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Summary of doctoral thesis

Diversity Management and Employee Performance

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Content of the summary of the PhD thesis

Table of contents of the PhD thesis

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Diversity management, workforce diversity, inclusion, human resource management, individual performance, employee perceptions.

1. Introduction

The PhD journey began with an exploration of the subject of DM, including its evolution, meaning, limitations, opportunities, and barriers. Initially, our main objective was to identify the impact of DM on organizational performance. This involved asking ourselves numerous questions, such as: why is diversity important in today's business environment? Can workforce diversity truly be a source of competitive advantage? Could DM lead to positive discrimination? Can DM initiatives attract talent and improve corporate reputation? By exploring and clarifying the existing DM literature, we clarified some of these questions and concluded that our contribution to the field would be more significant if we shifted our focus towards a ramification of DM that is severely limited in global research.

As a result, the aim of the thesis shifted to a focus on employees' perceptions of DM (EPDM), and the relationship of EPDM with individual work performance (IWP), organizational commitment, job satisfaction, perceived organizational support (POS), innovative work behaviour (IWB), and self-efficacy. By exploring these areas, we hope to make a unique contribution to the understanding of DM in the Eastern European context. In essence, we want to show whether the DM perception of employees is positively or negatively related with IWP and the rest of the above-mentioned variables.

2. The current state of knowledge

During the 1980s, in the United States of America (USA), the concept of DM emerged and was built upon the groundwork established by Equal Employment Opportunity and affirmative action practices (Johnston & Packer, 1987). Being under continuous business development (Plummer, 2018), DM has the aim to create a positive and inclusive work environment where individuals are appreciated and able to make valuable contributions toward achieving organizational goals (Carstens and De Kock, 2016; Cox, 1991; Thomson et al., 2019). As part of strategic human resource management (HRM), DM is often viewed as a contemporary tool for attracting, retaining, and motivating a diverse and talented workforce (Ashikali & Groeneveld, 2015).

Within the available literature, we were able to find that perceptions of diversity are closely linked to the reality of each organizational context and can significantly impact the success or failure of DM initiatives (Garib, 2013). In other words, although actions and rewards aimed at promoting diversity and improving the organizational climate may be equitable, they may not yield the intended results if employees perceive them negatively (Gould-Williams, 2007).

The current DM literature primarily focuses on the organizational-level impact of DM initiatives, and when attitudes or perceptions are measured, researchers tend to adopt the perspective of the employers (Carstens & De Kock, 2016; Patrick & Kumar, 2012). However, relatively few studies begin at the micro level by examining employee perceptions of DM, and there are no studies exploring the IWP implications of these perceptions in relation to self-efficacy or IWB. In this vein, measuring EPDM and linking it with variables such as IWB, POS and self-efficacy offer a unique approach to DM literature. Studying these perceptions is valuable because it provides essential information about the organizational general view of similarity and dissimilarity (and DM), offering decision-makers the opportunity to build a culture that values diversity by implementing targeted DM initiatives.

3. Defining the research objectives

The general research purpose of the current thesis is to shed light on the implications and correlations of EPDM on work behaviours and IWP. In order to reach this aim, a selection of the research objectives stipulated in the study are presented below.

1. As the literature presented raises the question of whether employee awareness of DM affect individual and organizational success, the first objective of this paper is to explore how employees perceive the DM initiatives. Linked with the same idea is a secondary objective that examines potential differences in terms of demographic characteristics between perceptions of DM. To realize this objective, the study relies on the analysis and interpretation of the descriptive statistics.

2. Another objective is to explore whether the perceptions of DM have a direct influence on employee's performance, their job satisfaction, organizational commitment, POS, IWB, and self-efficacy. To successfully reach the second objective of the study, simple and multiple regressions are applied, interpreted and discussed.

3. Lastly, this study aims to deepen our understanding of the interplay between EPDM and individual outcomes, both positive and negative. Specifically, we investigate the

mediating effects of job satisfaction, organizational commitment, POS, IWB, and self-efficacy on the relationship between EPDM and IWP. To uncover the nuances of this relationship, we examine various serial mediations. In order to complete the final objective this study had relied on results from multiple regressions and Hayes' PROCESS macro.

Taking into consideration the opportunity to conduct a study on EPDM, with original relationships and in a new geographical context, the present paper aims to advance and extend DM theory. By responding to all these objectives, we anticipate valuable contributions that can further promote conditions and improve individual and organizational well-being.

4. The Empirical Research: Understanding the relationship between EPDM and Employee Performance

Drawing on the research gaps identified in the preceding three chapters, Chapter 4 serves as a pivotal link between theory and practice, where our primary emphasis lies in defining and analysing variables that are expected to interact with EPDM and hold relevance to the comprehensive assessment of IWP. As previously mentioned, these pertinent variables encompass organizational commitment, job satisfaction, POS, IWB, and self-efficacy. Building upon the theoretical foundation established in Chapter 4, we have formulated 16 research hypotheses, notable among them being:

- EPDM is positively related to IWP.

- Job satisfaction mediates the relationship between EPDM and IWP.

- There is a serial mediation between EPDM and IWP, through POS and job satisfaction.

In the empirical research (corresponding to Chapter 5) we present the research methodology, provide an overview of the sample and data collection characteristics, describe the measures used in the research, assess the reliability and validity of the selected variables, and, most importantly, analyse and interpret the results of the quantitative research.

Choosing the appropriate methodology to test the research hypothesis was a vital step of our study. Ultimately, we opted for a social survey approach, utilizing a (web-based) self-administered questionnaire. This method was chosen for its time efficiency, freedom from interviewer bias, capacity to ensure consistency, and its effectiveness in quantifying attitudes and behaviours from a sample that represents the entire population (Watson, 2015; Zikmund et al. 2013).

In the current study, IBM SPSS Statistics 20 was used to uncover descriptive statistics of research variables and to test the hypothesis of the study. Tools such as principal component analysis (PCA), correlations, means and grand means analysis, simple and multiple linear regressions, and mediation analysis (PROCCESS macro) were used to analyse the data collected from the 414 valid survey respondents.

After conducting the statistical analysis, we have reached a compelling outcome: all of our Hypotheses have been supported. As a consequence of this discovery, we acknowledge the resounding validation of the hypotheses posited in Chapter 4, grounded upon the pertinent theories.

5. Conclusions and contributions

5.1. Theoretical contributions

The literature review has been structured to contribute to the advancement of knowledge in the field of DM research. A handbook-style approach was adopted, starting with a discussion of general information on the diversity concept, progressing to an exploration of the role of DM in the business environment, and culminating with a focus on the specificities of EPDM, a largely unexplored component in the HRM domain.

One of the significant contributions we made to the literature is the categorization of the primary obstacles that affect the effectiveness of DM implementation. These obstacles are related to the definition of diversity, insufficient managerial support and unclear responsibility, discriminatory practices, and hindrances arising from a biased organizational culture. Essentially, the implementation of DM must be considered a long-term strategy in line with management and HR objectives that requires persistent commitment and accountability from the entire workforce.

Furthermore, our literature review has revealed multiple factors that can impact the success of DM initiatives, with one of them being the rationales for their implementation. We have found that combining the ethical and business case for diversity can increase the likelihood of reaping the benefits of having a diverse workforce. Moreover, our study has identified a set of best practices that can significantly impact the success rate of DM initiatives, while also fostering an inclusive and supportive work environment. These instruments include measurement tools for both DM and EPDM, as well as strategies to reduce resistance to change and reshape the organizational culture. As well, it was found that

effective diversity rhetoric aligned with the perceived reality of DM, conflict management, diversity-related training, and HR actions such as diversity recruitment, retention, and talent management were important in positively influencing EPDM.

We identified that an organization's DM initiatives are likely to be ineffective if employees' perceptions of these initiatives are not aligned with the objectives set by those responsible for their implementation, despite the organization's good intentions. In other words, staff members' perceptions of DM can shape the reality of the business environment (Garib, 2013). This highlights the critical role that DM perceptions play in the success rate of DM initiatives, and this is one of the reasons why our empirical research is focused primarily on EPDM.

5.2. Empirical contributions

Our study makes a significant empirical contribution to the field of DM research. Specifically, we advance knowledge by examining the novel relationships between EPDM and IWB, as well as EPDM and self-efficacy. In addition, our exploration of the mediating relationships in the relationship between EPDM and IWP sheds further light on the intricate effects that perceptions related to DM initiatives can have on performance, particularly IWP.

Our findings revealed that of the 414 employees surveyed, 293 (70.77%) had a predominantly positive perception of DM initiatives, indicating support for DM efforts. Moreover, our results indicate that some employees believe that their organizations could do more to address diversity at work. These findings demonstrate that investing in DM initiatives is not only important for legal and ethical reasons, but also makes good business sense, contributing to the broader theory of the business case for diversity.

Our study also examined EPDM's direct relationships on various outcomes, including IWP, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, POS, IWB, and self-efficacy, while controlling for the effects of demographic variables. Our study provides evidence to support all hypotheses, indicating a significant positive relationship between EPDM and the aforementioned variables. Therefore, our findings suggest that when employees have a positive perception of DM, regardless of whether it is implemented within their organization, they are likely to perform better in their work, experience greater job satisfaction and organizational commitment, exhibit more IWB, and demonstrate higher levels of POS and self-efficacy.

In addition, our study has provided insights into the mediating effects of several variables, including job satisfaction, organizational commitment, POS, IWB, and self-efficacy, on the relationship between EPDM and IWP. Our results support all the mediation hypotheses, with job satisfaction fully mediating the relationship between EPDM and IWP, while organizational commitment, POS, IWB, and self-efficacy serve as complementary partial mediators. By considering these mediators, organizations can more effectively tailor their DM strategies to meet the needs of their workforce and facilitate greater employee engagement, satisfaction, and productivity.

Finally, we conducted additional tests in our empirical research to identify variables that could act as serial mediators in the relationship between EPDM and IWP. In all four analysed relationships we found strong evidence of full serial mediation. These results provide additional important insights into the intricate and complex relationship of EPDM and the studied variables, as organizations are recommended to consider these findings when developing policies and programs aimed at enhancing DM strategies and improving employees' work performance.

Our empirical research makes a valuable contribution to understanding employee perceptions in the business world. Our findings highlight that employees' perceptions of their organization's DM practices may have a significant impact on their IWP. Furthermore, our study reveals that EPDM also influences other self-assessed psychological and job-related variables, as supported by the statistical evidence of our hypotheses. Overall, our research improves our understanding of the role of perceptions in shaping individual outcomes in the workplace, emphasizing the importance of effective DM initiatives in enhancing employee performance and well-being.

5.3. Managerial implications

From a managerial perspective, our thesis provides valuable insights to enhance the best practices of diversity, equality and inclusion. The literature review and empirical research collectively offer guidance to HR professionals, top management teams, and diversity practitioners to better understand and effectively incorporate DM initiatives into their business strategy, placing emphasis on EPDM. We believe that the lessons learned from this study can help organizations more comprehensively address the actions necessary to foster an inclusive workplace environment.

Moreover, the empirical findings obtained from the self-assessed survey and analysed through statistical methods provide valuable motivation for practitioners to implement the lessons learned into practice and to establish realistic expectations for their DM objectives. Outlined below are the most significant managerial implications and some of the best practices that have been identified:

1. To develop effective DM strategies, managers must acknowledge the impact of cultural and social norms on perceptions related to diversity. Therefore, integrating EPDM measurement as an integral component in the initial stages of building these strategies is crucial to success. By doing so, managers can better understand of the current attitudes and perceptions of employees toward diversity and tailor their strategies accordingly to promote a more inclusive workplace.

2. Practitioners must remember that DM is not just about supporting minority groups, but valuing the characteristics of all employees. It is important for members of majority groups to understand and support DM initiatives, as any perceived favouritism or unfair treatment can lead to negative consequences. DM is about growing together as an entity, where everyone's unique characteristics are valued and considered important.

3. From a managerial standpoint, a similarly structured EPDM questionnaire administered within an organization can effectively capture vital information about employees' readiness to engage with DM initiatives, their knowledge of DM, and their level of support for such efforts. Additionally, examining EPDM in relation to demographic characteristics is crucial, as this can help organizations tailor their DM training programs to specific employee groups. By adopting these measures, companies can better understand the needs of their employees and develop targeted strategies that promote a more supportive workplace culture.

4. Based on the results of our survey, it was found that a significant 70.77% of the respondents have a predominantly positive EPDM. This finding suggests that a majority of employees can be classified as 'diversity optimists' and hold favourable attitudes toward DM initiatives. This presents a promising landscape for promoting more inclusive workplaces.

5. Our research has revealed that employees who prioritize diversity and perceive their organization as actively engaged in DM programs tend to have a higher IWP. Furthermore, we found a positive correlation between EPDM and several significant variables, such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, IWB, POS, and self-efficacy. These findings

highlight the importance of investing in DM initiatives, as they can have far-reaching positive impacts on various aspects of organizational functioning and employee well-being.

6. Our analysis has shown that the relationship between EPDM and IWP is complex and is influenced by several mediators. Notably, the level of job satisfaction, organizational commitment, POS, IWB, and self-efficacy all serve as mediators and positively impact the relationship between EPDM and IWP. This underscores the importance of cultivating a supportive work environment and investing in initiatives that foster these positive outcomes. Practitioners should consider these mediators when designing and implementing DM initiatives for optimal results.

5.4. Limitations and future research possibilities

The main limitation of our study is related to the method used to collect the data. The primary limitation is the restricted depth of information obtained with this methodology, as it only allows respondents to rate their perceptions and experiences. As a result, the data collected may not capture the full complexity and context of EPDM. Second, the limited scope is another limitation of this study, as the self-assessed survey only collects specific information based on the variables included in the research, thereby restricting the exploration of other potential factors that can influence EPDM. Third, response bias represents another limitation of this study as participants may intentionally or unintentionally respond inaccurately to the survey questions. Given the sensitivity of the topic under investigation, social desirability bias is likely the primary category of response bias. Lastly, the results obtained through the self-assessed survey may have limited generalizability, as the findings may not be applicable to other groups or contexts. However, as noted throughout the research, reduced generalizability is expected in DM investigations.

Another constrained aspect of our study pertains to the sample of the research, which is composed entirely of employees working in multinational corporations. This characteristic of our sample inevitably leads to limited generalizability of our findings and restricts the generalizability of our research findings. To enhance the inclusiveness of our research, we acknowledge that incorporating participants from SMEs and government-owned companies could have provided an additional layer of knowledge in the DM domain, as it would have allowed us to perform comparative EPDM analyses between the types and sizes of different companies.

An additional limitation we have identified in our paper concerns the subjectivity of all the measures employed, including the self-assessed IWP questions. To gain a more comprehensive and accurate view of employee performance, we recognize the potential benefits of combining subjective perceptions with objective data such as performance appraisals and other key performance indicators. Nevertheless, we acknowledge the complexity of obtaining such objective statistical information, especially given the stringent guidelines outlined in the European General Data Protection Regulation that apply to the workplace.

Drawing from the theoretical and empirical insights presented in this paper, it becomes evident that the topic of DM offers abundant opportunities for further research possibilities. Given that DM is perceived as a double-edged sword, and that the effects of DM vary across different national contexts, we argue that continuing the exploration of the impact of EPDM on all performance types is fundamental in the HRM research.

To overcome the limitations mentioned earlier, future studies are recommended to investigate the impact of DM initiatives and measure the intricate relationships of EPDM using a mixed methodology approach that includes interviews, surveys, peer reports, supervisor evaluations, and other relevant techniques. By employing both qualitative and quantitative methods, future studies can gain a more comprehensive understanding of EPDM, obtain richer insights into employee circumstances and perceptions, and provide a more holistic perspective on this complex phenomenon.

The far-reaching practical implications of DM underscore the importance of prioritizing strong practitioner-researcher partnerships in order to maximize the impact of their findings on organizational practice. As mentioned in our study, it is crucial that these partnerships and all future DM research take into account the relevant cultural and contextual particularities that shape the experiences of diverse individuals and groups. By collaborating closely in future DM studies, diversity practitioners and diversity researchers can co-create innovative solutions that can more effectively investigate and address the complex opportunities and challenges associated with DM in the workplace.

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