Rebels without a cause? A study about generations, gender, diversity climate and work attitudes.

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Introduction

Diversity management literature has been recently characterized by some crucial dilemmas (Holvino and Kamp, 2009): Is diversity management something related to business or to social justice? Does diversity management sustain the status quo or does it catalyze change? The existence of these dilemmas could be connected to different reasons: (1) there are different streams of research with diverse assumptions in the field (some perspectives are based on neoliberal ideology, other perspectives are close to critical management studies, etc.) (Calas et al. 2009); (2) there are ambiguous results about antecedents and consequences (e.g. organizational/group/individual level; performance, process, attitude) of diversity management (Shore et al. 2009). Starting form this debate, the objective of this paper is (1) to shed more light on the connection between diversity management and work attitudes, and (2) to link this connection to discourse about age diversity, i.e. the focus of this paper is on the consequences side of diversity management across generations. Moreover, focusing on the Italian contexts, we would like to answer the call for studies that go beyond the U.S. context. The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. The next section describes the theoretical framework of the research hypotheses. Then, we will present the methodology used to test the model, including the study context. The last section discusses results, providing theoretical and practical implications.

Theoretical Background and Hypotheses

Individual perception of diversity climate and positive work attitudes

According to Hays-Thomas (2004), diversity management represents an ensemble of systematic and planned programs or procedures that are designed to improve interaction among diverse people, and to make this diversity a source of creativity, complementarity, and greater organizational effectiveness, rather than a source of tension, conflict, miscommunication, or constraint on the effectiveness, progress, and satisfaction of employees. Diversity management is devoted to manage individual differences of employees, these differences can be readily perceivable attributes (e.g. gender, race, age, disability) or not visible attribute of employees (e.g. sexual orientation), but all these differences are aspects of the identity of the employees (for a review of this issue see Stockdale and Crosby, 2004). Existing literature is converging on the importance of identity dynamics in understanding organizational tension and conflict. Identity conflicts can negatively alter many organizational processes and procedures (e.g. communication, learning, flexibility, and creativity) (Fiol et al., 2009). Moreover, identity is by no means a stable, enduring index of categorization: identity is better understood as a process of human development than a “task” to be “achieved”. Diversity management policies and programs may influence identity dynamics, and conflicts and, through these, work attitudes. In particular, individual perception of diversity climate may have a direct influence on work attitude dimensions because it represents the link between the individual level and the organizational level (i.e. the organizational commitment to eliminate discrimination). Drawing from Gelfand and colleagues (2005: p. 105), we may define individual perception of diversity climate as employees’
perceptions of the policies, practices, and procedures that implicitly and explicitly communicate the extent to which fostering and maintaining diversity and eliminating discrimination is a priority in the organization. Only recently, research has devoted attention to how diversity climate may influence positive work attitudes (Day and Schoenrade, 2000; Ragins and Cornwell, 2001; Button, 2001; Lubesky et al., 2004; Pugh et al. 2008; Shore et al. 2009). In order to understand how diversity climate influences work attitudes, we focus on engagement (Saks, 2006) and oriented change OCB (Choi, 2007). The reason why we focus on these constructs is twofold: on the one side, recent literature has shown how engagement and oriented change OCB are important with respect to other attitudes to get superior individual and organizational performance (Williams and Anderson, 1991). On the other side, while there is extensive research on the sources of these attitudes in terms of job characteristics, we still do not know how psychological climate can influence them (Schaufeli and Sanova, 2007).

**Individual perception of diversity climate and engagement**

Engagement can be defined as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, absorption (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004). One of the seminal articles about engagement at work (Kahn, 1990) has defined this construct as “the simultaneous employment and expression of a person’s “preferred self” in task behavior that promote connections to work and to others, personal presence (physical, cognitive and emotional) and active, full role performance” (1990: 134). According to this study, at the basis of engagement there is the opportunity for the employee to see return on investment in role performance, defined as “psychological meaningfulness”; to show himself without the fear of negative consequences for status and career, defined as “psychological safety”; to have energies and resources to invest in role performance, defined as “psychological availability”.

Regarding antecedents and outcomes of engagement, extant research has pointed out numerous theoretical models, focused both on individual and on the organization as levels of analysis. Regarding the antecedents of engagement, research has focused on pointing out explanations of engagement at the individual level of analysis, by focusing especially on job characteristics, in terms of skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, performance feedback predict job engagement (Sacks, 2006; May, Gilson, Lymn and Harter, 2004) and job resources (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004; Salanova and Schaufeli, 2008).

Individual perception of diversity climate can be conceived as an antecedent of engagement due to its effect on identity dynamics, and conflicts, and psychological meaningfulness, safety and availability. Formally:

\[ H_p1: \text{Individual perception of diversity climate is positively associate with work engagement} \]

**Individual perception of diversity climate and change oriented OCB**

Change-oriented OCB can be defined as ‘constructive efforts by individuals to identify and implement changes with respect to work methods, policies, and procedures to improve the situation and performance’ (adapted from Bettencourt, 2004). Both affiliative and challenging types of OCB are important and required for high performance. Affiliative behavior such as helping and compliance lubricates interpersonal relationships among coworkers and promotes collaborative task performance, which is critical in effectively completing tasks with high interdependence and complexity that require collective effort and intensive coordination. Perhaps this aspect of OCB is most consistent with the definition of contextual performance as behaviors that maintain and enhance social, motivational, and psychological environment for task performance (Borman and Motowidlo, 1993). However, simply creating a harmonious environment and hard-working employees is not sufficient for improved performance. In fact, having collaborative and compliant employees can backfire on the organization: ‘a worker who goes beyond the call of duty to accomplish a misconceived job may actually be more dangerous to an organization than a more mundane performer’ (Staw and Boettger, 1990, p. 537). With increasing competition and unpredictable changes in the business
environment, employees are required to be more and more proactive, flexible, and innovative in their dealings with task-related issues (Bettencourt, 2004; Frese et al., 1997).

Several empirical studies have demonstrated that organizational context variables can significantly affect employees' change-oriented OCB. For instance, research has shown that employees' propensity to make constructive suggestions is affected by the overall organizational context as represented by the style of top management and organizational climate or culture, Scott and Bruce (1994) found that psychological climate for innovation such as perceived support for innovation was a critical factor for R&D workers' innovative behavior. Indeed, when employees believe that their workplace supports new ideas and change, and it supplies resources for innovative initiatives, they may generate and express innovative ideas and suggestions for change more freely and frequently (Scott and Bruce, 1994). Moreover, unlike cooperative behavior, which supports existing work relationships and is positively regarded by supervisors and colleagues, change-oriented OCB (even when it is constructively framed and presented) tends to challenge the status quo and disrupt the interpersonal relations and work process endorsed by others (LePine and Van Dyne, 2001; Staw and Boettger, 1990).

Individual perception of diversity climate influences change oriented OCB, since it can provide employees with the beliefs that the organization is open to diverse way of working and relating with others and with the resources to implement change, by favoring idea generation and knowledge exchange. Formally,

Hp2: Individual perception of Diversity climate is positively associate with change-oriented OCB.

Individual perception of diversity climate, generations, gender and work attitudes

Existing literature proposes different and heterogeneous definition of “diversity” and “workforce diversity”. For some, the term “diversity” provokes emotional reactions because they link the term to the idea of protected groups and quotas. In this case, the term diversity is often narrowed to differences such as gender and race. Some alternative definitions of diversity are broader and include all types of individual differences, such as ethnicity, age, religion, disability status, geographic location, personality, sexual preferences, cultural and national origin, and a myriad of other personal, demographic, and organizational characteristics (Herring, 2009; Shore et al., 2009). Within this kaleidoscope of dimensions, it is worth studying differences among people that are likely to affect their acceptance, work performance, satisfaction, or progress in an organization because directly affect, both the organizational climate, and the performance of Human Resource Management (HRM) practices (Hays-Thomas, 2004). Among all these differences, age is worth studying because (1) unlike other social categories of diversity, aging is an experience that most human beings will have, in light of current predicted life spans (Shore et al., 2009), (2) recent literature points out that younger people are experiencing a more fluid identity about gender and sexual orientation (Savin-Williams, 2005), and are characterized by a more neutral approach to the diversity issue than the older ones (Heiskanen, Rantalaiho, 1997).

People who belonged to the same generation share a position of an age-group in specific historical time (Mannheim 1952). More in general, social scientists use the term “generation” to referring to people born in the same general time who share historical or social life experiences (Ryder, 1965; Kupperschmidt, 2000; Smola and Sutton, 2002). Smola and Sutton (2002) argue that the social context in which a generational group develops impacts their personality, personal feelings towards authority, values and beliefs about organizations, work ethic, goals and aspirations for their work life, distinct preferences or traits that distinguish their feelings toward work and what they desire from work (Jurkiewicz and Brown, 1998; Kupperschmidt, 2000). In general, while researchers differ slightly in the precise years of birth that define the different generations, most agrees that there are four broad generations of employees: Veterans (1925-1944), Baby Boomers (1945-1964), Gen X (1965-1981), and Gen Y (1982-2000) (Howe et al., 2000; Yu and Miller, 2003).

Many scholars (Loomis, 2000; Smola and Sutton, 2002) suggests that Baby Boomers value on-job security and a stable working environment and remain loyal and attached to an organization; they are idealistic, optimistic and driven (Loomis, 2000).
Instead, Gen X are typically characterized as cynical, pessimistic and individualist (Kupperschmidt, 2000; Smola and Sutton, 2002); portrayed as comfortable with change and diversity, they are described as independent and self-sufficient than people from previous generations. Compared to Baby Boomers who respect authority, Gen Xs are seen as skeptical and unimpressed with authority. Their approach to work has been characterized as one that values a strong work-life balance (Howe et al., 2000), whereby personal values and goals are likely to be regarded as more important than work-related goals.

Finally, Gen Y has grown up with technology, so the first characteristic of this generation is that it has a different way of communicate. Furthermore, they are seen to be comfortable with change and are less likely to see job security as an important factor in the workplace. As employees, Gen Ys are typified as valuing skill development and enjoying the challenge of new opportunities. Similar to the Baby Boomers, they are viewed as driven and demanding of the work environment and are also likely to be optimistic (Smola and Sutton, 2002; Huntley, 2006). Displaying a high level of confidence, Gen Ys are described as enjoying collective action and are highly socialized (Tulgan and Martin, 2001; Smola and Sutton, 2002). Moreover, they are seen to value having responsibility and having input into decisions and actions (McCridle and Hooper, 2006). Howe and Strauss (2000) describes Gen Y also as team-oriented, pressured to excel, and conventional rather than rebellious. According to this perspective, young people in western countries are basically content with modern culture and do not desire critical analysis (Savin-Williams, 2005).

Given the differences between generations, we propose that the relationship between (1) individual perception of diversity climate and engagement, and (2) individual perception of diversity climate and change attitude is stronger for the older ones.

When considering the role that gender plays in the relationship between the perception of diversity climate and positive work attitudes, we argue that this relationship is stronger for women rather than for men. The theoretical rationale is rooted in organizational justice (Cropanzano, 2000) and identity theories (Fiol, et al. 2009), according to which diversity climate signals the extent to which the organization is committed to value a plurality of identities and to give voice to all of them. Extant literature has shown that the historical development of organizations has led them to refer to ‘male’ role, career and performance models. Our argument is that in these contexts, the signals that diversity climate might give in terms of ‘equal opportunity’ is stronger for women, who can see in it the promotion of new organizational value oriented to encourage different role models. Given these differences between women and men in the interpretation of diversity climate, we propose that (1) individual perception of diversity climate and engagement, and (2) individual perception of diversity climate and change attitude is stronger for women.

Formally:

Hp3a: Age moderates the relationship between individual perception of diversity climate and engagement, so that this relationship is stronger for older generations.

Hp3b: gender moderates the relationship between individual perception of diversity climate and engagement, so that this relationship is stronger for women.

Hp4a: Age moderates the relationship between individual perception of diversity climate and change attitude, so that this relationship is stronger for older generations.

Hp4b: Gender moderates the relationship between individual perception of diversity climate and change attitude, so that this relationship is stronger for women.

Results

In order to test our hypotheses, we run OLS regression models on a sample 319 employees belonging to an international consultancy company located in Italy. Results support our finding both on the main effects and on the moderating ones.

This study contributes to the diversity management literature in three ways. First, this paper sheds more light on the consequences of diversity management practices and programs. In particular, this paper focus on how individual perception of diversity climate can influence positive work attitudes. Second, it
contributes to the debate on diversity neutrality within generations, by providing empirical support to the mediating role of younger generations in the relationship between diversity climate and work attitudes. In particular, this paper clarify that the linkage between diversity management and work attitude is not an absolute linkage, but depends on individual perceptions based on generation effect. Younger generations seem to be less concerned with diversity management issues, even if international and national data show that the problems of equal opportunity, and discrimination based on gender, sexual orientation, etc. are not solved.

**Selected References**


The study defined traditional gender role attitudes as viewing the woman as homemaker and man as breadwinner; more egalitarian views were defined as men and women sharing in work and family roles, with both men and women working in paid work and participating in child-rearing and household duties (Corrigall & Konrad, 2007). Results of the study suggested that women's early gender role attitudes predicted their later work hours and earnings, and women's work hours predicted their future gender egalitarianism (Corrigall & Konrad, 2007). Children were negatively associated with future gender diversity, including diversity of gender, religion, and ethnicity, has been shown to improve retention and reduce the costs associated with employee turnover. In a diverse workplace, employees are more likely remain loyal when they feel respected and valued for their unique contribution. This, in turn, fosters mutual respect among colleagues who also value the diverse culture, perspectives, and experiences of their team members. Where working in homogeneous teams can seem easier, it can cause a business to settle for the status quo. Diversity, on the other hand, can breed healthy competition, stretching a team in a positive way to achieve their best. This atmosphere of healthy competition can lead to the optimization of company processes for greater efficiency. Younger generations also share a different view of the U.S. relative to other countries in the world. Gen Zers (14%) and Millennials (13%) are less likely than Gen Xers (20%), Boomers (30%) or Silents (45%) to say the U.S. is better than all other countries. Similarly, the youngest Republicans stand out in their views on the role of government and the causes of climate change. Gen Z Republicans are much more likely than older generations of Republicans to desire an increased government role in solving problems. About half (52%) of Republican Gen Zers say government should do more, compared with 38% of Millennials, 29% of Gen Xers and even smaller shares among older generations. European Journal of Innovation Management. Diversity, climate and innovative work behavior. Diversity, climate and innovative work behavior. Sabina Bogilović, Guido Bortoluzzi, Matej Černe, Khaterh Ghasemzadeh, Jana Žnidarji. Findings of this study indicated that cognitive group diversity mediated the negative relationship between visible dissimilarity and IWB. Further, both innovative/entrepreneurial and team/clan climates moderated the relationship between visible dissimilarity and cognitive group diversity. IWB is defined as individuals' behavior that encompasses idea generation, creating support for ideas and idea implementation (e.g. Scott and Bruce, 1998; Janssen, 2000). A result of this boost in age diversity are conversations about how generational differences will impact the functioning of our organizations. After all, Millennials only want to communicate with coworkers via textâ€™ and Baby Boomers donâ€™t text, right? And you need to attract those tech-y Millennials with promises of flexible work schedules, but their older counterparts all want a traditional workday, correct? Well, actually, wrong. Most of the evidence for generational differences in preferences and values suggests that differences between these groups are quite small. In fact, there is a con