



PERCEIVED DIVERSITY AMONG ITALIAN EMPLOYEES

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Abstract

The paper tests the diversity typology associations with organisational outcomes set out by Harrison & Klein (2007) based on variety, separation and disparity.

The main finding is that variety has a positive significant association with positive organisational outcomes, as well as on organisational performance. The way diversity is perceived in an organisational setting can have important relations with how organisational performance is perceived. This study has a strong practical implementation as in organisations where diversity is viewed as variety, diversity can have positive associations and thereby diversity can have an added value for society and organisations.

The study is unique in providing empirical evidence for a diversity typology, operationalising this typology and providing evidence for links with organisational outcomes and organisational performance. No current study contains an operationalisation of the diversity typology of Harrison and Klein (2007) while linking it to organisational outcomes.

Key words: diversity perceptions, variety, disparity, separation, Italian employees.

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INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, there has been a rapid increase of diversity among employees through global trends such as increased emancipation, increased global migration, and a growing shortage of adequate staff. As a consequence of globalisation many organisations are now dealing with increased diversity on the work floor (Appadurai 1990; Robertson, 1995; Cox, 1997; Harris, Moran & Moran, 2004: 209). Several perspectives exist for studies on diversity in organisations. One way of viewing diversity is by distinguishing the various forms that it takes, such as gender, age, functional, ethnic and cultural diversity. Due to the emancipation of women, for example, gender diversity has increased in the workplace. Age diversity has increased as more people choose to work longer. Functional diversity also has a stronger presence in many organisations due to the increased use of cross-functional teams (Randel & Jaussi, 2003). With higher cognitive diversity, heterogeneous groups are better at solving problems than a more homogenous group (Taylor & Greve, 2006). Ethnic and cultural diversity is increasing due to global migration. The latter aspects have been studied by many researchers (Williams & O'Reilly, 1998), who point out negative effects and positive effects for various types of diversity. For example, Knouse & Dansby (1999) found that diversity concerning gender and minority groups can have a positive effect on work-group effectiveness, while others have found that diversity can have an adverse effect on cohesion and task conflict (Pelled, et. al, 1999). This has led academics to conclude that diversity can have both positive and negative effects (Van Knippenberg et.al, 2004).

Diversity can also be analysed in terms of observable and unobservable elements of diversity that can influence the perception of diversity (Milliken & Martins, 1996; Williams & O'Reilly, 1998). Diversity aspects on the observable level (e.g., sex, ethnicity, age, hair colour) are often referred to as aspects of the social categorisation perspective (Williams & O'Reilly, 1998). The social categorisation perspective is based on the tenet that diversity is influenced by how people can be more similar or more different than others on the basis of how they categorise themselves and others. According to social identity theorists, when faced with diverse members, in-group members and out-group members are cognitively created, whereby the in-group membership is perceived as more positive than the out-group membership (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Consequently, a separation between people exists on the basis of their group membership. Members are placed in a specific category and all other information concerning this category is associated with them. This is relatively easy to do for observable features, because it is often clear to people whether one belongs to the "female" group or the "male" group based on their gender. However, for less visible features it might be more difficult to categorise members in specific groups, e.g., functional background, or even ethnicity.

Diversity aspects on the unobservable level (e.g. culture, education, social background) often refer to aspects of the information/decision-making perspective (Williams & O'Reilly, 1998). The latter perspective is based on the tenet that diversity consists of the variety concerning expertise, knowledge, approaches, or ideas of group

members. For example, one employee might have better networking skills than another employee, or one employee has a better customer focus than another employee. However, observable elements could also be related to this perspective, as it is possible that older employees might take different approaches or have different skills compared to younger employees. For example, an older employee might have more experience with customers and therefore possess a richer and a higher quality customer focus than a younger employee with less experience with customers and therefore possesses a richer and high quality customer focus than a younger and less experienced employee.

The main idea behind this perspective is based on the fact that there is no clear distinction between an out-group member and an in-group member, but employee diversity is considered as a different set of capabilities, experiences or knowledge employees might bring. In this case, an employee might be associated with a specific characteristic of a group, but not with all the characteristics that are associated with the group. This perspective provides an explanation for positive effects as a result of increased diversity as a result of increased diversity. If diversity is considered as contributing to the knowledge an organisation possesses or adding value to the existing stock of ideas, it should lead to more innovation and a higher performance of an organisation. These two perspectives of social categorisation and information/decision-making are similar to the distinction of Fiske & Neuberg (1990) concerning category-based and person-based processing. The latter two perspectives are very broad categories for structuring diversity, but it seems that these two categories are also not exhaustive as another typology of diversity can be distinguished by other academics.

Related to these two diversity perspectives, Jehn, Northcraft & Neale (1999) argued that there are three types of diversity: value diversity, social category diversity, and informational diversity. The last two types of diversity refer to the same categories, which have been discussed: diversity based on the social categorisation and information/decision-making perspective. Value diversity, however, refers to the values that members possess concerning their group's performance (e.g., quality versus quantity, relationship versus task orientation). Thus, it seems that diversity types are often referring to the social categorisation and information/decision-making perspective. Also, most diversity studies use specific types of diversity, like age, race or gender diversity. A new way of looking at diversity would combine these two views by looking at a different level of diversity. In this way, one should have a typology on a higher level of the concrete types of diversity (e.g., age, race or gender diversity) which also encompasses the two perspectives of diversity. The typology developed by Harrison & Klein (2007) can be used for this purpose. Instead of real diversity, this study will use perceived diversity leading to a new perspective on diversity as real diversity does not always necessarily need to be perceived by organisational members.

Harrison & Klein (2007) identify three diversity constructs: separation, variety and disparity. Separation refers to diversity perceived as differences based on positions or opinions, e.g., different beliefs, values or attitudes among employees. With separation they indirectly refer to the social categorisation perspective as people can be placed in

various groups. Similarly, the separation construct is also based on in-group and out-group members, as members either share the position or opinion or not. In that case, members who share the position or opinion are in-group members, while members who do not share the position or opinion are out-group members.

Variety refers to diversity perceived as differences based on kind or source, e.g., different knowledge or expertise levels between employees. Variety can be linked to the information/decision-making perspective as this includes the assumption that group members can have various skills and capacities, even if no in-group and out-group membership distinction is made. Disparity refers to diversity perceived as differences based on socially valued assets or resources, e.g., different social statuses among employees. With disparity there seems to be a relation to value diversity as it refers to socially valued assets, which is very similar to value diversity. The fact that several ways of defining the different types of diversity can be found shows the complexity concerning the definition of diversity. This complexity is still not solved as various diversity perspectives exist with little to no empirical evidence. Providing empirical evidence for a diversity perspective can therefore have an added value for diversity research.

According to diversity perspectives, various ways of defining diversity can be found. However, different types of diversity are neither clear-cut nor distinct (Jehn, Northcraft & Neale, 1999). A social categorisation diversity aspect can also be an informational diversity aspect or even a disparity or value aspect. Consider the fact that a group member is a woman (i.e., an observable and social categorisation aspect, separation), she might have different approaches and she might possess different types of information (i.e., a variety or informational aspect), different types of information (a variety or informational aspect) due to the fact that she is a woman: she is more relationship oriented in her job and she knows a lot about how to manage relationships well, also: she quickly detects subtle emotional signals from her colleagues. Moreover, she might also have a different social status (i.e., a disparity aspect) because of her female role: for example, she is not able to gain a management position due to a glass ceiling that exists for women in her company. This example shows that diversity types are not necessarily distinct, can be interconnected.

Instead of measuring real diversity, for example in the case of gender diversity, by how many men and women work in an organisation, diversity perceptions are the main focus in this study. Perceptions of employees in the work place have been used by other researchers to study attitudes, for example towards job satisfaction (Schulte, Ostroff & Kinicki, 2006). Individuals' perceptions of diversity can therefore be more important than actual diversity in relation to perceptions of organisational outcomes and to correctly deal with diversity (Martins & Parsons, 2007). Perceptions of employees concerning diversity are closely related to psychological climate perceptions (Schulte, Ostroff & Kinicki, 2006) or the diversity climate (Gonzalez & Denisi, 2009) which influences job satisfaction and eventually organisational outcomes.

Diversity can have both negative and positive effects as many researchers have pointed out (Milliken & Martins, 1996; Williams & O'Reilly, 1998; Gonzalez & Denisi, 2009; Van Knippenberg, De Dreu & Homan, 2004; Van Knippenberg & Schippers,

2007, De Anca & Vazquez, 2007). A number have studies have shown that positive effects of diversity are likely as it was found that diversity can result in a higher level of innovative and new ideas (Cox, 1993; Knouse & Chretien, 1996; Milliken & Martins, 1996; Watson, Kumar & Michaelsen, 1993; Wiersema & Bantel, 1992), increased productivity (Gonzalez & Denisi, 2009), a greater group effectiveness (Pettigrew, 1998; Knouse & Dansby, 1999), or the fulfilment of a wider range of tasks (Northcroft et al, 1995). Conversely, some other studies have found negative effects of diversity like a low level of cohesion and higher task conflict (Pelled et al. 1999), a low level of commitment and low satisfaction (Jehn et al., 1999), poor communication and high conflict (Ancona & Caldwell, 1992), a high level of competition (Thomas, 1990), and a low level of integration (Jackson et al., 1991; Blau, 1977; O'Reilly et al, 1989). Therefore, it seems that empirical diversity studies are not able to show whether diversity should always have a positive or a negative effect.

The outcome of diversity is determined by the processing style of human beings as Van Knippenberg et al. (2004) clearly point out in their categorisation-elaboration model (CEM) in which both the social categorisation and information-decision making perspectives seem to be included. However, in the CEM model they refer to the elaboration of task-relevant information instead of the information-decision-making perspective. Thus, the model shows that it depends on how diversity is being processed by human beings in order to lead either to a positive effect or a negative effect. The perceptions of diversity might therefore be more important than real diversity. Therefore, the typology of Harrison & Klein (2007) could be used to study diversity more closely as it is a more complete, more concrete and more integrative typology than other diversity typologies. For example, the two main perspectives taken on diversity by Williams & O'Reilly (1998) seem to be too broad and contain incomplete perspectives.

Harrison & Klein (2007) mention three diversity constructs: separation, variety and disparity. Separation refers to diversity perceived as differences based on positions or opinions, e.g. different beliefs, values or attitudes among employees. As this idea refers closely to the social categorisation perspective (Williams & O'Reilly, 1998), and social categorisation elaboration (Van Knippenberg et. al, 2004), one would expect that a negative organisational outcome is more likely when diversity is considered as separation. Similarly, the in-group bias would imply that due to the higher preference given to in-group members compared to out-group members, diversity viewed as a separation aspect would have negative effects on various outcomes (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). One could, for example, expect a low level of cohesion and higher task conflict (Pelled et al. 1999) as diversity viewed as separation would imply an obstacle to find common ground for various opinions or viewpoints. Diversity as separation may lead to a low level of commitment and low satisfaction (Jehn et al., 1999) due to the variety of attitudes and values people may possess. Having various interests and several ways of communication due to diversity as separation can also lead to poor communication and high conflict (Ancona & Caldwell, 1992), a high level of competition (Thomas, 1990), and a low level of integration (Jackson et al., 1991; Blau, 1977; O'Reilly et al, 1989). Therefore, the two hypotheses are as follows:

H1 Perceptions of employee diversity as a separation aspect have a negative effect on organisational outcomes.

H2 Perceptions of employee diversity as a separation aspect have a negative effect on organisational performance.

Variety refers to diversity perceived as differences based in kind or source, e.g., different knowledge or expertise levels between employees. Variety can be linked to the information/decision-making perspective as this includes the assumption that group members have various skills and capacities. Therefore, diversity is cognitively elaborated in such a way that positive organisational outcomes are expected (Van Knippenberg et al., 2004). For example, one can expect that diversity viewed as variety can lead to a higher level of innovative and new ideas (Cox, 1993; Knouse & Chretien, 1996; Milliken & Martins, 1996; Watson, Kumar & Michaelsen, 1993; Wiersema & Bantel, 1992) as one has access to a broader variety of knowledge and more information in general as several people know more than one single person. Diversity as variety can also lead to an increased productivity (Gonzalez & Denisi, 2009) as having access to more knowledge can develop a more efficient way of processing tasks and fulfilling responsibilities. Similarly, greater group effectiveness (Pettigrew, 1998; Knouse & Dansby, 1999) is likely to be the result of diversity viewed as variety. Due to diversity as variety leading to a greater amount and diversity of skill sets one is also more likely to find a stronger and improved fulfilment of a wider range of tasks (Northcroft et al, 1995). Therefore, the two next hypotheses are as follows:

H3 Perceptions of employee diversity as a variety aspect have a positive effect on organisational outcomes.

H4 Perceptions of employee diversity as a variety aspect have a positive effect on organisational performance.

Disparity refers to diversity perceived as differences based on socially valued assets or resources, e.g., different social statuses among employees. As disparity refers to a social aspect as socially valued assets are considered, one could link it to the social categorisation perspective (Williams & O'Reilly, 1998), and social categorisation elaboration (Van Knippenberg et al, 2004). Again, one can expect to find a low level of cohesion and higher task conflict (Pelled et al. 1999) when diversity is viewed as disparity due to the inequality organisational members might experience as socially valued assets are not equally divided. Diversity as disparity can lead to a low level of commitment and low satisfaction (Jehn et al., 1999) as the diversity in socially valued assets might be more conspicuous. Furthermore, when diversity is viewed as disparity, poor communication and high conflict (Ancona & Caldwell, 1992)

can occur due to the differences in access to socially valued assets for organisational members or the feeling that they are not communicating in the same way. Similarly, diversity based on separation can lead to a high level of competition (Thomas, 1990), and a low level of integration (Jackson et al., 1991; Blau, 1977; O'Reilly et al, 1989). Therefore, the last two hypotheses are the following:

H5 Perceptions of employee diversity as a disparity aspect have a negative effect on organisational outcomes.

H6 Perceptions of employee diversity as a disparity aspect have a negative effect on organisational performance.

METHOD

In Italy, 80 employees in various organisations, all located in the city of Florence, were personally contacted to participate in a survey on the basis of convenience sampling. The researcher would enter organisations located in the centre on a random basis, and introduce the research to the potential participants. The main aim was to enter hotels, restaurants, bars, or touristic organisations that would be easy to access and where employees were present. Instructions were given in Italian by the researcher. It was explained that a study was being performed on diversity by Tilburg University, in the Netherlands. The questionnaire would take about 5-10 minutes to fill out. It was completely in Italian, so no language problems should occur. They would receive compensation in the form of a small typically Dutch gift. Participants could choose between a magnet or a key chain in the shape of Dutch clogs. Hardly any participant declined whereby a response rate of 95% was obtained. Rejection to participate was often based on the fact that participants were not allowed by their managers to participate in any type of research. Gathering the data in this way took about 4 days.

The distribution of sectors for these organisations was the following: 1% sports (N=1), 2% culture (N=2), 48% tourism (N=38), 4% recreation (N=3), and 45% other (N=36).

The average age of participants was 40 years, varying from 17 to 70 years old (SD=10.70). There were 56% men (N=45) and 44% women (N=34) (one respondent did not indicate this). Most participants had at least a high school diploma (59%, N=47), while 11% (N=9) had a lower diploma. Also, 9% (N=7) had a Bachelor's degree, while 17% (N=14) had a Master's degree or higher degree (about 4% N=3, did not indicate their educational background).

The median for the number of employees working in the organisation was 30 varying from 1 to 80000. The survey was conducted in Italian. The following information was asked: employee background, diversity experience, diversity perception,

organisational outcome of diversity (i.e., organisational effectiveness of diversity and impact of diversity) and general organisational performance. The organisational performance items were based on a study from Kearney, Gebert & Voelpel (2009).

The original English questionnaire was translated into Italian with a repeated forward-backward translation from English to Italian involving two English native speakers and 4 Italian native speakers.

Participants' background information included gender, age, level of education, number of employees, job function and sector. All other remaining questions were measured on a 7-point Likert scale where 1 stands for "I fully disagree" and 7 stands for "I completely agree".

Concerning diversity experience, two items refer to what extent employee diversity is present in the organisation (e.g., In my organisation there is employee diversity). Then, for each typology the diversity perceptions are measured with several items referring to operationalisations on the basis of Harrison & Klein (2007): 7 items for separation (e.g., employee diversity means that employees have different opinions), 5 items for variety (e.g., employee diversity means that employees possess different knowledge/information) and 4 items for disparity (e.g., employee diversity means that employees differ in income they receive). The items were formulated on the basis of previous pre-tests done with several items among Dutch managers.

The pre-tests were performed as part of a data collection process during a management course at Tilburg University. Students had to collect data from several organisations in the Netherlands. These data already included the items in an English questionnaire. Therefore, the reliability and validity of the items could already be tested. This pre-test data was useful in the adaptation of items to improve validity. As a consequence, some items were deleted while other items were added or adapted.

Consequently, four items measure the organisational outcomes of diversity (e.g., employee diversity as a contribution to organisational effectiveness, diversity as a positive aspect of an organisation). Finally, the last organisational outcomes including 7 items were taken from the study done by Kearney, Gebert & Voelpel (2009) measuring general organisational performance (e.g. In comparison with other organisations, what is the evaluation of your organisation compared to the efficiency in achieving goals?).

RELIABILITY

The various items for each diversity perception typology were analysed to measure the reliability. The seven items for separation had a high Cronbach's alpha of .84. Therefore, these items were aggregated into a separation variable.

The four items for disparity had a lower Cronbach's alpha of .65. Deletion of two of these items would increase the strength of the Cronbach's alpha. Therefore,

it was decided to aggregate two separation items which resulted in a high Cronbach alpha of .75.

The Cronbach's alpha for the five variety items was also high: .80. Thus also the variety items were aggregated into a variety variable.

The reliability of the positive organisational outcomes items linked to diversity was also measured. The Cronbach's alpha of the two positive organisational outcomes items was high: .74. The Cronbach's alpha of the two negative organisational outcomes items was high: .81. The seven general organisational performance items had a very high Cronbach's alpha of .95.

RESULTS

General results can be found in table 1 concerning means and standard deviations of the main variables.

Table 1
Means and Standard deviations of main variables

Main variables	M	SD
Variety	5.04	1.28
Separation	4.82	1.35
Disparity	4.92	1.66
Positive organisational outcomes	5.47	1.63
Negative organisational outcomes	4.41	1.84
Organisational performance	4.47	1.42

From Table 1 we can infer that most participants perceive diversity as variety as this has the highest mean (M=5.04). The lowest mean can be found for diversity perceived as separation (M=4.82). All means are higher than 3, which means that in general participants do perceive diversity as separation, variety and disparity. Concerning the outcomes of the dependent variables, Table 1 shows that the mean for the positive organisational outcomes is the highest (M=5.47), while the mean for the negative organisational outcomes is lowest (M=4.41) and also close to the mean for the general organisational performance (M=4.47). Again, all means are higher than 3 indicating that in general participants perceive some extent of positive organisational outcomes, negative organisational outcomes and organisational performance.

Correlations were performed between the independent variables (i.e., diversity perceptions and the dependent variables (i.e., the organisational outcomes and performance variables).

Table 2
Correlations between dependent variables and independent variables

Correlations	negative organisational outcomes	positive organisational outcomes	organisational performance
Separation	-0.07	.57**	0.10
Variety	-0.07	.62**	.28*
Disparity	0.00	.44**	0.19

* p<.05 **p<.01 **p<.001

The correlation between variety and organisational outcomes is significant ($r=.38, p<.01$). The correlation between organisational outcomes and disparity is significant ($r=.29, p<.01$), while the correlation between organisational outcomes and separation is not significant ($r=.20, p>.07$). There are significant positive correlations between all diversity perceptions and the positive organisational outcomes ($p<.01, r$ (for separation) = .57; r (for variety) = .62, and r (for disparity) = .44). It is interesting to note that the highest positive correlation is found for variety. There was one significant positive correlation between organisational performance and variety ($r=.28, p<.05$). There were no significant correlations between the diversity perceptions and the negative organisational outcomes.

MAIN FINDINGS

There are three univariate regressions performed. The results can be found in Table 3.

Table 3:
Regression Results

Variable	negative organisational outcome			positive organisational outcome			organisational performance		
	B	SE	β	B	SE	β	B	SE	β
Separation	-0.09	0.27	-0.06	0.32	0.18	0.28	-0.26	0.2	-0.24
Variety	-0.13	0.30	-0.09	0.61	0.2	0.5**	0.52	0.23	.44*
Disparity	0.08	0.21	-0.07	-0.11	0.14	-0.11	0.03	0.16	0.03
Constant	5.155	0.95		1.43	0.63		3.22	0.76	
ΔR^2	-0.04			0.39			0.7		
R ²	0.1			0.41			0.1		
F	0.21			1.54			2.54		

B= final raw score weights of variables . β = final standardised weights . * p<.05 **p<.01 **p<.001

The first regression was performed with negative organisational outcomes as the dependent variable and separation, variety and disparity as the independent variables.

On the basis of these results we cannot confirm hypotheses 1 and 5 as the betas were not significant. Then a regression was performed with positive outcomes as the dependent variable and separation, variety and disparity as independent variables. On the basis of these results, hypothesis 3 can be validated as variety has a significant effect on positive organisational outcomes. Finally, a third regression was performed with organisational performance as the dependent variable and separation, variety and disparity as the independent variables. On the basis of the results of this regression, hypotheses 2 and 6 cannot be validated. However, hypothesis 4 can be validated as there is a significant positive effect of variety on organisational performance.

Results were also computed on the basis of the same dependent variables and independent variables including control variables (e.g., gender, age, size of company). However, these control variables did not seem to have an effect, and these were therefore excluded from further analyses. Furthermore, correlations between the control variables on the one hand, and the other variables (both dependent, and independent) on the other hand were not significant. Therefore, these control variables were not included. It might be interesting to note that a negative significant correlation was found between the number of employees and gender ($r = -.28$, $p < .02$). This indicated that men seemed to work in larger companies compared to women. However, this finding does not have an effect on either the dependent or independent variables. Therefore, these variables were also not included as control variables in further analyses.

DISCUSSION AND LIMITATIONS

Variety perceptions are associated with positive organisation outcomes as Harrison & Klein (2007) stated. This means that employees who perceive diversity as variety also perceive more positive organisational outcomes. Thus, the perception of employee diversity as the different fields of expertise, the different informational sources and the different work experiences of employees go hand in hand with positive organisational outcomes and higher organisational performance.

This study does not give a causal explanation for this phenomenon, although this would be interesting to study in the future. It does seem to show that when employees perceive differences in an organisational setting as differences based on, for example, knowledge instead of status, employees perceive higher organisational outcomes. An organisational environment where differences that are based on knowledge and not status are fostered can bring about a more positive organisational setting. This can have important social implications, as employees will enjoy working with diverse colleagues more if they perceive diversity as variety, as it can lead to a positive organisational outcome.

This perception of diversity should therefore be stressed and communicated in the whole organisation and by managers. For organisations dealing with diversity, the findings of this study are of great value, as it implies that diversity can lead to improved

organisational outcomes when diversity is viewed as differences in knowledge or experience employees have.

Contrary to the hypotheses, disparity and separation perceptions of diversity are not associated with the perception of negative organisational outcomes. This finding does not support what Harrison & Klein (2007) claim, but it does confirm that negative organisational outcomes are not contrary to positive organisational outcomes and should be treated as two separate dependent variables. This finding might be related to the idea that differences based on socially valued assets are already accepted by people, and therefore are not obviously related to positive or negative organisational outcomes. People might easily concede to the distributions of socially valued assets in an organisation, as these should be based on assessments, tenure, expertise and they are given by HR specialists whom they trust to make the right judgement. Therefore, employees might accept this easily and consider it to be what it is. Thus, perceptions of differences in income, and in status have different implications for organisational outcomes compared to perceptions of differences in expertise, values or attitudes. Consequently, this result implies that employees may try to avoid diversity perceptions that focus on financial or status aspects. Organisations dealing with diversity should therefore not indicate that diversity internally can be viewed as diversity based on socially valued assets, or financial assets as these diversity perceptions are not related to positive organisational outcomes.

In general it seems that diversity perceptions are not associated with negative organisational outcomes in this study, but can lead to the perception of positive organisational outcomes. Even disparity, which was not significant, still had a positive relationship with organisational outcomes. The findings of this study therefore show that diversity perceptions can be positive indeed. However, this does not mean that all diversity perceptions necessarily would lead to positive outcomes. For example, if people have a stronger tendency to view diversity more as disparity or separation compared to variety, one could still expect to have more negative outcomes of diversity than if diversity is viewed more as variety. However, this study does show that at least the Italian employees perceive diversity more as a variety aspect compared to separation or disparity. This might also vary depending on the type of employees or culture, for example.

The way employees perceive diversity is positive in this study at least. The positive diversity perception can be explained by the fact that it is natural in an organisational setting to have differences between employees to some extent, which can be lesser or greater. However, diversity always exists. No employee is completely equal to another employee, as people are not completely alike. Therefore, after some level of acceptance, employees may perceive the positive elements that are associated with diversity perceptions.

The acceptance of diversity is needed, however, in order to bring about this optimism, as is the acceptance of disparity in a business environment. However,

disparity does not naturally bring about positive organisational outcomes. The fact that an employee earns more money does not necessarily bring a company more creativity, or innovation. On the contrary, when an employee has a different vision, different skills, or different attitudes towards a complex problem, innovation and creative solutions can be brought to an organisation.

Due to the fact that the study included 80 different Italian organisations in the city of Florence instead of dependent branches of the same organisation, the study contains some variability across organisations with a strong local orientation. There was no geographical spread. Therefore, it would be advisable to do another study across various cities in Italy, to give a better picture of companies within Italy instead of in a single city.

The social and organisational implications can also be validated in a study that could replicate these findings. The social implication of this study is that one can create a society in which diversity is much more viewed as a positive aspect by stressing the variety elements of diversity. The organisational implication is that this study sheds light on how organisations can promote diversity in such a way that diversity can be perceived to bring about positive organisational outcomes and a higher level of organisational performance.

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