IT Workplace Climate for Opportunity and Inclusion

Debra A. Major
Old Dominion University, USA

Donald D. Davis
Old Dominion University, USA

Janis V. Sanchez-Hucles
Old Dominion University, USA

Lisa M. Germano
Old Dominion University, USA

Joan Mann
Old Dominion University, USA

INTRODUCTION[1]

Our program of research is rooted in organizational psychology and employs a climate perspective to understand women's experiences in the information technology (IT) workplace. An appropriate climate can help a workplace effectively attract and retain a diverse employee base (Miller, 1998). Climate consists of employees' perceptions of workplace events, practices and procedures, including which behaviors are expected, supported and rewarded (Schneider, Wheeler, & Cox, 1992). Climate requires a referent to have meaning, and there is not a single climate within an organization. For example, there are climates for safety, innovation and customer service. Our focus is climate for opportunity and inclusion (Hayes, Bartle, & Major, 2002).

Climate for opportunity is defined as an individual's overall perception of the fairness and inclusiveness of the workplace in terms of the processes used to allocate opportunities and the resulting distribution of opportunities. Opportunities include hiring, assignments, promotions, pay, power, authority, awards and training. By creating an *inclusive* work environment, employers can capitalize on the benefits of diversity. Although definitions vary in this emerging literature (cf. Miller, 1998; Mor-Barak & Cherin, 1998; Pelled, Ledford, & Mohrman, 1999), most agree that inclusion means ensuring that everyone in an organization's diverse workforce feels a sense of belonging, is invited to participate in important decisions and feels that his or her input matters. Exclusion leads to turnover, reduced organizational commitment and decreased job satisfaction (Greenhaus, Parasuraman, & Wormley, 1990). Moreover, prospective employees are more likely to be attracted to inclusive organizations (Powell & Graves, 2003).

Our research suggests that three key factors predict inclusive climate: (1) good working relationships between supervisors and IT employees, (2) supportive coworkers, and (3) an organizational culture that supports balance between one's work life and personal life (Major, Davis, Sanchez-Hucles, & Mann, 2003). In turn, IT employees respond to an inclusive climate with better performance, greater job satisfaction, heightened commitment and increased likelihood of remaining with the current employer and staying in the IT field (Major et al., 2003). In this article, we focus on the gender differences and similarities regarding IT employees' perceptions of: (a) inclusion and climate for opportunity, (b) workplace relationships, and (c) satisfaction and commitment.

BACKGROUND

Research Methodology

Our Web-based survey was completed by 916 IT employees from 11 companies. (See Major & Germano, 2006, for a detailed description of participants and measures.) Due to missing data, the sample size for most analyses reported here is 872; exceptions are noted.

Key Research Findings: Gender Similarities and Differences

In comparing men's and women's experiences in the IT workplace, we found a number of similarities and differences. Means and standard deviations, along with the results of independent samples t-tests and Cohen's effect size (*d*), are presented in Table 1. We used the results of t-tests to estimate mean differences between the responses of men and women. Because our sample is large and the significance of the *t* statistic is influenced by sample size, we also calculated *d*, which is uninfluenced by sample size, to estimate the magnitude of the gender effect. These two statistics together tell us whether there is a significant difference between men and women (*t* statistic) and how meaningful the magnitude of this difference is (*d* statistic). The sign of the effect size (positive or negative) merely reflects the direction of the gender difference (positive effect size when the mean score for men is greater than the mean score for women).

Inclusion and Climate for Opportunity

Men and women did not differ on the belonging and participation dimensions of inclusion, suggesting that both feel equally welcome in the IT work environment and both are equally likely to be a part of decision making. However, when it comes to having an influence in the environment (i.e., feeling that one's contributions actually have an impact), men were significantly higher than women. Men were also more likely to perceive a positive climate for opportunity than women. That is, women were less likely than men to feel that opportunities are provided without regard to gender and ethnicity.

Workplace Relationships

Effective interpersonal relationships allow individuals to feel adjusted and anchored in work contexts that might otherwise be overwhelming and unwelcoming (Kahn, 1996). Employees' relationships with their mentors, coworkers and immediate supervisors are particularly important.

Mentors

Mentors are senior individuals with advanced expertise and knowledge who assist in providing upward support and mobility to their protégés' careers (e.g., Wanberg, Welsh, & Hezlett, 2003; Ragins & Cotton, 1999). Mentors typically offer both career development and psychosocial support. Having a mentor has a positive influence on numerous career outcomes for protégés. Compared to their nonmentored counterparts, those with mentors have higher job performance ratings, are promoted more frequently, have higher satisfaction with their jobs and have higher incomes (e.g., Allen, Eby, Poteet, Lentz, & Lima, 2004; Ragins & Cotton, 1999).

In general, research shows that men and women have equal access to mentors (O'Neill, 2002). In our study, women were actually more likely than men to report having at least one mentor. However, this finding may be due to gender differences in conceptualizing mentoring. Follow-up focus group discussions with men and women in our sample (see Major & Germano for a description) suggested that, despite being provided with the same definition of mentoring on the survey, women may have had a broader interpretation of mentoring (i.e., any helping behavior) than men. Among men and women who reported having at least one mentor, there was not a statistically significant gender difference in level of satisfaction with mentoring received, although the effect size suggests that men may be less satisfied with mentoring than women.

Coworkers

Research shows that supportive coworkers are beneficial in a variety of ways. Coworker support is associated with reduced stress, greater organizational commitment, higher job satisfaction and re-

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