

Theoretical and Practical Implications of Workplace Diversity in a Global Society

Symposium Proposal

Mzamo P. Mangaliso, University of Massachusetts, Amherst MA (Organizer, presenter)

Robin Back, University of Central Florida, Orlando, FL (Presenter)

Howard Jean-Denis, University of Massachusetts, Amherst MA (Presenter)

Ben Kahn, Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts, North Adams MA (Presenter)

Leah Z.B. Ndanga, West Chester University, West Chester PA (Presenter)

Nancy Ovitsky, Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts, North Adams MA (presenter)

Zengie A. Mangaliso, Westfield State University, Westfield MA (Chair)

Submitted for the 18th Biennial Conference on Managing In A Global Economy

be held in

Dubrovnik, Croatia

June 16 – 20 2019

Theoretical and Practical Implications of Workplace Diversity in Global Society

Abstract

Diversity in terms of race/ethnicity, gender, age, ability, sexual orientation, or nationality has become a reality that contemporary organizations must face. The increase in migration patterns across national borders has further exacerbated the need for academics to address questions that arise from diversity. Several approaches for mitigating diversity are suggested in the literature, including colorblindness, pluralism, multiculturalism, and polyculturalism. The symposium will address the broader challenge of how to effectively institutionalize diversity in the workplace. We hope that answering some of the issues raised will lead to the creation of new knowledge that will deepen our understanding of workplace diversity.

Theoretical and Practical Implications of Workplace Diversity in Global Society

Diversity – in its various dimensions of race/ethnicity, gender, age, ability, sexual orientation, or nationality – has become a reality that contemporary organizations must face. The increase in migration patterns across national borders has further exacerbated the need for academics to address questions that arise from diversity. The extant management literature tends to essentialize diversity in terms of the aforementioned demographic differences, and the intersection of such differences (Bodenhausen, 2010; Holck, Muhr, & Villesèche, 2016; Tatli & Özbilgin, 2012). But identity can also be defined by the specific dynamic contexts in people's socially constructed environments which belie such essentializations (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Roberson, 2006; Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005).

In the latter part of the 20th century leading scholars and consultants began calling for organizations to respond with approaches that embrace diversity (Copeland, 1988; Cox & Blake, 1991; Etsy, 1988; Mandrell & Kohler-Gray, 1990; Theodorakopoulos & Budhwar, 2015). Indeed, an important implication of W. Ross Ashby's (1956) *Law of Requisite Variety* is that for any organization to survive in the long-run, the diversity within its ranks must match or exceed the diversity of the clientele in its environment. Embracing diversity, therefore, has been seen to hold the promise of enhanced organizational performance (Siciliano, 1996). In fact, a recent study showed that the diversification of the foreign employees with respect to their nationalities increases the total factor productivity in German manufacturing plants (Trax, Brunow, & Suedekum, 2015). However, along with the desirability of greater organizational diversity has also come a stronger reaction against it, and greater prejudice against minorities.

Several studies have pointed to a number of different approaches that undergird diversity, discussing the advantages and disadvantages of each. Among them are colorblindness, pluralism, multiculturalism, and polyculturalism (Bernardo, et al., 2016; Cho, Tadmor, & Morris, 2018; Rosenthal & Levy, 2012). *Colorblindness* has been defined as the ethos of disregarding cultural differences under the belief that group categories, such as race, should be de-emphasized because doing so will foster reduced prejudice. It encourages people to focus on the similarities across groups of people, such as, "we are all human or Americans." But taken to the extreme, colorblindness can lead to the monolithic and assimilationist ideology driven by the 'melting pot' beliefs, whereby cultural differences are disregarded and the dominant culture is adopted (Allport, 1979/1954). In fact, in terms of organizational performance, studies have found

colorblindness to be associated with lower cultural creativity through reduced inclusion of foreign ideas.

An alternative ideology is based on *pluralism*. A pluralistic organization is open to diversity, but the norm is to place most ‘minority’ employees in similar job positions or in specific departments. A third ideology is *multiculturalism*, justified by the ethos of preserving separate cultural traditions. And yet some research has shown that multiculturalism produces no effect on creative problem solving (Cho, Tadmor, & Morris, 2018; Rosenthal & Levy, 2012). And finally there is *polyculturalism*, whose focus is on intercultural interaction, i.e., how cultures have interacted, influenced, and shared ideas and practices with one another throughout history, and how they continue to do so in contemporary organizations. There is increasing evidence emerging that polyculturalism may offer several positive organizational outcomes (Prashad, 2003; Rosenthal & Levy, 2012).

Questions that these approaches to diversity bring up include whether the promotion of polyculturalism offers the best chance to the effective implementation of diversity instead of colorblindness, pluralism, or multiculturalism. Are these approaches opposed one another or are they positively associated with one other, with people likely to simultaneously endorse multiple combinations of them? The latter line of thinking would lead to an endorsement of a hybrid “every-bit-of-each-ism” type of approach that incorporates the strengths of the each of the four (Rosenthal & Levy, 2010; Ryan, Casas, & Thompson, 2019; Sunter, 1996).

The broader question that the symposium will address is how diversity can be institutionalized in the contemporary work environment. Perhaps a greater understanding of authentic leadership may be the key source of social information that can exert a push for a climate of diversity. Or are there alternative ways diversity can be instituted, such as bottom-up or lateral communication approaches? We hope that answering some of the issues raised in the symposium will lead to the creation of new knowledge that will deepen our understanding of workplace diversity.

Format of the Symposium

The symposium is planned for 90-minutes, which can be adjusted to fit the available time slot.

The format of the symposium is planned as follows:

1. A welcome and brief introductions of the panelists by the Chair (3 mins)
2. Each participant discusses the topic from his/her perspective (7 min. max, total: 42 min)
3. Questions/comments from the audience (15 mins)
4. Roundtable discussions (20 mins). Depending on the number of attendees present, they will be asked to form groups of 4 - 6 people to engage in discussions exploring strategies for dealing with the issues of diversity raised by the presenters.
5. Concluding comments from organizer (10 mins).

Take away: A greater awareness of the multiple intersecting issues in the topic of diversity and developing of models and strategies to serve as guidelines as guidelines for dealing with diversity in the workplace.

References

- Allport, G. W. (1979/1954). *The Nature of Prejudice*. Cambridge, MA: Addison Wesley.
- Ashby, W. R. (1956). *Introduction to Cybernetics*. New York, NY: John Wiley and Sons.
- Berger, P. L., & Luckmann, T. (1966). *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.
- Bernardo, A. B., Salanga, M. G., Tjipto, S., Hutapea, B., Yeung, S. S., & Khan, A. (2016). Contrasting lay theories of polyculturalism and multiculturalism: Associations with essentialist beliefs of race in six Asian cultural groups. *Cross-Cultural Research, 50*(3), 231-250.
- Bodenhausen, G. V. (2010). Diversity in the person, diversity in the group: Challenges of identity complexity for social perception and social interaction. *European Journal of Social Psychology, 40*(1), 1-16.
- Cho, J., Tadmor, C. T., & Morris, M. W. (2018). Are all diversity ideologies creatively equal? The diverging consequences of colorblindness, multiculturalism, and polyculturalism. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology, 49*(9), 1376-1401.
- Copeland, L. (1988). Learning to manage a multicultural workforce. *Training, 5*(May), 48-56.
- Cox, T. H., & Blake, S. (1991). Managing cultural diversity: Implications for organizational competitiveness. *Academy of Management Perspectives, 5*(3), 45-56.
- Etsy, K. (1988). Diversity is good for business. *Executive Excellence, 5*, 5-6.
- Holck, L., Muhr, S. L., & Villesèche, F. (2016). Identity, diversity and diversity management: On theoretical connections, assumptions and implications for practice. *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal, 35*(1), 48-64.
- Mandrell, B., & Kohler-Gray, S. (1990). Management development that values diversity. *Personnel, 67*(March), 41-47.
- Prashad, V. (2003). Bruce Lee and the anti-imperialism of Kung Fu: A polycultural adventure. *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique, 11*(1), 51-90.
- Rosenthal, L., & Levy, S. R. (2012). The relation between polyculturalism and intergroup attitudes among racially and ethnically diverse adults. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology, 18*(1), 1-16.
- Ryan, C. S., Casas, J. F., & Thompson, B. K. (2019). Interethnic ideology, intergroup perceptions, and cultural orientation. *Journal of Social Issues, 66*(1), 29-44.

- Siciliano, J. I. (1996). The relationship of board member diversity to organizational performance. *Journal of Business Ethics, 15*(12), 1313-1320.
- Sunter, C. (1996). *The World and South Africa in the 1990s*. Cape Town, South Africa: Human and Rousseau.
- Tatli, A., & Özbilgin, M. F. (2012). An emic approach to intersectional study of diversity at work: A Bourdieuan framing. *International Journal of Management Reviews, 14*(2), 180-200.
- Theodorakopoulos, N., & Budhwar, P. (2015). Guest editors' introduction - Diversity and inclusion in different work settings: Emerging patterns, challenges, and research agenda. *Human Resource Management, 54*(2), 177-197.
- Trax, M., Brunow, S., & Suedekum, J. (2015). Cultural diversity and plant-level productivity. *Regional Science and Urban Economics, 53*, 85-96.
- Weick, K. E., Sutcliffe, K. M., & Obstfeld, D. (2005). Organizing and the process of sensemaking. *Organization Science, 16*(4), 409-421.