Original Article

Navigating Cultural Diversity in the Workplace of the College of Hospitality and Tourism Management, University of the Cordilleras

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Received: 18 August 2026; Revised: 30 September 2026;
Accepted: 02 October 2026; Published: 07 October 2026

DOI: https://doi.org/10.66074/N2M5Z1D9Y

Abstract

Cultural diversity within higher education workplaces creates both opportunity and strain, a tension that is sharpened within institutions situated in strong indigenous cultural regions. This qualitative case study examined cross-cultural orientation and workplace diversity among the faculty and staff of the College of Hospitality and Tourism Management (CHTM) at the University of the Cordilleras in the Philippines. Thirteen participants, spanning the college dean, administrative staff, an OJT coordinator, and faculty of varied regional backgrounds, took part through a fast-write interview method, chosen deliberately over full oral interviews to elicit candid responses across a power-differentiated sample and limit social-desirability pressure; responses were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Five themes emerged, treated as co-occurring patterns rather than a validated sequence: a diverse yet unevenly embraced organizational culture; language as a central barrier to integration; empathy as a primary coping strategy; informal cross-cultural learning as an underused resource; and existing goodwill as a foundation for collaboration. The study also proposes evidence-based recommendations, including a cultural dialogue forum and a formal DEI policy for OJT placement, while noting the exploratory, single-institution scope of these findings.

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Volume 2, Issue 4, December 2026

Keywords: Cordillera, cross-cultural orientation, hospitality education, intercultural competence, organizational culture, workplace diversity

1. Introduction

Workplaces everywhere have grown more culturally mixed as globalization accelerates staff mobility and pushes institutions toward internationalization, and higher education has not been spared this shift (Mor Barak, 2022). Within the Philippine setting, that shift plays out with particular intensity within institutions built in indigenous cultural regions, where an already distinct local identity now has to absorb an increasingly mixed incoming workforce, a dynamic that looks nothing like what happens on culturally uniform urban campuses. Recent scholarship has moved this conversation toward more granular, individual-level frameworks than earlier macro-cultural models offered: Semenov and Randrianasolo (2024) extend cultural intelligence (CQ) theory to examine how individuals, not just national cultures, adapt across differences, and Kebe et al. (2025) show empirically that culturally attuned leadership shapes employee behavior at the level of daily organizational practice rather than broad national comparison. This study is grounded primarily in that individual- and workplace-level tradition, using broader cultural dimensions frameworks only as background context rather than as the primary analytic lens.

The University of the Cordilleras (UC) sits precisely at that crossroads, in Baguio City within the Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR). Its College of Hospitality and Tourism Management (CHTM) draws staff and faculty from across the archipelago, integrating them into a working environment shaped from the ground up by Igorot customs and values. Cross-cultural orientation, in the sense used here, is the mix of awareness, knowledge, and skill a person accumulates when confronted with cultural difference at work, a concept most usefully unpacked through Hall's separation of high-context from low-context communication: in high-context settings, meaning rides on relationship and situational cue far more than on anything spoken outright, a distinction that continues to shape how intercultural communication competence is taught and studied within tourism and hospitality education specifically (Badu-Baiden et al., 2025). Left to itself, that gap in communication style tends to curdle into friction and crossed wires; managed with intention, it can just as easily turn into a source of fresh thinking and institutional staying power.

Philippine higher-education scholarship has begun documenting this same aspiration-versus-practice gap, though seldom within a campus wrapped in a dominant indigenous culture, as CHTM is. Working across Philippine higher education institutions nationwide, Castulo et al. (2026) reported that Gender Equity, Diversity, and Inclusivity (GEDI) work tends to remain symbolic in practice, appearing in mission statements without a corresponding push into curriculum, faculty training, or any mechanism to hold the institution accountable. Raton-Hibanada et al. (2025)

reached a comparable conclusion after studying a Philippine university's community extension work, pointing to unfamiliarity with diversity concepts, cultural pushback, and limited resources as recurring barriers. What neither study reaches, and what this study takes up, is the specific case of a hospitality and tourism college sitting inside the Cordillera Administrative Region, where the surrounding indigenous culture is not background scenery but a defining feature of the workplace itself.

This gap between stated commitment and lived practice is not unique to the Philippine setting. Mor Barak (2022) argues that organizations frequently distinguish between diversity, the presence of demographic and cultural differences within a workforce, and inclusion, the degree to which those differences are actively valued and integrated into everyday organizational life, and that many workplaces achieve the former without the latter. Rathee et al. (2024) extend this distinction into the specific domain of human resource management, finding that cross-cultural diversity initiatives frequently remain concentrated at the level of policy statement and recruitment rather than reaching day-to-day interpersonal practice. Read together, this literature suggests that a college's leadership expressing commitment to inclusivity, as this study later finds CHTM's own Dean does, is a necessary but not sufficient condition for genuine inclusion; whether that commitment reaches the level of everyday faculty experience is an empirical question this study is positioned to answer.

Four research questions guided the inquiry into cross-cultural orientation, workplace diversity, and intercultural dynamics among CHTM's faculty and staff: What demographic and organizational characteristics define cultural diversity within the CHTM workplace? How do CHTM employees describe their own cross-cultural experiences, perceptions, and adaptation strategies? What challenges and what opportunities surface from cross-cultural interaction inside the college? And what evidence-based recommendations or framework could strengthen intercultural understanding and collaboration in the future?

Two things justify the study: one practical, one scholarly. On the practical side, it gives CHTM's administrators and human resources staff something to build culturally responsive policy on, rather than guesswork or anecdotes. On the scholarly side, it takes up Castulo et al.'s (2026) call for research that gets past symbolic institutional gestures to examine how diversity is actually negotiated at the level of the working unit, and it fills out the still-thin literature on workplace diversity specifically within Philippine hospitality and tourism education, a field where intercultural competence is a core professional outcome rather than an afterthought, given its curricula and its direct ties to industry (Sarwari et al., 2024; Semenov & Randrianasolo, 2024).

An Input-Process-Output (IPO) framework organizes the study. The inputs are CHTM's diverse employees, its established institutional policies, and the cross-cultural experiences lived within the college. The process involves structured fast-write interviews followed by reflexive thematic analysis of the resulting interviews. The output is a set of evidence-based recommendations meant to strengthen inclusivity and collaboration campus-wide. Theoretically, the study rests on Hofstede's Cultural

Dimensions Theory, whose continued relevance to workplace and leadership behavior is demonstrated empirically by Kebe et al. (2025), and which treats workplace behavior as shaped along axes such as power distance, individualism versus collectivism, and uncertainty avoidance, paired with Semenov and Randrianasolo's (2024) extended Cultural Intelligence (CQ) framework, which supplies a way of examining how individuals adapt and build intercultural competence. The study is limited to CHTM's faculty and staff during the academic year 2025–2026 and does not extend to the university's other colleges or its student body.

The stakes run higher here than they might elsewhere, given the college's discipline. Hospitality and tourism programs across the Philippines already treat intercultural competence as a core learning outcome, since graduates step into guest-facing industry roles that demand exactly that skill (Sarwari et al., 2024). A college asking its faculty to teach intercultural competence while its own workplace has not yet formalized that same competence internally runs into a credibility problem worth naming: whether CHTM models, and not merely teaches, intercultural competence bears directly on how deep that instruction actually goes. What this study finds, then, matters beyond internal college administration — it speaks to whether CHTM's own institutional practice keeps pace with the demands it places on the graduates it sends into the workforce.

2. Methodology

A qualitative case study design anchors this research, chosen because it suits the examination of a present-day phenomenon inside its actual real-world setting (Miller et al., 2023). The study takes fast-write interview data originally gathered across four structured areas of exploration, organizational and demographic profiling, lived cross-cultural experience, challenges and opportunities, and strategic recommendations, and formalizes them into a single bounded case rather than treating each as a stand-alone exercise, allowing the earlier activity-level material to be re-examined together under formal thematic analysis. This design allowed the researcher to capture the specific, textured experience of CHTM's faculty and staff as they navigate cultural diversity within a single bounded academic unit, situated within the interpretive paradigm, where meaning is understood as something participants construct through their own perspectives and lived experience. All data collection happened on-site at CHTM, University of the Cordilleras, Baguio City.

Purposive sampling yielded 13 participants, chosen to represent the range of roles and cultural backgrounds present at CHTM: the college dean, one administrative staff member, one OJT coordinator, and 10 faculty members. Among the faculty group, the researcher deliberately sought out people from outside the Cordillera region, faculty who had transferred in from other institutions, and long-tenured educators with a decade or more at UC. Inclusion required only current CHTM employment and a willingness to share workplace experience voluntarily; no one was excluded on any basis other than declining to take part.

A fast-write interview instrument gathered the data, a structured yet informal technique that gives each participant a single, focused prompt for each area of exploration and asks for an immediate, unedited response in a sentence or two. This method was selected specifically because it tends to elicit authentic, spontaneous answers while reducing the social desirability bias that a formal interview setting can introduce. The instrument covered thirteen areas of exploration nested within three thematic domains: organizational profile, lived cross-cultural experience, and challenges and opportunities. The researcher built it specifically for this study rather than adapting it from an existing validated scale, in keeping with its role as an exploratory qualitative probe rather than a psychometric instrument.

All thirteen fast-write responses were collected within a single data-collection session on the CHTM premises. Participants were briefed on the purpose of the study, given written prompts for their assigned area of exploration, and asked to respond in their own words, without researcher intervention, to preserve the spontaneity the fast-write method depends on. Completed responses were compiled and prepared for analysis immediately following collection.

In direct response to peer-review feedback that the original single-round fast-write data were thin, a second data-collection phase was conducted approximately two months after the original session. This phase differed in modality from the first: rather than a second written instrument, the researcher conducted a brief, casual discussion with each of the thirteen original participants, individually, in which each participant's own original written response was read back to them and they were invited to elaborate verbally, with the researcher noting down what they added. All thirteen participants chose to take part. This follow-up phase yielded meaningfully richer material than the original single-sentence prompts alone, including detail not present in the original round; both rounds are integrated throughout the Results below and cited together as a single respondent code, since they represent the same individual's account elaborated over two points in time rather than two separate participants. The author is transparent that this shift in modality is a genuine methodological trade-off rather than a cost-free improvement: the original fast-write format was chosen specifically, as justified above, to reduce deference and social-desirability pressure in a sample that includes the College Dean alongside her own reporting staff, by removing the researcher's real-time presence from the moment of response; the follow-up round, being a live discussion with the researcher present, reintroduces that same interpersonal dynamic for the elaboration data specifically, even though rapport had already been established through the original written round and each participant was elaborating on their own prior words rather than disclosing new sensitive material for the first time. This trade-off and its implications for how the follow-up data should be weighted relative to the original written responses are addressed further in the Discussion and Limitations below.

Participation was strictly voluntary throughout. Before taking part, each participant was briefed on the study's purpose and assured that their responses would remain confidential. In line with the Philippines' Data Privacy Act of 2012 (Republic

Act No. 10173), full names are withheld from this paper; participants appear only under a respondent code (R1–R13) paired with initials. Nothing beyond the professional role and cultural background was collected about any participant, and consent was deemed given once a participant chose to complete the fast-write instrument voluntarily. Every respondent is cited as a personal communication (APA 7th ed.) throughout. Because this study grew out of doctoral coursework rather than an externally funded or clinical protocol, it did not pass through a formal institutional research ethics board, and no ethics approval number applies. Individual informed consent was obtained: each participant was told directly what the study involved. The author acknowledges that formal institutional ethics board review represents a stronger standard of participant protection than the measures implemented here, and recognizes this as a limitation of the present study rather than an equivalent alternative; formal ethics clearance will be sought for any future extension of this research line, and participants could withdraw at any point without any consequence to them.

The choice of a fast-write instrument over a full oral interview format warrants explicit justification, not as a matter of convenience but as a deliberate methodological response to this study's specific power dynamics. Given that this study's respondent pool included the College Dean and other individuals in positions of institutional authority relative to several other participants, and given that the researcher is a colleague of every participant rather than an external interviewer, a written, self-paced response format was judged less likely to produce socially desirable or deferential answers than a face-to-face interview, since participants could compose their response privately, without an interviewer present to react to it in real time or to whom a subordinate participant might feel obligated to perform candor. This trade-off came at a real cost: it forfeits the follow-up probing a full interview would allow, and it yields shorter individual responses than an extended interview transcript would, a limitation this study does not minimize and returns to explicitly in the Discussion and Limitations sections below. The instrument was nonetheless judged appropriate to this study's exploratory aim, which prioritized breadth of candid first-impression data across the full range of institutional roles present at CHTM over depth from a smaller, more institutionally constrained set of interviewees; reflexive thematic analysis, as Braun and Clarke (2022) describe it, is explicitly compatible with shorter meaning units, since its unit of analysis is the code and the pattern across codes rather than the length of any single response.

Reflexive thematic analysis, per Braun and Clarke (2022), structured the coding: familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, building candidate themes, reviewing and refining those themes, naming and defining them, and finally writing up the report. Each response was read in full first, then coded inductively to extract recurring patterns and meaningful units of sense-making. Codes were then grouped into broader themes spanning the three areas of exploration, with representative verbatim statements selected to ground each theme.

Methodological rigor was evaluated against the qualitative criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Guba & Lincoln, 2001), consistent

with established standards for establishing trustworthiness in qualitative inquiry. Credibility was pursued through investigator-led triangulation: because the researcher is both a full-time CHTM faculty member and a member of the Cordilleran cultural group under study, an insider position shaped the entire data collection and analysis process, and a reflexive memo ran alongside the coding to catch moments where personal familiarity, rather than the data itself, might be steering a code or theme; the analysis deliberately leaned on direct, verbatim participant language over paraphrase to guard against this. Dependability was supported by an audit trail linking each reported theme back to its originating response and coding decision across both rounds of data collection. Confirmability rested on the same reflexive memoing practice, anchoring interpretation in participants' own words rather than the researcher's prior assumptions. Transferability, addressed further in the Discussion and Limitations below, is supported by the thick description of CHTM's specific institutional context provided throughout this manuscript, while explicitly disclaiming statistical generalizability beyond it. Saturation appeared to be reached well within the thirteen-participant sample: coding the last several responses turned up no genuinely new codes, only reinforcement of patterns that had already surfaced. That convergence, cutting across a deliberately mixed sample spanning the dean, the OJT coordinator, administrative staff, and faculty with differing tenures and regional backgrounds, served as a further form of triangulation: the same themes kept appearing from structurally different vantage points rather than from a single type of informant.

The fast-write instrument's design followed the study's four research questions, sequencing participants from lower-stakes, descriptive prompts (organizational and demographic profile) toward higher-stakes, more reflective ones (lived challenges and recommendations), a deliberate build meant to ease participants into candor rather than demand it upfront. Responses were compiled into a single de-identified dataset immediately after collection, with respondent codes (R1–R13) assigned only at the compilation stage rather than during collection, so the researcher did not hold any participant's identity in mind while coding and analyzing. The de-identified dataset is stored in a password-protected file accessible only to the researcher, in keeping with the confidentiality assurance given to participants up front.

3. Results

Table 1. Demographic and organizational characteristics of the CHTM workplace sample (N = 13).

Role	Count	Percentage
Faculty	10	76.9%
College Dean	1	7.7%
Other Staff (OJT Coordinator, Admin Staff)	2	15.4%

CHTM draws its workforce from several Philippine regions at once, a fact the college's own administrative staff independently confirmed. All thirteen invited

participants completed the fast-write instrument, yielding a 100% response rate, and no responses were excluded from the analysis.

Theme 1: Diversity, Present but Uneven

Leadership and OJT-level policy at CHTM articulate a clearly inclusive institutional stance. Faculty accounts, however, ranged from viewing that diversity as a strength to seeing it as a source of quiet, ongoing tension, revealing a real distance between what the college states as its values and what its diverse workforce actually experiences day to day.

"their faculty come from different cultures; they are from NCR, here in CAR, there also from Regions 1 and 3" (R2)
"we foster an environment where members of diverse backgrounds are valued for their unique perspectives and contributions" (R1)
"always take into consideration both the physical health and mental health of students and faculty advisers" (R3)
"a little bit of everything — strength, ignored, or sometimes a source of tension" (R4)

Theme 2: Language Is the Biggest Wall

Faculty who came to CHTM from outside the Cordillera described a three-stage arc: initial overwhelm, gradual adjustment, and eventually genuine meaning-making, driven mainly by the language barrier and limited prior exposure to Cordilleran culture. This connects to cultural clustering and to perceptions of communication style, though this study did not directly measure individual communication orientation and so treats high-context/low-context framing as interpretive context rather than a verified claim about any individual.

"Overwhelming as someone who is not from the CAR, I felt overwhelmed by the fact that I cannot speak the language, and has limited knowledge about their culture" (R6)
"I thought about ways to communicate with them, especially since from my previous job we barely spoke as it's completely different culture" (R8)
"I really wanted to fit with the group who are more on to read between the lines" (R8)
"taught myself on ways to communicate through observation" (R8)
"language barrier, cultural beliefs, adjusting in work environment" (R10)
"Cultural differences is quite visible here in CAR, although I cannot state whether it's positive or negative" (R7)
"not outspoken… quite reserved and content to work without being noticed" (R5)

A pattern not present in the original round of data collection emerged clearly once follow-up elaboration was gathered: three participants independently extended this theme beyond colleague-to-colleague dynamics to their relationships with students, suggesting that faculty already practice, informally and in the classroom, the kind of intercultural modeling the college has not yet formalized institutionally.

> *"student[s] will use their own dialect to speak in class to explain their thoughts" (R6)*
> *"in the classroom, I have different students with different languages and cultures, and it's a challenge to express and share my ideas, considering there are sensitive parts" (R10)*

Theme 3: Empathy Fills the Gap

Where misunderstanding did surface, participants pointed to self-initiated empathy, not any formal institutional program, as the way through it. This transcript evidence is direct, if drawn from a subset of the sample rather than a majority.

> *"It helps when you take the initiative to acknowledge the misunderstanding and make efforts to resolve it by exercising empathy" (R11)*
> *"Conflicts become smaller when trying to consider things from the other perspective. Accepting that we are only human and that we grow from different environments and backgrounds affects our perspective. Respect begins with respect" (R11)*
> *"to see that we also apply what was discussed in class" (R13)*

Theme 4: Learning Happens, Informally

Several participants described their cross-cultural exposure as a genuine source of professional growth, learning that passes person-to-person but that the institution has no formal way of capturing.

> *"It has taught me a few different cultures that I was not aware of, both personally and professionally, which I can also share with my students about culture of other people" (R9)*
> *"the best thing that has come out of working in a culturally diverse team is learning the culture of others and applying it in daily routine of our work" (R12)*
> *"not only in the faculty room but outside" (R12)*

Theme 5: Goodwill Is Already There

A reserve of everyday goodwill was described by participants across all roles in the sample, independently of one another, signaling that accommodating difference is already a shared norm at CHTM, even without formal structure to back it.

"everyone is adjusting to each difference, like the gender" (R13)

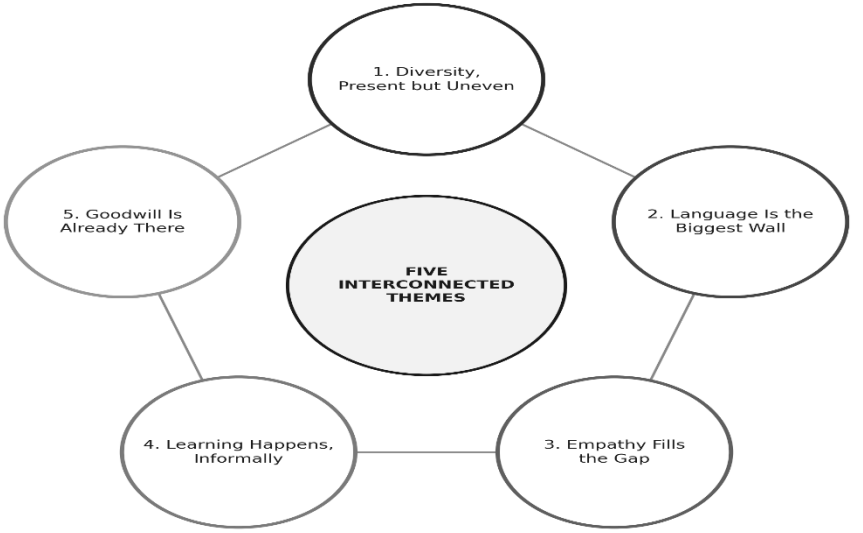


Figure 1. How the five themes relate: a conceptual map of cross-cultural experience at CHTM.

How the Themes Relate to One Another

Taken together, Table 1 and Figure 1 show these five themes as conceptually interconnected rather than as scattered, unrelated observations. It is important to be precise about what the data can and cannot establish here: because all responses were collected from different individuals rather than tracked longitudinally within the same participants, these themes should be read as co-occurring patterns across the sample, not as a validated temporal sequence or causal cycle that any individual employee necessarily moves through.

In line with standard practice in reflexive thematic analysis, the coding also deliberately attended to responses that broke from the dominant five-theme pattern rather than folding only the majority view into the account. Respondent R2, the administrative staff participant, framed the workplace mostly in operational rather than

cultural terms; Respondent R3, the OJT Coordinator, spoke largely in policy terms, describing the college's handling of diversity as already working well. Rather than smoothing these over as contradictions, this study treats them as evidence that cross-cultural experience at CHTM shifts meaningfully by role: those in policy-facing or administrative positions describe the college's diversity climate in more settled, institutional terms, while classroom-facing faculty describe something still in motion and occasionally uneven.

4. Discussion

Taken against the four research questions that opened this study, the findings show a CHTM workforce that is culturally diverse in composition but unevenly diverse in how that diversity is actually lived: leadership and OJT-level policy state an inclusive institutional position clearly, yet faculty accounts range from experiencing that diversity as a strength to experiencing it as a quiet, ongoing tension. Employees' cross-cultural experience follows a fairly consistent path from initial overwhelm through deliberate adaptation to eventual professional payoff, with language and high-context communication style standing out as the central obstacle throughout, and self-initiated empathy, not any formal institutional program, standing out as the main resource employees lean on to manage it. These findings cut across all five themes identified in the Results: a diverse but unevenly embraced culture (Theme 1), language as the central barrier (Theme 2), empathy as the primary coping strategy (Theme 3), informal cross-cultural learning (Theme 4), and existing goodwill as a foundation for collaboration (Theme 5).

These results line up closely with recent Philippine higher-education scholarship. Castulo et al. (2026) found GEDI integration across Philippine institutions to be "largely symbolic," present in mission statements without a matching push into curriculum, coordinated strategy, or accountability; this study carries that observation from the curricular level down to the daily workplace, showing the same gap between CHTM's stated inclusivity and the uneven experience its own faculty report living through. Raton-Hibanada et al. (2025) found something similar in a Philippine university's community extension work, pointing to unfamiliarity with diversity concepts and thin resources as recurring institutional obstacles; the language barrier and cultural clustering documented here read as CHTM's own workplace-level version of that same unfamiliarity. Sarwari et al.'s (2024) account of high-context communication offers one plausible interpretive lens for why the language barrier surfaces so consistently, in that Cordilleran cultural groups have been characterized in the broader literature as communicating through channels that are more implicit and relational; however, this study did not directly measure participants' individual communication orientation, so this connection is offered as a candidate explanation the data are consistent with rather than a claim the data independently establish. Read

this way, the overwhelm Respondent R6 described and the adaptation strategy Respondent R8 worked out are more defensibly framed as this study's participants' own reported experience of difference, which may or may not generalize to Cordilleran communication style as a whole, than as evidence of a verified cultural trait.

This pattern maps closely onto Mor Barak's (2022) distinction between diversity and inclusion introduced earlier: CHTM demonstrably has diversity, a workforce drawn from multiple Philippine regions, and it has leadership-level rhetoric of inclusion, articulated directly by Respondent R1, yet the faculty-level accounts gathered here, ranging from R4's ambivalent "strength, ignored, or sometimes a source of tension" to R6's account of genuine overwhelm, suggest that inclusion in Mor Barak's fuller sense, the active, felt integration of difference into everyday belonging, has not yet fully arrived. Rathee et al.'s (2024) finding that cross-cultural HRM initiatives often remain concentrated at the level of policy rather than daily practice offers a precise description of what this study finds at CHTM: real DEI-aligned policy exists, particularly in OJT placement as Respondent R3 described, but the everyday interpersonal experience of faculty has not yet caught up to that policy layer. This is not a contradiction in the data but confirmation of a well-documented organizational pattern, observed here in a setting, a hospitality college embedded within a strong indigenous regional culture, where it had not previously been examined.

Theory and practice meet closely here. Theoretically, the finding that empathy operates as an important self-initiated strategy for several participants reflects what Liao and Thomas (2025) theorize as the CQ-Action dimension of cultural intelligence, the behavioral capacity to adjust one's actions across culturally diverse situations, and it extends Semenov and Randrianasolo's (2024) conceptualization of CQ by showing it operating informally, as an individual coping strategy, well ahead of any institutional CQ-building program. It also lines up with Odame and Pandey's (2025) finding that emotional and cultural competencies, empathy chief among them, shape how individuals manage interpersonal conflict across cultural lines. The transcript evidence for this pattern is direct, if drawn from a subset of the sample rather than a majority: Respondent R11 (D.Z.) described taking deliberate initiative rather than waiting for formal process, noting that "it helps when you take the initiative to acknowledge the misunderstanding and make efforts to resolve it by exercising empathy" (R11); Respondent R8 (D.C.) described a comparable self-directed effort to adapt her own communication rather than expecting the institution to bridge the gap for her, reflecting that "I really wanted to fit with the group who are more on to read between the lines" (R8); and Respondent R9 (M.R.) described drawing on that same cross-cultural exposure constructively, carrying it forward into his own teaching. These three accounts, together with Respondent R12's (A.L.) framing of cross-cultural learning as "the best thing that has come out of working in a culturally diverse team" (R12), are offered here as illustrative of a pattern present in roughly a third of the sample rather than as evidence that empathy is CHTM's dominant or universal response to cultural

friction; the claim this study makes is that empathy is a real, recurring, self-initiated strategy worth institutional attention, not that it is the only or even the most common response among all thirteen participants. Practically, this points to a specific, low-cost opening: CHTM does not need to manufacture intercultural competence from scratch, since a genuine, if partial, reserve of goodwill and empathy is already present among its faculty and staff; what the institution has not yet done is give that goodwill the shape of structured language orientation, dialogue forums, and written DEI policy that would let it operate more consistently and reach newcomers before the kind of overwhelm Respondent R6 described sets in.

Several limitations temper these findings. First, this is a bounded, single-college case study with thirteen participants, and the findings are not intended to generalize statistically to other academic units, though they may be transferable to comparable settings that share CHTM's core condition, a workplace situated within a strong regional culture that recruits staff from lower-context, more explicit-communication backgrounds elsewhere in the country. Second, the fast-write method, chosen deliberately to capture authentic, spontaneous reaction, by design initially captured brief impressions rather than extended narrative; a second, follow-up round of data collection was subsequently conducted with all thirteen participants specifically to address this. This follow-up round took the form of a brief individual discussion rather than a second written instrument, which meaningfully deepened the dataset but also reintroduced, specifically for the follow-up material, the researcher's real-time presence that the original written format had been chosen to avoid; because this sample includes the College Dean alongside her own reporting staff, the possibility that follow-up elaborations carry more social-desirability influence than the original written responses cannot be ruled out, even though participants were elaborating on their own prior words rather than disclosing new material for the first time. Third, the researcher's own position as a Cordilleran CHTM faculty member, while managed through reflexive memoing and a deliberate emphasis on verbatim participant language, cannot be fully separated from the interpretive choices made during coding, and a differently positioned researcher might have weighted some themes differently; this concern applies with particular force to the follow-up discussions, which the same researcher personally conducted. Fourth, data were collected across two rounds two months apart in mid-2026, and cross-cultural dynamics that shift across a full academic year, for instance around the arrival of new faculty or major college events, are not captured here. Fifth, and importantly, individual participants' communication orientation was not directly measured through any validated instrument; the high-context and low-context framing used to interpret language-related findings draws on broader literature about Cordilleran and regional communication patterns rather than on data establishing this for each participant, and readers should treat cultural-region and communication-style claims in this study as interpretive context rather than as verified individual-level findings. Sixth, the five themes reported in the Results are best read as co-occurring patterns identified across a cross-sectional sample rather than

as a validated process or sequence that individual employees necessarily move through over time.

These results carry specific weight for CHTM's curricular and industry-facing mission as well, and the follow-up data collection round produced direct evidence for what was initially only a plausible inference. Respondents R6, R10, and R13 each independently extended their account of cross-cultural navigation from colleague relationships into their own classrooms, describing concern for students' dialect use, the challenge of teaching across culturally diverse student groups, and a deliberate effort to model the same respect for difference they discuss in class (see Results, Theme 2). This confirms empirically, rather than merely suggests theoretically, that CHTM faculty are not confining intercultural navigation to their own workplace relationships; several are already extending it into their teaching practice, informally and without institutional prompting. If hospitality and tourism graduates are meant to exercise intercultural competence on the job, this faculty-driven modeling, documented directly in participants' own words rather than assumed, is a pedagogical resource the college is not yet formally recognizing or building on, a point that resonates directly with Badu-Baiden et al.'s (2025) account of how intercultural communication competence is taught and studied specifically within tourism and hospitality education: faculty who have personally worked through the overwhelm-to-adaptation arc Respondents R6 and R8 described, who have built the kind of deliberate communication strategy R8 named as observation, or who are already modeling respect for difference in their own classrooms as R13 described, hold experiential knowledge that could feed directly into intercultural competence instruction rather than staying locked inside private, individual practice. Even a modest mechanism for faculty to share that knowledge, whether through the proposed Cultural Dialogue Forum or structured mentorship for incoming faculty, would strengthen the college's internal climate and its classroom content at the same time, closing the coherence gap raised earlier between what CHTM teaches and what it practices.

5. Conclusion

This study examined cross-cultural orientation and workplace diversity within CHTM at the University of the Cordilleras. The findings show that the workforce is culturally diverse, with employees from several Philippine regions and a dominant Cordilleran cultural presence. Participants described recurring experiences of adjustment, language barriers, cultural clustering, communication differences, and empathy-based collaboration. These patterns suggest that CHTM's diversity climate is generally functional at the interpersonal level but remains formally underdeveloped in terms of institutional support. Based on these findings, CHTM may consider formalizing DEI-related practices for faculty onboarding and OJT placements, establishing a semestral Cultural Dialogue Forum, providing language and culture orientation for newly hired personnel from outside the Cordillera, and supporting

existing empathy-based approaches to conflict resolution. These recommendations should be viewed as initial directions rather than definitive policy prescriptions, as the study involved only 13 participants within a single academic unit. Future studies may include student perspectives and use larger, comparative, and longitudinal designs across other higher education institutions in the Cordillera Administrative Region. Overall, the findings suggest that CHTM already possesses a foundation of intercultural goodwill and adaptability, but these strengths could be reinforced through more structured institutional mechanisms.

Acknowledgment

The researcher gratefully acknowledges the thirteen faculty, staff, and administrators of the College of Hospitality and Tourism Management who voluntarily participated in the study. Appreciation is also extended to the University of the Cordilleras, College of Hospitality and Tourism Management, for the use of its facilities, and to Lyceum of the Philippines University–Batangas for academic supervision under the PhD-ITHM 910 course. The author also acknowledges the use of an AI writing assistant (Claude, Anthropic) for literature search support, manuscript formatting, and language editing during preparation of this article; all research design, data collection, interpretation, and conclusions remain the author's own.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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Author Contributions: Gaspar, J.; Study design, method conception, data collection, data analysis, and manuscript writing. The author has read and approved the final version of the manuscript and agreed to be accountable for the integrity and scholarly content of the work.