

THE PERCEPTION OF EMPLOYEES TOWARD WORKPLACE DIVERSITY IN THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY

Audrey Yee Yik Ting

BERJAYA University College of Hospitality, Malaysia.
audreyyee@live.com

Najmi Abdullah @ Thijs Hovenkamp

BERJAYA University College of Hospitality, Malaysia.
najmi@berjaya.edu.my

ABSTRACT

Workplace diversity involves a variety of perceptions, concept and ideas. It is predicted that workplace diversity will increase continuously in the hospitality industry, thus managing diversity has become necessary and unavoidable. The purpose of this paper is to study whether there is a relationship between the demographic profile and the perception of workplace diversity, between the effect of workplace diversity, common concerns of workplace diversity, the expectation towards the management of diversity and the perception of workplace diversity. A quantitative approach is used whereby 162 questionnaires were collected from hospitality professionals in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The results indicate a fairly strong correlation between the effect of workplace diversity and perception of workplace diversity and a fairly weak correlation between expectations towards the management of diversity and the perception of workplace diversity. The results also indicate there is no significant relationship between the common concerns of workplace diversity and the perception of workplace diversity. The results show no significant difference between groups for the five demographic variables.

Keywords: *Workplace diversity, perception, effect of workplace diversity, common concerns, expectation towards management.*

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Diversity is more than just ethnic differences (Wambui, Wangombe, Muthura, Kamau & Jackson, 2013). A diverse workforce is a workforce that consists of a broad mixture of employees from a variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds, different age groups and genders and varying domestic and national cultures (Wood, Zeffane, Fromholtz, Wiesner, Creed, Schemerhorn, Hunt & Osborn, 2006). It has also been suggested that workplace diversity involves a variety of perceptions, concepts, ideas and so on (Green, Lopez, Wysocki & Kepner, 2012; Wanbui et al., 2013).

According to Price water-house Cooper (PwC, 2011), the trends of the workforce becoming more progressive with a higher mobility, more fast-paced, more prioritizing work-life balance and a higher awareness of equality in diversity, require changes to be made for employers to be compatible and competitive in the labour market. Increasing workplace

diversity is an accompanying change, showing blends of gender, ethnicity, background and beliefs (Green et al., 2012). Workplace diversity in the hospitality industry is also predicted to increase continuously in the future (Abdullah and Hamdan, 2012; Suratman, n.d.). The hospitality industry in Malaysia, involving the tourism industry, hotel industry and food and beverage industry is exposed to employees and customers from a variety of backgrounds in terms of culture, language, lifestyles and so on (Abdullah and Hamdan, 2012; Noor, Khalid & Abdul Rashid, 2014; Suratman n.d.). Thus managing diversity has become necessary and unavoidable.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Perception on Workplace Diversity

The workforce in the hospitality industry of Malaysia is diverse with regard to their ethnicity, culture, language and religion (Sumarjan, Arendt & Shelly, 2012). Workplace diversity raises the awareness and emphasizes the equality in opportunity at the workplace for each individual in the labour market (Henry & Evans, 2007). Patrick and Kumar (2012) have suggested that diversity requires a set of conscious practices that includes understanding, appreciating and respecting interdependence of differences; it is not just a way of being, but a way of knowing so that discrimination can be combatted. Henry and Evans (2007) argued that organizations that value workplace diversity are likely to cultivate success and will possess a competitive and advantage in the future dynamic labour market. However, diversity itself is a neutral issue that will not unleash any potential to achieve the competitive advantage if it is not culturally valued. It requires effective management to overcome the challenges and barriers (Carelse, 2013; Pless & Maak, 2004).

Effect of Workplace Diversity

Malaysia possesses the benefits of being diverse from the beginning. However, this does not mean the country is managing diversity with a more outstanding performance. Malaysia has been listed as a country with diversity that potentially leads and historically led to violence among the population (Evers, 2014).

Green et al. (2013) stated that negative attitudes caused by prejudice, stereotypes and discrimination are the main barrier in the management of diversity. This has been agreed by Abdullah and Hamdan (2013), Kamal and Ferdousi (2009), Kinyanjui (2013) and Wambui et al. (2013). Kinyajui stated that when employees felt isolation or being discriminated, their productivity and work performance will gradually be negatively affected leading to low morale, high employee turnover, potential of discrimination and harassment, high absenteeism and disruption of work teams.

Expectation towards the Management of Diversity

Chuang (2013) stated that leadership is the key to unlock mysteries of workplace diversity to lead the organization to a new level of development and change. Kinyanjui (2013) has suggested that, in the management of workplace diversity, sustaining growth requires strategies that complement the organizations' operations. Adoptions of employees' constructive and critical feedback for learning and improvement will be an encouragement to employees and promote innovative problem solving skills. This can also be included in the organizations' policies to ensure compliance and to express the stand of the organization toward workplace diversity (Green et al., 2013).

Conceptual Framework

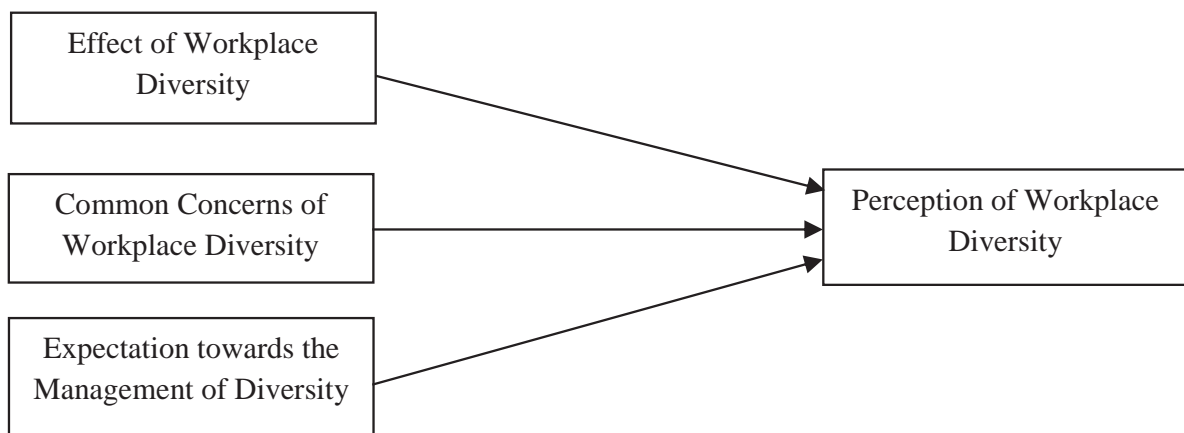


Figure 1: Proposed Conceptual Framework

Research Questions

1. What is the perception of different demographic groups towards workplace diversity?
2. Is there a relationship between the effects of workplace diversity towards the perception of workplace diversity?
3. Is there a relationship between the common concerns of workplace diversity and the perception of workplace diversity?
4. Is there a relationship between the expectations towards the management of diversity and the perception of workplace diversity?

Hypothesis

- H₁: Different demographic groups will have different perceptions towards workplace diversity.
- H₂: There is a relationship between the effects of workplace diversity towards the perception of workplace diversity.
- H₃: There is a relationship between the common concerns of workplace diversity and the perception of workplace diversity.
- H₄: There is a relationship between the expectation towards management of diversity and the perception of workplace diversity.

METHODOLOGY

Sampling

A non-probability sampling method was adopted. The respondents were selected among members of the hospitality industry within the area of Kuala Lumpur. The requirements of the respondents were (1) an employee in an organization of the hospitality and tourism industry, and (2) the workplace of the respondent was to be in the area of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. A total of 385 hard-copies of the questionnaire were distributed and a total of 162 were returned, giving a response rate of 42.08%.

Instrument

The instrument used was a questionnaire based on the literature review. The first part of the questionnaire focused on collecting demographic data. The second part consisted of 25 questions using a 4-point Likert scale to measure respondents' perception of workplace diversity, effects of workplace diversity, common concerns of workplace diversity and expectation towards the management of diversity.

Analysis

Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used as a tool to process the quantitative data.

RESULTS

Table 1: Profile of Respondents

<i>Demographic Variables</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Gender		
Male	85	52.5
Female	72	47.5
Age		
20 and below	26	16.0
21-30	94	58.0
31-40	24	14.8
41-50	10	6.2
51-60	7	4.3
61 and above	1	0.6
Race and Ethnicity		
Malay	48	29.6
Chinese	91	56.2
Indian	9	5.6
Others	14	8.6
Religion		
Islam	53	32.7
Buddhism	42	25.9
Christianity	50	30.9
Hinduism	9	5.6
Others	8	4.9
Nationality		
Malaysian	150	92.6
Non-Malaysian	12	7.4

Descriptive analysis shows that both genders were almost equally represented with males making up 52.5% of the respondents and females 47.5%. In terms of age group, the majority of the respondents came from the 21 – 30 age group (58%). The Chinese race was the major representative with 56.2% followed by the Malay race with 29.6%. In terms of religion, Islam (32.7%), Christianity (30.9%) and Buddhism (25.9%) were the major religions indicated by the respondents. Almost all respondents (92.6%) were Malaysians.

In order to test H_1 : *Different demographic groups will have different perceptions towards workplace diversity*. T-test was used to determine the variables gender and nationality whilst ANOVA was used to determine the variables age group; race and ethnicity; and religion.

Table 2: Summary of T-Test and ANOVA for Demographic Variables

<i>Demographic Variable</i>	<i>Method</i>	<i>Result (Sig)</i>
Gender	T-Test	.731 (2-tailed)
Nationality	T-Test	.678 (2-tailed)
Age Group	ANOVA	.773
Race and Ethnicity	ANOVA	.982
Religion	ANOVA	.969

As can be seen from Table 2, all results show a significance of more than 0.05 which indicates that for all five demographic variables there is no significant difference between groups. As a result H_1 is rejected.

Table 3: Correlation Matrix

		(PerWorkDiv)	EffWorkDiv	ComConWorkDiv	ExpManDiv
Perception of Workplace Diversity	Pearson Correlation	1	.524**	.092	.451**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.246	.000
	N	162	162	162	162
Effect of Workplace Diversity	Pearson Correlation	.524**	1	.205**	.594**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.009	.000
	N	162	162	162	162
Common Concerns of Workplace Diversity	Pearson Correlation	.092	.205**	1	.331**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.246	.009		.000
	N	162	162	162	162
Expectations towards the Management of Diversity	Pearson Correlation	.451**	.569**	.331**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	
	N	162	162	162	162

***. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)*

As shown in table 3, the results of the Pearson's correlation indicated that the components of Effect of Workplace Diversity and Expectations towards the Management of Diversity were found to be significantly correlated ($p < 0.01$) whilst the component Common Concerns of Workplace Diversity was found not to be significantly correlated ($P = .246$ which is > 0.01). Based on the results, H_3 : There is a relationship between the common concerns of workplace diversity and the perception of workplace diversity is rejected, whilst H_2 : There is a relationship between the effects of workplace diversity towards the perception of workplace diversity and H_4 : There is a relationship between the expectation towards management of diversity and the perception of workplace diversity are supported.

The results further indicate a fairly strong correlation between the effect of workplace diversity and perception of workplace diversity (Pearson Correlation Coefficient = .524) and a fairly weak correlation between expectations towards the management of diversity and the perception of workplace diversity (Pearson Correlation Coefficient = .451).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion we can see from the results that the demographic profile of the respondents did not have an influence on their perceptions towards workplace diversity. Furthermore it was found that common concerns such as stereotypes, unsupportive work environment, lack of open communication channels, social integration, discrimination and resistance to change were also not found to be related to the perception of workplace diversity among the respondents.

The effect of workplace diversity, consisting of workplace diversity encouraging a more diverse client base, a decrease in complaints and litigation, triggering diversification of thought and decision-making, improving the financial bottom line, improving the public image and the organizational competitiveness and reducing costs associated with turnover, absenteeism and low productivity was found to be related to the perception of workplace diversity as was the expectations towards the management of diversity consisting of superiors considering different viewpoints of employees in decision making, communication between different cultures, fostering a sense of belonging among employees, personal intervention of managers to support diversity and encouragement of employees to participate in diversity workshops.

REFERENCES

- Abdullah, A.A. & Hamdan, M.H. (2012). Internal success factor of hotel occupancy rate. *International Journal of Business and Social Science*, 22, pp. 199-218.
- Carelse, K. (2013). Employees' perception towards workplace diversity in a financial institution operating in the Western Cape. *University of the Western Cape*. Retrieved on November 30, 2015 from <http://edt.uwc.ac.za/xmlui/handle/11394/3224>
- Chuang, S.F. (2013). Essential skills for leadership effectiveness in diverse workplace development. *Online Journal for Workforce Education and Development*, 6 (1), pp. 1-23. Retrieved on November 30, 2015 from <http://opensiuc.lib.siu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1133&context=ojwed>
- Evers, H.D. (2014). Changing ethnic diversity in Peninsular Malaysia. *Kajian Malaysia*, 32(1), pp. 37-53.
- Green, K.A., Lopez, M., Wysocki, A. & Kepner, K. (2012). Diversity in the workplace: Benefits, challenges, and the required management tools. *University of Florida IFAS Extension, February*, pp. 1-3. Retrieved on June 11, 2015 from <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ht022>
- Henry, O. & Evans, A.J. (2007). Critical review of literature on workplace diversity. *African Journal of Business Management*, pp. 72-76.
- Kamal, Y. & Ferdousi, M. (2009). Managing diversity at workplace: A case study of HP. *ASA University Review*, 3 (2), pp. 157-169.

- Kinyanjui, S. (2013). Innovative strategies for managing workforce diversity in Kenyan leading corporations in present global scenario. *International Journal of Business and Management*, 8(15), pp. 20-32.
- Noor, A.N.M., Khalid, S.A. & Abdul Rashid, N.R.N. (2014). Clarifying the effects of human resource diversity management practices on organizational behavior: The mediating role of diversity receptiveness. *Journal of Arts and Humanities (JAH)*, 3(5), pp. 25-38.
- Patrick, H.A. & Kumar, V.R. (2012). Managing workplace diversity: Issues and challenges. *SAGE Open*, pp. 1-15. Retrieved on November 30, 2015 from <http://sgo.sagepub.com/content/2/2/2158244012444615>
- Pless, N.M. & Maak, T. (2004). Building an inclusive diversity culture: Principles, processes and practice. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 54(2), pp. 129-147.
- PwC (2011). *Millennials at Work: Reshaping the Workplace*. Retrieved on June 4, 2015 from https://www.pwc.com/en_M1/ml/services/consulting/documents/millennials-at-work.pdf
- Sumarjan, N., Arendt, S.W. & Shelley, M. (2012). Incongruent quality management perceptions between Malaysian hotel managers and employees. *The TQM Journal*, 25(2), pp. 124-140.
- Suratman, R. (n.d.). *Tourism Industry in Malaysia, the Experience and Challenge*. Retrieved July 28, 2015 from http://www.academia.edu/1421294/Tourism_Industry_In_Malaysia_The_Experience_and_Challenge
- Wambui, T.W., Wangombe, J.G. Muthura, M.W., Kamau, A.W. & Jackson, S.M. (2013). Managing workplace diversity: A Kenyan perspective. *International Journal of Business and Social Science*, 4(16), pp. 199-218.
- Wood, J., Zeffane, R., Fromholtz, M., Wiesner R., Creed. A., Schemerhorn, J., Hunt, J. & Osborn, R. (2006). *Organisational Behaviour: Core Concepts and Applications*. (2nd Ed.). New York: John Wiley & Sons.