

10<sup>th</sup> International Strategic Management Conference

## The Soft Element of Strategic Human Resource Management: The Employee's Perception of Diversity Climate

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### Abstract

Workforce diversity imposes itself as an imperative for organizations. Hence, today's organizations distinguish the diversified workforce as a tool to leverage business opportunities. In order to acquire a competitive advantage from human resources, diversity management comes to the front for all organizations. Managing diversity successfully requires a proper diversity climate for employees in all levels of organizations. This study reports the findings of a research study on the diversity climate among employees of a hotel chain. Both the t-test and one way ANOVA tests predict the perception of employees. The results show that diversity perceptions of employees predominantly depend on managerial status.

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Peer-review under responsibility of the International Strategic Management Conference.

*Keywords:* Diversity climate, hotel industry, strategic human resource management.

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### 1. Introduction

The salient fact presenting a major challenge for an organization's agenda of the century is diversity. Since the initial studies summoning managing diversity (Thomas, 1990; Cox, 1991; Thomas & Ely, 1996), the extant literature on diversity management has emphasized that benefitting from a diversified workforce and diminishing the potential conflicts among the employees requires long-term planning and strategic initiatives. The trend to posit diversity management in strategic human resource management (Kossek *et al.*, 2006) directed the researchers towards the hard elements of strategy; namely, strategy, structures, and systems. From this point of view, diversity appears to be an embedded phenomenon associated with power relationships in organizations, and the success of diversity depends on top management commitment (Cox & Blake, 1991), best practices (Kreitz, 2008), and initiatives (Gilbert, Stead, & Ivanchevich, 1999). The research concentrates on the hard elements usually interested in performance (Pitts, 2009). However, the soft elements can be titled as the climate, values, and skills. This view relies on ethical and non-

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discriminatory bases. Hence, the research stresses inclusion (Pless & Maak, 2004; Barak *et al.*, 1998), equity (Agocs & Burr, 1996), among other aspects. However, both approaches are considered to be instrumental (Janssens & Zanoni, 2005), and depend on the assumption that diversity can be managed. Diversity management is an extensive managerial approach which depends on a positive climate for all employees. The organization's diversity climate plays an important role in structuring the diversity initiatives (Barry, 1996). In this study, diversity climate refers to the perceptions and attitudes of individuals towards the differences among employees in the workplace. It is asserted that the positive diversity climate in an organization helps managers to mitigate conflicts and negative attitudes, leverages organizational performance, and provides an efficient workplace (Herdman & McMillan-Capehart, 2010; Kossek & Zonia, 1993), thus contributing to a highly tolerant climate assists organizations to be more pluralistic (Cox, 1991).

Due to its very nature, the hospitality industry – especially the hotel sector – is considered to be multicultural and composed of a greater diversified workforce. The major characteristics of the hotel industry include low pay, low job security, high labor flexibility, high turnover, and gender discrimination (Deery & Shaw, 1999; Walsh & Deery, 1999). In addition, the workers are usually unskilled laborers (Gröschl & Doherty, 1999) and are underrepresented women (Baum, 2013). These characteristics pose the hotel industry as a promising field to examine. In this study, we examine a hotel chain to ascertain the importance of diversity climate in hotel chains. This study examines the diversity climate of an organization from the employee's view. In the study, a brief literature about diversity climate is presented and an empirical investigation reported. The research question is provided below:

- Do the demographic attributes of employees differentiate in perceiving diversity climate?

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. The Diversity Climate

Diversity management is considered as a double edge sword that has both positive and negative outcomes for organizations. The proponents of diversity management tend to see it as a strategic property for an organization and set their arguments on resource based view (Chrobot-Mason & Aramovich, 2013).

The scholars of diversity management examine the diversity climate on three levels: individual, group (working group), and organization (Cox, 1993; Hicks-Clarke & Isles, 2000; Sawyerr, Strauss, & Yan, 2005). *Individual level* states personal experiences of diversity workplace. (Bean *et al.*, 2001). On this level, personal perceptions of employees are considered in order to measure and elaborate the current position of an organization in diversity related management. *Group level* is defined in a cognitive aspect as exchanging information and perspectives within a group (Joshi & Roh, 2009). Group level climate and relationships increase problem solving capability (Gilbert, Stead, & Ivanchevich, 1999). Organizational level indicates organizational attitudes and responses to diversity, both coherent organizational climate and management of diversity, and employees' evaluations towards managers with whom they are not directly dependent in diversity related issues. This level is characterized with the choices of the decision makers – in other words, the management.

## 3. Methodology

The research applied the quantitative method and data is gathered via the questionnaire technique. The sampling consisted of a hotel chain and the data collected from 285 respondents. Statistical analyses of the data were conducted using the software programs SPSS (Version 15). In particular, descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations) were used in the data analysis. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) and independent t-test was employed to determine whether or not there was a difference in perceived diversity climate according to hotel worker's demographic attributes.

### 3.1. Data Collection

The sample of the study consists of the employees of a hotel chain which is one of the biggest in Turkey due to number of owned hotels (10), rooms (1972), and beds (5,561). The hotel chain, one of the first hotel chains in Turkey which was founded in 1970, is a typical family owned business. The hotels settled in Antalya and the hotel chain provides an opportunity for diversity management researches with its practices including corporate social responsibility initiatives and raising awareness trainings for employees.

The data gathered from six hotels of the chain all settled in three regions of Antalya, Turkey. In order to gather comprehensive data, quantitative and qualitative methods were applied together. We visited six out of 10 hotels owned by the chain distributed the questionnaires and made semi-structured face-to-face interviews with the management consultant of the chain (general coordinator of human resources) and the human resource manager of the hotels. We filled out a form which comprises the initiatives and practices are present at the chains. Then, we handed the questionnaires to the employees of the chain. The data was collected between the period 20 May through 25 October, 2013.

**3.2. Research Instrument**

The Diversity Climate Survey: The survey conducted in the study (Bean et al., 2001) consisted of 15 items and 10 demographic questions measuring three levels of the diversity climate: namely, individual, work group/department, and organization. Each level comprises issues related to respect, equality, conflict, discrimination, and feelings about diversity. The survey was used several studies in Turkey and internal validity was approved. In addition, a pilot survey conducted to provide reliability. The overall Cronbach alpha score was 0.77 for the survey which lies between the acceptable values.

**3.3. The participants**

The participants of the study are employees working in the hotel chain for at least three years and who accepted to contribute the research voluntarily. Table 1 demonstrates the participants of the study.

*Table 1. The Participants of The Study*

	N	(%)	2. Education Level	N	(%)
<b>1. Gender</b>					
Female	78	72,6	Primary	67	23,5
Male	207	27,4	Highschool	109	38,2
<b>Total</b>	<b>285</b>	<b>100</b>	Associate	43	15,1
<b>3. Age</b>	N	(%)	Undergraduate	58	20,4
18-30	10	3,5	Graduate (Master/PhD)	8	2,8
31-40	128	44,9	<b>Total</b>	<b>285</b>	<b>100,0</b>
41-50	116	40,7	<b>4. Marital Status</b>	N	(%)
51-60	31	10,9	Married	178	62,5
<b>Total</b>	<b>285</b>	<b>100</b>	Single	107	37,5
<b>5. Position</b>	N	(%)	<b>Total</b>	<b>285</b>	<b>100,0</b>
Manager	6	2,1	<b>6. Department</b>	N	(%)
Deputy Manager	10	3,5	Housekeeping	33	11,6
Department Manager	20	7,0	Front Desk	30	10,5
Department Chief	69	24,2	Restaurant	54	18,9
Non-managerial employee	180	63,2	Kitchen	55	19,3
<b>Total</b>	<b>285</b>	<b>100</b>	Other	113	39,6
<b>7. Sectoral Experience</b>	N	(%)	<b>Total</b>	<b>285</b>	<b>100</b>
1-5	112	39,3	<b>8. Appointment Type</b>	N	(%)
5-10	79	27,7	Permanent	184	64,6
10-15	50	17,5	Non-permanent (Seasonal employee)	101	35,4
15-20	44	15,4	<b>Total</b>	<b>285</b>	<b>100,0</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>285</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>10. Hometown</b>	N	(%)
<b>9. Work Experience (In the Organization)</b>	N	(%)	Antalya	119	41,8
1-5	164	57,5	Other	166	58,2
5-10	66	23,2	<b>Total</b>	<b>285</b>	<b>100,0</b>
10-15	30	10,5			
15-20	25	8,8			
<b>Total</b>	<b>285</b>	<b>100</b>			

Table 1 shows the demographic attributes of the participants. A total of 72.6 % of the participants were male (N=207) and 27.4 % were female (N=78). Of the participants, 62,5 % were married (N=178); the majority was between age 31-40 (44.9%) , and were high school graduates (38.2%). The majority of the sample (57.5% of participants) had been working for the hotel chain for between 1-5 years. The total sample size is 285.

### 3.4. Statistical Analysis

The data was analysed using the SPSS package program. In order to determine whether a significant difference exists regarding to the diversity climate perceptions among the demographic groups, the independent sample t-test and one way anova (Analysis of Variance) was applied. The independent sample t-test and one way anova tests are used when examining the difference among the groups on a dependent variable. The independent sample t-test shows the differences between two groups (i.e., the differences between men and women towards diversity climate in workplace) when one way anova presents the difference among more than two groups (i.e., chiefs , supervisors, department managers, and general managers' perception). Pallant (2011: 238-264) suggests the one-way analysis of variance involves one independent variable (diversity climate perceptions) which has a number of different levels (individual, wokgroup/ depatment, and organization in our case). The significance level based on the  $p < 0.05$  for both analysis.

### 3.5. Results

This section presents the findings of the study. The independent sample t-test and one way anova test were used to conduct the differences among the employees' perception towards diversity climate. Table 2 shows the findings of the independent sample t-test.

Table2. Independent Sample T- test

Level	Appointment type	N.	Mean	SD	T	P
Individual	Permanent	184	3,66	,78	3,381	.00*
	Temporary	101	3,30	,95		
Work Group-Department	Permanent	184	3,41	,69	2,441	.01*
	Nonpermanent	101	3,22	,56		
Organization	Permanent	184	3,81	,90	1,385	.16
	Nonpermanent	101	3,65	,88		
Level	Marital status					
Individual	Married	178	3,64	,87	2,865	.00*
	Single	107	3,34	,82		
Work Group-Department	Married	178	3,44	,69	3,394	.00*
	Single	107	3,19	,55		
Organization	Married	178	3,77	,91	.352	.72
	Single	107	3,73	,87		
Level	Position					
Individual	Managerial	105	3,75	,78	3,388	.00*
	Non-managerial	180	3,40	,88		
Work Group-Department	Managerial	105	3,49	,73	2,751	.00*
	Non-managerial	180	3,26	,59		
Organization	Managerial	105	3,89	,86	1,978	.04*
	Non-managerial	180	3,67	,91		

\* $p < 0.05$

The table 1 represents the results of the T-test. The t-test exhibits that the perceptions of the employees are significantly different. According to the findings, the perceptions of the employees differ in appointment type, marital status, and position variables.

*Appointment type:* Employees with permanent appointments are more positive about the diversity climate at individual and workgroup/department levels.

*Position:* When examining the comparison of managerial and non-managerial employees, it appears that being in managerial positions affect employees’ perceptions in a more positive manner. The employees in managerial positions are more likely to perceive diversity climate in favorable all three levels when compared to those in non-managerial positions which is consistent with the extant literature (Hicks-Clarke&Isles, 2000).

*Marital status:* In the study, an association is found between marital status and diversity climate perceptions. The test findings suggest that married employees perceive more positive than the single employees, in individual and group levels. The study signifies a data that when supported by a policy support (e.g., family allowance, flexible working hours) marital status also can be differentiated in regards to diversity climate (Hicks-Clarke & Isles, 2000).

Table 3. One Way ANOVA Test

Level	Variable	Position	N	X	SSP	F	P
Individual		Manager	6	3,00	,63246	6,373	.00*
		Deputy Manager	10	3,52	,82839		
		Department Manager	20	3,40	,62912		
		Department Chief	69	3,96	,75168		
		Non- managerial Employee	180	3,40	,88714		
		Total	285	3,53	,86551		
Work Group- Department		Manager	6	3,31	,34427	3,228	.00*
		Deputy Manager	10	3,23	,41722		
		Department Manager	20	3,53	,85430		
		Department Chief	69	3,55	,75335		
		Non- managerial Employee	180	3,26	,59377		
		Total	285	3,34	,65852		
Organization		Manager	6	4,0417	,62082	1,844	.121
		Deputy Manager	10	3,7000	,101926		
		Department Manager	20	3,6125	,72309		
		Department Chief	69	3,9928	,88904		
		Non- managerial Employee	180	3,6778	,91255		
		Total	285	3,7579	,89976		

p <0.05

Table 3 shows the statistically significant difference in perceptions of diversity climate among employees in individual and work group/ department levels. The one way anova tests (including the Post Hoc-Scheffe tests) were conducted in order to ascertain the difference among employees due to their orientation through positive diversity climate. The two grouping was statistically different at p <0.05. The responses of the employees in non-managerial positions are less positive about both the individual level (x =3,40) and the workgroup/department level (x=3,26) when compared to the department chiefs (x=3,96; 3, 55).

The findings of the study suggest the increase in organizational position brings a more positive perception of diversity climate. This fact coincides with the other studies in the relevant literature. It is found that members of management (Harris, Rousseau, &Venter, 2007) and particularly senior managers (Hicks-Clark & Isles, 2000) are more positive about diversity climate. Briefly, a higher step in the organizational hierarchy brings career and education opportunities with respect.

**Discussion and Conclusion**

It can be deduced from the findings that demographic variables are very useful to elicit information on diversity climate. The study shows that both hierarchical level and marital status were important variables in determining perceptions. Two main findings of the study indicates that organizational level and being in the management or not

distinguishes diversity climate perceptions. Using t-tests and ANOVA, relationships were shown to exist between the level of management with employees' perceptions to their own, their department, and the organization – becoming more positive as management level increased. Marital status also signifies that the diversity initiatives have an impact on the climate's perception. Being married is an accepted value and is promoted (flexible working hours, child allowance, food allowance, etc.) in the organization that causes positive climate for those who are married. On the other hand, this can lead a social trap (Barry & Bateman, 1996) that diversity initiatives may continue in favor of the groups whose values and lifestyles are already a social norm.

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