Influence of Diversity on Conflicts, Turnover, and Performance

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The purpose of this study is to examine the relationships between diversity, conflicts, and performance. Practically, it first indicates that organizations should start to consider the gender composition a variable as it affects conflict, satisfaction, and performance. Second, the emotional conflict variable explains attitude toward turnover. Third, task conflict is helpful for increasing organizational performance: therefore, organizations should try to maintain the appropriate level of task conflict in workgroups of mixed function experience and tenure in public service.

[Key words] Diversity, Conflict, Performance

Introduction

Recently diversity issues have been treated as an important part of organizational management in many developed countries (Williams and O'Reilly 1998 Barsade, Ward et al. 2000 Pitts 2009), evidenced by the many papers on diversity that were presented at the 2012 American Society for Public Administration Conference held in Las Vegas, NV. Initially, diversity was related to demographic variables in programs like affirmative action (AA) and equal employment opportunity (EEO). In other words, the term applied to the equal participation of more women and people of color within organizations. Therefore, the concept was more normative, that is, more women and people of color were employed in

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organizations because of these programs regardless of real performance or productivity.

Since the 1980s, as organizations’ workforce diversified, many practitioners and scholars have become interested in workforce diversity (Wentling and Palma-Rivas 1998 Mor-Barak 1999 Barsade, Ward et al. 2000 Pitts 2009). The term “diversity” has been expanded from simple demographic characteristics such as age, gender and race to complex and broad concepts such as belief, background, and function (Thomas Jr 1990 Slack 1997 D'Netto and Sohal 1999 Gardenswartz and Rowe 2010). Studies of the private sector have been undertaken to reveal the relationship between diversity and organizational performance (Pelled 1999). However, it is difficult to find empirical studies that examine the relationship between diversity and performance in the public sector (Pitts 2005 Pitts 2009).

In recent decades, empirical studies have focused on the direct relationship between demographic variables and performance, but, recently, a group of scholars tried to suggest a more sophisticated model to explain diversity and performance. For example, conflict variable – emotional or task conflict – can be used as a moderate variable between diversity and performance(Pelled 1999).

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationships between diversity, conflicts, and results. These three variables fall into three categories. The diversity variable can be classified as less or more work related. The conflict variable is divided into emotional and task conflicts. Finally, performance is divided into turnover and cognitive performance. This model is very similar to that of Pelled and her colleagues (1999).

Theoretical Background and Hypotheses

Diversity, Emotional Conflict, and Task Conflict

Organizations have employees with various demographic characteristics. Employee composition in gender, age, race, education, tenure, and functional background differs across organizations. Diversity in demographic characteristics can cause emotional and task conflict. It can be explained by the term “categorization,” which is a very useful method for