A Study of Perceived Diversity Climate in relation to Organizational Acculturation, Agreeableness and Previous Acquaintance with Various Social Groups

An Abstract

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As we enter the new millennium, diversity in the workforce is rapidly increasing. Employees now reflect a diversity of cultural perspectives, ethnic backgrounds, ages, genders, physical abilities and levels of education. By the implementation of latest technologies, the world has turned into the global village. Such modernization in communication has allowed several organizations to spread their businesses in different parts of the world. On one hand, an organization is extending its business, and on the other hand the organization is building a diverse environment for its employees. This wave of multiculturalism is here to stay and can't be ignored. It is the need of attention in order to uphold the well-being and success of businesses and organizations all over the country.

**Workforce Diversity**

Today, there is more to diversity than just gender and race. It has evolved from anti-discrimination compliance to focusing on inclusion, and the impact on a company's bottom line. Diversity in today's workplace refers to racial minority groups, ethnic minority groups, women, older persons, persons with disabilities, persons of non-traditional sexual orientation, employees of different language groups and other non-traditional groups.

Larkey (1996) defines diversity as a sign of differences in worldviews or subjective culture resulting in potential behavioural differences among cultural groups, and differences in identity among group members in relation to other groups. The basic assumption is that members of a given culture are likely to share a set of symbols, values and norms that are the root of their common worldviews and behaviours. These shared views and behaviours create a sense of belonging to the group among group members with respect to other groups.

Group identity, therefore, provides not only a sense of belonging in the group members, but also a perception of not belonging or exclusion of members of other groups, (Mor Barak, 2000). An expanded definition of diversity includes such variables as education level, position and years in the organization or marital status. A common typology for this expanded definition provides a distinction between two types, i.e. diversity of the observable attributes (visible diversity) such as race, gender or age; and diversity of the less readily detectable attributes (invisible diversity) such as religion, education and position in the organization, (Cummings et al. 1993; Jackson et al. 1995).
Acculturation

Cultural change which results from the continued firsthand contact between members of two distinct cultures is called acculturation. It is marked by both physical and psychological changes. The classic definition of acculturation dates back to the mid 1930's. Famous anthropologists Redfield, Linton and Herskovits (1936), defined it as those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous firsthand contact with subsequent changes in the original cultural patterns of either or both groups. According to Kempa and Thomas (2000) Acculturation is the process of shifting values to the host culture from the culture of origin. Acculturation refers to the process of change in which individuals from one culture modify their behaviour in order to adapt to another culture, (Burnam, Telles, Karno, Hough and Escobar, 1987).

When members belonging to two cultures come in contact, each could influence the other equally, but in practice one tends to dominate the other, leading to a distinction between the "dominant group" and the "acculturating group". This is not to say that changes in the dominant culture are uninteresting or unimportant: acculturation often brings about population expansion, greater cultural diversification, attitudinal reaction (prejudice and discrimination), and policy development (for example- in the areas of immigration, cultural pluralism, bilingualism and schooling).

Agreeableness

Agreeableness is a tendency to be pleasant and accommodating in social situations. In contemporary personality psychology, agreeableness is one of the five major dimensions of personality structure, reflecting individual differences in concern for cooperation and social harmony. People who score high on this dimension are empathetic, considerate, friendly, generous, helpful and generally likable. They also have an optimistic view of human nature. They tend to believe that most people are honest, decent and trustworthy. In general, they are more responsive to others than are their peers, (Tobin, Graziano, Vanman and Tassinary, 2000). People scoring low on agreeableness place self-interest above getting along with others' well-being, and therefore less likely to go out of their way to help others, (Graziano, Habashi, Sheese and Tobin, 2007). Sometimes their skepticism about others' motives causes them to be
suspicious and unfriendly. People very low on agreeableness have a tendency to be manipulative in their social relationships. They are more likely to compete than to cooperate.

Mayer and Nishii, (2007) have studied the relationship of leaders' attitudes and employees' perceptions of justice climates. High agreeableness score in leaders have been found to be positively related with perception of justice climate. When leaders were more agreeable, they tended to lead groups that experienced more favourable interpersonal, informational and procedural justice climates. Thus, perception of diversity climate in an organization can be a function of agreeableness of the employee.

**Previous Acquaintance with Various Social Groups**

Human being is a social animal. Being a social creature, it interacts with other members since childhood. These members may belong to his/her family, may be from own community or from other community. Acquaintance or interaction with members of other social groups can influence the perception and attitude of an individual.

India is a multicultural and pluralistic country. It consists of different social groups based upon language, religion, caste, ethnicity, gender etc. Democratic system of this nation provides an individual with ample opportunity to interact and become acquainted with members of various social groups. Gender also plays a role. Conservative communities particularly in rural India, still attach social stigma if a female person interacts with any male member except her relatives or family members. Many a times stereotypes from senior members put restrictions on others, due to which an individual may not interact, even if s/he is interested.

Acquaintance with other/s can be approached from the perspectives as suggested by Welbourne (2001), 'time' and 'contextual diversity'. Time indicates the length of time the individual is acquainted with; contextual diversity indicates/describes whether the individual knows the other member in a single context or across multiple contexts. A long tradition of research indicates that consistency in behaviour across situations tends to be rather low, (Dudycha, 1936; Hartshorne and May, 1928; Mischel, 1968; Mischel and Peake, 1982). However recent research suggests that the inconsistencies in behaviour across different types of situations form a meaningful pattern that is both stable and predictable, (Mischel and Shoda, 1995). This predictable pattern is definitely based upon facts and logic being away from
prejudice. Triandis (1991) also suggests that regular interaction with members of other social groups helps in reducing the stereotypes and increasing the sociotypes.

**Rationale of the study**

Due to globalization, world is no longer a bigger place to live and on this shrinking planet, no society, nation or organization is self-dependent. It is the era of multinationals and multi-cultural corporates. People from different castes, nations, states, races, communities etc. come to one place and work together for some common organizational goal. So, it is quite obvious that these modern organizations face a lot of diversity in their workspace. But, the most important thing is that, how the employee perceives the diversity climate of his/her workplace. If a person perceives the climate to be healthy, only then he would feel satisfied with his job and will try to make full use of the potential leading to better and creative problem solving, more productive use of human resource and better understanding of market and competition. Whereas, if he perceives this climate to be unhealthy, it can lead to misunderstanding, distorted communication, destructive competition, political maneuvering, favouritism, discrimination and intolerances among the employees. So, perception of diversity is very important and the various factors which affect it must be studied to have more accurate knowledge about it. For proper management of this diversity in organization, various cultural, social, personality and structural factors can play a significant role. Organizational acculturation at organizational level, agreeableness as a personality factor; and previous acquaintance with various social groups at social level will be taken in this study to assess their contribution towards perception of diversity climate. After having knowledge about the antecedents, we will be able to maintain and enhance diversity climate in a more effective way. Thus, the proper management of diversity can turn this acknowledgement of individual differences into more productive growth as well as development which will finally lead to the welfare of the organization as a whole.

**Objectives of the Study**

1. To study the difference between different group of employees upon Perceived Diversity Climate.
2. To study the relationship between Organizational Acculturation Strategies and Perceived Diversity Climate in the organizations.
3. To study the relationship between Agreeableness and Perceived Diversity Climate.
4. To study the relationship between Previous Acquaintance with Various Social Groups and Perceived Diversity Climate.
5. To assess the relative contribution of organizational acculturation, agreeableness and previous acquaintance with various social groups towards perceived diversity climate (organizational fairness, organizational inclusiveness and perceived diversity value).

Hypotheses
On the basis of review of literature, following hypotheses were framed:

1. Native Punjabis will differ significantly from Non-Punjabis with respect to their Perceived Diversity Climate.
2. Acculturation Strategies will have significant relationship with Perceived Diversity Climate.
3. Agreeableness will be positively related with Perceived Diversity Climate.
4. Previous Acquaintance with Various Social Groups will be positively related with Perceived Diversity Climate.
5. All the three antecedent variables will contribute significantly towards Perceived Diversity Climate.

Method
This study will constitute of two parts. In part I a pilot study will be conducted and in part II the target study will be conducted.

PART I (Pilot study)
Sample- 40 to 50 white collar employees from service sector will be taken randomly.
Tools- The following tools would be used:
1. Perceived Diversity Scale (Barak et al. 1998)
   This scale consists of four sub-scales which measure: Organizational inclusiveness, Organizational fairness, Personal diversity value and personal comfort. Split half reliability and cronbach alpha of the scale is 0.75 and 0.71 respectively. Coefficient alpha for all dimensions,
i.e. organizational fairness, organizational inclusiveness and personal diversity value is 0.38, 0.44 and 0.44 respectively. (Scale would be modified according to the need of the study).

2. **Acculturation Strategy Questionnaire (Adopted from Berry, 1992)**
This is Likert type 5 point rating scale which measures four strategies of acculturation that are: Assimilation, Integration, Separation and Marginalization. (Scale would be modified according to the need of study).

3. **NEO PI-R Scale (Costa and McCrae, 1992)**
This scale measures five dimensions of personality. Only the dimension of Agreeableness will be used, which further includes six sub-divisions: Trust, Straightforwardness, Altruism, compliance, Modesty and Tender mindedness. Internal consistency of Agreeableness is 0.86 and test-retest reliability is 0.63.

4. **Cumulative Index of Previous Acquaintance with various Social Groups**
   This scale would be developed and will be modified according to the results obtained from pilot study.

   **Statistical Analysis**- Item-total correlation, split-half coefficient and coefficient alpha will be applied to the data.

   **PART II (Main study)**

   **Sample**- Stratified random sample will be taken from three strata: Native Punjabis, Non-Punjabis Settled in Punjab, Non- Punjabi Sojourners (who are in Punjab since few years/ less than one generation). Responses will be collected randomly from 100 skilled employees from each stratum.

   **Tools**- Questionnaires and Scales developed and modified during pilot study will be used.

   **Statistical Analysis**- Product Moment Correlation and Multiple Stepwise Regression will be applied to the data.

**Implications of the study**
This study can proved to be beneficial in designing diversity training programs in the organizations. The findings would help us to identify which acculturation strategy out of Integration, Assimilation and Separation should be used for proper management of diversity in organizations. Besides these implications, it can be helpful for counseling purposes too, through introducing personality improvement programs in organizational settings.