



Diversity, organizational commitment and organizational citizenship behavior: An organizing framework

Aminu Mamman ^{a,*}, Ken Kamoche ^b, Rhoda Bakuwa ^c

^a University of Manchester, Institute for Development Policy and Management, Oxford Road, Manchester, M13 9GH, United Kingdom

^b Nottingham Trent University, Nottingham Business School, Burton St., Nottingham NG1 4BU

^c University of Malawi, The Malawi Polytechnic, Florence House, Private Bag 303, Chichiri, Blantyre 3, Malawi

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ABSTRACT

Experts generally agree that workforce diversity can produce positive outcomes such as novel and diverse ideas. However, research evidence indicates that workforce diversity can lead to undesirable outcomes as well. The main aim of this paper is to put forward an analytical framework that can help to explain why certain categories of employees, namely perceived low status minorities (PLSMs), might not always produce desirable outcomes. A number of theories such as social exchange, organizational justice, status, and reciprocity theories are used to illustrate why PLSMs would react to perceived injustice in a unique way leading to lower commitment and withdrawal from Organizational Citizenship Behavior.

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1. Introduction

There is considerable evidence which suggests that workforce diversity can contribute to organizational performance in terms of innovation and problem-solving (Barsade, Ward, Turner, & Sonnenfeld, 2000; Carpenter, 2002; Cox, 1991, 1993; Cox & Blake, 1991; Jehn & Bezrukova, 2003; Krishnan, Miller, & Judge, 1997; Mamman, 1996; Neal & Mannix, 2005; Pitcher & Smith, 2000). Also, experts argue that when organizations manage their diverse workforce effectively, employees exhibit desirable behaviors which contribute to the success of the organization (Cox, 1993; Cox & Blake, 1991; Jackson, LaFasto, Schultz, & Kelley, 1992; Mamman, 1996; Maruyama, 1994; Richard, 2000). Conversely, failure to manage diversity can lead to conflict and dysfunctional behavior which can have severe consequences for the organization (Earley, 1993; Shore et al., 2009; Tsui, Egan, & O'Reilly, 1992). The potential benefits of diversity have led many organizations to go out of their way to seek a diverse workforce (Cox, 1991, 1993). Indeed, given the potential significance of diversity, it is not surprising that many researchers have devoted significant amounts of effort to determining the implications of diversity to organizations (Copeland, 1988a, 1998b; Cox, 1991, 1993; Cox & Blake, 1991; Heery, 1994; Jackson et al., 1992; Maruyama, 1994; Powell, 1998; Thomas, 1990, 1993; Tsui et al., 1992).

However, in spite of the benefits of diversity, evidence also indicates that some members of a diverse workforce experience real or perceived injustice from the systems or members of their organization (James, Lovato, & Khoo, 1994; Roberge & van Dick, 2010; Shore et al., 2009). Although there is evidence to suggest that such experiences (real or perceived) lead to specific behaviors such as absenteeism and turnover (James et al., 1994), there is no theoretical explanation of why such behavior is unique to this category of the workforce. Even earlier research on organizational demography did not provide a theoretical framework for understanding the implications of the demographic composition of the workplace in terms of what it means when a particular category of the workforce experiences injustice (see Lawrence, 1997 for an extensive review). Instead, organizational demography literature focuses largely on explaining the outcomes of demographic composition (Alexander, Nuchols, Bloom, & Lee, 1995; Lawrence, 1997). For example, it is reasonable to expect that any category of employees who experience injustice

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +44 161 2752800; fax: +44 161 2738829.

E-mail addresses: aminu.mamman@manchester.ac.uk (A. Mamman), ken.kamoche@ntu.ac.uk (K. Kamoche), rcbakuwa@yahoo.co.uk (R. Bakuwa).

would react in a certain way. However, the point of departure of this paper is to argue that the reaction to real or perceived injustice would vary across categories of a diverse workforce. Nevertheless, there is no adequate theoretical framework which would help in the understanding of this important issue. To address this gap in the literature, we use the notion of a *perceived low status minority* (PLSM) to understand and theorize why certain categories of employees would react to injustice in a unique way. We conceive the status in this paper to be derived from perception of social identity such as gender, age, ethnicity and nationality. In fact, in a study of the effect of demographic similarity on OCB, Chattopadhyay (1999, p. 285) concluded that, “A central assumption of this research was that employees belonging to some categories are more affected by demographic dissimilarity than are those belonging to other categories because of the concomitant loss of status and other, more tangible rewards.”

Indeed, minority status has been recognized as a key variable that affects integration in a social setting (Cohen, 1984; Mummendey, Kessler, Klink, & Mielke, 1999; Putallaz, Sheppard, Shantz, & Hartup, 1992; Roberge & van Dick, 2010). Also, Cohen (1984) argued that status equalization can moderate the effect of diversity outcomes. It is important to point out here that, in this paper, ‘low status minority’ can apply to any category of employees irrespective of gender, ethnicity, disability, and racial background. The salience or relevance of the *status* of any category of employees will depend on the context and location. Also, in order to properly understand the reaction of a PLSM to real or perceived injustice, we have used the concept of *extra-role behavior*, namely organization citizenship behavior (OCB), because it is a construct that captures voluntary behavior which would be the initial mode of reaction to injustice before considering, for example, leaving the organization. The term injustice will be used to refer to both real and perceived injustices, given that they can be “in the eye of the beholder.” Therefore, the purpose of this article is to provide a brief review of literature on the subject and advance an organizing framework that will aid in understanding why some categories of employees would be less keen to contribute to the organization beyond the call of duty (*in-role behaviour*).

2. Background literature

Many researchers and practitioners agree that workforce diversity can produce positive outcomes (e.g. Cox, 1991; 1993; Cox & Blake, 1991; Jackson et al., 1992; Maruyama, 1994; Powell, 1998; Thomas, 1990, 1993; Tsui et al., 1992; Tung, 1993). The case for diversity has been made for many reasons, not least for its strategic contribution to organizational competitiveness (Cox, 1991; Cox & Blake, 1991; Maruyama, 1994; Powell, 1998). In a heroic attempt to measure the *global* effect of diversity, Richard (2000) invoked resource-based theory to examine the relationships among racial diversity, business strategy and firm performance. His findings revealed that racial diversity interacted with business strategy to enhance productivity, return on equity and market performance. The strategic importance of diversity has been interpreted in terms of specific and unique qualities which certain categories of employees bring to the organization. Typical of such inputs are novel ideas, creativity, cultural skills, language skills, working styles, strong work ethic, taking on extra responsibilities by virtue of diverse employees’ “unique” backgrounds, and so forth. Arguably, these inputs fall into the category *beyond the call of duty*. This is because employees are not rewarded for or trained in order to exhibit such behavior (Organ, 1988). This is widely known as *extra-role behavior*, of which Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB) is the best known category. Indeed, Van Dyne, Graham, and Dienesch (1994) argued that extra-role behavior is underlined by the importance of organizational innovation, flexibility, productivity and responsiveness to changing external conditions. Morrison and Phelps (1999) argued that extra-role behavior is critical to organizational effectiveness because managers cannot foresee all the contingencies that may lead employees to perform. Thus, the benefits that will accrue from using a diverse workforce can be adequately captured by the concept of OCB.

In spite of this optimism, the relationship between workforce diversity and positive outcomes is not always as straightforward as it seems (Richard, 2000; Roberge & van Dick, 2010; Shore et al., 2009). For example, it has been argued that the greater the similarity between two cultures the easier it would be for people to interact effectively with one another (Black, Mendenhall, & Oddou, 1991). This has generally been confirmed empirically (Babiker, Cox, & Miller, 1980; Gudykunst, 1985). Other evidence reveals that cultural similarity generates reciprocal feelings and that people who are similar culturally tend to like each other (Brewer & Campbell, 1976), whereas differences in values and beliefs can generate discrimination against out-groups (Greenberg, Pyszczynski, & Solomon, 1986; Katz & Hass, 1988). In an extensive review of literature on team and organizational diversity, Jackson, Joshi, and Erhardt (2003, p. 807), concluded that, “Despite researchers’ intensive efforts to measure diversity and predict its outcomes, the literature offers few conclusive findings about the effects of diversity in the workplace.” For example, research indicates that performance of a sample of managers was lower when assigned to a group with diverse backgrounds (Earley, 1993). Similarly, evidence suggests that, while the performance of some women is higher in a mixed-sex group than in a same-sex group, men’s performance is higher in an all-male group (Wood, 1987). Another study found that men in a diverse workgroup have lower job satisfaction and commitment than their counterparts in a homogeneous workgroup (Tsui et al., 1992). Also, there is evidence which associates workforce heterogeneity with management turnover (Wiersema & Bird, 1993), health problems, and lower productivity (James et al., 1994).

In a study of the impact of diversity on organizational performance, Richard (2000, p. 171) reported that the positive impact of racial diversity on firm performance depends on the context. The author found that in the absence of consideration of context, a negative relationship between cultural diversity and firm outcomes may emerge. The author argued that diversity can increase coordination cost, therefore firms should be particularly aware of the implications of a clash between diversity and organizational context such as downsizing. Similarly, research evidence indicates that, in spite of the benefits of diversity, it creates additional costs resulting from increased coordination and control (Jehn, 1995; Milliken & Martins, 1996; Richard, 2000; Williams & O’Reilly, 1998). Williams and O’Reilly (1998) reported that increased diversity has negative effects on social integration,

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