ANTECEDENTS OF AFFECTIVE COMMITMENT IN A MULTICULTURAL WORK SETTING

Dr Lynne Leveson **
School of Business
La Trobe University
Bundoora, Australia, 3086
Ph: 61 3 94791718
Email: l.leveson@latrobe.edu.au

Dr Steve Bakalis
School of Applied Economics
Faculty of Business and Law
Victoria University
Footscray Park Campus, Melbourne, Australia
Ph: 61 3 96884616;
Email: Steve.Bakalis@vu.edu.au

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[1] ** Corresponding author

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Abstract

This study investigates the relationship between employee perceptions of their organisation's management of cultural diversity (support for diversity and access to informal networks), their perceived organisational support and affective commitment. A questionnaire survey was developed and distributed to a sample of employees working in a large Australian financial institution. Analysis of the data reveals that cultural diversity management perceptions are not *directly* associated with affective commitment; rather, diversity management is positively associated with affective commitment *via* perceived organisation support. This suggests that cultural diversity management practices may need to be perceived by employees as a sign of organisational caring and support before individual commitment will be affected favourably. The study reinforces the need to rethink simple relationships between cultural diversity management perceptions and organisational/individual outcomes, to consider more complex models that include important mediating variables in order to more fully understand the effects of cultural diversity management.

Keywords: cultural diversity management, workforce diversity, affective commitment, perceived organizational support

INTRODUCTION

The Australian workforce is one of the most culturally diverse in the world. Cultural diversity can be defined as differences, such as in language, religion, dress and moral codes that exist between people according to race and ethnicity (Kossek and Zonia, 1993). Currently overseas born people own and operate approximately 29% of Australian small businesses (DIMA, 2006). As this sector, together with medium size business employ about 70% of Australia's workers (Syed, 2006) and as Australia is increasingly turning to overseas workers to ameliorate a growing skills shortage in key industries, there is an increased focus on how organisations can best manage cultural diversity among their employees. 'Managing' cultural diversity is defined here as the recognition by industry leaders that workforce cultural diversity not only exists but that it should be backed by employment practices and policies which are supportive and equitable (D'Netto and Sohal, 1999; Syed, 2006).

Studies investigating workforce cultural diversity, both in Australia and internationally, generally focus on managers and far fewer have explored diversity from the perspective of non-managerial workers. Yet, their perspective could have much to tell. While management shapes diversity practices and policies, it is the perceptions and reactions towards these by non-managerial employees, which is likely to influence the

tone and subsequent effectiveness of these within the workplace (Hicks-Clarke and Iles, 2000). Understanding the nature and outcomes of employee perceptions of an organisation's treatment of diversity is important, particularly in light of the research showing an association between cultural diversity management and key work outcomes, such as organisation climate, commitment, performance, career and job satisfaction (Cox, 1993, 1991; D'Netto and Sohal, 1999; Hall and Parker 1993; Hicks-Clarke and Iles, 2000).

The study described here explored the responses of non-managerial employees working in a large multicultural financial organisation in Australia, investigating the relationship between their perception of aspects of its management of cultural diversity (organisational support for cultural diversity and ease of access to its informal networks) and their perceptions of support from and commitment to the organisation. The model employed allows for the possibility that employee perceptions of organisation support may mediate the relationship between diversity management perceptions and organisation commitment.

THEORETICAL CONSTRUCTS AND HYPOTHESES

Employee perceptions of cultural diversity management

From an employee perspective, research has shown that individuals who perceive that diversity (generally) is supported and encouraged in their workplace are likely to hold positive attitudes towards their organisation, their job and their career. Support for diversity has been related to positive job and career attitudes (Hicks-Clarke and Iles, 2000) and lack of support with negative job satisfaction (Cox, 1993) and poor interaction with others (Kossek and Zonia, 1993).

One premise underpinning our research is that an organisation cannot be considered as managing cultural diversity appropriately unless its initiatives are recognised throughout the hierarchy and through its informal and formal networks. Access to informal networks is particularly significant given the importance of language on communication flows and the development of personal networks within

organisations (Feely and Harzing, 2004; Lindholm, 1997; Marschan-Piekkari, Welch and Welch, 1999). Both are constrained in situations where not everyone speaks the dominant language (in this case, English). The literature suggests that communication and cohesion suffer where diversity within work groups is ignored (Kochan, et al., 2003) or when language barriers exist (Neal, 1998). Importantly, employees appear to interpret company initiatives as supportive if its actions are discretionary rather than if they are perceived as merely fulfilling mandatory requirements (Cotterell, Eisenberger and Speicher, 1992; Gilbert and Ivancevich, 2000; Gouldner, 1960; Rhoades, Eisenberger and Armeli, 2001).

In this study employee perceptions of two aspects of their work environment are explored – their perceptions as to whether they feel their organisation supports cultural diversity and whether they believe they have access to its informal networks

Affective commitment

Affective commitment was selected for this study as it is the form most likely to be engendered when an organisation's cultural diversity management makes employees feel valued and involved (Meyer and Allen, 1991). Affective commitment is associated with other key outcomes such as organisational citizenship behaviors (Carmelli, 2005; Meyer and Allen, 1991, 1997; Mowday, Porter and Steers, 1982; Shore and Wayne, 1993), intention to participate in professional activities (Snape and Redman, 2003) and increased individual performance (Joiner and Bakalis, 2006; Meyer and Allen, 1997; Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002).

Perceived organisational support

Through their experience of work, employees are considered to develop global beliefs concerning 'the extent to which the organisation values their contribution and cares about their well-being' (Eisenberger, Stinglhamber, Vandenberghe, Sucharski and Rhoades, 2002:566). Work experiences such as favorable opportunities for rewards, procedural justice and supportive and helpful supervision have been positively

related to perception of organisation support (Eisenberger, Cummings, Armeli and Lynch, 1997; Fasolo, 1995; Hutchison, 1997) as have favorable job conditions (Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002). Where employees perceive that they are genuinely supported they are more predisposed to reciprocate with commitment (Blau, 1964; Cotterell et al., 1992; Gilbert and Ivancevich, 2000; Gouldner, 1960; Rhoades et al., 2001).

Perceived organisation support is important to this study because it may provide the link between employee-perceived management of cultural diversity and affective commitment. This premise is further discussed in the next section.

Hypotheses

Given the foregoing, four hypotheses are proposed. First, we need to consider the possibility of a *direct* relationship between employee perceptions of cultural diversity management and affective commitment. Theoretically, if management is showing support for cultural diversity in the workplace and allowing minority groups access to informal networks, employees are more likely to feel emotionally attached and committed to that organisation. The following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: There is a direct positive association between employee's cultural diversity management perceptions and affective commitment.

Following from H1 and consistent with van Kippenburg and Schippers' (2007) call to consider mediating variables in diversity management-organisational outcome models, we also consider an *indirect* relationship between cultural diversity management perceptions and affective commitment, via perceived organisation support. Specifically, employee perceptions of the management of cultural diversity are likely to be positively associated with employees' perception of support from the organisation, and in turn, such felt support is expected to be positively associated with affective commitment.

With respect to the first component of the indirect model, the diversity management-organisation support relationship, research to date is limited. The works of Fasolo (1995) and Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002), however can be invoked to show that favorable job conditions (generally) and fair work procedures enhance perceptions of organisation support. Support for cultural diversity and ease of access to informal networks for all employees may have a similar effect.

With respect to the second component of the indirect model, the organisation support-affective commitment relationship, a number of studies demonstrate support for a positive (reciprocal) relationship between the two variables (Bishop, Scott, Goldsby and Cropanzano, 2005; Blau, 1964; Gouldner, 1960; Settoon, Bennett and Liden, 1996; Wayne, Shore and Liden, 1997).

Accordingly, the following three hypotheses are proposed:

H2: There is a direct positive association between cultural diversity management perceptions and perceived organisational support.

H3: There is a direct positive association between perceived organisational support and affective commitment.

H4: There is an indirect association between cultural diversity management perceptions and affective commitment through perceived organisational support.

RESEARCH METHODS

Sampling and Data Collection

The relationship between cultural diversity management perceptions, perceived organisation support and affective commitment were examined via a questionnaire distributed to employees working in a large multinational financial organisation in Australia. The company prides itself on issues relating to equal opportunity and access. Written permission to distribute the questionnaire was obtained from the organisational head. Three hundred questionnaires were distributed to five divisions within the

organization and division heads were asked to distribute 75% of the questionnaires to employees from non-English speaking backgrounds - the group of interest in this study. Respondents were provided with return self-addressed, stamped envelopes and 101 of the 108 returns were useable, yielding a response rate of 36%. An analysis of the differences in the key variables between earlier and later survey respondents revealed no statistically significant differences. However, the possibility of non-response bias must be acknowledged.

With respect to the sample 58% was male and 42% female, 63% were aged 35 years or less while 37% were older than 35 and 68% had completed secondary and/or university undergraduate education. Slightly less than one quarter had served for one year and 28% had been with the company for 10 years or more. These figures are consistent with the employee profile for the entire organization. Sixty-one percent pf respondents listed countries other than Australia as their place of birth and 70% stated that a language other than English was spoken at home. While 80% of the sample was classified as "General employees" the remaining 20% occupied lower management positions. Since none of these were from the senior levels where diversity management policies and procedures were formulated, they were considered as non-management employees for the purposes of this study. Most were employed in Administration (32%) or the Call Centre (30%).

Variable Measures

Perceived organisation support was measured using all nine items of the instrument developed by Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison and Sowa (1986). Two representative items are "Help is available from my organisation when I have a problem" and "The organisation cares about my general satisfaction at work". Affective commitment was measured using the instrument developed by Allen and Meyer (1990). Only the six items that related to affective commitment were used. Two examples are "I feel 'emotionally attached' to this organisation" and "This organisation has a great deal of personal meaning for me".

In contrast, it was not possible to find pre-existing measures for the two aspects of cultural diversity management perceptions (support for cultural diversity and access to informal networks). This was not unexpected as the study sought to address specific gaps in the research literature and it was anticipated that no measures would exist for either. Instead, questions were formulated based on two instruments ("Reaction-to-Diversity Inventory" and "Workplace Diversity Survey") devised by De Meuse and Hostager, (2001) to measure attitudes and perceptions to a variety of forms of diversity in the workplace. We selected relevant key terms from the inventory and nine framed questions with a cultural diversity orientation. Examples are, "My cultural differences are seen as an asset to my organisation", "I believe my organisation attempts to engage with my ethnic community" and "I believe my organisation supports workplace diversity". In all, nine items were developed.

Employee access to informal networks, was developed in a similar manner it was not possible to locate any studies that described instruments to measure this dimension. Using research from a social categorization and social identity perspective (Brewer and Brown, 1998; Tajfel and Turner, 1986) we focused on the significance of language differences in the formation of workplace 'in-groups' and 'out-groups' and the influence of language differences on this process. We conceptualised access to informal networks as the facility to freely enter and participate in any organisational activity. Evidence of this facility would be the freedom that employees feel to enter and exit lunch groups, social networks, communication grapevines and other informal activities (Davidson and Griffin, 2000). Fifteen items were developed including, "I have access to informal networks (e.g., having lunch, coffee in out-of-work hours) with colleagues", "I believe my organisation makes an effort to include everyone" and a reverse scored item "I believe my verbal communication is misunderstood by my colleagues".

One limitation of this measure is the difficulty in attributing in/exclusion to informal networks to cultural differences alone. In order to minimise this, the wording of the questionnaire cover page oriented the respondent specifically to the *cultural* aspect diversity. The effectiveness of this was confirmed

statistically as we found a strong positive relationship between Access to informal networks and Organisation support for cultural diversity ($r = 0.68$) but no statistically significant relationship between the Access variable and gender, age or tenure.

The 14 items for the two aspects of cultural diversity management perceptions were piloted on a sample of 30 students from the Graduate School of Management at the researchers' university. Following an analysis of the pilot study some items were deleted or the wording modified. The items comprising the final measures and the factor scores (following a Principal components factor analysis with Varimax rotation) are presented in the Appendix A. The final 10 items were placed on a seven-point Likert scale which ranged from "Strongly agree" to "Strongly disagree".

RESULTS

The descriptive statistics and Cronbach alpha reliability measures for the relevant variables are contained in Table 1 and a correlation matrix for all relevant variables is presented in Table 2. Ordinary least-squares regression-based path analysis was adopted to test the study's hypotheses. This technique allows a dependent variable in one equation to become an independent variable in another equation, and it is often employed to test relatively simple relationships (Grapentine, 2000). Thus, this technique was used to show the relation between employees' perceptions of cultural diversity management, perceived organisation support (POS) and affective commitment (AC). The regression results presented in Table 3 were used to compute the magnitudes (standardized beta coefficients) of the direct and indirect effects in the path model (see Figure 1).

Hypothesis 1 examined the *direct* relationships between cultural diversity management perceptions and AC, when controlling for POS. Referring to Table 3, the first regression shows that there is no statistically significant relationship between the two aspects of cultural diversity management, access to informal networks and organisation support for diversity, and organisation commitment. Thus, H1 is not supported.

(It should be noted that the correlation matrix of Table 2 shows a positive association between the diversity management variables and organisation commitment. However, this relationship no longer exists when controlling for POS, suggestive of an indirect relationship which is further explored next.)

To test the *indirect* relationship between cultural diversity management perceptions and AC, hypotheses H2-H4 were tested. First, referring to Table 3, it is clear that the two aspects of cultural diversity management perceptions are positively associated with POS (Organisation support for cultural diversity: beta = 0.38, $p < 0.001$; Access to informal networks: beta = 0.45, $p < 0.001$), providing support for H2. It appears therefore, that if an organisation is perceived as supporting cultural diversity and as providing access to its informal networks, then the organisation is perceived by employees as supporting them. Second, the regression results in Table 3 show a positive relationship between POS and AC (beta = 0.72; $p < 0.001$), supporting H3. Finally, H4 is supported by virtue of support for H2 and H3. Thus, there is an *indirect* path between cultural diversity management perceptions and AC via POS. The strength of the indirect effects are, for organisation support for cultural diversity: beta = 0.28 (0.38 * 0.73), $p < .01$ (Sobel test statistic 3.70) and access to informal networks: beta = 0.33 (0.45 * 0.73), $p < .01$ (Sobel test statistic 4.16). Figure 1 depicts these relationships. From these results we can conclude that cultural diversity management perceptions are not *directly* associated with AC; rather, diversity management is positively associated with affective commitment *via* POS. This represents a fully mediated model. That is, the employees consider that on the basis of their organisation's support for cultural diversity and the opportunities it provides to access its informal networks, it is caring and supportive, and this has flow-on effects in raising their affective commitment. **[Insert Tables 1-3 and Figure 1 here]**

DISCUSSION

Organisational support for cultural diversity and access to informal networks were selected for this study because of the likelihood that they would capture employees' perceptions of the more informal aspects of how their organisation managed cultural diversity. The results highlight the significance of the less formal

aspects of managing cultural diversity and their links to key organisational outcomes such as organisational commitment.

Specifically, we found a direct positive association between two aspects of cultural diversity management perceptions and Eisenberger et al's. (1986) perceived organisation support. This suggests that the organisation concerned is conveying to its employees that it takes diversity management seriously and possibly also that it is willing to take initiatives that are over and above its mandatory obligations. This finding contributes to the literature on perceived organisation support in that it adds two aspects of cultural diversity management to the list of work experiences already identified as contributing to employee perceived organisation support (Eisenberger et al., 1997). In addition, and consistent with previous research, we found a direct positive association between perceived organisational support and affective commitment (Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002; Eisenberger et al., 1986)

A further finding, which highlights the significance of perceived organisational support, is the mediating role it plays in linking cultural diversity management perceptions with commitment. This finding suggests that employees in the organisation concerned may not automatically reciprocate its initiatives in managing cultural diversity with greater commitment *unless* these initiatives are also interpreted as the organisation supporting and caring for their wellbeing. This particular finding could have implications for the assumptions firms make about their approach to cultural diversity management. Non-managerial employees are less likely to derive their sense of involvement through policy development are more likely to evaluate cultural diversity management policy in terms of how it affects them, their colleagues and their working atmosphere. One lesson may be that the greater number of employees who genuinely feel involved in cultural diversity management policy, then the more widespread the benefits (including increased affective commitment) are likely to be.

Our study also contributes to the existing literature by attempting to quantify perceptions of two different aspects of cultural diversity management. Notwithstanding the limitations addressed in the Methods section, both aspects, organisation support for cultural diversity and access to informal networks, were important in understanding the influence on employee perceived organisation support and affective commitment. With an increasingly culturally diverse labor market in Australia there is a heightened potential for workers to perceive themselves as 'outsiders' within the organisation, unless management undertakes specific steps to develop a climate of inclusiveness, as illustrated by the variable perceived access to informal networks. This may include such initiatives as translating important documents into workplace languages, ensuring migrant representation on recruitment and promotion panels, providing language training for non-English speakers and cultural sensitivity training for all (D'Netto and Sohal, 1999).

There is scope for future research to explore other aspects of cultural diversity management within the existing model. For instance, how supported do employees feel by their company's practices in the recruitment, selection, training and remuneration of workers from diverse backgrounds and is this associated with their affective commitment to that company? Scope exists also to employ an expanded model that includes the influence of cultural diversity management perceptions on outcome variables, such as performance and citizenship behaviors.

LIMITATIONS

Although a sample size of 101 is adequate for statistical analysis, caution must be exercised in generalising the findings beyond the associated hypothesis tests. Secondly, the instrument devised to measure cultural diversity management perceptions has not previously been used (see Methods). Thirdly, only one organisation was studied thus limiting the generalisability of the results to other contexts. (This could also be seen as a strength since variation in organisational cultures is controlled for). Finally the

path model used for this study implies causality. We are unable to assess the possibility of alternative causal directions among some of the variables with the research method adopted.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, cultural diversity management practices may have to be perceived by employees as a sign of caring and support from the organisation before individual commitment will be affected favourably. Diversity initiatives may need to be perceived of as sincere if they are to influence employee commitment. Importantly, the criteria for sincerity may differ between managers and non-management employees with the latter possibly requiring a higher level of proof. An important factor in this respect is the ease of access that employees, particularly those from minority groups, have to the organization's informal networks.

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Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for all measured variables

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Cronbach Alpha
Organisation support for cultural diversity	10.00	35.00	28.15	5.19	0.86
Access to informal networks	8.00	35.00	25.35	6.39	0.89
Perceived Organisational support	11.00	63.00	43.51	11.24	0.96
Affective commitment	6.00	42.00	26.06	8.67	0.93

Table 2: Correlation matrix for all measured variables

Variables	1	2	3	4
1. Organisation support for cultural diversity	1			
2. Access to informal networks	0.68**	1		
3. POS	0.68**	0.70**	1	
4. Affective commitment	0.55**	0.62**	.80**	1

** Significant at .01 level (2-tailed)

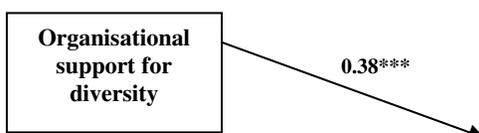* Significant at .05 level (2- tailed)

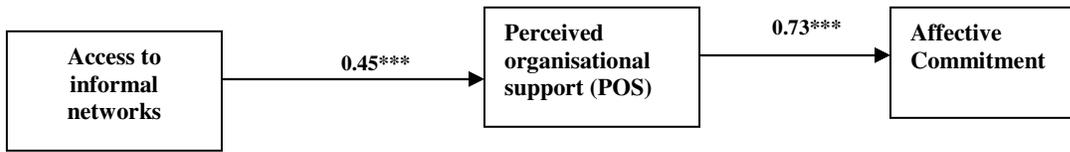**Table 3: Regression results for affective commitment, POS and aspects of diversity[1]**

Dependent Variable	Independent variable	Standardized Co-efficient	t-val	R^2
Commitment	POS	0.73	7.74**	0.64
	Support for diversity	-0.04	-0.44	
	Access to networks	0.14	1.45	
POS	Support for diversity	0.38	4.20**	0.57
	Access to networks	0.45	4.91**	

** Significant at .01 level (2-tailed)

* Significant at .05 level (2- tailed)

[1]Affective commitment was not associated with any of the control variables (age, gender, educational level and tenure)

| Organisational support for diversity | ————0.38***————→ |

Access to informal networks →0.45***→ **Perceived organisational support (POS)** →0.73***→ **Affective Commitment**

**Significant at .01 level (2-tailed)

Figure 1: Path Model for dimensions of diversity management, POS and Affective Commitment

Appendix A: Items and factor scores for cultural diversity management dimensions

Items	1	2
I believe this organisation has a culturally diverse workforce	0.801	
My team/unit is composed of culturally diverse employees	0.782	
I believe that my organisation encourages cultural diversity in the workplace	0.824	
I believe management supports cultural diversity in the workplace	0.711	
I believe cultural diversity is promoted in the organisation	0.643	
I have access to informal networks		0.821
I have access to casual conversation with other employees		0.859
I have access to casual conversation with management		0.738
I feel included in my organisation		0.669
I believe my verbal communication is misunderstood by the other employees (reverse scored)		0.731