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Increasing diversity as an HRM change strategy

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Abstract *In order to manage strategic demographic change in economic and labor markets, a common human resource (HR) change strategy is to increase the diversity of the workforce through hiring over time. This study examined department level consensus and valence regarding an organizational HR strategy to shift demography toward greater diversity in race and sex composition over an eight-year period. Though the organization had experienced significant change in organizational demography: an increase in the overall representation of white women (36 percent) and minorities (41 percent) over time; work group members in units with the greatest change did not necessarily agree nor hold positive perceptions regarding these HR changes. The results show that HR strategies that focus on structural change without working to develop supportive group norms and positive climate may be inadequate change strategies.*

Managing growth in workforce diversity and increasing the representation of women and minorities throughout the organization is a critical strategic human resource (HR) management issue for most organizations (Thomas and Ely, 1996). In order to manage demographic change in economic and labor markets, a common HR change strategy is to increase the diversity of the work force through hiring over time. Though most HR strategies to manage diversity are conceived at the firm level, they are often socially and practically enacted at the work group level of analysis (Larkey, 1996). Since employees are typically hired (and expected to assimilate) into departments, it is important to understand how demographic changes are experienced in this context. Departmental groups are the receptacles of organizational dispersion of HR strategies to manage diversity. Individuals are embedded in departmental work groups, which provide a context shaping the social meaning of HR strategies to shift organizational demography. Research is mixed on whether HR strategies to increase minority representation results

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in positive or negative group processes, depending on whether one takes a social contact (Allport, 1954) or resource competition view (Blalock, 1967). We designed this study to develop and assess climate constructs grounded in these prevailing literature themes: consensus, the degree to which group members held common perceptions of diversity climate, and valence, the direction of those perceptions. The study also was designed to explore the well grounded, but mixed, theoretical stances in the literature, and to consider how the magnitude of organizational diversity change strategies may be diluted at the work group level.

The perceived magnitude of change at the group level is important to consider, because organizational demographic shifts are likely to trickle down in a fashion that dilutes saliency and increases variance in the interpretation of organizational change at the group level of analysis. Positive social climate may not necessarily occur when organizational changes are diluted in enactment within work groups. Rationale for the view that group climate may not necessarily be improved by minor demographic shifts is provided by Kanter's (1977) work on tokenism and tipping points within groups. She argued that depending on proportional representation levels, members experience others as dominant, token, tilted, or balanced. She held that negative social psychological processes such as subtle discrimination is minimized where minority representation reaches a critical mass, referred to as tipping point. Such negative dynamics may occur in groups where there are tokens, defined as 15 percent or less, and are not likely to significantly lessen in exaggerated impact until groups are tilted, where minorities comprise at least 35 percent. If demographic shifts are not enough to alter tipping points in specific work groups, then increased consensus and valence regarding the social climate for diversity may not necessarily occur. Despite the significance of conducting analysis of group level reactions to diversity change, little research has been conducted on this issue.

1. Research objectives

This study examined department level consensus and valence regarding an organizational HR strategy to shift demography toward greater diversity in race and sex composition over an eight-year period. Our first research objective was to identify and develop new measures of constructs reflecting a positive social construction of change in diversity at the department level. Our second objective was to examine the question: "Do work groups with higher demographic shifts tend to have more positive climates?"; that is, higher consensus and valence toward diversity change for both organizational and group level change referents? Our third objective was to examine the question: "Does increasing the proportion of senior women and minorities at the department level positively relate to group valence and consensus?"

1.1 Developing group level measures of the social construction of change in diversity

Addressing our first objective, we develop theory and measures for understanding the social construction of change in diversity at the work group level. These constructs include: work group demographic shift, group climate (i.e. consensus and valence), and group and organizational change referents. First, it is important to examine structural progress, which we call “work group demographic shift”. This is defined as a work group’s increase in the proportion of women and racial minorities over time occurring through change in member composition. If an organization has been successful in hiring strategies, it will increase the number of women and minorities within an organization as a whole. These hiring increases typically create demographic shifts that are cascaded down to the work group level and impact the social climate for diversity. The study of work group demographic shift raises issues not ordinarily addressed in cross-sectional HR management research on diversity (McGrath *et al.*, 1995). Members of two groups with the same composition might not necessarily share current perceptions about the climate for diversity – whether it is a favorable or unfavorable climate. The reasons for this difference may include, but not be limited to, historical differences in heterogeneity, the degree to which diversity is seen as valuable for achieving strategic goals, and the quality of interpersonal relations and resource allocation between members of different backgrounds. As Kanter (1977) argued, relative (rather than absolute) numbers or proportional representation shape and tip minority and majority group dynamics surrounding organizational change. Work group demographic shift reflects contextual and relative experience with a firm’s overall or absolute demographic hiring practices.

The second set of constructs we use to understand demographic change is “group level climate”, the social construction of the demographic shift. Climate, or prevailing member beliefs about “the way things are around here” is increasingly being studied less in terms of “the climate” and more in terms of “the climate for something” – a specific referent (Schneider and Reichers, 1983). Using cross-sectional data, Kossek and Zonia (1993) examined how current demographic composition related to individual perceptions of diversity climate. We build on this previous research by measuring climate at the group level to assess shared member perceptions of the effects of a demographic shift over a significant time period. Our approach is grounded in the suggestion that by definition, climate may be best measured as a group phenomenon (Reichers and Schneider, 1990). Climate is partly a function of structural aspects of the work context (Payne and Pugh, 1976). Work group members observe structural features such as small or large work group demographic shifts, interpret them in order to make meaning of organizational change. The greater the work

group shift, the greater the implementation of the change strategy, which could lead to a more positive climate, since these members experienced the most change.

We contend group climate may be operationalized by the constructs of consensus, increased agreement in member perceptions, and valence, the direction of agreement. Consensus, reflects what Harrison *et al.* (1998) refer to as deep level similarity in attitudes and values. Consensus identifies the extent to which there is commonality among the perceptions of unit members (Brown *et al.*, 1996). The issue here is variability within a work group. Work groups with low variability (high consensus) would share common perceptions regarding the social climate for diversity and similar understanding of social reality (Festinger, 1954). In high consensus groups, we would anticipate that members would experience higher behavioral and attitudinal predictability regarding how to enact change in response to an organizationally-driven demographic shift. This would shape shared basic assumptions (Schein, 1988) regarding appropriate behaviors in response to organizational change (Forsyth, 1990). High attitudinal and behavioral predictability reduces strain on interpersonal relations within groups (Zander, 1994), and allows for greater ease of communication and less friction regarding how to enact change (Bleise and Halverson, 1998), resulting in a more similarly construed group climate.

In order to have a positive climate, members must not only agree on the climate, they must also see the climate as favorable. Valence measures the direction of group members' perceptions, akin to what Lindell and Brandt (2000) identify as climate quality. The focus here is on group members' typical, average, or median response. Following work group demographic shifts, those groups with high valence would have a positive construction of the change. Members would be expected to perceive that it is important to achieve organizational goals through implementing diversity activities. In contrast, low valence groups would have negative climates grounded in perceptions of discrimination and harassment toward minority members, as well as less than enthusiastic unit response to strategic diversity initiatives (James *et al.*, 1994; Schneider *et al.*, 2000).

The last set of constructs we identified as important for understanding diversity change are "group and organizational referents of change". Like most HR organizational change strategies, diversity change initiatives are enacted at the group and organizational levels, and therefore should have referents at both levels. It is critical to assess group perceptions of organizational level phenomenon, as groups can vary in the degree to which they perceive organizational strategic initiatives as supporting unit objectives. Based on a review of the literature, we identified two organizational referents: favorable agreement that top management is committed to diversity, and the belief that

the employer should promote diversity initiatives as a strategic organizational goal. Many studies conclude that the success of diversity initiatives is correlated with member perceptions that management is highly committed to the active pursuit of diversity policies as an organizational strategic objective (Cox, 1993; Kossek and Lobel, 1996; Thomas and Ely, 1996).

Since the group level of analysis is more proximal to interpersonal social outcomes, we developed specific group indicators for the social construction of diversity change that were distinctive from those at the organizational level. Most individuals are sophisticated enough today to know that it is socially desirable to state that managing diversity is an important organizational goal, as such contentions have become a truism in the management literature. However, at the group level, members' attitudes are more likely to reflect how they see shifting demography affecting them personally in their immediate work group context. The assumptions that a work group is viewed as having women and minorities who mix well with white men, and that resources are equitably allocated across groups are key in operationalizing diversity paradigms (Kossek and Zonia, 1993; Thomas and Ely, 1996). Thus, group referents include favorable agreement that women and minorities are seen as mixing well with group members, and that work group resources are allocated with equal access to women and men, and whites and non-whites. These perceptions would suggest that the work group has become more multicultural in a positive way.

1.2 Do work groups with higher demographic shifts have a more positive group climate?

Our second objective was to address the question: "Do groups with higher demographic shifts have higher consensus and valence toward diversity change for both organizational and group referents?". Competing arguments could be made that higher demographic shifts could lead to either negative or positive climates depending on whether one takes a social contact or intergroup theoretical perspective. Under the social contact view, work group demographic shift to increase the proportion of women and minorities enables higher cross-group interaction and mixing, which is necessary to improve perceptions of intergroup relations and social integration and reduce prejudice (Allport, 1954; Triandis *et al.*, 1994). Because groups with a higher demographic shift would have more social contact, there would be higher consensus in a positive direction about the change. Unfortunately, the social contact theory may only apply if the demographic shifts are great enough to reduce negative tokenism dynamics (Kanter, 1977).

More likely, in groups where the demographic shifts are not large enough to create a critical mass and tip the demographics to reduce tokenism, the alternative perspective grounded in intergroup resource competition theory

prevails. Here, the argument is made that the diversity change is not large enough to lead to greater consensus and valence. The redistribution of intergroup power through resource reallocation to reduce inequality (Alderfer and Smith, 1982) is likely to be experienced negatively by both majority and minority group members. In groups where demographic shifts are diluted, minority members may still experience negative psychological processes and discrimination. Majority members may see the slight demographic shifts as changing the status quo to negatively impact them, as they would see this as losing power.

- H1.* Work groups with higher demographic shifts may not necessarily have more positive climates; that is, higher consensus and valence toward diversity change, for organizational and group level change referents

1.3 Is there a positive senior women and minority proportional effect on change?

We turn to our third objective that investigates: “Does increasing the proportion of senior women and minorities at the department level positively relate to favorable group valence and high consensus?”. Growing evidence suggests that the interaction of demography with hierarchical level is critical to understanding organizational change processes. The manner in which HR strategies to promote demographic change shifts group demography across status levels within groups can lead to differing group climates. Thus, the current race and gender composition of two groups can be identical in collective race and sex composition, but have markedly different social reactions to dynamics due to the saliency of members’ multiple identities in relation to other key employee backgrounds such as hierarchical level.

By examining the interaction of level (i.e. status) with race and sex demography, we are able to investigate the theory that it is not just the change in overall proportional demographic representation that effects climate, but the combination of demographic and non-demographic attributes that might influence the group social construction of diversity strategies in a multiplicative manner (Ely, 1995). Demographic variables such as race and gender usually assume greater importance when associated with the differences in status (Tsui *et al.*, 1992). For example, higher status members may be more likely to withdraw when groups are first integrated by lower status members (Harrison *et al.*, 1998). Research on how status relates to group proportional representation suggests that HR strategies to simply increase the overall proportion of a minority group do not necessarily result in improved organizational effectiveness and increased inclusion of under-represented groups (Ely, 1994, 1995). In order to have favorable climate, the minority group also must be well represented in senior positions.

Yet the dilution of organizational strategies across group hierarchies again may hamper the achievement of positive change in the status of

groups. When organizational diversity objectives to increase the upward mobility of women and minorities are first enacted across work groups, studies show that most organizations are likely to increase the number of senior women and racial minorities by only a few in each group (Tsui and Gutek, 1999). Again, relying on Kanter's (1977) theory of tipping points, a slight gradual increase may not be strong enough to improve climate compared to work groups that experienced no change or a decrease in hierarchical representation. Recent work by Lau and Murnighan (1998) builds on Kanter's (1977) work and suggests that groups have fault lines or ways to align demographic characteristics across level, gender, and race. Increasing gender and racial diversity through diversity hiring strategies can alter the demographic strength and alignment, or fault lines of internal subgroups (e.g. senior and junior management, tenured and junior faculty). If these alignments are weak, and work groups do not experience "earthquakes" like the notion of a shift to a critical mass, a slight shift work group demographic may be even more diluted at the senior levels. The dilution of change may result in senior groups being still largely seen as white male, having little change impact on diversity climate.

Weak demographic shifts create weak group fault lines and, consequently, may do little to change or coalesce the social construction of group climate. Under such conditions, intergroup resource competition theories are again likely to be apt explanations of group processes. As a minority group gains stature, and starts to become larger and more of a realistic competitor for scarce resources, the majority is more likely to discriminate (Blalock, 1967). Gradual proportionate increases in the representation of women and minorities at senior levels might lead to greater hostility by majority members because of resource control issues. This would lead to more strained intergroup relations and reduced social interaction among members, resulting in greater variation of the climate for diversity (i.e. reduced consensus) and more negative perceptions of climate.

H2. Increasing the proportion of senior women and minorities at the department level may not necessarily positively relate to group valence and consensus

2. Method

2.1 Organizational setting

The data collection period for this study was designed to mirror the time period of implementation of an organizational change strategy to manage diversity at a large public sector university in the USA. Over eight years, the administration had been actively engaged in HR strategies to foster organizational change in diversity. These included active recruitment of a diverse workforce and wide dissemination of a document affirming the

university's commitment to diversity. National consulting firms had been contracted to provide advice on managing diversity. The administration made funds readily available (sometimes over the initial salary posting) to hire quality minorities and women, even for units in which new tenure stream positions had not been approved. Training to promote diversity sensitivity among administrators was initiated. Small cash achievement awards were distributed to recognize department activities that promoted multiculturalism.

Using the human information system, the researchers collected faculty demographic data by department from records in the HR information system at two points over an eight-year period to measure change in demography by department. We used a stratified sample of tenure stream faculty with full selection of the population of women and minorities and random sampling of white males. At the end of the eight years, a survey was developed to examine the success of the change efforts. The archival data on proportional change in demography by group were used to form the independent variables (change from year 1 to year 8) and the survey data collected at the end of the eight years were used to form the group climate dependent variables. The survey to assess the success of these change strategies was developed with expert and faculty input.

2.2 Measures

Group dependent variables: climate for diversity (consensus and valence). Five group dependent variables were developed to assess the climate for diversity. Exploratory factor analysis ensured that each of these measures developed for the study tapped into unique constructs. Each of these measures utilized the same five-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Below we first describe the five dependent variables and then we discuss how we aggregated them to create group level consensus and valence measures.

Diversity as an organizational goal. We used Kossek and Zonia's (1993) six-item scale (α 0.89) to assess the perceptions of the extent to which members believed that organizational excellence and effective functioning were related to the recruitment and retention of faculty who are female or minority. Sample item: "If organization X is to remain an excellent institution, it must recruit and retain more minority faculty".

Commitment of management to diversity. We developed a five-item scale (α 0.85) to assess the administration's commitment to diversity through its support of efforts to increase faculty diversity through hiring and related policies. Sample item: "The Dean of my college is strongly committed to recruiting more minority faculty".

Perceived work-group mix. We developed a five-item scale (α 0.72) to assess the degree to which the department had a mix where women and

minorities had good representation. Sample item: “My department has a good mix of men and women faculty members”.

Equality of department support of women. We used Kossek and Zonia’s (1993) three-item scale (α 0.71) to assess the degree to which faculty women had the same opportunity to have graduate assistants, teaching release, and above average merit increases compared to males.

Equality of department support of racial minorities. We used Kossek and Zonia’s (1993) three-item scale (α 0.77) to assess the degree to which minority faculty had the same opportunity to have graduate assistants, teaching release, and above average merit increases compared to non-minorities.

Group consensus about climate for diversity. These scales measured group agreement for each of the five dependent variables assessing climate. We utilized procedures outlined by Bleise and Halverson (1998) to ensure the valid aggregation of individual data. Group consensus was computed by:

- (1) determining the mean variance for each scale item per department;
- (2) calculating the sum of each scale’s mean item variance;
- (3) dividing the sum (from step 2) by the number of items to obtain the average mean item variance for each scale;
- (4) multiplying the result from step 3 by -1 to capture the level agreement.

The closer the score is to 0 the higher the consensus.

Group valence about the climate for diversity. This scale assessed the median score (a robust measure of central tendency) to assess the favorability of the group climate for the five dependent variables. Groups whose scores were at, or above, the median, have a more favorable climate for diversity than those whose scores were below the median.

Group independent variables. All of the independent variables were drawn from the university’s HR information systems. These included measures of size, race, gender, and tenure (level) distribution by department at time 1 and time 2, eight years later. Variables were created to assess proportional demographic change for each group comparing the two points in time. For example, a group’s proportion of women at time 1 was subtracted from the proportion of women at time 2 to measure proportional change.

Change in department size was entered as a control variable, since the degree to which a department is growing may influence member climate perceptions. Drawing on Allport’s (1954) theory of social contact, the more opportunity an individual has to interact with members of other social groups, the more likely they are to disconfirm individually held stereotypes. However, with increasing department size, members may migrate toward others with familiar characteristics.

3. Results

3.1 *Organizational structural demographic change*

The data show considerable success in increasing organizational diversity over the eight-year hiring period. At the organizational level, the university experienced a 36 percent increase in female faculty from 437 at time 1 (baseline) to 644 at time 2. Similarly, there was a 41 percent increase in the number of racial minority faculty (from 211 at time 1 to 298 at time 2). Overall, there were 2,511 total faculty at time 1 and 2,684 at time 2. The net change was from 19 percent at baseline to 24 percent eight years later for women, and from 8 percent to 11 percent for minorities. Upward mobility was also improving. At baseline, the data show 9 percent women and 5 percent minority tenured faculty, which increased to 11 percent (women) and 6 percent (minority) at time 2. We took these data and transferred them into the measures described above.

3.2 *Survey response rate*

A total of 1,529 individuals received the survey distributed at time 2, and 775 were returned – a 51 percent response rate. For those surveys in which demographic identification was provided, analysis showed that response rates were 47 percent for white men, 46 percent for racial minority women, 51 percent for white women, and 43 percent for racial minority men. Of the 81 departments in the original sample, 74 had at least three departmental respondents complete the diversity survey, which were included in the final analysis. Analyses were done to ensure the respondents from the seven omitted departments did not statistically differ from the 74 included. Only tenure stream faculty were included in the final dataset, since there were relatively few non-tenure stream faculty.

3.3 *Group level descriptive measures of diversity change*

Means, standard deviations, and correlations of measures are shown in Table I. In support of our first research objective, Table I shows the descriptive statistics for our new group level measures of diversity change. These included:

- work group demographic shift;
- group climate (i.e. consensus and valence); and
- group and organizational change referents.

As the change variables show, the average work group shift to increase in women was 1 percent with a standard deviation of 7 percent. The average work group increase in minorities was 1 percent with a standard deviation of 3 percent. The group climate variables for the group referents (e.g. mix well, equality of department support of women, equality of department support of minorities) and organizational referents (diversity is an organizational goal, commitment of management to diversity) are shown in Table I. There was the greatest consensus that departments had equal

Table I.
Means, standards
deviations, and
correlations of
variables

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. Department size Time 1	25.52	16.04	-				
2. Department size Time 2	29.06	17.66	0.89*	-			
3. Proportion of whites Time 1	0.90	0.01	0.21	0.21	-		
4. Proportion of whites Time 2	0.81	0.18	0.07	0.12	0.47*	-	
5. Proportion of women Time 1	0.19	0.21	0.05	0.02	0.01	0.17	-
6. Proportion of women Time 2	0.43	0.27	0.06	0.06	0.17	0.35*	0.58*
7. Proportion with tenure Time 1	0.81	0.15	0.10	0.10	-0.15	-0.05	-0.09
8. Proportion with Tenure Time 2	0.84	0.11	0.04	0.03	-0.08	-0.18	-0.12
9. Proportion of white tenured males Time 1	0.34	0.19	-0.04	-0.09	-0.10	0.00	0.76*
10. Proportion of white tenured males Time 2	0.39	0.18	-0.09	-0.10	-0.39*	-0.13	0.65*
11. Change in department size Time 1-Time 2	24.75	50.40	0.62*	0.59*	-0.09	-0.13	0.09
12. Change in tenure time 1-Time 2	0.01	0.01	-0.15	-0.13	-0.28*	-0.12	0.06
13. Change in gender Time 1-Time 2	0.01	0.07	0.04	-0.02	0.09	0.10	0.76*
14. Change in whites Time 1-Time 2	0.01	0.03	-0.09	-0.16	-0.59*	-0.05*	-0.08
15. Diversity as organizational goal - Consensus	-1.00	0.57	0.01	0.01	-0.19	-0.15	0.24*
16. Commitment of management to diversity - Consensus	-0.99	0.48	0.07	0.14	-0.03	-0.06	0.08
17. Perceived work-group mix - Consensus	-1.25	0.47	0.01	0.11	0.02	-0.06	0.12
18. Equality of department support of women - Consensus	-0.24	0.16	0.07	0.07	0.15	0.09	0.01
19. Equality of department support of minorities - Consensus	-0.25	0.21	0.06	0.11	-0.05	0.14	-0.06
20. Diversity as organizational goal - Mean	3.90	0.38	-0.03	-0.05	-0.23*	-0.07	0.39*
21. Commitment of management to diversity - Mean	3.53	0.40	-0.10	0.01	-0.22	-0.07	0.29
22. Perceived work-group mix - Mean	3.14	0.48	-0.21	-0.21	-0.11	-0.17	0.30
23. Equality of department support of women - Mean	2.45	0.29	-0.09	-0.03	-0.17	-0.31*	0.02
24. Equality of department support of minorities - Mean	3.93	0.50	-0.01	0.02	0.07	-0.10	-0.16
25. Diversity as organizational goal - Median	3.61	0.49	-0.03	0.01	-0.18	-0.05	0.20
26. Commitment of management to diversity - Median	3.24	0.57	-0.09	-0.03	-0.24*	0.01	0.14
27. Perceived work-group mix - Median	2.50	0.37	-0.09	-0.11	-0.03	0.00	0.27*
28. Equality of department support of women - Median	2.00	0.14	-0.06	0.02	-0.13	-0.24	-0.08
29. Equality of department support of minorities - Median	1.92	0.15	-0.18	-0.02	0.07	0.06	-0.10

(continued)

Variable	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Department size Time 1	-	-				
2. Department size Time 2	-0.20	0.31	-			
3. Proportion of whites Time 1	-0.19	-0.58*	-0.29*	-		
4. Proportion of whites Time 2	0.54*	-0.18	-0.32*	0.73*		
5. Proportion of women Time 1	0.48*	0.09	0.12	0.06	0.03	
6. Proportion of women Time 2	-0.06	-0.16	0.22	0.14	0.06	0.08
7. Proportion with tenure Time 1	0.32*	-0.19	-0.13	0.68*	0.55*	0.05
8. Proportion with tenure Time 2	-0.18	0.23	0.14	0.01	0.34*	0.13
9. Proportion of white tenured males Time 1	0.01	0.02	0.08	0.14	0.11	0.08
10. Proportion of white tenured males Time 2	-0.13	0.01	0.00	0.09	0.03	0.07
11. Change in department size Time 1-Time 2	-0.08	-0.17	0.07	0.17	0.09	-0.11
12. Change in tenure Time 1-Time 2	-0.05	-0.16	-0.09	0.07	-0.08	0.15
13. Change in gender Time 1-Time 2	-0.11	0.11	0.08	-0.10	-0.23	0.04
14. Change in whites Time 1-Time 2	0.57*	-0.02	-0.14	0.36*	0.48*	0.14
15. Diversity as organizational goal - Consensus	0.03	0.18	-0.01	0.16	0.26*	0.01
16. Commitment of management to diversity - Mean	0.07	-0.04	0.05	0.32*	0.30*	0.04
17. Perceived work-group mix - Mean	-0.13	0.01	0.12	0.08	0.11	0.05
18. Equality of department support of women - Mean	-0.33*	-0.05	-0.07	-0.07	-0.12	-0.02
19. Equality of department support of minorities - Consensus	0.48*	0.02	-0.04	0.20	0.27*	0.16
20. Diversity as organizational goal - Median	-0.11	0.14	0.01	0.03	0.17	-0.03
21. Commitment of management to diversity - Median	0.05	0.03	0.19	0.21	0.15	0.06
22. Equality of department support of women - Median	-0.09	-0.04	0.22	-0.01	-0.02	0.04
23. Equality of department support of minorities - Mean	-0.26*	-0.18	-0.10	-0.07	-0.16	-0.24
24. Equality of department support of minorities - Median						
25. Diversity as organizational goal - Mean						
26. Commitment of management to diversity - Mean						
27. Perceived work-group mix - Mean						
28. Equality of department support of women - Mean						
29. Equality of department support of minorities - Mean						

(continued)

Table I.

Table I.

Variable	12	13	14	15	16	17
1. Department size Time 1						
2. Department size Time 2						
3. Proportion of whites Time 1						
4. Proportion of whites Time 2						
5. Proportion of women Time 1						
6. Proportion of women Time 2						
7. Proportion with tenure Time 1						
8. Proportion with tenure Time 2						
9. Proportion of white tenured males Time 1						
10. Proportion of white tenured males Time 2						
11. Change in department size Time 1-Time 2						
12. Change in tenure Time 1-Time 2	-					
13. Change in gender Time 1-Time 2	0.01	-0.07	-			
14. Change in whites Time 1-Time 2	0.16	-0.07	-			
15. Diversity as organizational goal - Consensus	0.15	0.11	0.14	-		
16. Commitment of management to diversity - Consensus	-0.13	0.21	0.06	-0.07	-	
17. Perceived work-group mix - Consensus	0.15	0.13	0.06	0.38*	0.34*	
18. Equality of department support of women - Consensus	0.13	0.18	-0.01	-0.11	0.45*	0.08
19. Equality of department support of minorities - Consensus	0.00	0.04	0.04	-0.11	0.42*	0.00
20. Diversity as organizational goal - Mean	0.00	0.05	0.15	0.34*	-0.32*	-0.07
21. Commitment of management to diversity - Mean	-0.20	0.22	0.22	0.22	0.23	0.02
22. Perceived work-group mix - Mean	0.10	0.11	0.18	0.17	0.10	0.16
23. Equality of department support of women - Mean	0.02	-0.09	0.15	-0.09	0.06	-0.07
24. Equality of department support of minorities - Mean	0.01	0.07	0.11	-0.06	-0.19	0.07
25. Diversity as organizational goal - Median	0.05	-0.06	0.10	0.08	0.01	-0.10
26. Commitment of management to diversity - Median	-0.27*	0.09	0.21	0.24	-0.03	0.02
27. Perceived work-group mix - Median	0.07	0.04	0.12	0.23	-0.03	0.13
28. Equality of department support of women - Median	0.10	-0.19	0.10	-0.03	-0.14	-0.14
29. Equality of department support of minorities - Median	0.02	-0.02	0.09	0.00	0.01	0.20

(continued)

Variable	18	19	20	21	22	23
1. Department size Time 1						
2. Department size Time 2						
3. Proportion of whites Time 1						
4. Proportion of whites Time 2						
5. Proportion of women Time 1						
6. Proportion of women Time 2						
7. Proportion with tenure Time 1						
8. Proportion with tenure Time 2						
9. Proportion of white tenured males Time 1						
10. Proportion of white tenured males Time 2						
11. Change in department size Time 1-Time 2						
12. Change in tenure Time 1-Time 2						
13. Change in gender Time 1-Time 2						
14. Change in whites Time 1-Time 2						
15. Diversity as organizational goal – Consensus						
16. Commitment of management to diversity – Consensus						
17. Perceived work-group mix – Consensus						
18. Equality of department support of women – Consensus	–	–	–	–	–	–
19. Equality of department support of minorities – Consensus	0.57*	–0.27*	–	–	–	–
20. Diversity as organizational goal – Mean	–0.35*	0.18	0.08	–	–	–
21. Commitment of management to diversity – Mean	0.18	–0.05	0.15	0.27*	–	–
22. Perceived work-group mix – Mean	0.10	0.00	–0.08	0.08	0.14	–
23. Equality of department support of women – Mean	0.01	0.34*	–0.26*	0.26*	0.19	–0.21
24. Equality of department support of minorities – Mean	0.30*	–0.13	0.83*	0.04	0.08	–0.07
25. Diversity as organizational goal – Median	–0.22	–0.02	0.15	0.79*	0.18	0.00
26. Commitment of management to diversity – Median	–0.07	–0.04	0.14	0.12	0.84*	0.12
27. Perceived work-group mix – Median	–0.02	–0.09	–0.02	0.02	–0.04	0.86*
28. Equality of department support of women – Median	–0.05	0.31*	–0.21	0.10	–0.04	–0.08
29. Equality of department support of minorities – Median	0.14					

(continued)

HRM change strategy

Table I.

Table I.

Variable	24	25	26	27	28	29
1. Department size Time 1						
2. Department size Time 2						
3. Proportion of whites Time 1						
4. Proportion of whites Time 2						
5. Proportion of women Time 1						
6. Proportion of women Time 2						
7. Proportion with tenure Time 1						
8. Proportion with tenure Time 2						
9. Proportion of white tenured males Time 1						
10. Proportion of white tenured males Time 2						
11. Change in department size Time 1-Time 2						
12. Change in tenure Time 1-Time 2						
13. Change in gender Time 1-Time 2						
14. Change in whites Time 1-Time 2						
15. Diversity as organizational goal – Consensus						
16. Commitment of management to diversity – Consensus						
17. Perceived work-group mix – Consensus						
18. Equality of department support of women – Consensus						
19. Equality of department support of minorities – Consensus						
20. Diversity as organizational goal – Mean						
21. Commitment of management to diversity – Mean						
22. Perceived work-group mix – Mean						
23. Equality of department support of women – Mean						
24. Equality of department support of minorities – Mean						
25. Diversity as organizational goal – Median						
26. Commitment of management to diversity – Median						
27. Perceived work-group mix – Median						
28. Equality of department support of women – Median						
29. Equality of department support of minorities – Median						
	-0.20	0.02	-	-	-	-
	0.25	0.01	0.19	-	-	-
	0.08	0.00	-0.01	0.05	-	-
	-0.32*	0.00	-0.18	0.13	-	-
	0.58*	-0.24	0.18	0.13	-0.03	-

Note: * $p \leq 0.01$ or greater

support of resources for women and men, and whites and non-whites as these measures hovered at -0.24 and -0.25 or close to 0, which would be total consensus. There was the least consensus that minorities and majorities mixed well (-1.25) with slightly more consensus that diversity should be pursued as organizational (-1.0). The most positive valence was the perception of equality of department support for minorities (3.93) and that diversity should be pursued as a goal (3.9).

3.4 Regression results on demographic shift and climate

To address our second research objective, which was to examine whether work groups with higher demographic shifts had more positive group climates, for each of the five dependent variables, separate hierarchical regressions were run to examine the relation between group demographic change and group consensus (see Table II) or valence (see Table III). In the first step of all regressions, proportional change in size was entered as a control. For the consensus regressions, the current mean of each dependent variable was also entered as a control. In step 2, the group proportional change in women, and the group proportional change in minorities were entered. (In early analyses, for the second step of each regression, interaction terms, change in gender or race by tenure, were included following Aiken and West's (1993) procedures. No significant interactions were found.) Using standardized *beta* weights, as seen in step 2 of Tables II and III, our hypothesis that work groups with higher demographic shifts may have higher consensus and valence toward diversity change received partial support. Group referents of diversity climate were unchanged by demographic shifts reflecting possible dilution of HR strategies. Organizational referents of valence were effected, but consensus was reduced in terms of whether the organization should pursue diversity as an organizational goal. Departments with higher shifts in the proportion of women had lower consensus on whether the organization should pursue diversity as an organizational goal. Both regressions with organizational referents as dependent variables were significant. Groups with higher increases in the proportion of women over time tended to have more favorable valence regarding the desirability of promoting diversity as an organizational goal, but were less sure of management's commitment, as they had more experience with the reality of implementing the organizational change.

3.5 Regression results on positive senior women and minority effect on climate

Our third research objective was to examine whether increasing the proportion of senior women and minorities at the department level positively relates to group valence and consensus. In our data analysis, the proportional change in overall tenured faculty was entered in step 2, and then the proportional change

Table II.
Regression
predicting
consensus on
climate for diversity

	Organization			Department	
	Diversity as organizational goal	Commitment of management to diversity	Perceived work-group mix	Equality of department support of women	Equality of department support of minorities
<i>Step 1</i>					
Dept size Time 2- Time 1	0.02	0.08	0.18	0.00	0.06
Mean of DV	0.35**	0.22	0.17	0.02	0.29*
	0.12**	0.06	0.06	0.00	0.09
	0.12**	0.06	0.06	0.00	0.09
<i>Step 2.</i>					
Women Time 2- Time 1	-0.35**	-0.17	-0.18	-0.07	-0.02
Whites Time 2- Time 1	-0.02	-0.05	-0.03	0.04	0.21
Tenure Time 2- Time 1	0.09	0.03	0.22	0.10	0.00
	0.11*	0.03	0.08	0.01	0.04
	0.23**	0.09	0.14	0.01	0.13
<i>Step 3.</i>					
White tenured males Time 2-Time 1	-0.09	-0.12	0.05	-0.30	-0.31
	0.01	0.01	0.00	0.04	0.05
	0.24**	0.10	0.14	0.05	0.18

Note: * $p \leq 0.05$ or greater; ** $p \leq 0.01$ or greater

	Organization		Perceived work-group mix	Department	
	Diversity as organizational goal	Commitment of management to diversity		Equality of department support of women	Equality of department support of minorities
<i>Step 1</i>					
Dept size Time 2-Time 1			-0.06	0.21*	0.05
ΔR^2	0.08	0.15	0.00	0.04*	0.00
Total R^2	0.01	0.02	0.00	0.04*	0.00
<i>Step 2</i>					
Women Time 2-Time 1	0.40**	-0.38**	-0.21*	-0.06	-0.13
Whites Time 2-Time 1	-0.07	0.19	0.08	-0.17	-0.01
Tenure Time 2-Time 1	-0.07	-0.13	0.12	0.16	0.19
ΔR^2	0.16**	0.17**	0.06	0.07	0.05
Total R^2	0.17**	0.19**	0.06	0.11*	0.05
<i>Step 3</i>					
White tenured males Time 2-Time 1	0.05	0.11	0.00	0.07	0.35*
ΔR^2	0.00	0.01	0.00	0.00	0.04*
Total R^2	0.17**	0.20**	0.06	0.11	0.09

Note: * $p \leq 0.05$ or greater; ** $p \leq 0.01$ or greater

Table III.
Regression predicting valence of climate for diversity

in tenured white males was entered in step 3. The results are that the third block was not statistically significant in the regressions, showing that small increases in the group proportions of senior women and minorities did not increase group consensus or valence regarding climate for change.

4. Discussion

This study explored links between actual change in organizational structure, organizational demography and work group interpretation of this change. Our results showed that HR strategies that focus on structural change without working to develop supportive group norms and positive climate are inadequate change strategies. Current employer efforts to increase diversity as an isolated HR strategy may not necessarily lead to increased member agreement that change is favorable. Most change efforts, like the diversity change effort we studied, are focused at the organizational or individual intervention levels and under-emphasize the work group level and the importance of group tipping points. Our study highlights a disconnect between organizational level diversity practice which often assumes that hiring more minorities and women will improve climate, and what our research found at the group level: a climate that was mixed and ambivalent at best, and sometimes negative.

4.1 Group level measures of demographic change: consensus and valence on diversity climate

The first objective of this study was to develop new theory and measures of group level change in diversity. We provided new ways to measure and group social construction of change. These included: consensus, the degree to which members held common perceptions of diversity climate, and valence, the direction of those perceptions. Our measures identify group and organizational level referents of HR strategies to increase demographic diversity. Group level referents of diversity change were: how well members perceived their work group mix, and the perceived equality of resource allocation across demographic groups. Organizational referents were: management commitment to change and whether diversity should be an organizational strategy assessed general support for change. Our study highlights how important it is for research and practice to not only examine how change in demography relates to differences in individual attitudes, but also to group member shared perceptions about the direction of the climate for change. Understanding linkages between HR changes (in this case group demography which raises unique psychological processes related to social identity) and positive consensus is important because it is relevant to cooperation, work experiences, interpersonal conflict, stress, and norms in groups striving to manage change.

4.2 Greater work group demographic shift does not necessarily result in favorable climate

Our second objective was to assess whether work groups with higher demographic shifts tend to have more positive climates; that is, higher consensus and valence toward diversity change for both organizational and group level change referents. Our results only partially supported this belief that greater structural demographic shift would positively relate to a more favorable climate for diversity. Although at the organizational level, the university had experienced significant change in organizational demography: an increase in the overall representation of white women (36 percent) and minorities (41 percent) over time; work group members in units with the greatest change did not have higher consensus or more favorable valence. We found more favorable results for organizational than group level referents of change. Members may find it easier to agree with organizational referents and more difficult to agree on group level referents due to their greater psychological proximity to group processes that affect how they personally experience conflict and wellbeing from change in their daily work. Work groups with more demographic change had higher valence but lower consensus on whether the organization should pursue diversity as a strategic goal. When organizational change strategies to increase diversity are enacted at the work group level, the group demographic shift may be diluted across the organization to only slightly increase the representation of women and minorities within actual groups. Due to this dilution effect, group members' social construction of the HR strategies may lack consensus or positive valence regarding the organizational diversity change strategies. If the change is not large enough to create a critical mass to tip representation of minorities to at least 35 percent, according to Kanter (1977) negative intergroup dynamics such as increased resource competition and tokenism may still occur.

4.3 Diluting diversity: gradually increasing the proportion of senior women minorities does not necessarily improve group climate

Our third objective was to investigate whether increasing the proportion of senior women and minorities at the department level positively relates to group valence and consensus. There was no relation between increasing the proportion of senior women and minorities and group valence and consensus. Due to diluted saliency of organizational HR change strategies to increase diversity at the work group level, slight demographic shifts to proportionally increase the representation of senior women and minorities did not relate to higher group valence or consensus. This increase did little to improve group climate and may have even hurt the climate in the short run.

5. Implications for future research and practice

5.1 Incremental structural change not sufficient to improve climate

We hope this study will encourage researchers and practitioners interested in diversity change strategies to augment individual and organizational levels of intervention to focus on work group climates supporting change. Our results highlight some disparities between the underlying assumptions of HR strategies to manage organizational change (increasing structural diversity will be positive for climate) and reality at the department level (incremental increases did not improve climate). Organizational strategists implementing diversity recruitment initiatives typically assume that change strategies (in this case hiring diversity) would improve the group social climate due to a positive change in member attitudes based on increased group diversity and positive social contact. Yet our study does not support this view. Although the organization we studied had had significant success in enacting the formal HR strategy – increasing the representation of women and minorities at the organizational level – our research shows that gradually shifting the demography of work groups may not necessarily lead to increased consensus or valence about the social climate within work groups. For example, it did not lead to improved climate regarding the perceived fairness of resource allocation, or good mixing in social interaction. In fact the incremental increase in the proportion of minority groups lowered consensus and agreement in the short term as subgroups sorted out shifting and socially ambiguous power relationships within work units. These results suggest the importance of measuring change initiatives impacts at the group level and having group level interventions such as team-building and group-focused resource allocation to support organizational level diversity strategies.

5.2 Focus change strategies on tipping points within targeted work units

Future research should consider how HR strategies to manage organizational demographic change are socially constructed and enacted at the work group level. It is especially important to identify what constitutes a group level tipping point or critical mass across hierarchical levels and different demographic groups to enable positive consensus supporting change. Practice might find it more fruitful to focus future HR strategies to increase diversity through hiring to alter tipping points within targeted work groups. This will dramatically alter the saliency of strategic organizational demographic change and intervene to shape the climate of specific units. Our study suggests that organizations may need demographic earthquakes within work groups to effect group consensus and valence on the climate regarding the HR change (i.e. managing diversity). Dilution of change at the group level may ameliorate intended positive effects unless certain group level tipping points, such as at least 35 percent of the work group, are effected in each unit by

the HR strategy. After eight years of hiring new faculty, in our sample, women hovered at about 15 percent in 89 percent of groups and minorities had a maximum representation of 25 percent. The demographic shifts, while increasing, were not dramatic enough to create imbalances that markedly increased the salience and power of new demographic subgroups created by the HR strategies. Instead of being balanced, many of our groups were still largely white male and remain tilted or skewed over time, which Kanter (1977) notes perpetuates stereotypical negative dynamics.

5.3 Avoiding backlash: weaving tipping points across the hierarchy

Recent work at MIT by Bailyn (2000) suggests that backlash and resistance to organizational change may be occurring among senior white male faculty in response to HR diversity strategies. Initially, women and minorities now enter departments with relatively equal resources to white men as supported by the HR system design. However, by the time women and minorities reach the associate and full professor levels, subtle discrimination processes occur in how HR policies are applied, such as lower access to resources, promotions, and poor climate. Despite the increase in upward mobility, the representation of women and minorities at the top is still relatively low. Ely (1994) found that if women are under-represented at higher organizational levels, relations between women at lower levels might be of lower quality due to increased competition and negative gender dynamics in the larger social system. If HR change strategies that alter the distribution of existing resources across organizational and demographic groups are to be successful, they must take into account how, not only tipping points in terms of overall departmental representation, but, more importantly, how tipping points are distributed in demographics across the hierarchies of work groups or departments.

HR diversity change strategies that bring in many new hires of different backgrounds may have negative ramifications for social functioning in groups, particularly if new members are not supported by additional HR strategies that allow them to enter work groups on an equal footing or if their work groups do not have leadership that mirror their demographic identities. As Kanter (1983) found, identity groups must be equal in their access to power resources if contact is to produce improvement in attitudes. There must also be time for the new members to be socialized and integrated into the culture. Harrison *et al.* (1998) found that the longer the length of time that members worked together, the greater the effects of deep level attitude similarity. Organizations are increasing surface (demographic) and deep level (attitudinal) diversity simultaneously, which is likely to have negative short-term ramifications for the consensus and direction of climate. We argue HR strategies must not only focus on the surface level – reflecting structural and demographic attributes – but also simultaneously to deep level characteristics reflecting values within

the context of specific groups at all organizational levels. In sum, HR strategists and change agents should focus on how HR change strategies relate to the joint alignment of group member's multiple characteristics (e.g. demographic, hierarchical status, task) in work groups – that is, to examine group contextual influences (Wharton, 1992).

5.4 Limitations

Our study, while making contributions to organizational research, is not without limitations. Though large in individual respondents, by utilizing the group as the level of analysis, our sample size includes only 74 groups. This could reduce the level of statistical power of our findings. Additionally, because the sample was based on one organization, it is important to replicate this analysis across multiple organizations to substantiate our results. Although changes in department heterogeneity across an eight-year period were included, this is not a longitudinal design. Future research should employ repeated measures over a length of time across all variables measuring demographic change in heterogeneity as well as consensus and valence. Our study points to some of the challenges in measuring “success in increasing diversity”, as we did not look at annual turnover or the effects of the glass ceiling at the group level in this study, which is a gap we hope future researchers will be motivated to study, spurred by our research.

Since little published work has been done on group consensus regarding the effects of HR policies to increase diversity through demographic change, we extend many social science literatures ranging from organizational development to demography, and HR. Future research on diversity and organizational change also should strive to be interdisciplinary, as the literature on HR strategy and change has been largely developed in the HR literature, separate from other social science disciplines reducing theoretical integration. Without such integration and increased scholarly and practitioner attention to climate and consensus, many organizations may fail to support group members' explicit use of their cultural experiences to advance organizational learning from enacted diversity change strategies, despite the group and intergroup social tensions that will inevitably occur (Thomas and Ely, 1996).

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