

Original Paper

Assessing Diversity across Cultures: A U.S.-Hispanic Perspective

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Received: June 22, 2018

Accepted: July 4, 2018

Online Published: July 12, 2018

doi:10.22158/wjssr.v5n3p225

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/wjssr.v5n3p225>

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to compare workplace diversity perceptions between a US and Hispanic population. This study used the diversity perceptions of a sample of US business students and compared them with a sample of Hispanics using the Reaction to Diversity Inventory (RDI). The means of both samples were tested for significant differences at the $p < .05$ level using SPSS. A statistically significant difference was noted between the US sample and the Hispanic sample. The data analysis showed a between groups sum of squares=5892.35 and significance at $p < .000$ level. This study suggests that Hispanic perceptions of diversity are quite different than may be intuitively perceived or portrayed in the literature. The study also reinforces what is already stated in the literature, that collecting and analyzing perceptions can help determine if an organization's workplace is viable to support diversity initiatives. This study is one among a limited collection of research on Hispanic perceptions of diversity behaviors in the US workforce and illustrates how cultural values of majority-minority populations can potentially impact the design and implementation of diversity initiatives, especially within a global workforce environment.

Keywords

Hispanic workers, majority minority, workplace diversity, diversity behaviors, diversity assessments

1. Introduction

Although the issue of diversity in the workplace came to the forefront of corporate policies and practices during the 1970s, primarily in response to the federal enforcement of equal opportunity employment and affirmative action programs (Kelly & Dobbin, 1998), it wasn't until the 1990s that it

became a highly debated and researched organizational theory topic (Syeman, 2006). Undoubtedly, anti-discrimination legislation first compelled changes to internal practices, yet, over time, businesses began discovering the wider value of diversity and started promoting it voluntarily as an enhancer of business performance (Jayne & Dipboye, 2004; Richard, McMillan, Chadwick, & Dwyer, 2003).

In more recent times, an interest in diversity has been reignited by factors such as immigration (Lamphere, Stepick, & Grenier, 1994), globalization (Martin, 2014), disability rights (Ball et al., 2005), spirituality in the workplace (Hicks, 2002) and religious values at work (Ball & Haque, 2003), sexual orientation (Lubensky et al., 2004), and shifts in public opinion regarding the relevance of workplace diversity (Stockdale & Crosby, 2004). Among the purported benefits of a diverse workplace are improvements to productivity, a competitive advantage, better work relationships among employees, and an enhancement of social responsibility and ensuring of compliance (Wentling & Palma-Rivas, 1998). Consequently, organizations have increasingly invested in training programs as a pathway to a more inclusive—and competitive—positioning (Ferdman & Brody, 1996). Despite these increased training efforts, though, their measurable effects on performance remain uncertain.

Even with the apparent success of some training programs and initiatives to promote diversity as a value of organizational culture, appraisals of its performance utility remain scarce within the literature (Anand & Winters, 2008). Moreover, the most common methods of assessment are reactive in nature, consisting of external measurements related to compliance (e.g., lawsuits and grievances), internal indicators (e.g., organizations' demographics), or pre-/post testing of training offerings (Rynes & Rosen, 1995; Stutz & Massengale, 1997). Some of the more recent methodologies utilized for studying workplace diversity include evaluations against a needs assessment (Roberson, Kulik, & Pepper, 2003) and by means of a Reaction-to-Diversity Inventory or RDI (De Meuse & Hostager, 2001). EBSCO's *Mental Measurements Yearbook—Tests in Print* database shows just one further instrument, the Diversity Management Survey (Torres, 1995). Overall, there seems to be a significant gap in the literature between studies on the abundance of initiatives in organizational practice and research supporting the modeling, validity, and reliability of diversity effectiveness (Nguyen, 2014).

Beyond training design and research topics, however, lies the issue of the potential impact—if any—of significant demographic shifts wherein a minority group increases in size and becomes what Wentling and Palma-Rivas (1998) referenced as a “major-minority group”. In national cultures in which diversity programs in business have been reasonably effective with respect to minorities, what are the consequences with respect to perceptions of diversity and corresponding training programs when a workplace “minority” becomes a “minority-majority” (Wazwaz, 2015) or even a “new” majority (Gonzalez, 2010; Sanburn, 2015)?

One major-minority case in point worth analyzing in order to better understand the potential effects on workforce diversity perceptions is that of Hispanic and Latino Americans in some parts of the United

States (Ian, 2005). In 2010, around 16% of the U.S. population (50 million people) were Hispanics (National Council of La Raza, n.d.), representing, in turn, a considerable proportion of the total U.S. labor force. In fact, Hispanics make up a larger share of the U.S. workforce than any other racial or ethnic group (Craig & Richeson, 2014). More specifically, in 1988, some 9,000,000 Hispanic people were employed in the U.S. workforce; by 2011, there were 23,000,000, and it is projected that, by 2020, 30.5 million, or 19% of the labor force, will be Hispanic. More importantly, a United States Department of Labor report (Department of Labor, April 5, 2012) found that the Hispanic population tends to have a higher labor force-participation rate than do other minorities. Furthermore, the United States Census Bureau has estimated that the country's Hispanic population would more than double, from 53.3 million in 2012 to 128.8 million, by 2060—which means that, by 2060—nearly one in three U.S. residents will be Hispanic (U.S. Census Bureau, December 12, 2012).

Per-state statistics from the Census Bureau's 2010 data (American Fact Finder, 2010) include figures that are also significant in pointing to a majority-minority. For example, 46.3% of New Mexico's population is Hispanic, while California has a 37.6% Hispanic population; Arizona, 29.6%; Florida, 22.5%, and Texas, 37.6%. Moreover, according to an earlier report from the U.S. Census Bureau, nearly 1 in 10 of the nation's 3,141 counties had, at the time of publication, a population that was more than 50% Hispanic in makeup (Fry, 2008). While the Census Bureau has estimated that the USA will become a majority-minority nation for the first time in 2043 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012), it seems highly likely that a majority-minority context in the overall workforce of several of the nation's states may already exist (Preuhs & Juenke, 2011).

Although such statistics point to the emergence of a major-minority Hispanic workforce in the United States, the scholarly literature has given minimal attention to better understanding Hispanic worker perceptions and behaviors (Guerrero & Posthuma, 2014). Ironically, this lack of research occurs concurrently to the period of time—2010 to 2020—during which people of Hispanic or Latino origin/ethnicity will account for 74% of new workers (Kochhar, 2012). Ominously, some scholars have suggested that the declining share of workforce majorities may lead to an increased resistance toward diversity, as a way to reaffirm non-Hispanic Whites as prototypical Americans (Danbold & Huo, 2015). In addition to the general paucity of research on the issue, validity and reliability data on the few instruments that are available to assess diversity are also scarce (Sanchez & Brock, 1996).

Prior literature suggests that Hispanics share values, norms, and behaviors that are different to those of other Americans and that such divergence can lead to inefficiencies, conflicts, and dysfunctions when improperly managed (Holmes, 2005). Studies exploring some of these differences have found that Hispanic people, for example, show higher levels of in-group collectivism, greater acceptance of power distance, a stronger “present time” orientation, closer personal spaces, higher importance of family ties, and more traditional gender roles than do non-Hispanic Americans (Marín & Marín, 1991). Peppas (2006)

found significant variation in perceptions of hiring criteria between Hispanics and non-Hispanics. Language differences alone represent a major challenge within the organizational contexts of communications and performance (Offerman, Matos, & DeGraaf, 2014). Delgado (1994) observed that Hispanic personnel have strong loyalties to families, friends, and the organization for which they work, and tend to be more cohesive and cooperative in groups than non-Hispanic Americans. The integration of Hispanics into mainstream values has also been examined in the literature with some evidence found that they have not fully acculturated into the American culture (Romero, 2004).

The ever-increasing demand for diversity initiatives contrasted with the scant research available on their effectiveness, positioned alongside an emerging Hispanic workforce as a major minority in the United States, sets the stage for the present study. Additionally, this topic promises to have research implications in the international arena, too, as the phenomenon of major-minorities features in other nations as well. To illustrate, there is evidence of major-minorities in England (Wilson, 2012), Canada (Chianello, 2011), and India (*The Hindustan Times*, 2015), to mention just a few. This paper also sets out to challenge underlying assumptions framing the topic of diversity under majority-minority conditions and attempts to understand the corollaries for managing diversity in a globalized organization. What effects—if any—might an increasing majority-minority have on diversity dynamics within an organization, such as with reference to any related curricula, training, practice, and research? What underlying perceptions serve as antecedents to the design and implementation of diversity initiatives?

The main purpose of this research project is to compare diversity perceptions between a US and a Hispanic population. Having a better appreciation of Hispanic perceptions can serve as guidance for preparing, conducting and researching diversity in a majority-minority situation. Accordingly, the research question for this project was formulated as follows:

Are the perceptions of a Hispanic workforce on diversity significantly different from those of a US workforce population in the United States?

The literature on diversity research in the workplace seems to follow three distinct tracks. The first focuses on the individual worker's abilities and challenges in dealing with dissimilar social groups or national cultures (Swann et al., 2004; Triana, Wagstaff, & Kim, 2012; Whitney-Gibson et al., 2011). The second takes a normative approach and emphasizes policy frameworks and institutional rules that recognize, protect, and address diversity conflicts (Abdel, 2010; Ferner, Almond, & Colling, 2005; Strachan, Burgess & Sullivan, 2004). The third track deals with the creation and sustainment of organizational environments that thrive and perpetuate diversity as a performance enhancer. The essence of this latter approach is the building of an organizational culture that nurtures diversity (Gilbert, Stead, & Ivancevich, 1999; Rajput & Ball, 2014; Schur, Kruse, & Blanck, 2005; Waters, 2004). It is possible, too, to identify a fourth approach to workplace diversity: a cultural values framework that affects individuals, policies, and organizations' cultures (Balkin & Schjoet, 2012; Marques, 2007; Smith et al.,

2004). The approach selected for the present study draws from the first approach, whereby the perceptions of a sample of individual workers from the United States are compared to those of a sample of workers from Puerto Rico, and the fourth approach, through which the perceptions are shared along a set of values.

There is evidence in the literature of a strong direct relationship between perceptions and reactions to diversity initiatives. Here, “perceptions”, or mental models, refer to “deeply ingrained assumptions, generalizations, or even pictures or images that influence how we understand the world and how we take action” (Senge, 1990, p. 8). Since perceptions are behaviorally relevant (Robbins & Judge, 2009), it follows that they will affect workers’ reactions to diversity (Harris, Rousseau, & Venter, 2007; Greenberg, 2004; Woszczyński, Myers, & Moody, 2006). More specifically, a positive perception of diversity by employees has been clearly related to organizational commitment, empowerment, and job satisfaction (Wolfson, Kraiger, & Finkelstein, 2011). Equally, a negative perception of diversity has been associated with degradation in team performance (Harrison et al., 2002). While the literature shows additional relationships as well (Smith et al., 2004), the point for the purposes of the current research is that collecting and analyzing perceptions can help determine if an organization’s workplace is likely to be able to support diversity (Hubbard, 2004).

For this study, diversity perceptions were determined using the Reaction to Diversity Inventory (RDI), a tool developed over a three-year period, supported and concurrently validated by De Meuse and Hostager (2001). The RDI consists of five perceived outcomes, categorized as affective, behavioral, cognitive, personal, and organizational. Each of these outcomes is characterized by seven positive words and seven negative words representing a range of positive and negative reactions to workplace diversity. For example, the seven positive words for the behavioral outcome are “collaborate”, “cooperate”, “friendly”, “listen”, “participate”, “support”, and “understand”, and the seven negative words are “blame”, “fight”, “patronize”, “resist”, “stubbornness”, “unfriendly”, and “withdrawal” (see Figure 1, below). Each participant in the study was asked to circle all of the words frequently associated with diversity in the workplace, and from this input, a summary score was calculated. Since the inventory consists of seven positive and seven negative words for each of the five outcomes, individual scores for each outcome ranged from a low of -35 to a high of +35. In the original validation, the RDI outcomes were found to be statistically significant at the $p < .05$ level (De Meuse & Hostager, 2001).

2. Method

The population for this study was analogous to that originally selected for the validation of the RDI in the earlier De Meuse and Hostager (2001) study, namely, undergraduate and graduate business students. The original RDI study sampled 110 students, whose scores, as presented in the De Meuse and Hostager (2001) article, were then compared, in the present work, with a separate sample of students

from an accredited business college in Puerto Rico. Although the specific demographics from the original DeMUSE and Hostager (2001) report are not available, the typical population for the university used for testing the RDI is about 90% White and 2% Hispanic (College Profile, n.d.).

The students from Puerto Rico were selected because they were known to possess a well-defined Hispanic cultural identity, to be bilingual, to be U.S. citizens, and to enjoy close ties with mainstream American economics. At a deeper level, differences in diversity perceptions are rooted in the values and customs of the respective national cultures (Cox & Blake, 1991; Ng & Burke, 2004). In order to assess diversity perceptions of Hispanics in its most distinctive character, it was necessary to sample a Hispanic population with a strong national culture while at the same time maintaining certain US workplace factors. Although selecting business students from native cultures such as Mexico, Central America, South America or even Spain would seem appealing, Puerto Rico was selected for this study not only because it also has a distinct Hispanic culture (Leibowitz, 1967), business schools are accredited by US agencies (Zammuto, 2008), they have the same currency and economic system (Collins, Bosworth, & Soto-Class, 2006), and share ties with US professional organizations, such as the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM, n.d.), but more importantly, US Federal Labor Laws also apply (Leibowitz, 1967).

The English version of the RDI is presented in Figure 1. In the Puerto Rican version, the 70 words were arranged identically to their positioning in the English version but translated into Puerto Rican Spanish and validated separately by professors teaching business courses at the participating college. All of the positive words retained a value of +1 and the negative words a value of -1, such that individual scores once more could range from +35 to -35, and with a score of 0 calculated if all of the 70 words were selected (circled).

Directions: Circle all the words that you frequently associate with workplace diversity

Compassionate	Ethical	Anger	Unfair
Resentment	Wisdom	Insecurity	Progress
Unity	Bureaucratic	Proud	Justified
Stress	Fight	Cooperate	Happy
Support	Listen	Blame	Rivalry
Bad	Fear	Clashes	Confused
Discovery	Sensible	Frustration	Turnover
Stubbornness	Grateful	Unjustified	Harmony
Liability	Team-building	Participate	Asset
Innovation	Expensive	Hopeful	Understand
Useless	Rewarding	Sacrifice	Worthless
Unprofitable	Good	Withdrawal	Patronize
Fair	Pressure	Merit	Enthusiastic
Excited	Collaborate	Unfriendly	Profitable
Disorder	Immoral	Regulations	Useful
Resist	Unnatural	Proper	Disagree
Sleeplessness	Advancement	Enrichment	Apprehensive
Opportunity	Friendly		

Figure 1. Reaction to Diversity Inventory (RDI)

The summary score identifies a participant's overall orientation toward workplace diversity, and, as a calculation, is valuable in assessing diversity perceptions as being "pessimistic", "realistic", or "optimistic". Next, statistical analysis of the scores, comparing those of the U.S. business students in the earlier De Meuse and Hostager (2001) study against those of the Puerto Rico business students, was carried out. Analysis of variance was performed using SPSS software to test for significant differences in the samples at the $p < .05$ level. Statistically significant differences between means would suggest a significant difference in perceptions of diversity between the two sample populations.

A sample of 107 students from a major business school in southern Puerto Rico participated in the new RDI study; 55 participants were female, 40 were male, and 12 incomplete forms were collected over a four-month period. Within this population, 23 of the students were under 25 years of age, 58 were between 26 and 36, and 14 were more than 36 years old. Regarding work experience, 16 of the students

had experienced less than 1 year in a workplace environment, 14 had between 1 and 2 years of experience, 27 had between 2 and 5 years, and 38 had more than 5 years. Thus, the majority of the study's participants were between the ages of 26 and 36, and the sample represented a wide range of work experience.

The descriptive statistics are presented in Table 1. They show a mean of 5.09 and standard deviation of 10.79 for the U.S. students, which resulted from the findings of the De Meuse and Hostager (2001) study. The descriptive statistics for the Puerto Rican students show a mean of 7.14 and standard deviation of 7.47. Table 1 also shows the between-groups sum of squares as 5892.35, with 38 degrees of freedom, $F = 513$, and significance at $p < .000$ level. Therefore, a statistically significant difference is noted between the U.S. sample and the Puerto Rican sample.

Table 1. Statistical Analysis

Descriptive Statistics

	<i>N</i>	<i>Minimum</i>	<i>Maximum</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std Deviation</i>	<i>Variance</i>
US-Students	110	-28	35	5.09	10.79	115.97
PR-Students	107	-14	28	7.14	7.47	55.78

ANOVA

	<i>Sum of Squares</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Between groups	5892.35	38	513.13	.000
Within Groups	20.55	68		

In addition to the overall scores, the De Meuse and Hostager (2001) study also interpreted the RDI scores according to three categories: namely, “optimist” (from +11 to +35), “realist” (from +10 to -10), and “pessimist” (from -11 to -35). Category comparisons between the U.S. and the Puerto Rican (“PR”) students are presented in Table 2. Comparing these RDI categories between groups, the Puerto Rican sample shows a more “realistic” perspective to diversity than does the U.S. sample. Although 35% of the U.S. students scored higher as “optimists,” the Puerto Rican students scored higher as “realists”, with 68%, while still retaining a 31% “optimistic” perception. The U.S. sample featured 7% “pessimists” whereas the Puerto Rican sample had only 1% in that category.

Table 2. Response to the Reaction-to-Diversity Inventory (RDI)

<i>Range of Scale Values</i>	<i>US Students</i>		<i>PR Students</i>	
	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Optimists [+11 to +35]	38	35	33	31
Realists [+10 to -10]	64	58	73	68
Pessimists [-11 to -35]	8	7	1	1
	n=110		n=107	

3. Results

The results of this study suggest there are significant differences in perceptions of diversity between the U.S. student sample used in the De Meuse and Hostager (2001) study and an analogous sample of students from a Hispanic population in Puerto Rico. Moreover, the data show more variability of responses among the U.S. students (115.9) than in the Hispanic sample (55.78).

4. Discussion

The results of this study are encouraging for a number of reasons. First, they suggest that Hispanic perceptions of diversity are quite different—in fact, somewhat more “realistic”—that may be inferred from the literature. Subconsciously, it would be easy to assume that Hispanics as a group would tend to be unduly homogenized based on a single dimension of their identity (Rodriguez, Parrish, & Parks, 2017). Regrettably, this tendency seems also present in the literature, where Hispanics are many times mistakenly lumped as a single identity despite significant cultural differences (Lee, Martin, & Hall, 2017). Here the educational and business disciplines can benefit from Sociology, where inter-cultural dynamics of group diversity, attitudes, behaviors, and experiences—if openly recognized and properly managed—are known to have a positive impact on organizational effectiveness (Rivera, 2014). If these perceptions hold true, it can be anticipated with some confidence that diversity initiatives in the workplace would be well received among a Hispanic majority-minority, provided that cultural sensitivities are properly acknowledged.

Secondly, the study reinforces the supposition already stated in the literature that collecting and analyzing perceptions can help to determine whether an organization’s workplace would be able to support diversity. The dynamics of a majority and the influence of other minorities notwithstanding, the present study supports the proposition that a Hispanic majority-minority would tend to react positively to diversity initiatives. However, given the small size of the sample selected for this study, such inferences should be considered with caution. Plus, there remain additional factors to be taken into

account in order to formulate a more definitive understanding of a Hispanic majority-minority, such as generational differences among Hispanics and tensions between Hispanic cultures (Markert, 2010; Tung, 2008). This study provides some insights into further research possibilities, such as assessments of the effects of national cultures in understanding diversity perceptions, which is especially important for diversity initiatives within a “globalized” workforce.

There are also possible considerations that go beyond the scope of this exploratory study yet have some merit as suggested topics for further research. The attention of this research project to the majority-minority phenomenon poses a challenge to some aspects of the current thinking on organizational dynamics, especially within the context of globalization. For example, to what degree does a majority-minority identity affect the socio-structural nature of power, communications strategies, acculturation processes and relational performance expectations within global business organizations? What are models of behavior that guide majority-minority conformance to majority norms, or at least, provide a better understanding of managing multiple sub-cultures within an organization? To what degree does the limited situation of women in business executive positions (glass-ceiling or similar syndromes) in some countries conform to majority-minority dynamics? Also, what lessons can be derived from business organizations in other nations—such as China, Canada, Saudi Arabia and Switzerland—that have a longer history of coping with majority-minority situations, and to what degree do these dynamics contribute to their own globalization effectiveness? Undoubtedly, developing acceptance of dimensional values in relation to diversity perceptions in a multicultural workforce is also a consideration in the design and implementation of training programs and in assessing impacts on business performance. Additional research in correlating RDI scores along Hofstede’s (1984) cultural dimensions, for example, may bring about more concrete guidance for diversity initiatives. Interestingly enough, there are prior studies that demonstrate cultural differences between individuals from the United States and from Puerto Rico using Hofstede’s model (Rivera-Vazquez, Ortiz-Fournier, & Flores, 2000) that may explain the differences in diversity perceptions arising from this study. Similar studies with workforces of other cultures may be warranted.

The outcomes of this research suggest a need for alternative approaches to the training, designing, and research of diversity discussed in the literature review. For instance, shifts in demographics from a minority to a major-minority may very well drive a need for more representative and inclusive recruiting, selection, and training of supervisors and managers (D’Netto & Sohal, 1999; Morrison, 1992). Additionally, a major-minority situation may also prompt the need for wider use of qualitative approaches to diversity research (Sundin & DueBilling, 2006), since quantitative assessments are less effective in obtaining sensitive data, are inflexible in scope, and may lose valuable insights when reducing the data to just numbers (Mertens, 2014; Pitts & Wise, 2010).

Various practical applications also emerge from this study. First of all, getting to appreciate a national culture in a fuller sense rather than learning from a minority subset seems a better grounding for understanding diversity reactions, especially in challenging some of the paradigms of management in a major-minority situation (Laurent, 1983). Also, the construct of “homogeneous national cultures and values” may be flawed, since intra-national cultural variations can sometimes be as significant as cross-national differences (Tung, 2008). Furthermore, the overemphasis on the relationship between diversity and internal organizational effectiveness may undermine other more relevant performance indicators, such as competitiveness in the global landscape (Cox & Blake, 1991).

Some limitations and delimiters of this study are worth noting. First, the earlier literature on the RDI is not clear regarding the cultural background of the sample used for validation. The assumption is that the U.S. sample used for validation represents the “American perspective” on diversity. Second, the Spanish language has many variations and some words used in this study for use in Puerto Rico may require modification and validation for use in other Spanish-speaking countries. Likewise, although the main cultural heritage in Puerto Rico comes from Spain, the island maintains close ties across many fronts with the United States (e.g., U.S. multinational corporations and franchises), and so there may have been subliminal American cultural influences within the sample Puerto Rican workforce. Finally, there is a possibility that the selection of the college in Puerto Rico used for this study might not necessarily represent mainstream national culture, given the institution’s educational objectives and mission.

Notwithstanding these limitations and delimiters, though, the present study nonetheless identifies significant differences in diversity perceptions that may affect organizational dynamics and will undoubtedly encourage further research.

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