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The Soft Element of Strategic Human Resource Management: The Employee's Perception of Diversity Climate

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Abstract

Workforce diversity imposes itself as an imperative for organizations. Hence, today's organizations distinguish the diversified workforce as a tool to leverage business opportunities. In order to acquire a competitive advantage from human resources, diversity management comes to the front for all organizations. Managing diversity successfully requires a proper diversity climate for employees in all levels of organizations. This study reports the findings of a research study on the diversity climate among employees of a hotel chain. Both the t-test and one way ANOVA tests predict the perception of employees. The results show that diversity perceptions of employees predominantly depend on managerial status.

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1. Introduction

The salient fact presenting a major challenge for an organization's agenda of the century is diversity. Since the initial studies summoning managing diversity (Thomas, 1990; Cox, 1991; Thomas & Ely, 1996), the extant literature on diversity management has emphasized that benefitting from a diversified workforce and diminishing the potential conflicts among the employees requires long-term planning and strategic initiatives. The trend to posit diversity management in strategic human resource management (Kossek *et al.*, 2006) directed the researchers towards the hard elements of strategy; namely, strategy, structures, and systems. From this point of view, diversity appears to be an embedded phenomenon associated with power relationships in organizations, and the success of diversity depends on top management commitment (Cox & Blake, 1991), best practices (Kreitz, 2008), and initiatives (Gilbert, Stead, & Ivanchevich, 1999). The research concentrates on the hard elements usually interested in performance (Pitts, 2009). However, the soft elements can be titled as the climate, values, and skills. This view relies on ethical and non-

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discriminatory bases. Hence, the research stresses inclusion (Pless & Maak, 2004; Barak *et al.*, 1998), equity (Agocs & Burr, 1996), among other aspects. However, both approaches are considered to be instrumental (Janssens & Zanoni, 2005), and depend on the assumption that diversity can be managed. Diversity management is an extensive managerial approach which depends on a positive climate for all employees. The organization's diversity climate plays an important role in structuring the diversity initiatives (Barry, 1996). In this study, diversity climate refers to the perceptions and attitudes of individuals towards the differences among employees in the workplace. It is asserted that the positive diversity climate in an organization helps managers to mitigate conflicts and negative attitudes, leverages organizational performance, and provides an efficient workplace (Herdman & McMillan-Capehart, 2010; Kossek & Zonia, 1993), thus contributing to a highly tolerant climate assists organizations to be more pluralistic (Cox, 1991).

Due to its very nature, the hospitality industry – especially the hotel sector – is considered to be multicultural and composed of a greater diversified workforce. The major characteristics of the hotel industry include low pay, low job security, high labor flexibility, high turnover, and gender discrimination (Deery & Shaw, 1999; Walsh & Deery, 1999). In addition, the workers are usually unskilled laborers (Gröschl & Doherty, 1999) and are underrepresented women (Baum, 2013). These characteristics pose the hotel industry as a promising field to examine. In this study, we examine a hotel chain to ascertain the importance of diversity climate in hotel chains. This study examines the diversity climate of an organization from the employee's view. In the study, a brief literature about diversity climate is presented and an empirical investigation reported. The research question is provided below:

- Do the demographic attributes of employees differentiate in perceiving diversity climate?

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Diversity Climate

Diversity management is considered as a double edge sword that has both positive and negative outcomes for organizations. The proponents of diversity management tend to see it as a strategic property for an organization and set their arguments on resource based view (Chrobot-Mason & Aramovich, 2013).

The scholars of diversity management examine the diversity climate on three levels: individual, group (working group), and organization (Cox, 1993; Hicks-Clarke & Isles, 2000; Sawyerr, Strauss, & Yan, 2005). *Individual level* states personal experiences of diversity workplace. (Bean *et al.*, 2001). On this level, personal perceptions of employees are considered in order to measure and elaborate the current position of an organization in diversity related management. *Group level* is defined in a cognitive aspect as exchanging information and perspectives within a group (Joshi & Roh, 2009). Group level climate and relationships increase problem solving capability (Gilbert, Stead, & Ivanchevich, 1999). Organizational level indicates organizational attitudes and responses to diversity, both coherent organizational climate and management of diversity, and employees' evaluations towards managers with whom they are not directly dependent in diversity related issues. This level is characterized with the choices of the decision makers – in other words, the management.

3. Methodology

The research applied the quantitative method and data is gathered via the questionnaire technique. The sampling consisted of a hotel chain and the data collected from 285 respondents. Statistical analyses of the data were conducted using the software programs SPSS (Version 15). In particular, descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations) were used in the data analysis. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) and independent t-test was employed to determine whether or not there was a difference in perceived diversity climate according to hotel worker's demographic attributes.

3.1. Data Collection

The sample of the study consists of the employees of a hotel chain which is one of the biggest in Turkey due to number of owned hotels (10), rooms (1972), and beds (5,561). The hotel chain, one of the first hotel chains in Turkey which was founded in 1970, is a typical family owned business. The hotels settled in Antalya and the hotel chain provides an opportunity for diversity management researches with its practices including corporate social responsibility initiatives and raising awareness trainings for employees.

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