

The impact of cultural values on the acceptance and effectiveness of human resource management policies and practices

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Abstract

The cultural diversity of U.S. organizations is increasing rapidly. In spite of this, relatively little attention has been paid to the impact that the increase in diversity may have on (a) the acceptance of human resource management processes and practices (e.g., recruitment, selection, training, performance appraisal, and compensation and benefits) by individuals and (b) the effectiveness of such processes and practices. Thus, we consider the moderating effects of both individual culture and organizational culture on relations between (a) human resource management processes and practices and (b) the acceptance and effectiveness of such processes and practices. In addition, we offer recommendations for both research and practice.

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Organizations in the U.S. are becoming more culturally diverse. One reason for this is that they are increasingly operating in a global environment. Another reason is that there is a growing level of domestic diversity in the U.S. For example, recent census data reveal that there are now over 84 million members of the four primary minority groups, i.e., African-Americans, Hispanic-Americans, Asian-Americans, and Native-Americans (U.S. Bureau of Census, 2000). In addition, the growth rates of these groups are expected to rise in the twenty-first century due to rising immigration rates from non-European countries (e.g., Latin America, Asia), and higher birth rates among ethnic minority group members (U.S. Bureau of Census, 2000). Thus, it is expected that by the year 2030, over 50% of the U.S. population will consist of ethnic minorities (U.S. Bureau of Census, 2000). Given the increasing levels of globalization and domestic diversity, many organizations now employ large numbers of individuals with multicultural backgrounds. For example, minority group members make up 49.9% of the workforce at Advantica, 58% at Levi Strauss, 55.6% at Dole Foods, 54% at Union Bank of California, 48% at Avis Rent-a Car, and 90% at some Walt Disney World Resorts (Fortune, 2007).

In view of the changing nature of workforce in organizations, researchers have argued that multiculturalism offers substantial benefits in terms of increased creativity, improved decision-making, and broader markets for products and services (Adler, 1983; Cox, 1993). However, the rise in cultural diversity also poses challenges for organizations, and has prompted many of them to develop new strategies for managing a diverse workforce. For example, some

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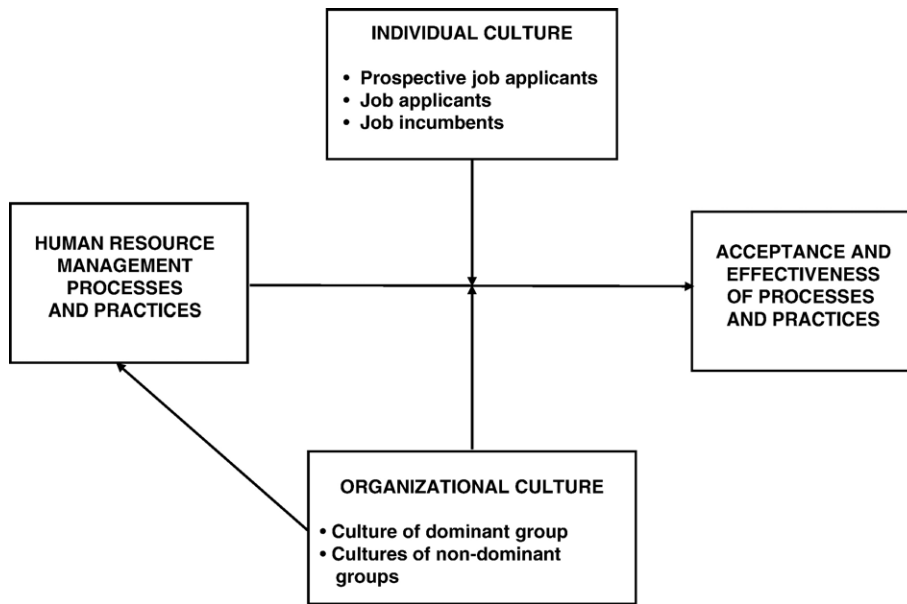


Fig. 1. The influence of culture on the acceptance and effectiveness of human resource management processes and practices.

companies (e.g., CNL Bank, Darden Corporation, Walt Disney World) have developed strategic initiatives designed to attract and retain employees from multicultural backgrounds in order to meet the needs of their diverse customer base. Thus, we believe that it is vital that we develop a better understanding of the issues that arise in organizations that employ workers from various cultures.

1. Importance of multiculturalism

In view of the above, a better understanding of multiculturalism and its impact on organizations is important for a number of reasons. First, researchers contend that cultural diversity has received scant attention in the related fields of human resource management (HRM), organizational behavior (OB), and industrial and organizational (I and O) psychology (Betancourt & Lopez, 1993; Triandis, 1994). Second, researchers maintain that the models and theories in the same fields are underdeveloped because they fail to consider the critical role that culture plays in attracting, motivating, and retaining individuals in organizations (Erez, 1994; Erez & Earley, 1993; Triandis, 1994; Triandis, Dunnette, & Hough, 1994). Third, most of the research on diversity in organizations has focused on issues associated with differences in race, gender, age, and disability. However, little research has examined the cultural and subcultural differences in values among these groups. Finally, there has been an increase in research on HRM in the international arena (Schuler, Dowling, & De Cieri, 1993). However, relatively little of it has considered the impact of cultural and subcultural differences in the U.S. on the acceptance and effectiveness of HRM practices (Stone & Stone-Romero, *in press*). For instance, much of the research on this issue in the U.S. has focused on identifying standardized strategies that may be used to attract and retain individuals in organizations (Huselid, 1995). However, diversity researchers (Cox, 1993) have argued that many current HRM practices (e.g., recruitment, selection, training, performance appraisal) used in U.S. organizations are based on Northern and Western European values. As a result, they may be less effective in multicultural than monocultural organizations. Thus, multicultural organizations are faced with the challenge of developing new HRM processes and practices without the benefit of an adequate amount of relevant theory and research.

2. Purposes of the present paper

In view of the above, the primary purposes of this paper are to (a) present a model of the influence of culture on HRM processes and practices, and (b) examine the influence that cultural values (hereinafter referred to as values) may

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