The Dynamic Labor Force:

Findings on diversity research from the 2009 Annual Meeting of the Southern Management Association

Jason R. Lambert
College of Business Administration
Department of Management Suite 209
University of Texas at Arlington
701 S. Nedderman Drive
Arlington, TX 76019
972 641 8193 hm
773 655 1093 cell
817 272 3853 ofc
jlambert@uta.edu

ABSTRACT

Purpose: The purpose of this report is to review the highlights of research on gender and diversity that was presented at the recent 2009 annual meeting of the Southern Management Association in Asheville, NC.

Design/ methodology, approach: The papers covering topics relevant to gender and diversity are summarized. The papers vary in terms of research design and methodology. There was a mix of conceptual papers and empirical studies using both quantitative and qualitative analysis.

Findings: The presence of minority and female employees continues to grow, and as a result organizational efforts to accommodate and properly manage the increasing workforce diversity continues. Due to this trend it is necessary for organizations to prepare themselves in order to accommodate and properly manage this workforce. Minority and female employees should also prepare themselves with strategies to combat discrimination at work in order to benefit fully from this emerging trend. The role of gender impacts the perceptions of both men and women employees, and associated outcomes may vary based on the type of job or position held by the employee. Religion is becoming more important to employees and their religious beliefs and level of spirituality may be linked to both individual performance and interdependent work outcomes.

Originality/value: The papers presented contribute to the body of research knowledge and better the understanding of the role that diversity plays in organizations. Ideas for future research and practical implications are also presented.

Keywords: Diversity, Education, Entrepreneurship, Gender, Human Resources, Organizational Behavior, Religion, Workplace.

Paper type: Viewpoint

In this report I highlight the findings and issues regarding diversity research raised in papers presented at the 2009 meeting of the Southern Management Association (SMA) in Asheville, North Carolina, USA.   This report was written based on either attendance at sessions or reading the paper as available in the Proceedings. The track dedicated to papers on diversity was combined with ethics and social issues including 14 paper presentations and 2 symposia. Of those paper presentations and symposia in that track, six papers and one symposium covered topics related to diversity. Five more papers on diversity were presented across three other tracks: 1) Human Resources/ Careers, 2) Organizational Behavior, and 3) Strategic Management/ Organizational Theory/ International Management.

In summary, the 10 papers I was able to draw from the conference on diversity included topics on gender, religion and spirituality, workforce trends/ workplace diversity, and diversity in education. The topic that was the most covered was gender with four papers. Surprisingly, the second most covered topic was religion and spirituality with three papers. This may demonstrate an emergence of the field recognizing the importance of examining the impact that religion has in the workplace. The third most covered topic was workforce trends/workplace diversity with two paper presentations. Lastly, there was one paper presentation on the topic of diversity in education. There were no papers that looked at sexual orientation or physical disability despite their importance in diversity literature and research.

Gender

The most apparent theme woven throughout the papers related to gender issues is the moderating effect that gender has on organizational outcomes. There were two papers that

addressed the effect that gender has on leadership. Using role congruity theory, Douglas, Gilson, and Powell (2009) found that the interaction between LMX and leader sex was significantly related to leader effectiveness. A main effect was found with female leaders rated as more effective than male leaders. However, contrary to their hypothesis, the relationship between LMX and leader effectiveness was stronger for male leaders than for female leaders. This was surprising because earlier research has suggested that female leaders seek LMX relationships more than male leaders due to their greater concern for the quality of relationships. The authors pose a possible explanation as being that although females seek LMX relationships more often and female leadership is effective, individuals who evaluate a female leader's effectiveness may be more influenced by the fact that she is a female rather than by her leadership style.

Gender stereotypes were used by Larch, Goopta, and Gooty (2009) as the theoretical underpinnings for their hypotheses and study. Hence, using 72 graduate business students (organized into 16 teams of 4-6 individuals each), the researchers examined the relationship between gender-role identity and two leadership behaviors, consideration behavior and initiating structure behavior. Each teams participated in a simulation of a strategic manipulation task, and data was collected using two surveys. The first survey was a self-report sale that measured masculine-feminine gender role identity. Five weeks later, students completed a 20-item leadership behavior questionnaire which asked them to rate themselves and their team members on various initiating structure and consideration behaviors they observed during the simulation exercise. The theory and hypotheses related to a focal individual's leadership behaviors as seen by others in the group. They found that regardless of their gender, individuals who view themselves as high in femininity engage in consideration behaviors more often than others, and individuals who view themselves as high in masculinity have a dominating personality which

motivates them to believe it is their job to maintain task structure. Results indicated that others perceived more initiating structure behaviors when self perceptions of masculinity were higher. Additionally, this relationship was stronger for men than for women. Contrary to their second hypothesis, for women there was no significant interactive effect between femininity and consideration behavior. However, masculinity had a significant main effect on consideration behaviors. The researchers believe the results demonstrate that at least within their sample of business students, masculinity was positively associated with both initiating structure and consideration leadership behavior, which suggests that further research should address a possible decreasing valuation of femininity in influencing who is perceived to engage in leader-like behaviors by their peers.

The increase in dual-earner families has created a need for both men and women to balance work and home life by sharing domestic duties. As an increasing number of females enter the workforce, male employees have begun to share more domestic duties including parental duties. Shumate (2009) presented a conceptual paper comparing gender role and role congruity theory for predicting supervisors' performance expectation of father who take parental leave. The timeliness of this article may be one of the reasons it was awarded the Best Paper for the Ethics/Social Issues/ Diversity track. Her propositions stem from gender role theory and role congruity theory. She began by citing research where role theory suggests that stereotypical female-gendered behavior is more communal while stereotypical male-gendered behavior is more agentic, and women in leadership positions considered to have masculine-agentic behavior were negatively evaluated by coworkers for violating female norms of communal behavior. Applying this to one's work role (e.g., nursing associated with feminine communal behavior and architecture associated with masculine-agentic behavior) the researcher proposed that in

communal jobs supervisory decisions will favor women over men, and in agentic jobs supervisory decisions will favor men over women.

Due to differences in gender stereotypes regarding parental behavior, Shumate proposed that after parental leave, supervisory decisions will favor women over men, but after medical leave supervisory decisions will not differ for men and women. Furthermore, she proposed that after parental leave supervisory decisions will favor those in a communal job over those in an agentic job, and after medical leave supervisory decisions will not differ for agentic and communal job holders. In conclusion, she proposes an interaction effect of sex and type of job on supervisory decision for workers who take parental leave only such that after parental leave, supervisory decisions will favor men over women in agentic jobs and will favor women over men in communal jobs. Furthermore, after medical leave supervisory decision will not differ based on sex for agentic and communal jobholders. Future research to examine her propositions would begin the conversation in work-family literature regarding under what specific job type men and women might experience both negative and positive family-to-work spillover.

The final paper regarding gender examined the relationship between board characteristics and the extent of female representation on corporate boards. Geiger and Marlin (2009) conducted a study to examine additional organizational factors that may impact female representation on large corporate boards – firm size, percentage of outside board members, board size, number of directors serving on multiple boards, and the number of older board members. Although firm size was not a predictor of female representation, firm size was significant and a positively related to female representation on boards. Furthermore, a higher percentage of outside board members was positively related to the percentage of female board members. The number of directors serving on multiple boards was also a predictor of female board

representation, and the number of older directors on the board was significant and negatively related to female board representation. This study extended prior research by revealing additional predictor of female board representation. The researchers' findings also contrast those of prior research which had found a positive relationship between firm size and female board representation. In this study no significant relationship between firm size and female representation was found. Overall, the study demonstrates that women are still significantly underrepresented on corporate boards as a result of possible gender bias that may unintentionally be related to the board characteristics or dynamics.

Religion and spirituality

The three papers covering religion and spirituality demonstrated ways in which either religion or spirituality in the workplace impacts performance outcomes either on an individual level or an interpersonal level. Petchsawang and Duchon (2009) conducted a two-part study at an organization in Thailand to examine the effect of one's spirituality and practice of meditation on work performance. Study 1 found that one's frequency of meditation is positively related to one's workplace spirituality. This study set the stage to conduct study 2 which examined the relationship between meditation training at work and both workplace spirituality and work performance. Some 30 participants from the same Thai company attended an 8-day meditation training program while another 30 participants who had never participated in the meditation training were randomly selected as the control group. Although the meditation training was not related to work performance, there was a significant relationship between one's level of workplace spirituality (spirituality score) and work performance. Furthermore, they found that those with a high workplace spirituality score meditated more frequently and the frequency of

meditation practice partially mediated the relationship of workplace spirituality and work performance.

The next study explored spirituality and its interactive effects with the employee personality trait cynicism and discretionary job performance dimensions citizenship behavior and counterproductive work behavior. James, Miles, and Mullins (2009) conducted a field study in which 360 employees from 17 schools within a local school district participated. There was no significant main effect between cynicism and organizational citizenship or between cynicism and counterproductive work behavior. However, spirituality moderated both relationships having significant interactive effects on citizenship behavior and counterproductive work behavior. When spirituality was high, there was a positive relationship between cynicism and organizational citizenship, and a negative relationship between cynicism and counterproductive work behavior. Further, there was positive relationship between cynicism and counterproductive work behavior when spirituality was low. The results of this study like the previous one indicate that spirituality can impact the workplace. This study also demonstrates that researching spirituality can possibly be instrumental in understanding alternate ways to predict and manage workplace deviance caused by some individuals.

The last paper on religion/spirituality focused more on religious diversity in the workplace and its organizational implications for interdependent work and group outcomes. Moore (2009) examined organizational religion acceptance at work (OWARE) as perceived by employees and its impact on group cohesion. Using the similarity-attraction paradigm, Moore proposed that employees that are religious fundamentalists will be negatively related to group cohesion and perceived organizational workplace acceptance of religious expression because individuals who are religious fundamentalists are sensitive to religious dissimilarity. Further,

the researcher proposed that OWARE would be positively related to perceived cohesion and would partially mediate the relationship between religious fundamentalism and group cohesion. Results indicated that religious fundamentalism was significantly and negatively related to perceived cohesion and also to OWARE. Furthermore, OWARE was found to fully mediate the relationship between religious fundamentalism and perceived cohesion. Religious diversity in the workplace receives scant attention, but the findings of this study may add to the understanding of the role that and employee's religion may play in impacting group performance and other organizational outcomes.

Workforce trends/ workplace diversity

An empirical paper and a theoretical paper were presented at the SMA meeting that both discuss managing workforce diversity. McKinney and Smith (2009) examined academic performance as an alternate selection tool and its relation to differential employment outcomes based on race and gender. This empirical study specifically examined the consequences of various selection practices highlighting an aspect of group differences not previously examined, namely, SAT scores, high school GPA, and college GPA. Using a student sample population, d-values were used to independently assess gender and race differences. Results indicated that the d-values favored men for SAT scores, but favored women on both high school GPA and college GPA. This suggests that if high school GPA and college GPA are used as alternate selection tools then adverse impact would be greater for men which is contrary to what happens when other selection tools are used. For race, Whites had higher scores on all the study variables, and higher d-values suggested that adverse impact potential would be the greatest for Blacks. The research contribution is very insightful in that it demonstrates the paradox of women being underrepresented in the workplace even though based on academic performance

used as a selection tool it is men who should be underrepresented and face adverse impact. This study challenges researchers and practitioners to take a second look at the selection tools used and the outcomes associated with them in an effort to reduce adverse impact due to high group differences.

Lambert (2009) developed a framework to investigate the how instrumental job attributes may moderate the relationship between diversity valuing firms and the level of its organizational attractiveness among White applicants. Prior research indicates that White applicants opt-out of the labor pool of firms that promote diversity valuing programs. Some researchers have theorized this may be due to their belief that they will not receive equitable outcomes if they chose to work for such organizations. Using social identity theory and expectancy theory, Lambert proposed that instrumental job characteristics such as contracts that offer job security, employment development opportunities (ED), and competitive compensation may mitigate the negative perceptions that White job seekers hold regarding diversity valuing firms. The promotion of job security may raise White applicants' belief in the instrumentality of attaining positive outcomes in the organization. Furthermore, the promotion of ED and competitive compensation may increase the valence associated with working for the organization. As a result, Lambert proposes that the usage of instrumental job attributes may ameliorate White applicants' negative perceptions about the organization's diversity valuing programs. Lambert suggests that this framework may prove useful in assisting organizations to create a climate perceived as equitable so as to not alienate any racial group. By doing so, organizations can be more successful in creating a diverse labor pool which will enhance their competitive advantage.
Diversity Education

There is a disparity that exists between the number of minorities that report they want to own their own business and the actual number of minority owned businesses in the U.S. Citing early research, Bryant et al. (2009) notes that this disparity may be due to misperceptions that when confronted with education are disproven. Furthermore, using identical pedagogical methods for students may not be successful across gender or race. Based on this theoretical foundation, Bryant et al. (2009) proposes a model for a minority and female entrepreneurship education system made up of six components or characteristics.

First, students should have access to the same race and same gender role models. Bryant et al. (2009) cited prior research that has shown that having a teacher as a role model who is the same race of the student improved the classroom achievement of African Americans. Secondly, it is necessary to remove real and perceived environmental barriers. Prior research has shown that entrepreneurial career preference among women is affected by career entry expectations by others. Women who confront a perceived barrier such as career entry expectations by others will be less likely to engage in the business start up process. An educational system that removes both perceived and real barriers will increase the likelihood of women becoming entrepreneurs. Third, guidance and encouragement into entrepreneurship is needed since typically minorities and women are not encouraged to become entrepreneurs. Without proper guidance and encouragement, it can be expected that minorities and women will not develop entrepreneurial self-efficacy which is important to becoming a successful entrepreneur. Fourth, a knowledge base of economic mechanisms is essential for minorities and women to have in order for them to become successful as entrepreneurs. Fifth, a comfort level with economic mechanisms must be achieved through experiential practice. Knowledge by itself is not enough. Bryant et al. (2009) suggests that going through an internship or apprenticeship with someone of the same race or

gender role models should help to create a level of comfort with economic mechanisms for the student. Lastly, learning how to develop a business plan is instrumental in preparing minorities and women for entrepreneurship as knowledge of business plan development (also defined as preparedness) was found to be a significant predictor of venture capital funding, firm performance, and the success of a new business in recent research. The author also notes that the entrepreneurship education system must be continually evaluated for effectiveness.

The papers presented at the 2009 SMA conference address the continuing trend of an increase in minority and women employees. Due to this trend it is necessary for organizations to continue to prepare themselves in order to attract, accommodate and properly manage this workforce. Schools and colleges of business need to examine the way business programs are being taught in the classroom. Minority and women employees should also prepare themselves with strategies to combat discrimination at work in order to benefit fully from this emerging trend. The role of gender impacts the perceptions of both men and women employees, and associated outcomes may vary based on the type of job or position held by the employee. Lastly, as religion becomes a more salient identity for employees, researchers and managers must recognize way in which to properly manage religious diversity in a way that benefits the organization. Overall, the conference presentations indicate that diversity research is on the radar in the southern region of the U.S. and growing with the addition of the diversity topics of religion and spirituality. However, the absence of research regarding sexual orientation and physical disabilities is a reminder that there is still more awareness that may need to be garnered among colleagues in order to effectively prepare for the dynamic workforce in the future.

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