

Climate for Diversity and Customer Service: The Healthy Organization

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ABSTRACT

We test the Schneider's (1987) ASA model hypothesis that workforce diversity is associated with organizational effectiveness. Specifically, we tested whether climate for diversity and climate for teamwork were related to quality of customer service. Results supported our hypotheses even when climate for customer service was accounted for.

PRESS PARAGRAPH

Researchers have suggested that a diverse workforce is related to organizational effectiveness. Unfortunately, there has been no empirical evidence for this assertion and so it is not surprising that managers typically discount diversity efforts. This study found significant connection between organizational units that report having a climate for diversity and teamwork and customers' ratings of quality service. These relationships were robust and could not be explained by other organizational practices focused on improving customer service.

Paper accepted for presentation at the 2008 American Psychological Association Conference. Boston, MA.

The diversity of today's workforce is increasing (Ployhart, 2006). Women are entering the American workforce and pursuing more active careers than ever before. The average age and the ethnic diversity of the American workforce have increased. Consistent with current gestalt, the empirical literature has documented positive organizational consequences for diversity (Argote, Gruenfeld, & Naquin, 2000; Hinsz, Tindale, & Vollrath, 1997). These empirical results are consistent with Benjamin Schneider's (1987) Attraction-Selection-Attrition (ASA) model. According to this model, workforce diversity provides organizations with the opportunity to enhance the competencies, perspectives, and problem-solving skills of their current employees. This diverse employee skill set should facilitate organizational responsiveness to a dynamic environment (Schneider, 1987). Specifically, it is hypothesized that workers from diverse backgrounds should be able to anticipate and meet the demands of a diverse clientele (Schneider, 1987). Finally, this model suggests that the long term survivability of organizations depends upon their ability to maintain the diversity of their human resources (HR).

Unfortunately, there is no evidence for this hypothesis. Indeed, there has been no discussion of what organizations need to do to maintain the optimal level of HR diversity implied by the ASA model. In the present paper, we argue that organizations that have developed a climate for diversity will be more likely to be effective in responding to their environment. We also argue that organizations that need a climate for teamwork to overcome some of the potential negative consequences (e.g., group conflict) that could arise with an influx of diverse employees. Specifically, we test our hypotheses using a sample of employees from five service organizations (i.e., research libraries). We show

that employees' ratings of both climate for diversity and teamwork are related to customers' ratings of customer service. Further, we demonstrate that the climate for diversity and teamwork add to the existing customer service literature by showing that the relationship of these two climate variables with customer service still exist even after controlling for employee's ratings of climate for customer service.

Organizational climate and the ASA model

Organizational climate is the employees' shared perceptions of the themes, goals, or imperatives that describe their workplace (Reichers & Schneider, 1990). The implication of employees shared perceptions of the important imperatives for their organization is that it clarifies everyone's understandings of what behavior is expected, what behavior will be rewarded, and what behavior is supported at work (Ostroff, Kinicki, & Tamkins, 2003; Schneider, 1990; Schneider, Gunnarson, & Niles-Jolly, 1994). According to Schneider's (1987) Attraction-Selection-Attrition (ASA) model, organizational climate affects the kinds of people that are attracted to, selected into, and remain in a given organization. In other words, people are attracted to an organization based on their perceived fit between their personal beliefs, competencies, values, and other characteristics and organizations' characteristics (i.e., organizational climate). Of the people that applied for employment, the organization uses some systematic procedure to non-randomly select people who have the needed competencies for a job and who share similar values/ characteristics as the organization. After time has passed, some employees no long match the requirements of the job or the organization. Once the employee (or employer) discovers this mismatch, termination of employment occurs. As

a result of employees leaving the organization, job openings occur and the entire ASA cycle starts again.

While most researchers have focused on the positive consequences of the ASA model (e.g., solidification, propagation, and refinement of organizational climate and culture over time), Schneider identified a serious negative consequence: organizations can tend to extreme levels of employee homogenization and these extreme levels can lead to organizational demise. Homogenization of employee beliefs, attitudes, values, and assumptions results in reduced sensitivity to environmental demands (e.g., introduction of competitors in the market, shifts in customer needs/desires). As a result, the organization may miss rising threats in its environment. Once the organization is finally forced to recognize its environmental threat, it may not have the behavioral flexibility to adequately respond. Schneider (1987) predicts that unless some intervention to increase diversity of ideas, values, beliefs, interests, competencies and other characteristics is undertaken, organizations suffering from a calcification of ideas will die.

In summary, the ASA model strongly suggests that diversity needs to be a central imperative for organizations. Managers can no longer discount the necessity of diversity nor can they dismiss it as political correctness. Rather, the ASA model highlights diversity is imperative for the long term health of any organization. Since climate is defined as employees' shared perceptions of important organizational imperatives, we believe that organizations that have developed a climate for diversity will be more successful than their counterparts.

The healthy organization: Balancing workforce homogeneity and diversity:

As indicated previously, organizations must find ways by which a healthy level of workforce diversity is maintained. Organizational responsive to its environment requires not only anticipating environmental changes but one that can manage the increased challenges brought on by a diverse workforce. This implies that organizations have to address issues of workforce diversity, teamwork, and group conflict seriously. We label an organization that effectively deals with these issues “healthy” (Hanges, Aiken, & Chen, 2007).

Hanges et al (2007) defined a *healthy organization* can be defined as an organization in which employees feel empowered. It is one in which employees believe that management values them and treats them fairly. It is an organization in which the policies, practices, and procedures are administered consistently and these practices work in concert to facilitate the attainment of one or more organizational goals (e.g., productivity, efficiency, safety). Finally, it is an organization in which the connection with its environment is not forgotten.

To accomplish this, the healthy organization sends two kinds of complimentary messages to their employees (i.e., concern for employees and concern for customers). The "concern for employees" message is sent when organizational practices, policies, and procedures strongly indicate that things like teamwork, diversity, and justice are valued. The "concern for customers" message is created when the organizational practices, policies, and procedures strongly indicate that customers are valued and meeting their needs is essential. When both of these messages are communicated, forces pushing toward overly restrictive workforce homogeneity are mitigated. The climate for diversity should operate to attract and keep employees from diverse backgrounds. The climate for

teamwork should reduce employee conflict and enhance the probability that productive cultural interpretations of organizational events are adopted and shared.

The healthy organization and climate for customer service

The literature on customer service has shown that climate for customer service is positively related to customer satisfaction (Parkington & Schneider, 1979; Schneider & Bowen, 1985; Schneider, Parkington, & Buxton, 1980; Schneider, Wheeler, & Cox, 1992). Such a climate is created by having policies, practices, and procedures (training, selection, incentives) that emphasize the imperative of quality customer service in the minds of employees (Schneider et al., 2003). The concept of climate for customer service does not overlap with the climate for diversity construct. We therefore believe that climate for diversity is a new concept in this literature and the relationship between customer service and climate for diversity will remain statistically significant after controlling for climate for service.

H1. Climate for diversity will be positively related to quality of customer service.

H2. Climate for teamwork should be negatively related to workgroup conflict.

H3. Climate for teamwork should be positively related to quality of customer service.

H4. These relationships will remain after controlling for climate for customer service.

Method

Sample

The data was collected from team members who were employed in one of five different state university research libraries. The sample came from the Southern, mid-Atlantic, New England, and mid-Western regions of the United States. A total of 703 employees participated in this survey (nlibrary 1 = 135, nlibrary 2 = 147, nlibrary 3 =

211, nlibrary 4 = 102, and nlibrary 5 = 108). The overall sample was 78% female and 60% of participants were between the ages of 40 and 59. The majority of the sample were white (82.2%), followed by Hispanic (4.5%), Asian (4.3%), and Black (3.9%).

Each individual identified the team that they primarily belonged to within the library. A total of 78 different teams across the five libraries were originally identified. The average number of members within each team was 8.1 (range between 1 to 39 group members). After deleting teams with less than three participating members, a total of 60 different teams with an average of 10 team members (range between 3 to 39 group members) were identified.

Measures

Climate for Diversity

Climate for Diversity was measured using a 20 item scale developed by Nishii, Raver, & Dominguez (2000). A maximum likelihood factor analysis with varimax rotation revealed that four separate factors were measured by this scale. *Non-discriminatory Practices* reflects the extent to which the organization implements non-discriminatory practices. *Standardization of Procedures Across Groups* assessed the extent to which minorities and majority groups were subject to the same organizational procedures. *Valuing Diversity* reflects the extent to which the organization values diversity and diversity-related initiatives. Finally, *Employee Support for Diversity-Related Policies and Procedures* reflects the degree to which individuals support their organization's diversity initiatives.

The means, standard deviations, internal consistency estimates, and inter-class correlation coefficients for all variables are presented in Table 1. As can be seen in this

table, the reliability coefficients for all the climate scales were acceptable (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). The interclass correlation coefficients (ICC) for three of the four sub-themes were statistically significant and therefore supported aggregating those sub-factors to the team level of analysis. Only those scales with evidence for aggregation will be examined further.

We also explored the measurement equivalence of these sub-factors across the different libraries. To do this, we conducted separate maximum likelihood factor analyses for each library for each subscale. The obtained factor structures for the six libraries were compared with each other using congruence coefficients (Harmon, 1976). Table 2 shows the average congruence coefficients (collapsed over the 15 comparison combinations). Overall, these results indicated that the three sub-factors were equivalent across libraries.

Climate for Team Surface Diversity

A 32 item scale adapted from Hanges, Leslie, & Keller (2005) was used to assess the extent to which team members support organizational diversity efforts for particular subgroups (i.e., race, gender, sexual orientation, team member rank). *Team Climate for Diversity: Race* refers to the extent to which an individual team supports racial diversity. *Team Climate for Diversity: Gender* reflects the extent to which an individual team supports diversity of genders. *Team Climate for Diversity: Rank* addresses the support of an individual team for diversity of persons of different ranks. Finally, *Team Climate for Diversity: Sexual Orientation* assessed the extent to which an individual team supports sexual-orientation related diversity.

Descriptive statistics, reliability information and aggregation information for these sub-factors are provided in Table 1. The only scale that exhibited a significant ICC(1) was *Team Climate for Diversity: Rank*. Only this scale was analyzed further. As seen in Table 2, the average congruence coefficients shows strong support for the measurement equivalence of this sub-factor across libraries

Group conflict

Conflict in a work unit reflects the amount of disagreement amongst team members (Jehn, 1995). Of the eight questions initially included in the measure of conflict, a maximum likelihood factor analysis with a varimax rotation revealed two unique factors. *Interpersonal Conflict* refers to personal or emotional team conflict. *Task Conflict* refers to the disagreements coworkers have over how to complete their tasks.

Descriptive statistics, reliability information and aggregation information for these sub-factors are provided in Table 1. Both of these sub-factors had significant ICC(1)s and therefore both were kept for further analysis. The average congruence coefficients suggest support for the measurement equivalence of these subscales across libraries.

Individual Team Climate

A total of 17 items were used to measure beliefs regarding the extent to which teamwork is seen as important and useful. A maximum likelihood factor analysis with a varimax rotation indicated four factors. *Employee Belief in Benefits of Teamwork* assesses whether employees view teamwork as useful and important. *Organizational value of teamwork* reflects whether the organization as a whole is perceived to value

teamwork. *Structural Facilitation of Teamwork* assesses the degree to which the organization's structure and policies facilitate and encourage teamwork. Finally, *Informational Facilitation of Teamwork* assesses the extent to which employees feel they have access to their supervisors and the necessary information they need from their supervisors to complete their work.

As shown in Table 1, all but the *Employee Belief in Benefits of Teamwork* sub-factor had a significant ICC(1) value. Thus, only three sub-factors were kept for further analysis. Further, as can be seen in Table 2, the average congruence coefficients support for the measurement equivalence of these sub-factors across libraries.

LibQual

LibQual is a survey designed to measure faculty, student, assesses the quality of a given Library's service. Consumers (e.g. graduate students, undergraduate students, and faculty) rate the service provided by their Library on four dimensions. These dimensions are: a) overall Library service; b) *Affect of Service* referring to user interaction with, and the general helpfulness and competence of, library staff; c) *Information Control* which reflects the extent that users can find information in the library in the format of their own choosing; and d) *Library as Place* which refers to the physical environment of library as a place for individual study, group work, and inspiration. Consumers rated each of these dimensions in terms of their perceptions of the library's current service, ideal service, and minimum acceptable service. For the purposes of this study, only perceived service will be examined.

Procedure

Our climate survey contained measures for Climate for Diversity, Climate for Team Surface Diversity, Group Conflict, Individual Team Climate, and Climate for Customer Service and were administered online to all employees in the six participating libraries. Employees had two weeks to complete the survey. Reminders were sent from contacts within each organization to employees before the aforementioned time period elapsed.

The LibQual ratings of the six libraries were collected from archival sources made available from the Association of Research Libraries. We had one year of data for four of our libraries and four years of data for two of our libraries. For those libraries with multiple years of data, we averaged the ratings over time. The LibQual data file was merged with the climate survey data file.

Results

Table 3 shows the inter-correlations among the LibQual scales. While the overall LibQual measure was significantly correlated with each sub-factor, only the correlation between *Affect of Service* and *Information Control* sub-factors was statistically significant ($r=.76, p<.001$). Clearly, the magnitude of this relationship raises the question of whether these two sub-factors are truly unique. However, we decided to keep these sub-factors separate in our analyses to conform to prior LibQual research.

Table 4 shows the inter-correlations among the climate for diversity, group conflict, and climate for teamwork scales. Consistent with H2, there were significant negative correlations between climate for teamwork and group conflict. In particular, teams that believe that teamwork facilitates information sharing were associated with reduced levels of task and interpersonal conflict. Further, even though it was not

hypothesized, four of the six factors for climate for diversity were significantly correlated with group conflict. Teams with a climate for diversity reported less task and interpersonal conflict.

Table 5 shows the relationships between LibQual and climate for diversity and teamwork scales. With regard to climate for diversity, the results provide partial support for H1. All three Climate for Diversity factors were significantly related with at least one LibQual factor. Specifically, *Climate for Diversity: Non-Discriminatory Practices/Policies* was positively correlated with *Information Control* but negatively correlated with *Library as Place*. Further, *Climate for Diversity: Standardization of procedures* was positively related to *Information Control*. Finally, *Climate for Diversity: Valuing Diversity* was positively related to both *Affect of Service* and *Information Control* scales but negatively correlated to *Library as Place*. These results indicate that teams with a climate for diversity are more likely associated with libraries in which customers report that the library staff is competent/helpful as well as associated with libraries in which customers report being able to find information in the format of their own choosing. However, climate for diversity was negatively associated with libraries in which customers report that the physical layout of the library encourages individual study. In summary, when focusing on *Affect of Service* and *Informational Control*, there is support for H1. However, there is no support for H1 when *Library as Place* is the variable of interest.

The Climate for Teamwork factors have differential relationships with the LibQual customer service scales. Specifically, *Climate for Teamwork: Organizational Value of Teamwork* was negatively associated with *Affect of Service*. *Climate for*

Teamwork: Informational Facilitation of Teamwork was positively associated with *Information Control* but negatively correlated with *Library as Place*. In other words, teams that value teamwork were less likely to be associated with libraries in which customers believe that the employees are competent and helpful. However, teams whose members shared the belief that teamwork facilitates information sharing were more likely to belong to libraries in which customers report being able to find information in the format of their own choosing. Thus, there is weak support for H3.

Finally, Table 6 shows the correlations between LibQual and both Climate for Diversity and Climate for Teamwork when the influence of Climate for Customer Service are controlled. Consistent with H4, the relationships between customer service and the climates for diversity and teamwork remained significant after controlling for Climate for Customer Service. In fact, the relationships became stronger and variables that were not significant in Table 5, now became significant. Most importantly, consistent with H3, there are now significant positive relationships between *Information Facilitation of Teamwork* and *Affect of Service* as well as *Climate for Surface Diversity: Rank* and *Affect of Service* and *Information Control* (H1).

Discussion

In the present study, we examined whether healthy organizations (i.e., organizations with climates for diversity and teamwork) would be more effective in responding to their environment than unhealthy organizations. We also tested whether these variables contribute to the existing customer service literature by statistically removing the influence of climate for customer service. We tested our hypotheses using a sample of employees from five research libraries. We found that employees' ratings of

both climate for diversity and teamwork were related to some measures of customer service. Further, we demonstrated that these relationships are unique and not explained covered in the climate for customer service construct. Finally, we showed that group conflict was diminished by climate for diversity and climate for teamwork (once climate for customer service was controlled).

One surprising finding was the negative correlations between the LibQual *Library as Place* measure of customer service and the climates for diversity and teamwork. Our hypotheses received stronger support when examining interpersonal aspects of service quality (i.e., *Affect of Service, Informational Control*) as opposed to aspects related to the physical layout of the library (*Library as Place*). Future research is needed to determine whether this distinction between interpersonal and physical aspects of customer service is a useful distinction.

Overall, these results provide initial support for the ASA model's hypothesis that there is an optimal level of diversity needed for an organization to remain effective and responsive to its environment. Thus, an organization with a healthy climate is better able to manage the potential difficulties associated with increased diversity in the workforce.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics, Internal Consistency Reliabilities, and Inter-class Correlation Coefficients

	Mean	SD	α	ICC	Items
<u><i>Climate for Diversity</i></u>					
Non-discriminatory Practices/Procedures	4.78	.61	.91	.05*	8
Standardization of Procedures	4.05	.61	.91	.05*	4
Valuing Diversity	4.51	.65	.94	.19**	5
<u><i>Climate for Team Surface Diversity</i></u>					
Rank	3.91	.56	.92	.05*	8
<u><i>Group Conflict</i></u>					
Interpersonal Conflict	2.26	.60	.79	.13**	4
Task Conflict	2.50	.53	.93	.09**	3
<u><i>Climate for Teamwork</i></u>					
Organizational value of teamwork	5.20	.76	.88	.09**	4
Structural Facilitation of Teamwork	4.17	.80	.90	.13**	4
Informational Facilitation of Teamwork	5.43	.78	.89	.11**	4
<u><i>Customer Perceived Experiences</i></u>					
Affect of Service	7.07	.13			
Information Control	7.14	.11			
Library as Place	6.69	.22			

Note: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Table 2. Average Congruence Coefficients Supporting Measurement Equivalence of Scales Across Libraries.

SCALE	Congruence Coefficient
<i>Climate for Diversity</i>	
Nondiscriminatory Practices/ Procedures	.90
Standardization of Procedures	1.00
Valuing Diversity	.79
<i>Group Conflict</i>	
Task Conflict	.99
Interpersonal Conflict	1.00
<i>Climate for Teamwork</i>	
Structural Facilitation of Teamwork	.99
Organizational Value of Teamwork	.99
Informational Facilitation of Teamwork	.99
<i>Team Climate for Diversity</i>	
Rank	.99

Table 3. Statistical Correlation Coefficients among LibQual Scales

	Overall Quality	Affect of Service	Information Control
Overall Quality	1.00		
Affect of Service	.85**	1.00	
Information Control	.75**	.76**	1.00
Library as Place	.58**	.11	.01

Note: ** $p < .001$

Table 4. Statistical Correlation Coefficients among Climate for Diversity and Teamwork Scales

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Climate for Diversity	1 Nondiscriminatory Practices/Procedures	1.00							
	2 Standardization of Procedures	.54**	1.00						
	3 Valuing Diversity	.65**	.55**	1.00					
Group Conflict	4 Task Conflict	-.16	-.25**	-.18*	1.00				
	5 Interpersonal Conflict	-.27**	-.38**	-.16	.55**	1.00			
	6 Structural Facilitation of Teamwork	.24**	.44**	.28**	-.09	-.08	1.00		
Climate for Teamwork	7 Organizational Value of Teamwork	.22*	.43**	.21*	-.07	-.13	.52**	1.00	
	8 Information Facilitation of Teamwork	.60**	.77**	.70**	-.31**	-.36**	.52**	.31**	1.00
Team Climate For Surface Diversity	9 Rank	.40**	.33**	.29**	-.31**	-.29**	.13	.13	.56**

Note: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Table 5. Statistical Correlation Coefficients between Employee and Customer Data

Employee Perceptions	Customer Perceived Experiences			
	Overall Quality	Affect of Service	Information Control	Library as Place
<i>Climate for Diversity</i>				
Non-discriminatory Practices/Procedures	-0.12	0.10	0.17	-0.41***
Standardization of Procedures	-0.02	0.08	0.13	-0.19
Valuing Diversity	0.00	0.15	0.48***	-0.44***
<i>Climate for Team Surface Diversity</i>				
Rank	-0.01	0.11	0.23*	-0.26*
<i>Group Conflict</i>				
Interpersonal Conflict	-0.22+	-0.30**	-0.24*	0.04
Task Conflict	-0.16	-0.26*	-0.25*	0.11
<i>Climate for Teamwork</i>				
Organizational value of teamwork	-0.14	-0.23*	-0.13	0.05
Structural Facilitation of Teamwork	-0.04	-0.06	0.01	-0.02
Informational Facilitation of Teamwork	0.00	0.11	0.28*	-0.28*

Note: * p<.05; ** p < .01; *** p<.001

Table 6. Partial Correlation Coefficients between Employee and Customer Data
(controlling the variable of the climate for customer service)

Employee Perceptions	Customer Perceived Experiences			
	Overall Quality	Affect of Service	Information Control	Library as Place
<i>Climate for Diversity</i>				
Non-discriminatory Practices/Procedures	-.08	.15	.16	-.39***
Standardization of Procedures	.07	.19	.20+	-.18
Valuing Diversity	.06	.21+	.55***	-.42***
<i>Climate for Team Surface Diversity</i>				
Rank	.10	.24*	.31**	-.24*
<i>Group Conflict</i>				
Interpersonal Conflict	-.27*	-.33**	-.22+	-.04
Task Conflict	-.22+	-.32**	-.27*	.07
<i>Climate for Teamwork</i>				
Organizational value of teamwork	-.11	-.22+	-.14	.10
Structural Facilitation of Teamwork	.05	-.01	.00	.09
Informational Facilitation of Teamwork	.12	.30*	.47***	-.34**

Note: * p<.05; ** p < .01; *** p<.001

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