



Journal of Intercultural Management and Ethics

JIME

ISSN 2601 - 5749, ISSN-L 2601 - 5749

published by

Center for Socio-Economic Studies and Multiculturalism

Iasi, Romania

www.csesm.org

TABLE OF CONTENT

Editorial	3
Liviu Warter	
Intercultural Competencies and Leadership in Intergovernmental Organizations. Analysis on the Example of the Secretary General of the United Nations	5
Ani Gasparyan	
How DEI Failed and What to Do About It: Confronting and Eliminating All Forms of Intolerance	21
Hershey Friedman, Nakato Hira Kubo	
How Emotion Regulation and Educational Attainment Shape Vulnerability to Love Addiction in a Romanian Sample	37
Luisa-Diana Antoniac, Adina Karner-Huțuleac	
Ethics of the Relationship Between Managers. Observations on the Ethics of the Relationship Between Top Management and Middle Management in Certain State-Owned Companies in Romania	51
Aurelian Virgil Băluță, Raluca-Ana-Maria Dumitru	
The Concept of Proportionality in End-Of-Life Care. From Iura Et Bona to Samaritanus Bonus	67
Ioan Robu, Claudiu Eva	
Letter to the Editor	77
George Simons	
Book Review	81
Iulian Warter	

INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCIES AND LEADERSHIP IN INTERGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS. ANALYSIS ON THE EXAMPLE OF THE SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE UNITED NATIONS

Ani Gasparyan

The University of Wrocław, Poland, Faculty of Law, Administration and Economy,
Institute of Administrative Sciences, Section of Comparative Public Administration
E-mail: anniegasparyan01@gmail.com

Abstract

This article explores the intercultural leadership practices of two United Nations Secretary-Generals—Kofi Annan and António Guterres—through the combined lens of Deardorff's (2006) intercultural competence framework and the Global Leadership Competency Theory (2010). Utilizing thematic content analysis, the study identifies key attitudes, behaviors, and strategic actions that demonstrate intercultural sensitivity, adaptability, ethical, and global decision-making across different geopolitical contexts. Special attention is given to Annan's initiatives in promoting global cultural dialogue and his mediation efforts in Africa, the Middle East, and Europe, drawing primarily on secondary scholarly sources. In contrast, Guterres's ongoing tenure is examined through current UN documentation, public statements, and policy developments related to migration governance, humanitarian crises, and multicultural inclusion. The findings highlight how intercultural competence shapes effective leadership within communication international organizations and reveal parallels and divergences in the leadership styles of the two Secretaries-General. The article concludes by outlining implications for future diplomatic practice and global governance.

Keywords: intercultural leadership, global leadership competency theory, migration policy, conflict mediation, cultural dialogue.

Introduction

In a world that is becoming increasingly interconnected and diverse, the significance of intercultural competence in international leadership has markedly increased. The United Nations (UN), recognized as the largest intergovernmental organization globally, functions across various cultures, languages, and political frameworks, necessitating that its leaders adeptly manage intricate multicultural interactions. The article indicates that the United Nations Secretariat headed by the Secretary-General plays an essential role in the effective functioning of the entire UN system. The latter not only manages the organization's daily operations but also serves as its symbolic and diplomatic representative. As a politically neutral entity, the Secretary-General is required to interact with stakeholders from all global regions, particularly during times of crisis, while upholding the principles of the UN Charter and being sensitive to the diverse cultural and political contexts. The Secretariat's functions are performed by a diverse international staff, highlighting the importance of culturally aware management practices that promote collaboration, equity, and respect within a global workforce.

Notable among its Secretaries-General, Kofi Annan and António Guterres are distinguished for their focus on inclusive dialogue, human rights, and cross-cultural comprehension. Both leaders have exemplified elements of intercultural competence through

their leadership approaches, diplomatic efforts, and institutional reforms. Nevertheless, despite the increasing acknowledgment of intercultural competence as a vital leadership quality, there is a scarcity of scholarly research investigating its specific role within UN leadership. Most of the existing literature tends to concentrate on policy results or political diplomacy, frequently neglecting the personal skills and strategies that enable multicultural collaboration. This oversight results in a research void regarding how individual leadership traits—particularly intercultural competence—impact global governance, conflict resolution, and internal organizational unity. This study aims to fill that void by examining and contrasting the culturally adaptive leadership methodologies of Kofi Annan and António Guterres, evaluating how their intercultural sensitivity shaped their capacity to lead a diverse and politically fragmented international community.

This research seeks to investigate the manifestation of intercultural competence in the leadership approaches of Kofi Annan and António Guterres. Additionally, it will assess the influence of their cultural leadership on policy development and crisis management within the United Nations. The primary hypothesis posited is that elevated levels of intercultural competence in UN leadership are associated with more inclusive and effective policy responses to global crises. Furthermore, it is proposed that both Kofi Annan and António Guterres employed intercultural strategies to foster trust and collaboration among member states and stakeholders.

This study is significant in two main aspects: academic and practical. From an academic perspective, it enriches the expanding domain of international leadership studies and intercultural communication by synthesizing knowledge from political science, organizational behavior, and cultural competence theory. Although there is a wealth of research on the political functions and peacekeeping initiatives of the United Nations, there is a scarcity of studies that investigate how the intercultural competencies of its top leaders influence decision-making, diplomacy, and the overall effectiveness of the institution. This research aims to fill that void by examining the manifestation of intercultural skills in the actions and decisions of the UN Secretary-General.

Only a few intergovernmental organizations have a global mandate akin to that of the United Nations, with strategic significance and impact on international security, development, and diplomacy that make them suitable for comprehensive case study analysis. The UN continues to serve as a particularly relevant platform for exploring the relationship between intercultural competence and leadership effectiveness in environments characterized by high diversity and political complexity. As the number of similar organizations is limited, the UN's extensive global influence and political relevance render it an appropriate and valuable setting for examining leadership within multicultural and high-pressure contexts.

On a practical level, the findings of this study are pertinent for both current and aspiring international leaders, diplomats, and administrators who operate within diverse cultural contexts. By analyzing the real-world experiences of Kofi Annan and António Guterres, this study serves as a valuable resource for training initiatives in diplomacy, public administration, and global governance. Furthermore, it provides actionable recommendations for improving cultural intelligence in the processes of leadership selection and development within international organizations.

This research is based on the concept of intercultural competence, especially in relation to leadership within diverse cultural contexts. Intercultural competence is generally understood as the capacity to engage in effective and appropriate communication with individuals from different cultural backgrounds. The intercultural competence in international leadership is described by introducing two widely recognized models: Process Model of Intercultural Competence and Global Leadership Competency Framework. These models serve as

conceptual tools to assess how intercultural awareness, adaptability, and communication skills influence effective leadership. The study of intercultural leadership within the United Nations is crucial in understanding how global diplomacy and cultural competence function in conflict resolution, peacebuilding, and international cooperation.

The theoretical framework is informed by Deardorff's (2006) Process Model of Intercultural Competence, which highlights the importance of attitudes (such as openness and respect), knowledge (regarding other cultures), and skills (including listening, analyzing, and adapting), all of which lead to effective and appropriate behaviors and communication. In the context of leadership, this study also incorporates Global Leadership Competency Theory, which connects leadership success in global environments to a leader's cultural intelligence, emotional resilience, and diplomatic flexibility. This model posits that global leaders must possess more than just technical expertise; they also require intercultural empathy, strategic foresight, and the capability to foster consensus across varied cultural and political landscapes. These theoretical frameworks serve as a basis for examining how Kofi Annan and António Guterres demonstrated intercultural competence through specific leadership actions—such as inclusive communication, diplomatic negotiations, policy development, and institutional reforms. The research will assess their methodologies in relation to these frameworks to determine the degree and effectiveness of their intercultural leadership within the United Nations.

Methods and materials

This qualitative study uses a comparative, case-based approach to analyze the intercultural leadership of two United Nations Secretaries-General: Kofi Annan (1997–2006) and António Guterres (2017–present). The research focuses on their strategies and actions in promoting intercultural dialogue, humanitarian diplomacy, and inclusive multilateral governance.

The analytical approach employed is thematic content analysis, guided by relevant intercultural communication and leadership theories, including frameworks of cultural competence, mediation, and global governance (Braun, 2006). This method allows for the systematic identification of recurring patterns, values, and leadership traits across speeches, policies, and conflict mediation efforts. The data corpus includes UN documents, official statements, public speeches, policy frameworks (e.g., the Global Compact for Migration, Millennium Development Goals), and institutional initiatives such as the Kofi Annan Foundation. Peer-reviewed articles and media coverage from credible sources were also included to triangulate findings.

This analysis has presented a comparative examination of two secretary generals' methodologies from an intercultural standpoint, utilizing significant case studies. Annan's administration was marked by groundbreaking initiatives such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine, and the encouragement of intercultural dialogue through the Dialogue Among Civilizations (2001) and the Alliance of Civilizations (2005). His diplomatic efforts during crises, including the Iraq War, the Kosovo conflict, and the post-election turmoil in Kenya (2007–2008), illustrate his function as an intercultural mediator.

Given his historical significance, the study of Annan's leadership primarily relies on secondary sources, including biographies, academic evaluations, and historical UN records, reflecting on his completed legacy.

In contrast, António Guterres (2017–present) represents contemporary UN leadership, dealing with a rapidly evolving global landscape marked by climate change, refugee crises, rising authoritarianism, etc. Before assuming his role, he served as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (2005–2015), gaining extensive experience in handling migration

crises and fostering cross-cultural cooperation- so crucial subject nowadays. The examination of António Guterres covers his tenure from January 2017 to July 2025, the period during which this study was conducted. Unlike Annan, whose legacy is well-documented, Guterres' work is still unfolding, making current reports, UN documents, and ongoing scholarly research essential sources for this study. By presenting these two leaders, this research aims to examine how intercultural leadership has evolved within the UN and how their distinct approaches to mediation, dialogue, and global governance reflect the challenges of their respective eras. Given that Guterres remains in office, the study presents a current yet evolving snapshot of his intercultural leadership, recognizing the potential for further developments in the coming years.

Thus the choice of these two leaders is theoretically and empirically justified. Kofi Annan represents one of the most diplomatically respected UN leaders of the post-Cold War era and is a Nobel Peace Prize laureate known for integrating human rights and intercultural dialogue into global governance. António Guterres, brings a deeply humanitarian and culturally inclusive perspective shaped by his leadership during major migration and displacement crises. By focusing on these two figures, the research reflects broader trends in IGO leadership, including the growing emphasis on soft power, cultural sensitivity, and inclusive multilateralism in international institutions responding to global crises.

Results

Kofi Annan's Intercultural Strategies

Kofi Annan's leadership in promoting intercultural dialogue and competence is evidenced by various activities, as noted by individuals who were acquainted with him, collaborated with him, or conducted research on his diplomatic efforts. Notably, he initiated the *Millennium Development Goals* (MDGs), which served as a foundation for the contemporary Sustainable Development Goals.

The establishment of the United Nations *Alliance of Civilizations* (UNAOC) by Kofi Annan represents a significant initiative aimed at mitigating escalating intercultural tensions, particularly in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks. The primary objective of this initiative is to address shared concerns while simultaneously safeguarding the unique identities and cultural heritages of various groups. To achieve this, the UNAOC emphasizes interfaith dialogue to foster peaceful coexistence between Christians and Muslims. The Alliance has launched eight Special Projects that focus on key areas such as Education, Youth, Migration, and Media. Among these initiatives are "Summer Schools," which engage participants aged 18-35 in workshops, roundtable discussions, and collaborative activities designed to promote diversity and global citizenship, diminish stereotypes, and alleviate identity-based conflicts, while also advocating for intercultural harmony and social justice (Hayness, 2016).

The *Dialogue Among Civilizations* initiative, announced by the United Nations in 2001, underscores Kofi Annan's commitment to fostering mutual understanding and respect across various cultures. His speech at the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies in 1999 provides significant insights into his views on the necessity of dialogue both within societies and among them: "... it must be a dialogue of mutual respect. The aim is not to eliminate differences between human beings, but to preserve and even celebrate them as a source of joy and strength.

People must be able to follow their own traditions without making war on each other. They must have sufficient freedom to exchange ideas. They must be able to learn from each other (Annan, 1999)."

In this address, he stressed that the Dialogue among Civilizations should encompass interactions within societies as well as between them, further illustrating his proactive stance on promoting intercultural understanding and respect.

The *United Nations Global Compact* (UNGC), established in 1999, serves as a framework for businesses to align their operations with environmental principles that support the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The UNGC promotes intercultural dialogue by urging companies globally to implement practices that uphold human rights, adhere to labor standards, ensure environmental sustainability, and combat corruption (UN Global Compact | UN Procurement Division, 2014). The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are regarded as “the most widely endorsed, comprehensive, and precise targets for poverty alleviation that have ever been set globally,” and they are largely acknowledged for their role in galvanizing and sustaining international efforts toward poverty reduction (Fukuda-Parr, 2013).

Mediation and Conflict Resolution Efforts by Kofi Annan

Mediation was a key aspect of Kofi Annan’s leadership as UN Secretary-General, but the term gained even greater prominence in international diplomacy after his tenure. During his rule, concepts like conflict prevention, peacebuilding, dialogue, and diplomacy were widely used, and mediation was considered part of a broader peacekeeping and conflict resolution strategy.

International mediation typically denotes the mediation efforts undertaken by various international entities aimed at managing conflicts that occur both between states and within states.

Annan actively institutionalized mediation within the UN framework, strengthening the UN’s Department of Political Affairs (DPA) to support diplomatic efforts and preventive diplomacy. He often emphasized that mediation should go beyond ceasefires, addressing root causes such as ethnic, cultural, and political grievances.

This text outlines several notable examples of his impactful mediation efforts, which exemplify his skill in promoting cultural dialogue across diverse societies. The initial case is Kenya, where he operated as an “insider” due to his deep understanding of African culture and heritage. The second instance pertains to the Middle East, specifically during the Iraq War, where he navigated the complexities of Muslim culture alongside Western perspectives. Lastly, the third example involves a significant crisis in Europe, specifically in Serbia. These conflicts, spanning three different continents, effectively illustrate Annan’s role as an intercultural mediator in a variety of contexts.

The presidential *elections in Kenya in 2007* were overshadowed by accusations of electoral malpractice, resulting in extensive ethnic and political unrest. The contention between the sitting President Mwai Kibaki and opposition figure Raila Odinga incited violent confrontations, especially among ethnic factions supporting each candidate.

The effectiveness of the Kenyan mediation process can be attributed to the involvement of individuals such as Kofi Annan. In addition to his profound knowledge and competencies, he had access to a wide array of international resources. Furthermore, his personal attributes significantly contributed to the success of the mediation efforts.

Kofi Annan’s understanding of African cultural dynamics pertinent to mediation significantly influenced the successful resolution of the Kenyan crisis. Although an external party can possess insights into a different culture, Annan was uniquely positioned to be perceived as an insider, embodying the essential attributes required to earn the trust of the conflicting parties, thereby transcending the limitations typically associated with outsider status.

Annan’s involvement in the *Iraq War* was characterized by his attempts to reconcile the interests of Western nations, particularly the United States and the United Kingdom, with the apprehensions of Middle Eastern countries and the global community at large. His methodology demonstrated a profound appreciation for intercultural communication, as he endeavored to bridge the gap between Western and Arab worlds. Annan underscored the

significance of honoring Iraq's sovereignty and cultural heritage, contending that any form of intervention should be consistent with international law and the principles outlined in the UN Charter (Meisler, 2008). He frequently stressed the necessity for Western nations to grasp the intricate historical and cultural dynamics of the Middle East. Annan's approach to mediation was characterized by a commitment to neutrality, enabling him to interact effectively with a range of stakeholders, including Arab leaders, Western authorities, and the Iraqi government. His proficiency in maneuvering through these varied cultural and political contexts demonstrated his intercultural competence.

Kofi Annan's involvement in addressing the crisis in Serbia, particularly during *the Kosovo conflict from 1998 to 1999*¹, exemplifies his adeptness in intercultural management. As the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Annan skillfully maneuvered through a multifaceted and culturally sensitive situation, striving to balance the diverse interests of various stakeholders while prioritizing dialogue, inclusivity, and the acknowledgment of cultural identities. Annan acknowledged the profound historical and cultural dimensions of the conflict, which encompassed the enduring impact of Ottoman governance, the emergence of Serbian nationalism, and the grievances expressed by the ethnic Albanian majority in Kosovo (Meisler, 2008). He underscored the necessity of considering these historical and cultural elements in any potential resolution, advocating against the imposition of a unilateral solution. Annan consistently stressed the importance of honoring the cultural and ethnic identities of both Serbs and Albanians, steering clear of a binary portrayal of the conflict as merely “good versus evil,” and instead recognizing the valid concerns held by both parties.

António Guterres's intercultural leadership

Like Kofi Annan, Antonio Gutierres is also convinced that multilateralism and regional integration are vital to promote prosperity as well as to advance human rights and the rule of law. In his inaugural address, Guterres emphasized a sophisticated perspective: human rights must be upheld as intrinsic values rather than being utilized for political purposes. It is essential that all individuals, including marginalized groups, have access to their fundamental human rights without any form of discrimination. He underscored the critical importance of safeguarding women's rights, stating, “Ultimately, it is about values... We aspire for the world our children will inherit to be characterized by the principles outlined in the UN Charter: peace, justice, respect, human rights, tolerance, and solidarity” (United Nations, 2016).

Rohingya Refugee Support

One of the significant humanitarian crises currently facing the world is the plight of the Rohingya population (Maizland, 2020). Presently, approximately one million Rohingya individuals² reside in overcrowded refugee camps in Bangladesh, the majority having fled

¹ The Kosovo conflict stemmed from deep-rooted tensions between ethnic Albanians (Kosovars) and Serbs in the Kosovo region, which was then a province of Serbia. The situation intensified in the late 1990s when the Yugoslav government, under the leadership of Slobodan Milošević (President of Serbia), launched a severe crackdown on the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) and ethnic Albanian civilians, resulting in widespread violence and significant human rights violations.

² The Rohingya are a Muslim ethnic minority group who have lived for centuries in predominantly Buddhist Myanmar - formerly known as Burma. For decades, they have endured systemic discrimination and oppression from successive governments in Myanmar. Denied citizenship by the 1982 Citizenship Law, they represent one of the largest stateless groups globally. An estimated 600,000 Rohingya remain in Rakhine State, where they experience ongoing persecution and violence. They are restricted to camps and villages, lacking freedom of movement and access to essential resources such as food, healthcare, education, and means of livelihood.

Myanmar in 2017 to escape the military's acts of violence and potential genocide (Rohingya | Human Rights Watch, 2017). United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres has engaged in a collaborative effort with Dr. Muhammad Yunus, the Chief Adviser of Bangladesh's interim government, to tackle significant humanitarian and political issues facing the country. Their joint efforts have particularly concentrated on aiding Rohingya refugees and promoting a democratic transition in Bangladesh (UN Refugee Agency, 2024).

Global Compact for Migration

UN Network on Migration

António Guterres' approach to migration policy emphasizes multilateralism, the protection of human rights, and the importance of cultural inclusion. His initiatives, which range from championing refugee rights during the 2015 crisis to spearheading the Global Compact for Migration, have significantly influenced the governance of international migration.

In his 2018 report, "Making Migration Work for All," Guterres highlighted the critical importance of extensive international collaboration in effectively managing migration. He asserted that "the most effective means to eliminate the stigma of illegality and mistreatment associated with migrants is to create additional legal avenues for migration" and urged for "enhanced international cooperation to ensure safe and orderly migration (The European Parliament, 2018)." This report served as a foundation for the "Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration", which was adopted later that year and seeks to tackle migration issues through collective responsibility and international partnership. The latter is a significant agreement aimed at safeguarding migrants, managing borders effectively, and fostering international collaboration. It is one of the landmark migration policies adopted in December 2018 and is the first-ever global framework on migration governance. Through this project Guterres maintained his commitment of "a fair sharing of responsibilities, particularly by those states that have the capacity to absorb and integrate refugees." This advocacy aligns with efforts to encourage equitable responsibility-sharing mechanisms among nations, promoting solidarity and support for countries facing significant migratory pressures.

Statements on Islamophobia and xenophobia

Guterres is recognized as a prominent advocate for migration policy, consistently promoting principles of solidarity, collaboration, and the dignified treatment of migrants and refugees across the globe.

United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres has actively championed the fight against Islamophobia, xenophobia, and anti-immigration attitudes, underscoring the necessity of inclusive and multicultural policies for migrants. He has repeatedly warned about the threats these biases pose to global peace and social unity. He cautioned that the use of fear-based tactics and nationalist discourse was undermining the European principles of solidarity and human rights. The Secretary General called on European leaders to foster social cohesion and cultural inclusivity, asserting that effective integration policies are essential for achieving long-term stability (United Nations, 2018).

Discussion

In assessing the leadership of the UN Secretary-General, it is crucial to take into account not only the individual decision-making style but also the wider geopolitical context that influenced the organization's operations during the period in question. The UN's significance in recent years has been affected by rising global polarization, a trend towards nationalist policy agendas among various member states, and deteriorating relations with the U.S. administration under President Donald Trump. For instance, the U.S. exit from the Paris Climate Agreement

and UNESCO, along with substantial funding reductions to UN initiatives, weakened the organization's operational capabilities and fostered diplomatic strains. These factors constrained the Secretary-General's ability to maneuver in negotiations, implement policies, and set agendas. Therefore, evaluations of leadership effectiveness must encompass both intercultural competence and the structural, political, and external pressures that influenced decision-making within the UN framework, recognizing how high-level geopolitical conflicts directly impacted the SG's leadership context.

Culture and leadership are fundamentally interconnected, representing two essential components of organizational dynamics. Leaders often play a pivotal role in shaping culture, particularly when seeking to unify various groups and organizations. In larger organizations, such as the United Nations, where diverse cultures coexist, leadership criteria are frequently predetermined, which can affect the selection of future leaders. A key duty of leadership involves recognizing both the positive and negative elements of existing cultures and adeptly managing cultural diversity, thereby fostering an environment where group members can excel amidst complexity. Leaders must develop a keen understanding of the cultural contexts in which they function; failing to do so may result in being influenced by those cultures. While cultural awareness is advantageous for all individuals, it is especially crucial for leaders who aspire to lead effectively.

Process Model of Intercultural Competence

In her 2006 study titled "Process Model of Intercultural Competence," Darla Deardorff articulates a framework that is particularly significant for comprehending leadership within international governmental organizations (IGOs). This framework is essential for individuals tasked with leading multinational teams, engaging in cross-cultural negotiations, and fostering global collaboration. Deardorff delineates a developmental trajectory that initiates with internal attitudes and culminates in observable behaviors, rendering it especially pertinent for leaders within the United Nations, whose cultural fluency is crucial for guiding institutional and diplomatic interactions. The key components relevant to international organizations include essential attitudes such as openness and respect, which are vital for diplomacy and coalition-building among UN bodies and member states. Additionally, cultural knowledge encompasses an understanding of geopolitical sensitivities, religious practices, communication norms, and institutional histories across various regions. Furthermore, skills such as interpreting cross-cultural behaviors and adapting communication styles are imperative when collaborating with diverse delegations, mediating peace negotiations, or leading UN missions. Lastly, both internal outcomes, such as flexibility and empathy, and external outcomes, such as effective communication, are directly manifested in leadership interactions within the Security Council, General Assembly, or during field missions. Deardorff underscores that intercultural competence is a dynamic, lifelong learning process, aligning with the ongoing challenges faced by international leaders as they navigate evolving cultures, crises, and political landscapes. "The development of intercultural competence is ongoing and iterative, rather than a set endpoint—particularly vital in institutions like the UN where change is constant and culturally-rooted misunderstanding can derail diplomacy (Deardorff, 2006)."

This model is especially useful because it identifies both attitudes and behaviors that reflect intercultural competence — which we can apply to the leadership of Kofi Annan and António Guterres. Below is an analysis of both leaders' intercultural leadership qualities, based on Deardorff's (2006) *Pyramid Model of Intercultural Competence*:

a. Attitudes:

- Kofi Annan: Demonstrated *respect and openness* by consistently promoting multilateral diplomacy and dialogue. With a deep belief in the power of dialogue, Annan

elevated the importance of mutual understanding across cultures by promoting landmark initiatives such as the Dialogue Among Civilizations and co-launching the Alliance of Civilizations (2005), both of which were designed to reduce cultural and religious tensions in an increasingly polarized world. The Alliance of Civilizations (2005) aimed to bridge understanding between Islamic and Western worlds after 9/11. Maintained *curiosity and empathy* through consistent engagement with marginalized communities, particularly in Africa during Kenya election violence and the Middle East during Iraq crisis.

- António Guterres: As former UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Guterres demonstrated deep *openness* and *respect for diversity*, advocating for dignity regardless of origin, ethnicity, or religion. Publicly condemned Islamophobia and xenophobia and pushed for inclusion of migrants in host societies. He stated that “racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism or Islamophobia are... poisoning our societies,” highlighting the essential need to uphold principles such as tolerance, respect for diversity, and acknowledgment of others. Guterres has persistently advocated worldwide solidarity in denouncing all forms of irrationality that threaten these core values (UN. Meetings Coverage and Press Releases, 2018).

b. Knowledge and Comprehension:

Annan’s deep *cultural self-awareness* as a Ghanaian shaped his sensitivity in conflict zones, especially within the African context. The effective peace mediation in Kenya has received praise for the approach and management demonstrated by Kofi Annan and his team. They maintained an inclusive stance, refraining from exclusion or judgment, and avoided labeling any groups as perpetrators. Instead, they focused on facilitating a problem-solving process through negotiations. It is recognized that a mediator's role is not to impose suggestions but to assist the parties involved in reaching their own resolutions, while ensuring that neither party gains excessive influence or control over the mediation process (Moore, 1974). According to the author Kofi Annan's extensive international experience and stature significantly contributed to the success of the mediation efforts.

In this context he also developed frameworks, such as Millennium Development Goals, with global inclusivity in mind, acknowledging diverse needs across continents.

- Guterres’ leadership on migration reflects strong *sociolinguistic awareness* and a grasp of regional tensions — shown in efforts to support the Global Compact for Migration. Shaping the Global Compact for Migration, challenging harmful stereotypes, and calling for fairer responsibility sharing among EU states illustrates his emphasis on operationalizing intercultural values.

c. Skills:

- Annan used *keen listening and mediation skills* in high-stakes negotiations, including in the Balkans, Iraq, and Kenya. During Kosovo conflict Annan's strategy was fundamentally anchored in multilateralism, underscoring the significance of the United Nations and other international entities in conflict mediation. He aimed to reconcile the interests of Western nations, which endorsed NATO's intervention, with those of Russia and China, which opposed such actions. Throughout his tenure, Annan consistently underscored the humanitarian consequences of the conflict, particularly the plight of hundreds of thousands of displaced Kosovar Albanians. He advocated international measures to safeguard civilians and deliver humanitarian assistance. His focus on human rights transcended cultural and political boundaries, thereby enhancing the moral standing of the UN. In his advocacy for intervention to halt the violence, Annan also stressed the necessity of honoring Serbia's sovereignty. This nuanced approach contributed to preserving the UN's reputation as a neutral mediator. Furthermore, Annan encouraged *interfaith and intercultural initiatives* that promoted better understanding, like the UN Year of Dialogue Among Civilizations (2001).

- Guterres led multilateral negotiations involving *states with divergent cultural stances*, such as during the European migration debates and the Rohingya refugee crisis. Referring to

the later vulnerable topic long before, on October 5, 2015, António Guterres made a statement in Geneva during the 66th session of the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme: "I can only say that for refugees, their legal status is their biggest vulnerability – being poor at home is not the same as being poor in a country that is not your own. ...And this is not only true for refugees – everyone knows that the root cause of the vulnerability of the Rohingya is their statelessness and lack of a legal status in their own country (Inter-Agency Standing Committee, 2015)".

d. Internal Outcomes:

- Annan showed strong intercultural empathy and flexibility by successfully balancing the expectations of Western countries with the needs and perspectives of the Global South. Such as during electoral violence in Kenya, Kofi Annan demonstrated a comprehensive grasp of the situation and asserted a decisive position at the outset of the process by offering recommendations regarding its structure. He emphasized the necessity of establishing a unified mediation process, arguing that Kenya should not engage multiple mediation teams. He cautioned that an excess of divergent initiatives would lead the involved parties to seek out the mediation that best suited their interests, thereby undermining the overall effectiveness of the mediation efforts (Juma, 2009).

- Guterres Embodied intercultural adaptability in handling *refugee crises*, balancing humanitarian needs with political diplomacy. Guterres consistently advocated for a cohesive and empathetic approach to the refugee crisis, imploring European governments to fulfill their legal and ethical responsibilities as outlined by international refugee law. Among his significant initiatives and advocacy efforts was the call for shared responsibility among European nations.

e. External Outcomes:

- In 2001, the Norwegian Nobel Committee conferred the Nobel Peace Prize jointly upon the United Nations and its Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, in recognition of their contributions to fostering a more organized and peaceful global community (The Nobel Peace Prize 2001, n.d.).
- António Guterres' advocacy resulted in institutional reforms like the UN Network on Migration and UNHCR expansion. The United Nations Network on Migration initiative aims to assist Member States in implementing the Global Compact. The Network consists of 39 United Nations entities, such as the International Organization for Migration, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, and the UN Development Programme, among others. Its main goals are to advocate migration policies that are consistent with development objectives, to enhance international collaboration on migration matters, and to guarantee systematic and compassionate management of migration (United Nations, n.d.).

Global Leadership Competency Theory

Global Leadership Competency Theory (2010) presents a framework designed to address the complexities of global leadership by identifying essential competencies vital in international contexts. Global leaders must not only understand and interpret cultural differences but must also be able to manage themselves and others effectively in culturally diverse settings." (Bird et al., 2010, p. 820). This theory is particularly applicable to the analysis of UN Secretaries-General, who function not only as administrators but also as symbolic figures and mediators within a culturally diverse global community. Among the relevant competencies for UN leaders, cultural self-awareness is crucial as it enables leaders to identify their own biases and comprehend their global perception. Another significant component, a global mindset, empowers leaders to make decisions that reflect the interests of various nations and cultures, which is essential for conflict management and achieving development objectives. Furthermore, diplomatic adaptability is vital for engaging with a range of political systems,

including authoritarian regimes, democracies, developing nations, and NGOs, each with distinct expectations and protocols. Lastly, systems thinking is an important attribute that allows leaders to integrate humanitarian, environmental, economic, and peacekeeping initiatives in a cohesive manner.

“Global leadership is more than traditional leadership extended across borders—it requires complex mental agility, cultural intelligence, and strategic foresight, especially in the high-stakes environment of international organizations” (Bird et al., 2010).

UN Secretaries-General like Kofi Annan and António Guterres exemplified these competencies through their roles in peace mediation, refugee advocacy, multilateral diplomacy, and internal reforms within the UN. Consequently, this theory provides a systematic approach to assess and compare their effectiveness as global leaders. These are typically grouped into three main domains: *perception management*, *relationship management*, and *self-management*.

a. Perception Management

This domain refers to the ability to accurately observe and interpret intercultural situations, being open to diverse perspectives without bias.

- Kofi Annan demonstrated perception management through his *sensitivity to cultural and political complexities*, for instance, during his mediation in Kenya’s 2007–2008 post-election violence. He recognized historical grievances and ethnic dimensions, which allowed him to lead a culturally informed negotiation process. As a good mediator he managed to cultivate an atmosphere where both parties can express their viewpoints and make decisions collaboratively.

- António Guterres, especially in his role as UN High Commissioner for Refugees, continuously emphasized the *need for empathy, cultural understanding*, and inclusion in refugee response systems. Guterres urged the European Union to establish an equitable quota system to ensure a proportional distribution of refugees across member states. Moreover, his statements often highlight the importance of *shared humanity across cultures*, e.g., fighting Islamophobia and xenophobia.

b. Relationship Management

This involves building trust, managing conflicts, and communicating effectively across cultures.

- Annan initiated programs like the *Global Compact* and the *Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)*, fostering cooperation between diverse stakeholders. His leadership reflected emotional intelligence and diplomacy in building bridges among nations. Notably, the United Nations Global Compact in 1999, which urged businesses around the globe to adopt universal values that transcend cultural boundaries.

- Guterres has emphasized multilateral partnerships, notably through the *Partnerships for the SDGs* platform. In his 2018 Report, he evaluates that the introduction of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) has spurred collaborative initiatives among Member States and civil society aimed at reducing poverty and fostering peaceful, prosperous, and inclusive societies. Guterres indicates that his reforms of the UN development system are designed to enhance the United Nations' ability to assist Member States in achieving these objectives. He believes that partnerships are essential for realizing the 2030 Agenda and has actively promoted the involvement of all stakeholders through the Partnerships (World Economic Forum, 2019) for the Sustainable Development Goals online platform (United Nations, 2022). Guterres has called on nations to work together, respecting diversity while uniting for common goals—showcasing his relationship management in the face of global crises such as migration and climate change.

c. Self-Management

This domain includes emotional resilience, tolerance for ambiguity, and the ability to reflect and learn from intercultural experiences.

- Annan demonstrated self-management in high-pressure political crises such as in Iraq and Kosovo, showing *composure, resilience, and reflection* even under global scrutiny. He was known for his *measured and ethical approach* to leadership. During Iraq crisis Annan underscored the significance of honoring Iraq's sovereignty and cultural heritage, contending that any form of intervention should be consistent with international law and the principles outlined in the UN Charter. He frequently stressed the necessity for Western nations to grasp the intricate historical and cultural dynamics of the Middle East. Annan's approach to mediation was characterized by a commitment to neutrality, enabling him to interact effectively with a range of stakeholders, including Arab leaders, Western authorities, and the Iraqi government. His proficiency in maneuvering through these varied cultural and political contexts demonstrated his intercultural competence.

- Guterres shows a *calm and persistent commitment to human dignity*, often advocating for vulnerable populations in politically polarized contexts. His consistent push for inclusive migration policies amidst global backlash illustrates his *resilience and moral clarity*.

While both Kofi Annan and António Guterres made landmark contributions to global leadership and intercultural diplomacy—particularly in humanitarian and migration issues—they also faced criticism and limitations in the scope, execution, and outcomes of their policies.

Kofi Annan's diplomatic legacy is closely tied to his role as a mediator in some of the world's most complex and culturally charged conflicts. During his time as Secretary-General, he took on the difficult challenge of navigating the aftermath of the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003—a conflict that deeply divided the international community. Generally, Annan's diplomatic opposition to the Iraq War won praise, but he was also criticized for not being forceful enough in galvanizing the Security Council to prevent unilateral action by the US and allies. Some see his leadership as too cautious, avoiding open confrontation with powerful member states. Annan was criticized for lack of decisive action and failure to mobilize the Security Council effectively. Critics argue that Annan failed to act on early warnings or push hard enough for intervention. Despite institutional constraints, Annan's careful language and persistent calls for multilateral cooperation demonstrated his diplomatic finesse and ability to balance diverse cultural and political perspectives.

In the Kosovo conflict, Annan emphasized the need for humanitarian intervention grounded in international consensus, leading to the development of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) principle. While Annan championed R2P, the principle remained largely normative, lacking binding enforcement. During his tenure, R2P wasn't yet adopted formally, and there was no clear mechanism to operate it. That's why critics note that his moral leadership didn't always translate into institutional reform. Even after his tenure, Annan's reputation as an intercultural mediator remained strong, exemplified by his efforts to resolve the 2007–2008 post-election crisis in Kenya. As head of the African Union–appointed mediation team, he brought together rival ethnic and political factions, demonstrating the power of culturally sensitive negotiation in restoring peace (Meisler, 2008, p. 317).

António Guterres has likewise demonstrated intercultural leadership in crisis situations, but his engagement has focused more on protracted humanitarian emergencies rooted in ethnic and national identity. As Secretary-General, Guterres has been vocal about the plight of the Rohingya population in Myanmar, repeatedly condemning their persecution and framing it as a gross violation of human rights. Even though António Guterres' commitment to human rights and migration is well-known, many observers argue that his leadership has been muted when addressing powerful states' violations. Critics argue that he has often preferred diplomacy over confrontation, avoiding strong condemnation in situations demanding moral clarity. Guterres

faced criticism for the slow and inadequate response to the humanitarian crisis in Tigray, where atrocities including ethnic cleansing and famine were reported.

Both Annan's and Guterres' strategies exhibit notable deficiencies, primarily their reliance on member states. Each leader was limited by the reality that the authority of the UN is fundamentally contingent upon the political will of its member states. Even ambitious projects like the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Global Compact on Migration encountered challenges due to inadequate enforcement mechanisms. Furthermore, both leaders received criticism regarding the UN's bureaucratic processes and sluggish response times, which obstructed the effective execution of intercultural and humanitarian efforts in the face of rapidly evolving crises.

Conclusion

The primary objective of this research has been to examine the leadership approach utilized by the Secretary-General of the United Nations and to evaluate its influence on organizational effectiveness in relation to cultural competence. The investigation has aimed to achieve specific goals, such as assessing the impact of cultural awareness on leadership practices within the organization and exploring the subsequent effects. Leadership is recognized as a vital subject in the field of organizational behavior (Northouse, 2018, p.3). To comprehend these dynamics, it is essential to adopt a “cultural perspective,” which entails interpreting situations through cultural lenses” and acquiring skills to navigate multicultural challenges, as exemplified by the two Secretaries-General during their respective tenures.

Both Kofi Annan and António Guterres have exemplified exceptional intercultural leadership through their diplomatic initiatives, policies, and global programs. Their proficiency in navigating various cultural contexts, mediating disputes among conflicting factions, and fostering intercultural comprehension has been pivotal to their leadership roles at the United Nations.

This research shows Kofi Annan's function as a mediator in intercultural disputes, emphasizing significant examples that showcase his skill in maneuvering through intricate cultural, political, and social terrains. His mediation initiatives have been characterized not only by diplomacy but also by a profound commitment to cultural dialogue and comprehension, establishing him as a pivotal figure in the resolution of conflicts across various contexts. His remarkable capacity to function across diverse cultural settings—African, Islamic, and European—underscores his distinguished position as an intercultural mediator. Annan's legacy offers a significant framework for comprehending how cultural competence can be integrated into global leadership to foster peace and mutual understanding.

António Guterres' leadership in global migration governance has been distinguished by a deep intercultural sensitivity and a firm commitment to human rights. A Through UN-led initiatives under his leadership, Guterres has supported access to education, healthcare, and labor protections for migrants and refugees, embodying an inclusive, rights-based framework for international cooperation. His insistence on countering misinformation and hate speech highlights his understanding of how cultural perceptions shape policy and public sentiment.

Despite the limitations mentioned earlier, both Kofi Annan and António Guterres demonstrated notable strengths in intercultural competence, which significantly shaped their leadership and contributed to the United Nations' global mission.

Annan's calm, inclusive communication style—based on listening, consensus-building, and cultural sensitivity—earned him the reputation of a diplomat who brought people together rather than divided them. Guterres' leadership in the Global Compact for Migration emphasized the cultural contributions of migrants, encouraging states to adopt policies rooted in dignity, integration, and mutual respect.

Ultimately, both Annan and Guterres represent two complementary modes of intercultural leadership within the UN framework. Annan emphasized the symbolic and normative power of intercultural dialogue as a means of fostering global cohesion, while Guterres prioritizes structural solutions to ensure the inclusion and protection of vulnerable communities. Their respective initiatives—be they Annan’s visionary alliances or Guterres’ responsive migration frameworks—demonstrate how intercultural competence remains central to effective leadership in international organizations. Each leader, shaped by their context and personal experience, reinforces the idea that sustainable global governance depends not only on diplomacy and negotiation, but also on an enduring commitment to cultural respect, human rights, and collective responsibility.

This investigation into the intercultural competence exhibited by Kofi Annan and António Guterres in their roles as leaders of the United Nations offers a significant basis for further academic inquiry into cultural management within international organizations. By scrutinizing their diplomatic strategies, crisis resolution efforts, migration policies, and internal leadership dynamics at the UN, this study underscores the practical relevance of intercultural competence in the realm of global governance. Subsequent research could expand upon this analysis by comparing other Secretaries-General, assessing the effectiveness of cultural training initiatives within the UN framework, or exploring the impact of cultural intelligence on peacekeeping results. Additionally, this study enhances the overall comprehension of how culturally adept leadership can drive institutional reform, promote inclusive policymaking, and facilitate effective multilateral cooperation, serving as a valuable reference for scholars and practitioners focused on leadership in varied international settings.

Acknowledgement

This article is based on research conducted as part of the Lane Kirkland Scholarship Program. I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. Karolina Kulińska-Jachowska for her guidance and valuable feedback throughout the research process.

References

- Annan, K. (1999, June 28). *Dialogue of civilizations and the need for a world ethic*. Oxford: Lecture delivered at the Sheldonian Theatre, Oxford University.
https://www.oxcis.ac.uk/sites/default/files/201701/28061999%20Kofi%20Annan%20.pdf?utm_source
- Bird, A., Mendenhall, M., Stevens, M. J., & Oddou, G. (2010). Defining the content domain of intercultural competence for global leaders. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 25(8), 810–828. <https://doi.org/10.1108/02683941011089107>
- Braun, V. &. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. In *Qualitative Research in Psychology* (pp. 3(2), 77–101). <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Deardorff, D. (2006). Identification and Assessment of Intercultural Competence as a Student Outcome of Internationalization. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 10(3), 241-266.
- Fukuda-Parr, S. Y. (2013). *The power of numbers: A critical review of MDG targets for human development and human rights*. World Bank.
https://www.worldbank.org/content/dam/Worldbank/document/Gender/Synthesis%20paper%20PoN_
- Hayness, J. (2016, December 1). *The United Nations Alliance of Civilizations' ability to improve relations between Christians and Muslims has been limited*.
<https://researchonline.lse.ac.uk/id/eprint/76441/1/The%20United%20Nations%20Alliance%20of%20Civilizations%E2%80%99%20ability%20to%20improve%20relations>

- %20between%20Christians%20and%20Muslims%20has%20been%20limited%20_%20Religion%20and%20the%20Public%20Sphere.pdf
- Rohingya | Human Rights Watch. (2017). Hrw.org. <https://www.hrw.org/tag/rohingya?utm>
- Inter-Agency Standing Committee. (2015, October 6). *interagencystandingcommittee.org*. <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/secretariat/content/opening-remarks-66th-session-executive-committee-high-commissioners-programme>
- Juma, M. K. (2009). African Mediation of the Kenyan Post-2007 Election Crisis . *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 407-430.
- Maizland, E. A. (2020, January 23). *Council on Foreign Relations*. <https://www.cfr.org/background/rohingya-crisis>
- Meisler, S. (2008). *Kofi Annan: A Man of Peace in the World of War*. John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Moore, C. W. (1974). Foreign Policy and Empirical Democratic Theory . *American Political Science Review*, 11, 92-97.
- Northouse, P. G. (2018). *Introduction to leadership: Concepts and practice* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- United Nations. (2022). *The Partnership Platform | Department of Economic and Social Affairs*. Sdgs.un.org. <https://sdgs.un.org/partnerships>
- The European Parliament. (2018, April 18). *European Parliament resolution on the UN Global Compacts for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration and on Refugees*. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-8-2018-0118_EN.html
- The Nobel Peace Prize 2001. (n.d.). NobelPrize.org. <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/2001/summary/>
- UN Global Compact | UN Procurement Division. (2014). *Un.org*. <https://www.un.org/Depts/ptd/about-us/un-global-compact>
- UN Refugee Agency. (2024, August 22). <https://www.unrefugees.org/news/rohingya-refugee-crisis-explained/?utm>
- UN. Meetings Coverage and Press Releases. (2018, December 10). <https://press.un.org/en/2018/dev3375.doc.htm>
- United Nations. (2016, December 12). <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/speeches/2016-12-12/secretary-general-designate-ant%C3%B3nio-guterres-oath-office-speech>
- United Nations. (2018, December 10). *World Leaders Adopt First-Ever Global Compact on Migration, Outlining Framework to Protect Millions of Migrants, Support Countries Accommodating Them*. <https://press.un.org/en/2018/dev3375.doc.htm>
- United Nations. (n.d.). *International Migration*. <https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/migration?utm>
- World Economic Forum. (2019, June 13). *World Economic Forum and UN Sign Strategic Partnership Framework*. <https://www.weforum.org/press/2019/06/world-economic-forum-and-un-sign-strategic-partnership-framework/>