



Hotel managers' perceived diversity climate and job satisfaction: The mediating effects of role ambiguity and conflict



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ABSTRACT

Given the increase of multiculturalism into the hospitality labor force, corporate investments in providing a positive diversity climate at work have increased over the last two decades. However, few studies have focused on managers' perceived diversity climate and how their perceived diversity climate has an impact on their work experience, which is a significant gap in the literature considering that the hospitality workforce is diverse and multiracial. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine the effect of hotel managers' perceived diversity climate on three outcomes: role ambiguity, role conflict, and job satisfaction. Survey data were collected from 130 hotel and lodging managers. The results showed that managers who perceived a positive diversity climate also reported less role ambiguity and role conflict, but more job satisfaction. Role ambiguity and role conflict mediated the relationship between perceived diversity climate and job satisfaction.

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1. Introduction

A multicultural work force has become a reality for the American hospitality industry through immigration and demographic trends (Madera, 2011). In the last three decades, the foreign-born population has increased fourfold from approximately 3% to 12% of the American population (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2009). Moreover, ethnic minorities are the fastest growing groups, with Hispanic and Black employees accounting for the two largest minority groups in the workforce (U.S. General Accounting Office, 2001). In the hotel and lodging industry, Jackson and DeFranco (2005) found that half, approximately 52%, of hourly employees are Hispanic and Black employees. As a result of such diversity in the workforce, corporate investments in providing a work environment that is conducive to a multicultural workforce, such as diversity training, networking programs focusing on developing ethnic minorities, and supplier diversity programs, have increased over the last two decades (Chavez and Weisinger, 2008). The goal of such investments is to create an organizational climate that values a multicultural workforce. As such, a growing body of literature has focused on diversity climate, which is defined as “perceptions of an organization's

diversity related policies, practices, and procedures” (Pugh et al., 2008, p. 1422).

Much of this research, however, has focused on (1) the antecedents of diversity climate, such as organizational policies and the racial composition of the employees and (2) employees' perceived diversity climate (e.g., Chen et al., 2012; Kossek et al., 2003; Kossek and Zonia, 1993; McKay and Avery, 2006; Mor Barak et al., 1998; Pugh et al., 2008; Roberson and Stevens, 2006), while largely ignoring the consequences of diversity climate and specifically, managers' perceived diversity climate. This is an important limitation in the literature because managers in the hospitality industry are often managing a multicultural workforce. Managing a multicultural workforce can be challenging because of misunderstandings, cultural subtle cues, language barriers, and discomfort that occur during interracial interactions (Avery et al., 2009; Shelton et al., 2010; Williams and O'Reilly, 1998).

Thus, the purpose of the current study was to examine the effect of managers' perceived diversity climate on three work outcomes that can be influenced by working in a multicultural environment: role ambiguity, role conflict, and job satisfaction. Because working in a multicultural environment can involve misunderstandings and language barriers (e.g., Avery et al., 2009; Shelton et al., 2010; Williams and O'Reilly, 1998), role ambiguity and role conflict are two stressors that managers might experience. Role ambiguity refers to “vague and unclear expectations” and role conflict refers to “simultaneous contradictory expectations from coworkers” (Eatough et al., 2011, p. 620). These two work stressors have been found to affect job satisfaction (Fried et al., 2008; Yun et al., 2007), providing a theoretical link between managers'

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perceived diversity climate and job satisfaction. As a consequence, the extent to which managers perceive their organizations value diversity might influence other organizational outcomes related to working in a diverse workforce.

2. Literature review

2.1. Perceived diversity climate

Employees' observations of their organization's policies that are related to diversity leads to a perceived diversity climate, which can be defined as a climate that fosters and maintains a multicultural workforce at one end or a climate that is hostile or indifferent toward a multicultural workforce on the other end (Mor Barak et al., 1998). Much of the early research on perceived diversity climate has focused on the antecedents. For example, a study on recruitment practices found that ethnic minorities had higher perceptions that the organization valued diversity when ethnic minorities were featured on a recruitment pamphlet than when there were not featured (Avery et al., 2004). In a study of workgroup heterogeneity, employees perceived a stronger diversity climate when their workgroup consisted of gender and race diversity than when their workgroup was homogeneous (Kossek et al., 2003). Having organizational recruitment practices that exclusively target building a multicultural workforce also leads to employees' perceptions of a positive diversity climate (Kim and Gelfand, 2003). Research on perceived diversity climate in a hospitality context is limited, but the little research there is has discovered findings consistent with the general managerial literature. While exploring the perceptions of hotel managers and employees, Herdman and McMillan-Capehart (2010) found a positive relationship between diversity initiatives and higher levels of perceived diversity climate. Thus, employees look at their work policies, practices, and work environment to make perceptions of how much their organization values diversity.

Research has begun focusing on the consequences of perceived diversity climate. Having policies and practices that foster a multicultural workforce, such as diversity training or supplier diversity programs, serve as signals about how a multicultural workforce is valued and that employees respond by also valuing multiculturalism among their organizations and customers. For example, a recent study found that an organization that has policies to incorporate multicultural employees as a competitive advantage leads to employees' perceiving a positive climate for diversity, which resulted in great customer satisfaction (McKay et al., 2011). In a similar study, diversity climate also had a positive impact on sales in a real estate company among employees (Chen et al., 2012). Nonetheless, only a few studies have focused on managers' perceived diversity climate.

For example, McKay et al. (2007) found that perceived diversity climate perceptions predicted turnover intentions among retail managers. Gonzalez and DeNisi (2009) found that perceived diversity climate predicted turnover intentions and commitment among managers and non-management employees. Similarly, Kunze et al. (2011) found that perceived diversity climate predicted commitment among managers and non-management employees. Thus, research finds similar outcomes of perceived diversity climate for manager and non-managers.

A limitation in this literature, however, is that research has not examined how managers' perceived diversity climate has an impact on experiencing stress (e.g., role ambiguity and role conflict) and job satisfaction. This is an important gap in the literature because managing a multicultural workforce can be stressful for managers for several reasons. First, managers are aware and concerned about not violating non-discrimination laws, such as Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, which promotes the access, employment,

and advancement rights for protected individuals and restricts the display of formal discrimination at the workplace. For example, most diversity management practices focus on adhering to non-discrimination laws and reducing displays of formal discrimination (Hebl et al., 2007; Madera, 2011). Multicultural interactions are often stressful for managers because social norms and desires to be politically correct often lead to managers monitoring, restricting, and reducing displays of formal discrimination and the affirmation of egalitarian ideologies. For instance, social norms dictate that appearing prejudiced or racist has negative consequences for employees at the workplace, so even when individuals do not hold egalitarian ideologies, they often pretend to appear as egalitarian making interracial interaction stressful (Neel and Shapiro, 2012). Therefore, it has been theorized, but not tested, that perceiving a positive diversity climate would reduce the experience of stress (e.g., role ambiguity and role conflict) and positively impact job satisfaction for managers (Mor Barak et al., 1998; Pugh et al., 2008).

2.2. Role ambiguity and role conflict

Role ambiguity involves unclear expectations that are associated with negative work experiences because the confusion of what to do can be experienced as stressful. Role conflict involves experiencing multiple conflicting expectations from coworkers and is also experienced negatively by employees because it is stressful to have contradictory expectations from coworkers. Thus, both role ambiguity and role conflict have negative effects on work attitudes (Beehr et al., 2000; O'Driscoll and Beehr, 1994; Stordeur et al., 2001).

In fact, role ambiguity and role conflict are work stressors that influence job satisfaction (e.g., Fried et al., 2008; Yun et al., 2007). This occurs because role ambiguity and role conflict hinder employees' ability to complete work task. When employees cannot complete their work, they are likely to experience negative emotions and anxiety at work (LePine et al., 2005). Likewise, role ambiguity and role conflict can be experienced as obstructions to work tasks, which threaten employees' perceptions that they can complete their assigned duties.

2.3. Job satisfaction

Job satisfaction has been defined "as a positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job or job experience or how content an employee is with their job experience" (Waight and Madera, 2011, p. 367). High levels of job satisfaction have been shown to be related to increases in job performance and job commitment, while low levels of job satisfaction have been linked to negative outcomes such as decrements in performance and motivation (Locke and Latham, 1990). In fact, job satisfaction is as good predictor of job performance as is measures of conscientiousness and structured interviews (Judge et al., 2001). Although individual differences have been linked to job satisfaction, research consistently shows that features of the job environment, such as responsibility and challenging tasks, can influence job satisfaction (Ilies and Judge, 2002; Locke and Latham, 1990).

Specifically, in hospitality research, job satisfaction has been shown to be a consequence of the job environment. For example, pay and job security have been shown to influence job satisfaction (Hancer and George, 2003). Satisfaction with pay, perceived supervisor support, and career opportunities have also been shown to affect job satisfaction (Rayton, 2006). Jang and George (2012) found that polychronicity or multitasking within a given time period had a positive impact on job satisfaction among non-supervisor hotel employees. Lee and Ok (2012) found that emotional labor among hotel employees affected job satisfaction by influencing depersonalization and personal accomplishment. Lastly, Yang (2010) found

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