) notes, qualitative research delves into the complex details of human behaviour, attitudes, and experiences, focusing on exploring nuances and context. Therefore, ensuring trustworthiness is critical to establishing the credibility and reliability of qualitative findings, encompassing elements such as credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

### **Data Analysis**

The data obtained from the field was inductively analyzed and interpreted. Given the interpretive phenomenological design to study deans' experiences in handling relationship and task-related conflicts, this study employed a thematic analysis as an approach for the primary data analysis (Braun and Clark, 2006; Creswell, 2013; Creswell and Creswell, 2018). According to Braun and Clark (2006, p.78), "thematic analysis provides a flexible and useful research tool which can potentially provide a rich and detailed, yet complex account of

the data." Besides being widely employed within qualitative methodological traditions, it represents a versatile analytical tool (Braun and Clark, 2006). And this is the major reason thematic analysis was used.

The data analysis followed the steps outlined by Creswell (2009), including data organization involving the transcription of interviews and the researcher's interview notes; categorization of data into separate categories; reading and re-reading of transcripts and notes to identify meaningful and credible information; data coding; and the establishment of themes and sub-themes. Initial codes were developed based on emerging information and insights from the interview participants, as well as pre-determined codes informed by the theoretical framework (Creswell, 2014). By combining elements from both Creswell's and Braun and Clark's models, a comprehensive and adaptable data analysis strategy was effectively created. Themes were mapped and evaluated against the research purpose and the specific objectives.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Adhering to national and international research ethical standards, including UNCST (2014, 2016) and Makerere University (2008), this study upheld a fundamental ethical framework based on principles of respecting human rights and avoiding harm. Permission to conduct the study was sought from the Makerere University School of Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee and was granted, Ref. No: MAKSHSREC-2024-745. Other key ethical considerations included strategies to ensure informed consent, maintain confidentiality, safeguard anonymity, protect human dignity, and prevent plagiarism. Participants were fully informed about the study's purpose and potential benefits, with assurances that participation would not result in harm.

### **FINDINGS**



This study intended to answer the research question, how do Makerere University academic deans utilize their psychological capital self-efficacy in the management of conflict? Results uncovered a spectrum of self-efficacy utilization dynamics deeply rooted in supportive cognitive processes, as outlined in Bandura's social cognitive theory. These dynamics were also informed by the gender, education rank and religious backgrounds of the individual deans. Four themes from the psychological capital theory were discovered from the cognitive processes.

**The Symbolizing Cognitive Processing.** This refers to the process of mentally constructing a representation or model of a situation or scenario that serves as a strategic tool for guiding future actions and decision-making. Findings from this study indicate that Makerere University Deans (especially, male deans – save for one female dean, with higher ranks – professors and senior lectures) engaged in symbolizing by mentally constructing representations of conflict situations through visualizing and trying to first understand the nature of conflicts, stakeholders involved, and underlying causal factors, which guided their decision-making processes for effective conflict management. Dean J while describing his confidence in successfully managing conflict in his school, said;

Basically, for a few months in office, it is difficult to tell, but I think the few conflicts that we have had, I have been able to manage them, and I think I am confident. Of course, conflicts in academia are frequent and even for the short time I have been dean here, we have had conflicts. How I have managed them, aaa... I would say, "It just takes patience and understanding to solve a conflict. Of course, as much as parties to the conflict ..... are understood. You know, when someone comes to you to report an issue or conflict, the person wants an immediate resolution, but conflict specifically relationship and personal task-related conflicts are not resolved in a day. It is something that will take time to resolve because even understanding

conflicts itself, doesn't come from someone coming to you saying, I have a conflict with so and so or I have a problem here and there. It is quite more than that! Because you have to listen to both parties to actually understand the conflict. Sometimes it goes beyond the two parties because sometimes what parties they are reporting may not be the issue, so it takes an effort from you the leader to actually understand the conflict. Yeah, from the few conflicts I have handled, I think I have ..... I feel there is progress although some are not reasonable .... You just change a small thing, and it becomes an issue. (January 06,2024, Makerere).

Dean J, a 41-year-old psychologist, a senior lecturer and proponent of positive psychology, approaches conflict management with a clear understanding and a blend of personal experience and theoretical knowledge. As a psychologist and a senior lecturer, he believes in the importance of experience, patience and understanding in resolving conflicts, especially in academia where conflicts are frequent. Despite being a proponent of positive psychology, believing in managing problems in a more positive and efficacious way, he still understands himself as a confident but cautious leader, yet successful in specific situations especially when managing conflict. As a relatively young dean, Dean J energetically acknowledges that conflict resolution is a complex process that requires time and effort to create an image of the nature of conflict.

His approach is common to self-efficacious leaders motivated by the concept of symbolizing. They create mental models of conflicting situations in their schools before handling them by emphasizing listening to both parties and understanding the root causes of conflicts, aligning this process with existing information and university regulations. They understand that effective conflict management is not a straight straightforward thing, but often involves addressing underlying issues beyond what is initially presented.

**Observational Cognitive Processing.** This is a cognitive mechanism through which individuals

acquire knowledge, skills, and behaviours by observing and analysing the actions and outcomes of others, particularly those who are considered relevant or experienced, such as their manager and more expert colleagues. Results from this inquiry show that mostly female deans actively observed and analysed the actions of supervisors and experienced colleagues to enhance their efficacy in conflict management. By immersing themselves in this learning environment, they sought to absorb not just theoretical knowledge, but also practical wisdom garnered from their supervisors' experience. Through this process, they aimed to enhance their own efficacy in conflict management and the broader management of complicated situations. They harnessed the collective expertise around them, fostering a sustainable growth trajectory in their professional roles. These deans, however, never received these learning opportunities without making consultations, seeking guidance or soliciting help from their leaders. Dean C, for example, who consulted senior colleagues to navigate intricate conflict scenarios, fortifying her self-efficacy mentioned that;

As dean, first and foremost, I try as much as possible to calm down the conflicted parties until the temperature is low and give them a listening ear after with total impartiality. Sometimes I talk with them separately or together depending on the nature of the conflict. Sometimes when they are separate, they may say things that they cannot repeat when their counterparts are around. I also consult my senior colleagues when a conflict goes out of hand. You call a few and ask them about where to go and what route to take. It always helps me because I always want to solve issues before they escalate. And none has gone out of our school! The moment you succeed in making the conflicting parties open up, then you know that you are on the right route. (December 16, 2023, Makerere).

Dean C, a middle-aged pioneering female Muganda and Catholic dean, a senior lecturer and medical doctor, who was entrusted with leading a school in

Makerere, embodies an efficacious, proactive, and adaptive approach to conflict management, informed by her strong observational cognitive processing abilities. Dean C's background as a pioneering Muganda and Catholic dean, coupled with her roles as a senior lecturer, likely influenced her conflict management approach in being culturally sensitive over dependency on one's knowledge but also consulting and depending on those above you. Accordingly, her professional expertise equips her with critical thinking skills and knowledge of human behaviour, aiding in objective analysis and effective solution development. Enabling her to handle conflicts in her capacity but also seek to learn from observing and listening to others appropriately.

Given Dean C's scenario, leaders in such conflict situations, utilizing their observational cognitive processing are usually inclined to use collaborative leadership which further enhances their conflict management capabilities, fostering cooperation and a positive organizational culture. This works as a sustainable foundation for achieving their management objectives, especially in conflict management.

**Self-Reflective Cognitive Processing.** This involves the systematic examination and analysis of one's thoughts, behaviours, and experiences to guide the next actions. A few Makerere University Deans including the males and females relied on self-reflection to bolster their self-efficacy in conflict management. Incidentally, all of them were Catholics who claimed to regularly take time to reflect and examine their past actions and interventions towards conflict management in their school, from which they glean valuable lessons to inform future decisions. Dean D said;

..... I have gathered a lot of experience since I first led at the departmental level as head of the department. I know where I have failed before, where I have succeeded and the best interventions that work... I always reflect on past interventions

and make decisions ..... hmmm, that is it. (December 20, 2023, Makerere)

Dean D, emerges as a figure of confidence and introspection, navigating the complexities of leadership with a blend of experience, cultural influence, and personal reflection. In his discourse, he unveils a strategic approach to conflict management deeply rooted in his self-reflective cognitive processing.

Dean D's gender and ethnicity, for instance, imbue his leadership style with distinct cultural nuances. As a male dean hailing from the Central region of Uganda, he is attuned to the societal norms and values that underpin interpersonal dynamics. His Muganda heritage instils in him a reverence for community harmony, which informs his empathetic approach to conflict resolution. As a Catholic, he embraces the practice of introspection as a cornerstone of his decision-making process by scrutinizing past actions and interventions as he distils invaluable lessons that fortify his efficacy in managing conflicts.

Dean D's approach portrays the efficacy of leadership experience and understanding that all leaders need, cultivated from self-reflection to acknowledge both past triumphs and failures. Through this lens of retrospection, leaders and in this case, Makerere University deans cultivate a robust self-confidence, fortified by the knowledge gleaned from navigating the unpredictable terrain of leadership in the context of conflict management.

**Self-Regulatory Cognitive Processing.** This involves an individual's active engagement in setting precise objectives and performance criteria for himself and subsequently monitoring his progress against these self-defined benchmarks.

Six deans including five male and one female, all at either a professor or senior lecturer level, utilized self-regulatory cognitive processing to effectively handle task-related conflicts by setting precise objectives and performance criteria for themselves.

They monitored their progress against these benchmarks, driving competitiveness within the university through effective conflict management. Dean G exemplifies this approach by setting up systems for conflict management. She stated that;

But there is something that I have not shared with you and that is prayer. Each morning at 5:00 am or 4:00 I pray for success, for everything that is coming against me, I pray for my students and teachers, I pray against negative energy. So, when I come here, I know, we have to teach, do research and engage the community. So, I quickly have to understand; what I have in place, how can I make it more efficient, then how can I monitor what am doing. So, that is how I try to do things, how can I be able to tell you what the faculty taught? And then, at the end of the semester, I talk to students to get feedback. "You were taught, how was it?" So, with that feedback, I am helped to plan for the next semester. I don't mind whether people feel that I am micromanaging them, or putting pressure on them. So, people can know that is my way. "Can you show that you have taught?" The other thing is that there are several activities at school, and you can't do them alone, so there are committees and I have tried to strengthen them because when you move alone, people complain. So, I did another survey, what do you want these committees to do? So, I used that information to formulate duties for committees. I worked with what was there before, but I made smaller committees. Instead of 18 people, I made committees of 10 to 11 people. I also gave them ToRs. I wanted them to own the work. So, I told them, that you as committees, look at these ToRs and see what you are going to work on. After that, I ask them to develop a work plan and they share this in a meeting, so we capture what we did; at the end of the semester, I put an academic board in which they share, and I also share what I have been up to. And then we agree on what they can do better and do differently next semester. I am happy about this because I have set up systems which I can monitor. With this strategy I feel, and I am confident that I



will be able to manage conflicts today and in future. (December 13, 2023, Makerere).

Dean G, a female academic in her early fifties at Makerere University, stands as a beacon of confident and strategic leadership, drawing from a rich tapestry of self-regulatory cognitive processing, self-efficacy, and her cultural and religious background. Dean G's gender, age, ethnicity (Muganda), and religious affiliation (born-again Christian)—shape her leadership style and conflict management strategies in profound ways. As a middle-aged woman with roots in the Buganda culture, she brings a nurturing and peace-oriented perspective to her role, reflecting the values of her community. Her strong organizational skills and penchant for harmony align seamlessly with her cultural heritage, guiding her efforts to foster collaboration and cohesion within her academic institution. Additionally, her faith as a born-again Christian infuses her actions with purpose and moral clarity, anchoring her commitment to excellence and integrity.

Leaders of this kind have a palpable sense of assurance, underpinned by unwavering self-efficacy. Their confidence emanates from a robust framework of goal setting, monitoring, and feedback, showcasing their readiness to tackle any obstacle that comes their way. This is in line with self-regulatory cognitive processing. Through this iterative process, they continually refine their approach, laying solid foundations for sustained success.

## DISCUSSION

This study aimed to discover how Makerere University deans utilize their psychological capital self-efficacy in the management of conflicts. In this context, self-efficacy was understood as a strong belief or conviction that serves as a driving force, motivating university managers towards success by selecting conflict management strategies that lead to effective conflict management. Results show that deans exhibited various self-efficacy utilization

dynamics influenced by cognitive processes with the interplay of gender, educational rank, and religious background. Each cognitive processing theme highlighted different strategies and approaches deans used, demonstrating the complexity and depth of self-efficacy in conflict management among the deans agreeable to Kew and Tasir (2021).

For instance, the study found that academic deans who predominantly used symbolizing cognitive processes to enhance their efficacy in conflict management—by visualizing and constructing representations of conflict situations for effective decision-making—were mainly male (with one female) and held higher academic ranks (professors, senior lecturers). This suggests that higher academic career rank (Gumiran, 2022) and male gender identity may be associated with a preference for gaining a clear and independent understanding of conflict situations before attempting to resolve them, often through thorough investigation. This is supported by studies by Jockwitz et al. (2021), who found that females tend to process information in a more detailed and segmented manner, focusing on individual components rather than the whole picture, while males tend to process information more globally, integrating various cognitive functions and considering the broader context rather than isolated details. Males' processing strategy is typically characterized by a systematic and extensive scan of the task. This way, males tend to gather broad data over a given conflict situation before handling it.

Further, findings indicate that academic deans who enhanced their efficacy in conflict management by acquiring knowledge and skills through observing and analyzing the actions and outcomes of their supervisors and experienced colleagues (observational cognitive processing) were predominantly female (with one male). This suggests that female deans often adopt a cautious approach to conflict situations, preferring to align their self-efficacious strategies with tested practical

wisdom beyond theoretical knowledge, which they acquire through consultations and guidance from senior colleagues (Maki, 2015).

Additionally, Giofrè (2024) found that females perform better on tasks requiring concentration, calmness, and attention, components crucial for the utilization of observational cognitive processing. These findings highlight the importance of recognizing specific strengths and weaknesses in the utilization of different cognitive processes by both males and females to develop conflict management policies that are gender- and culture-specific to improve conflict management.

Regarding deans who demonstrated self-efficacy in conflict management through systematic examination and analysis of their thoughts, behaviours, and experiences to guide future actions for conflict management (self-reflective cognitive processing), both male and female deans were represented, but predominantly Catholics. They regularly reflected on past actions and interventions to learn valuable lessons from their failures and successes. This finding suggests that Catholics may be inclined to approach conflict management through thorough reflection on their strengths and weaknesses, deciding whether to maintain or adjust strategies for better outcomes. This tendency may be influenced by their religious mentorship (Nel, 2018).

While these findings align with those of Criado-Perez et al. (2024), which indicate that cognitive reflection helps leaders to question an intuitive response and rely instead on a more analytical process that aids decision-making accuracy, this study finds no connection to faith they contradict several scientific findings related to the gender and religiosity. For instance, whereas this study found that reflective processing was related to religion (Catholicism) and both genders, Staniszewska et al. (2021) assert that in their study, females and highly religious people displayed an impulsive cognitive style, while males and the less religious thought more reflectively. Further, while this study found

that both male and female deans utilized their self-efficacy through self-reflective cognitive processes, previous studies like that of Espín et al. (2021) show that women tend to be more egalitarian and less self-interested than men, whereas men tend to be more concerned with social efficiency motives; thus, women rely more on intuition while men are more reflective.

Lastly, this study found that some deans (five male, one female) at the professor or senior lecturer levels demonstrated their self-efficacy by setting precise objectives and conflict management performance criteria or systems for themselves, which they monitored for progress and adjusted based on feedback (self-regulatory cognitive processing). These six deans, predominantly males, were also found to be utilizing symbolizing cognitive processes. This suggests that these deans gain their efficacy in conflict management through effective data utilization, embracing innovation and creativity, and dynamically setting strategies informed by data from their monitoring and evaluation processes. These findings align with those of Bartimote-Aufflick et al. (2015), which indicate that self-efficacy is related to factors such as value, self-regulation and metacognition, locus of control, intrinsic motivation, and strategy learning use, which in turn help in setting strategies for challenging scenarios like conflict management. Related to gender differences in the utilization of self-regulation, the findings of this study concur with those of Appiah-Kubi et al. (2022), who found that male high-level students had more self-regulated learning capacities than their female counterparts, though both sexes could similarly engage in their academic pursuits.

## **CONCLUSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This study explored how Makerere University deans use psychological capital self-efficacy in conflict management, revealing diverse dynamics influenced by cognitive processes, gender, academic rank, and religious background. Male

deans with higher academic ranks preferred symbolizing cognitive processes, and visualizing conflict situations comprehensively before resolution. Female deans favoured observational cognitive processing, enhancing self-efficacy by learning from experienced colleagues. Deans using self-reflective cognitive processing, mainly Catholics, analyzed past actions to guide future strategies. Some male deans at higher academic levels employed self-regulatory cognitive processing, setting precise objectives and adjusting strategies based on feedback. The study concludes that gender- and cultural issues interplay the use of psychological capital in the management of conflict.

This study therefore recommends that Makerere University's human resource development programs should focus on encouraging mentorship programs where less experienced deans can learn through observation and guidance from senior colleagues to facilitate the transfer of practical wisdom and enhance the conflict management capabilities of all deans. In addition, regular reflective practice sessions should be conducted at the school level, where deans can analyse past conflict management experiences to improve future strategies, to promote a culture of self-reflection that leads to better decision-making and positive conflict management outcomes. Further, deans should utilize data-driven approaches in setting objectives and performance criteria for conflict management to ensure that deans utilize feedback and monitoring systems to dynamically adjust their strategies for more effective conflict management.

Policymakers at Makerere University should develop and implement gender-sensitive training programs, and modules, focusing on enhancing conflict management skills to address the different cognitive processing styles of male and female deans to leverage their strengths in conflict management. They should also be tailored to different religious backgrounds to accommodate the reflective processes observed among Catholic deans. Additionally, Makerere University's

professional development policies should establish continuous professional development programs that enhance self-efficacy through observational learning, symbolizing processes, and self-regulatory practices to equip deans with the necessary skills to handle conflicts effectively by learning from experienced colleagues and utilizing innovative strategies. Future research should focus on exploring the interplay of cognitive processes, gender, educational rank, and religious background in conflict management to build a more comprehensive understanding of how these factors influence self-efficacy and conflict management strategies.

### **Declaration**

I, Proscovia Nalwadda, hereby declare that this proposal titled: "Discovering how Makerere University Deans Utilize their Psychological Capital Self-efficacy in Managing Conflict" is my original work, and to the best of my knowledge, it has never been presented for any award in any educational institution whatsoever.

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### **Conflict of interest/competing interests**

Not Applicable.

### **Availability of data and material for data transparency**

The datasets generated and/or analysed during the current study are available on Makerere University Institutional Repository, <http://hdl.handle.net/10570/13993>

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