Examining Antecedents and Outcomes of Diversity Initiative Fatigue

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Diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives in organizations have been gaining in notoriety; the US workforce is more diverse now than it has been in the past (Lindsay et al., 2015). One aspect that contributes to success in organizations is the degree to which the organization embraces and enhances diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). Having diverse employees helps organizations to acquire different perspectives on ideas and solutions. Initiatives that can ensure diversity within organizations are necessary; however, many organizations struggle with successful implementation.

When seeking to implement efforts to enhance DEI, the first step organizations often take is addressing biases and stereotypes of current employees. Sometimes biases and stereotypes are evoked when the dominant racial group feels threatened by the increase of minorities in an organization (Craig & Richeson, 2014). The feeling of being threatened can be explained through Group Threat Theory, which is discrimination "toward minorities stems from perceived threat to the dominant racial groups' privilege" (Craig & Richeson, 2014, p. 750).

Organizations may implement initiatives to resolve or prevent employee bias and stereotypes. Not all employees support organizational DEI efforts, which can lead to cynicism toward organization change. In addition, an organizations' diversity climate serves as an important and necessary condition in the achievement of DEI initiatives. Diversity climate also serves as a signal to employees as to the importance of diversity within the organization. Signaling theory suggests employees rely on cues and signals from their organization to help interpret an organizations' commitment and goals (Herdman & Capehart, 2010). If organizations send signals that they value diversity through initiatives/programs, it demonstrates to employees that the organization supports a positive diversity climate (Mansoor et al., 2020).

The purpose of the proposed study is to examine the relationship between attitudes towards Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), cynicism towards organizational change, diversity initiative fatigue, and unit diversity climate. Specifically, we integrate group threat theory and signaling theory to propose that diversity initiative fatigue will mediate the relationship between employee attitudes towards BIPOC and cynicism toward organizational change. We also propose that an organizations' diversity climate moderate the relationship between employee attitudes toward BIPOC and diversity initiative fatigue; as well as moderate the relationship between attitudes toward BIPOC and cynicism toward organizational change. Specifically, we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 1: Negative attitudes toward BIPOC will be associated with cynicism toward organizational change.

Hypothesis 2: Diversity initiative fatigue will mediate the relationship between attitudes toward BIPOC and cynicism toward organizational change.

Hypothesis 3a: Unit diversity climate will moderate the relationship between negative attitudes toward BIPOC and diversity initiative fatigue.

Hypothesis 3b: Unit diversity climate will moderate the relationship between negative attitudes toward BIPOC and cynicism toward organizational change.

Method

Participants

The participants for this study will be faculty and staff from [University in the South, blinded for review]. Participants will be recruited via a faculty- and staff-all email.

Measures

The measures of the proposed study will assess variables such as attitudes towards BIPOC (22 items; Neville et al., 2000), diversity initiative fatigue (7 items; Smith et al., 2021), diversity climate (10 items; HEDS 2020; University of Michigan, 2016), and cynicism towards organizational change (7 items; Reichers et al., 1997; Vance et al., 1997). All responses will be assessed using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from (1) strongly agree to (5) strongly disagree. In addition, work and personal demographic items will be collected and assessed for their use as control variables (e.g., age, sex, etc.).

Procedure

During the Spring 2022 semester, a university wide email will be sent to staff and faculty. They will volunteer to partake in the 20–25-minute survey; those who participate will be entered into a drawing to win one of eight $25 Amazon giftcards. All data will be collected through Qualtrics. For the proposed analyses, SPSS process macro model 8 will be used to assess the moderated mediation model, which allows for bootstrapping of confidence intervals. Diversity climate will be aggregated to the unit level.

Discussion

This paper relates to current diversity and inclusion literature because it not only addresses the diversity of organizations, but also how the lack of inclusion can interfere with minority opportunities and well-being in organizations. In integrating group threat and signaling theory, we anticipate the results will inform the effect of diversity climate on organizational cynicism derived from diversity initiative fatigue, a relatively recent construct of interest in the DEI literature.

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