

Exploring the influence of CEO and chief diversity officers' relational demography on organizational diversity management

CEO and CDO's role on managing diversity

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An identity-based perspective

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Abstract

Purpose – Drawing on the relational demography literature and a social identity perspective, several research propositions in which the authors postulate that demographic characteristics (e.g. gender and race) of senior leaders will influence the implementation and effectiveness of diversity management practices were presented. Specifically, the authors focus on the Chief Executive Officer/Chief Diversity Officer (CEO/CDO) dyad and explore independent and joint effects of CEO and CDO majority–minority group status on workplace diversity outcomes, outlining key identity-based and relational moderators (e.g. value threat, relational identity and leader–member exchange) of these relationships.

Design/methodology/approach – The literature on relational demography and leader–member exchange to develop propositions for future research was integrated.

Findings – This is a conceptual paper. There is no empirical data reported testing the propositions.

Research limitations/implications – The authors extended theory and research on relational demography by focusing on senior leaders in the organization and proposing that the influence of CEO and CDO demographic characteristics on the enactment of diversity practices may be contingent on key identity-based and relational processes.

Originality/value – The authors are not aware of any studies investigating how personal characteristics and relational processes relating to the CEO and CDO may influence the implementation and effectiveness of workplace diversity management practices. In a similar vein, the authors contribute to the research literatures on relational demography and social identity by extending the application of these theories to senior leaders in organizations and in relation to the work of CEOs and CDOs.

Keywords Diversity management, CEO, Social identity, Leader–member exchange, Relational demography, Chief diversity officer

Paper type Conceptual paper

There's a special place in hell for women who don't help each other! - Madeleine Albright, New Hampshire (February 6, 2016)



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Given rapidly expanding levels of demographic diversity in Canada and around the world (Statistics Canada, 2017; Klarsfeld *et al.*, 2016), there is a critical need to better understand how organizations are responding to and managing workplace diversity. Previous research has indicated that affirmative action laws and the business case have contributed to advancing diversity management in organizations (Dobbin *et al.*, 2011; Ng and Burke, 2010). Although institutional forces may pressure organizations to implement diversity management, organizational actors exercise strategic choice on whether and how to implement these practices in order to respond to these pressures (Joy Mighty, 1996; Ng, 2008). The form that diversity management and inclusion initiatives take are, to a large degree, voluntary organizational processes that are dependent on their actors (Abramovic and Traavik, 2017; Guillaume *et al.*, 2014). Yet, academic research to date has largely neglected the role of key organizational actors, particularly the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and Chief Diversity Officer [1] (CDO), in shaping the adoption and implementation of workplace diversity and inclusion practices. While there is evidence that CEO leadership styles and values may influence their organization's propensity to enact diversity practices (Buttner *et al.*, 2006; Ng and Sears, 2012, in press), our understanding of the role of CDOs, and how CEO and CDO relational dynamics impact workplace diversity outcomes remain unclear. The present paper extends existing knowledge and contributes to theory development on how organizational leaders influence organizational diversity practices (Ng and Sears, 2012; Musteen *et al.*, 2006; Shi *et al.*, 2018) by exploring the influence of CEOs and CDOs on workplace diversity management, with a specific focus on how demographic characteristics and relational and identity-based processes (e.g. relational demography and self-identity, value threat and leader–member exchange (LMX)) combine to impact the attainment of workplace diversity outcomes (e.g. the implementation of diversity practices, numerical representation of underrepresented group members).

Social identity processes play a central role in influencing how leaders perceive and process information in organizations and how they influence subordinates (Hogg, 2001; Hogg *et al.*, 2012; Lord *et al.*, 2016). Accordingly, individuals develop their self-concept in relation to other social entities (individuals and/or groups) which then serves to guide their attention and behavior across different situations (Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Brewer and Gardner, 1996; Tajfel, 1982). Complementing this perspective, a significant body of research suggests that demographic characteristics can impact perceptions of leaders and their behavior toward others. For example, the relational demography literature suggests that leader–follower demographic similarity can enhance interpersonal attraction, leading to positive attitudinal and behavior outcomes (Bakar and McCann, 2014; Tsui and O'Reilly, 1989; Turban and Jones, 1988). Guided by the research literature in these areas and more recent work highlighting the role of identity orientations, perceptions of threat and other dyadic interaction processes (e.g. LMXs) in shaping responses to diversity in the workplace, we explore the influence of CEO and CDO demographic characteristics on an organization's workplace diversity efforts and the role of these relational mechanisms in moderating these effects. In doing so, we endeavor to advance our understanding of whether and how both CEO and CDO demographic characteristics and interpersonal processes may contribute to the effective implementation of diversity management practices. In practical terms, results from this research will provide added guidance to organizations on how to foster stronger CEO–CDO relationships and will assist in identifying individuals who may be best suited to leading diversity management initiatives in the workplace. Figure 1 provides a graphical overview of the main concepts discussed in the paper.

The role of CEO and CDO demography in diversity management

Both CEO and CDO demographic characteristics should be instrumental in shaping the implementation of organizational diversity policies and practices. According to social identity theory, individuals establish a sense of social identity from personal attributes such as their demographic characteristics (Billig and Tajfel, 1973; DiDonato *et al.*, 2010; Tajfel, 1982). Based on

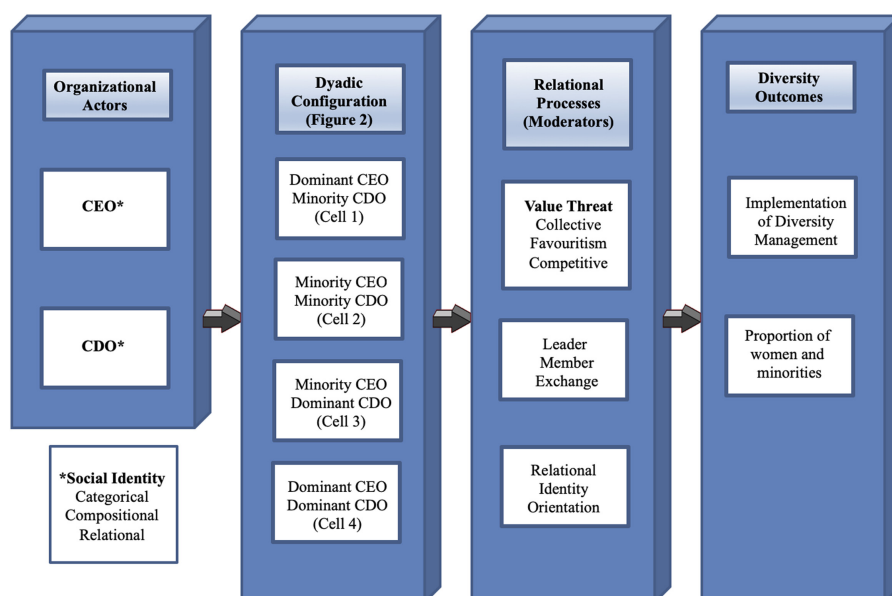


Figure 1.
Conceptual framework
for CEO-CDO
demography on
organizational
diversity outcomes

these characteristics, individuals may then display more favorable treatment to those who possess similar characteristics to them (i.e. in-group favoritism), due to a shared sense of identity and greater mutual understanding (Goldberg *et al.*, 2010; Hogg and Terry, 2000). In this respect, one's personal attributes can play an important role in determining whether a CEO or CDO will actively support specific workplace initiatives as these characteristics may be intricately linked to their social identity and how they may be inclined to treat individuals who share (or do not share) this identity. In order to simplify our discussion and maintain parsimony in our conceptual framework, we focus on two primary demographic characteristics – gender and race – which are particularly salient and have been shown to influence social identification processes in organizations (Abrams *et al.*, 1990; Ibarra, 1995). Thus, the “dominant group[2]” that we refer to in this paper are white males and the “minority group” is a racial minority and/or female. We chose to focus on CEOs and CDOs in this paper as CEOs play a central role in setting the corporate agenda and providing resources required to support diversity management (Cox and Blake, 1991). CDOs work in collaboration with the CEO and are specifically tasked with the responsibility of managing and implementing their organizations' diversity policies and practices. There are also other key organizational actors, such as union equity officers (see Kirton and Greene, 2006), who play a role in influencing the adoption of workplace diversity practices; however, these individuals may not have direct engagement or interactions with the CEO. Although our paper is largely set within a North American context, in which specific CDO positions are voluntarily created by organizations motivated to promote diversity and inclusion (Williams and Wade-Golden, 2013), our model would also apply to senior HR managers who are tasked with the responsibility of leading diversity management in the organization (i.e. in cases where a formal “CDO” position has not been assigned). For example, in the EU and the UK, specialist HR managers may be tasked with implementing diversity and inclusion programs and these roles can be senior level positions.

Demographic characteristics

Previous research suggests that the influence of individual demographic characteristics in organizations can be examined through three general perspectives: *categorical*, *compositional*

and *relational* (cf. Wells and Aicher, 2013; Tsui and Gutek, 1999). Under the *categorical* perspective, studies consider how individual personal characteristics (e.g. gender, race) impact their attitudes and work outcomes (Greenhaus *et al.*, 1990; McKay *et al.*, 2008). The *compositional* perspective broadens the focus to the group level and explores how individual demographic characteristics embedded within a work group impact work and organizational outcomes (Jackson *et al.*, 2003; van Knippenberg *et al.*, 2004), including the effects of compositional diversity in top management teams (Barkema and Shvyrkov, 2007; Nielsen, 2010). Finally, the *relational* perspective draws attention to the influence of dyads, including how demographic similarities influence interactions among individuals and dyads (e.g. supervisor–direct report interactions) (Avery *et al.*, 2008; Duguid *et al.*, 2012; Tsui and O'Reilly, 1989).

Given the importance of CEOs in diversity management, a compelling research question concerns how CEO demographic characteristics influence support for workplace diversity efforts (Ng and Sears, 2017). While very little research has examined this question, the literature on self-interest and social identity theories (e.g. in-group favoritism; Kanter, 1977; Pfeffer, 1983; Sears and Funk, 1991) would suggest that female and racial minority CEOs may be more likely to promote the careers of similar others as a result of a greater tendency to more readily identify with individuals from similar backgrounds and understand the obstacles they face in the workplace. Ng (2008) postulates that female and racial minority CEOs may be more sensitive to the need for effective diversity policies and practices and more actively advance such efforts as leaders from minority groups often have direct experience encountering and overcoming challenges associated with their minority group status.

Complementing the role of the CEO, CDOs are directly tasked with the responsibility of managing and implementing their organizations' diversity policies and practices relating to various stakeholders including employees, customers, shareholders and their local community (Piderit and Ashford, 2003). Given the complex and highly symbolic nature of the CDO's role (Tatli and Ozbilgin, 2009), organizations need to be highly selective in appointing individuals to these positions. Most organizations choose CDOs from underrepresented minority groups because they want to visibly support their claim as diversity leaders (Corporate Leadership Council, 2008). Some of the advantages in adopting this approach include gaining legitimacy with various constituents, enabling the strategic deployment of minority group members and providing symbolic or political representation at senior levels in the organization (Ely and Thomas, 2001; Sass and Troyer, 1999). Accordingly, consistent with social identity theory and the greater perceived legitimacy of minority leaders who support and implement diversity management initiatives, we propose the following as the starting point^[3] for our discussion:

- P1. The minority status (gender, race) of an organization's CEO will influence the integration of minorities in the workplace. Specifically, relative to organizations with a CEO from the dominant group, organizations with a CEO who is from a minority status group will report: (1) a higher level of implementation of diversity practices and (2) a greater proportion of minority employees throughout the organization.
- P2. The minority status (gender, race) of an organization's CDO will influence the integration of minorities in the workplace. Specifically, relative to organizations with a CDO from the dominant group, organizations with a CDO who is from a minority status group will report: (1) a higher level of implementation of diversity practices and (2) a greater proportion of minority employees throughout the organization.

Based on the preceding arguments, the minority status of the CEO and CDO should play an influential role in determining the implementation and effectiveness of diversity practices.

We also submit, however, that this effect may depend on two key contingency variables: the compositional diversity between the CEO and CDO (Duguid *et al.*, 2012) and the token status of the CEO/CDO (Chattopadhyay *et al.*, 2016; Duguid, 2011). Although past research in management suggests that women and racial minorities will advocate for each other (see Propositions 1 and 2), emerging research reveals that this is contingent upon the status and numerical representation of minority group members in the organization. For example, Duguid *et al.* (2012) have proposed that “value threat” – comprised of collective, favoritism and competitive threats – may discourage women and racial minorities from advocating for each other and supporting organizational diversity efforts. Collective threat entails invoking stereotypes that devalue an individual’s achievements because they are perceived to have lower qualifications. For instance, women and racial minority leaders who have advanced into the upper echelons of an organization frequently distance themselves from Affirmative Action policies and attribute their successes to merit to avoid being perceived as less competent (Faniko *et al.*, 2017). In this respect, women fear that supporting similar others may discount their own successes and reinforce the notion that they cannot succeed without support from Affirmative Action and similar policies (Heilman *et al.*, 1992; Heilman *et al.*, 1997).

Second, favoritism threat involves being seen as favoring demographically similar others. Women and racial minorities may avoid supporting each other for fear of being accused of in-group bias. This may be of particular concern for CEOs and other senior leaders who may be seen as prioritizing minority issues over broader, more strategic concerns (Robinson and Dechant, 1997). As an example, some commentators observe that Barack Obama did not champion Black or race issues despite being the first African–American president (Bryant, 2017; Kaleem *et al.*, 2017). There is also evidence that women and racial minorities who engage in diversity valuing behaviors are penalized with poorer performance ratings which discourages them from championing minority groups (Hekman *et al.*, 2017).

Third, competitive threat occurs when individuals perceive demographically similar others to be rivals who take away from their accomplishments. In this regard, women and racial minorities may avoid supporting other minorities for fear that this may erode their own position as a valued organizational member, particularly in high status roles. This phenomenon may be an example of the “Queen Bee” syndrome in which women in senior leadership roles do not support initiatives to assist other women because they perceive their gender as preventing their career progression and distancing themselves from other women is a strategy used to increase their own chances of personal success (Duguid, 2011; Srivastava and Sherman, 2015).

In light of these forms of value threat, women and racial minority leaders may be reluctant to support diversity initiatives, which in turn, impede rather than facilitate the implementation of organizational diversity initiatives (Duguid, 2011; Loyd and Amoroso, 2011).

The value threat perspective is also consistent with the view that low status individuals are more likely to engage in self-enhancing behaviors (e.g. they identify with one’s occupation rather than one’s demographic group) (Chattopadhyay *et al.*, 2011, 2016). It is important to point out that value threat is more likely to occur when individuals are in a numerical minority position within a team or work group (Duguid *et al.*, 2012). In this respect, the individual must be perceived as a “token” or being different from others in order for value threat to become salient. Value threat operates very much in a similar fashion to stereotype threat (see Roberson and Kulik, 2007) in that “being the only one” (or few) is more likely to cause the minority leader to stand out. On the basis of social identity theory and tokenism (Chattopadhyay *et al.*, 2016), we posit that value threat will moderate the influence CEO and CDO minority status on diversity outcomes. Specifically, we offer the following proposition:

- P3. The influence of CEO and CDO minority status (gender, race) on the integration of minorities in the workplace will be attenuated when value threat is experienced. Specifically, the positive relationship between being a minority group member (female, racial minority) and workplace diversity outcomes (i.e. implementation of diversity practices, proportion of minority employees in the organization) will be weaker when value threat is high (vs low).

A configural view of CEO–CDO relational demography

Tsui and O'Reilly (1989, p. 403) first coined the term “relational demography” to refer to “the comparative demographic characteristics of members of dyads or groups who are in a position to engage in regular interactions.” The concept of relational demography is grounded in both social identity theory (Tajfel, 1982) and the similarity–attraction paradigm (Byrne, 1971) and proposes that (dis)similarity in demographic characteristics can significantly affect interpersonal perceptions and behaviors (Elfenbein and O'Reilly, 2007; Tsui *et al.*, 1995). For example, demographic similarity can facilitate greater trust, psychosocial support and a greater desire to interact with similar others, owing to shared values, attitudes and behavioral styles (Byrne, 1971; Geddes and Konrad, 2003; Thomas, 1990; Tsui and O'Reilly, 1989). A number of studies support the relational demography perspective. Supervisor–employee similarity on demographic characteristics, such as age, gender and race have been shown to be positively associated with various employee work outcomes, including more favorable work perceptions (e.g. satisfaction with one's supervisor, overall job satisfaction, organizational commitment; lower perceived stress; Avery *et al.*, 2012; Avery *et al.*, 2008; Chrobot-Mason, 2004; Turban and Jones, 1988; Vecchio and Bullis, 2001; Wesolowski and Mossholder, 1997) and heightened job performance (Tsui and O'Reilly, 1989; Tsui *et al.*, 2002; Turban and Jones, 1988).

Although a key assumption in the relational demography literature is that demographic similarity will cultivate improved relational outcomes, we argue that specific identity-based and relational processes will moderate the influence of CEO and CDO relational demography on workplace diversity outcomes. Several studies have reported mixed results regarding the effects of demographic (dis)similarity on work outcomes (see Riordan, 2000). Moreover, recent research suggests that the positive outcomes arising from demographic similarity may be contingent upon various situational and perceptual factors including perceptions of support for diversity in the organization (Chattopadhyay *et al.*, 2011, 2016). Recent studies have also highlighted the role that power, status and even one's “hidden identities,” may play in moderating the effects of workplace diversity on individual and organizational outcomes (see Guillaume *et al.*, 2017; Roberson *et al.*, 2017). Likewise, in a study exploring the influence of supervisor and employee relational demography on perceptions of fair treatment, Schaffer and Riordan (2013) reported that racial dissimilarity exerts a stronger negative influence on employee perceptions of discrimination and exclusionary treatment when a dominant member (white male) reports to a minority (e.g. black) supervisor, providing evidence for asymmetrical effects of relational demography. Drawing on this evidence and recent work highlighting the importance of identity-based relational processes in determining actor responses to diversity (Duguid *et al.*, 2012), we propose a configural perspective on how the minority (vs majority) status of the CEO and CDO will influence workplace diversity outcomes. Figure 2 summarizes our proposed configural model.

In the first configuration depicted in Figure 1 (Cell 1), the CEO is part of the dominant group (i.e. white male) and the CDO is an underrepresented minority (i.e. female or racial minority). Under this configuration, we suggest that organizational diversity efforts are likely to be more effective than in other configurations (Cells 2, 3, 4). CEOs who are a part of

the dominant group are shielded from value threat as outlined by [Duguid and colleagues \(2012\)](#). In this respect, white male CEOs are not stigmatized when implementing diversity initiatives and are also unlikely to be accused of in-group favoritism. White male CEOs also do not experience in-group competitive threat when advancing minority group members; instead they may be lauded for championing and advancing women and racial minorities in the workplace. In contrast, when the CEO is a minority group member, they may be more susceptible to value threat on the basis of stigmatization, in-group favoritism and competitive threat. Female or racial minority CEOs also receive greater scrutiny and criticism from the public ([Ryan and Haslam, 2005](#)), making them less willing to champion organizational diversity efforts ([Cook and Glass, 2015](#); [Hekman et al., 2017](#)).

CEOs may be motivated to support diversity for a number of reasons. First, they may be motivated by the business case and a belief that diversity enhances firm performance and by extension their own performance as CEOs (see [Richard, 2000](#)). CEOs may also be persuaded by moral arguments (i.e. a desire to do “the right thing”; see [Ng and Sears, 2018](#) (in press)) and on the basis of relative deprivation for others, i.e. perceiving women are treated less fairly than men ([Tougas and Veilleux, 1990](#); [Veilleux and Tougas, 1989](#)). There is also recent research suggesting that CEOs with daughters may be more inclusive to endorse moral arguments for supporting diversity ([Cronqvist and Yu, 2017](#)). Finally, CEOs may also wish to leave a positive legacy or be remembered as a champion of women and minority rights during their tenure ([Ng and Wyrick, 2011](#)). In this respect, although white male CEOs [4] may be less likely to directly identify with diversity issues, we propose that they may be strong advocates for diversity management when certain motives noted above are present.

We also argue, however, that white male CEOs may be more willing and capable of supporting diversity when they are working with a minority group CDO. When the CDO is a minority, it may add legitimacy to the CEO's agenda in promoting diversity initiatives. Minority CDOs – as part of the top management team – provide symbolic representation on the leadership team and signal to organizational members the CEOs' commitment to diversity ([Corporate Leadership Council, 2008](#); [Williams and Wade-Golden, 2013](#)). Female and racial minority CDOs also have a greater understanding of the challenges other minority members face, and they can deploy the appropriate tools to tackle barriers facing woman and minorities in the workplace. In contrast, a white male CDO would elicit the opposite effect (e.g. lack legitimacy), leading to poorer organization diversity outcomes (see discussion for Cell 3 below). In this respect, we posit that a dominant CEO and minority CDO (Cell 1) would likely represent the most favorable configuration for implementing organizational diversity initiatives and yielding positive workplace diversity outcomes.

In Cell 2, both the CEO and CDO are minority group members. When both the CEO and CDO are minority status group members, the effect of value threat – stigmatization and in-group favoritism – may be amplified. In this respect, [Konrad et al., \(2008\)](#) suggest that when there are only two women (minority group members) in leadership positions, they avoid each other for fear of being seen as conspirators. For example, when there are two women on the board or top management team, and “if the women sit next to each other, if they go to the

	CDO minority	CDO dominant
CEO dominant	1	4
CEO minority	2	3

Figure 2.
Configural model of
CEO–CDO
demographic
characteristics

ladies' room together, the guys wonder what the women are up to" (Konrad *et al.*, 2008, p. 146). Minority CEOs may also distance themselves from diversity initiatives, particularly when the CDO is also a minority status group member, to avert the perception that both the CEO and CDO are products of Affirmative Action (stigmatization). From a compositional perspective, a minority CEO and CDO configuration will also increase the numerical representation of minority status members on the top management team, possibly inviting criticisms of in-group favoritism. Minority group CDOs may in turn perceive a lack of support (and thus receive fewer resources) from their CEOs leading to decreased motivation and efforts to implement diversity management. On this basis, we propose that a minority CEO-minority CDO (Cell 2) configuration would result in a poorer outcome than a dominant group CEO-minority CDO pairing (Cell 1).

In Cell 3, the CEO is a minority group member and the CDO is a white male. A minority group CEO may prefer, and in some cases, select a white male CDO in order to avoid the perception of in-group bias and also maintain perceptions of their legitimacy and/or competence as leaders (i.e. by having fewer minority status group members on the top management team). In this regard, a white male CDO can serve as a particularly effective conduit for allowing the minority CEO to promote diversity while minimizing accusations of favoritism and stigmatizing the leader. We therefore suggest that this configuration may afford a better diversity outcome than Cell 2 (when both the CEO and CDO are minority group members) since a female or racial minority CEO may not experience as much pressure to distance themselves from a diversity agenda when the CDO is a majority group member. At the same time, however, previous studies indicate that white males – as part of the dominant group – may demonstrate poorer work outcomes when they report to a racial minority (or female) supervisor (see Chattopadhyay *et al.*, 2011; Schaffer and Riordan, 2013). Dominant group members (i.e. white males) who are accustomed to leading others may experience greater discomfort when reporting to minority group supervisors (Ferdman, 1999). On this basis, we argue that this configuration (Cell 3) still results in a poorer outcome than Cell 1 (white male CEO, female or racial minority CDO).

Finally, in Cell 4, both the CEO and CDO are white males. Under this configuration, white male CEOs may be motivated to implement diversity management for reasons identified above (i.e. business case, fairness concerns and leaving a positive legacy; see Ng and Wyrick, 2011); however, the appointment of a white male CDO will be more likely to undermine a CEO's efforts to promote diversity. Such an appointment will work against the CEO's claim for supporting diversity given the lack of legitimacy in appointing a white male CDO to lead organizational diversity efforts. Organizational members and external stakeholders may also question the CEO's judgment in appointing a white male to lead organizational diversity efforts. As an example of this, Rachel Dolezal, who is racially white but identifies herself as a black woman, generated a lot of controversy when leading the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People [NAACP] [5] (Botelho, 2015; Chitnis *et al.*, 2015). Additionally, white male CDOs may also lack the motivation and knowledge of challenges facing minorities to meaningfully and effectively implement organizational diversity initiatives. We therefore argue that this configuration will tend to yield the least favorable outcomes with respect to implementing diversity management practices in an organization. Based on the preceding discussion, we propose the following:

- P4. CEO–CDO dyads in which the CEO is a majority group member and the CDO is a minority group member (Cell 1) will yield more favorable diversity outcomes than the other configurations (Cells 2, 3 and 4).
- P5. CEO–CDO dyads in which both the CEO and CDO are majority group members (Cell 4) will yield the least favorable diversity outcomes relative to the other configurations (Cells 1, 2 and 3).

The CEO–CDO relationship and the role of relational identity

Research adopting a relational approach to leadership suggests that social identification and reciprocal interaction processes play a central role in shaping the quality of leader–follower relationships (Bauer and Erdogan, 2016; Uhl-Bien, 2006). LMX theory is one of the most prominent approaches in this domain and describes how leader–follower relationships evolve over time. Rooted in role theory and social exchange theory, the LMX perspective emphasizes the development of reciprocal interpersonal relationships between leaders and followers (Erdogan and Bauer, 2014; Liden *et al.*, 1997). In return for displaying higher levels of loyalty and commitment to their supervisors, employees in high LMX relationships receive more favorable treatment, including greater access to privileged information, opportunities for career and role enhancement and increased attention, recognition and support from their supervisors (Bauer and Erdogan, 2016; Liden *et al.*, 1997). High-quality relationships are characterized by higher affect, loyalty, a sense of mutual obligation (contribution) in the exchange and professional respect (Liden and Maslyn, 1998).

Studies have shown that LMX is positively associated with a wide range of attitudinal and behavioral outcomes, ranging from employee job satisfaction, organizational commitment and empowerment to task performance and creativity (see Bauer and Erdogan, 2016; Dulebohn *et al.*, 2012; Gerstner and Day, 1997; Liden *et al.*, 1997). Thus, a high-quality CEO–CDO relationship may facilitate more effective implementation of diversity practices through improved work perceptions and performance on the part of the CDO. Because CEOs and CDOs who experience higher levels of LMX may be expected to act in a more coordinated manner in which a sense of mutual obligation and respect exists, this may also raise the profile of the diversity management agenda in the organization, in turn, garnering more resources and support for diversity initiatives. In this respect, the quality of the working relationship between the CEO and CDO may be a critical determinant of an organization's effectiveness in diversity management. We also argue, however, that higher levels of LMX should strengthen the influence of CEO–CDO minority status on diversity outcomes. Specifically, the enhanced communication and behavioral coordination embodied in high-quality relationships should allow minority CEOs and CDOs to work more effectively with their dyadic counterpart and to gain the resources and support needed to implement diversity practices in the organization. When a minority CDO is working with a CEO from the majority group, a high LMX relationship may enhance the CDO's upward influence and further sensitize the CEO to diversity issues. A higher quality LMX relationship may also lower perceptions of value threat among minority CDOs as they may expect that their CEO will demonstrably support their efforts to enhance diversity outcomes regardless of their perceived status/legitimacy according to others in the organization. Based on the relational perspective, we propose the following:

- P6. The quality of the CEO–CDO relationship will influence the integration of minorities in the workplace. Specifically, higher levels of LMX (i.e. higher levels of affect, loyalty, contribution and professional respect in the relationship) reported by a minority status CEO or CDO in an organization will be associated with (1) a higher level of implementation of diversity practices in the firm and (2) a greater proportion of minority employees throughout the organization.
- P7. The quality of the CEO–CDO relationship will moderate the relationship between CEO-minority status and the integration of minorities in the workplace such that minority CEOs will be more successful in cultivating positive diversity outcomes when they report higher levels of LMX (i.e. higher levels of affect, loyalty, contribution and professional respect in the relationship) with their CDO.

- P8. The quality of the CEO–CDO relationship will moderate the relationship between CDO minority status and the integration of minorities in the workplace such that minority CDOs will be more successful in cultivating positive diversity outcomes when they report higher levels of LMX (i.e. higher levels of affect, loyalty, contribution and professional respect in the relationship) with their CEO.

Furthermore, recent research suggests that social identity processes play an integral role in the development of LMX. Drawing on relational self theory (Andersen and Chen, 2002), Chang and Johnson (2010) report that a leader's relational identity orientation is positively associated with LMX. Individuals with a strong relational identity are motivated to satisfy their partner's role expectations and to improve their welfare. Leader relational identity was also found to moderate the influence of LMX on employee task and citizenship performance such that the negative relationship between low LMX and performance diminishes when employees have leaders with stronger relational identities. This desire to enhance one's dyadic connection with others and behave in a manner that contributes to others' well-being forms a central part of the perceptions of self-worth of individuals with relational identities (Brewer and Gardner, 1996). In contrast, individuals with a self-identity orientation value differentiating themselves from others and are more inclined to engage in behaviors that serve their own interests. Individuals with a collective identity, on the other hand, are motivated by a desire to adhere to group norms; their self-worth is derived from the success of their group and their enactment of assigned group roles (Hogg, 2001; Hogg *et al.*, 2012; Jackson and Johnson, 2012).

In presenting her model of identification processes in demographically diverse organizations, Brickson (2000) argues that both majority and minority group member relational identities should foster greater support for diversity in the workplace. By generating more inclusive perceptions of others, greater empathy, trust and cooperation and a reduced tendency to view others as competitive threats, a stronger relational identity among organizational members is more likely to produce positive diversity outcomes than self and collective identities. Indeed, Brickson contends that the benefits of relational self-definitions may expand beyond dyadic interactants and positively impact various diversity outcomes in organizations. Building on this work, coupled with evidence indicating that relational identities foster more effective working relationships (Chang and Johnson, 2010; Jackson and Johnson, 2012), we propose that stronger relational identity orientations will moderate the influence of CEO and CDO minority status on the integration of minorities in organizations. Because relational identities should mitigate one's tendency to categorize oneself and others (thereby reducing value threat and stigmatization) while increasing their tendency to cooperate rather than compete with others, we propose that relational identity orientations should strengthen the influence of CEO and CDO minority status on the implementation of diversity practices.

- P9. CEO relational identity orientation will moderate the relationship between CEO-minority status and the integration of minorities in the workplace such that minority CEOs with a stronger relational identity orientation will be more successful in cultivating positive diversity outcomes than CEOs with a weaker relational identity orientation.
- P10. CDO relational identity orientation will moderate the relationship between CDO minority status and the integration of minorities in the workplace such that minority CDOs with a stronger relational identity orientation will be more successful in cultivating positive diversity outcomes than CDOs with a weaker relational identity orientation.

Discussion

The present paper aims to explore the roles of organizational actors in driving the implementation and effectiveness of diversity management practices. In particular, we focus on CEOs and CDOs, the primary organizational actors responsible for the strategic direction and implementation of diversity management. CEOs often play a central role in initiating and supporting diversity management efforts. CEOs also facilitate the successful design and implementation of diversity management initiatives by recognizing and responding to the need for change, assisting in setting the agenda for change and providing appropriate financial, technical and human resources that support diversity initiatives over the longer term (Cox and Blake, 1991; Gilbert and Ivancevich, 2000). CDOs work in collaboration with the CEO and are directly responsible for initiating and managing their organizations' diversity policies and practices. While the CEO can be instrumental in providing appropriate strategic direction and support for diversity management, the CDO is ultimately responsible for designing and implementing effective diversity policies and practices drawing on their knowledge in the area (Corporate Leadership Council, 2008; Hastings, 2007; Tatli and Ozbilgin, 2009). Given the importance of both CEOs and CDOs in diversity management, a critical question concerns what demographic characteristics and relational processes may influence these senior leaders' willingness and ability to successfully implement workplace diversity initiatives.

The relational demography literature (Tsui and O'Reilly, 1989) suggests that gender and racial similarity between the CEO and the CDO can positively impact the CDO's ability to successfully develop and implement diversity policies. Integrating this literature with recent findings relating to the influence of social identity theory on diversity and leader–follower relationships (Duguid *et al.*, 2012), we propose that CEO and CDO demographic characteristics, and the combination of the characteristics of these actors, will influence the implementation and effectiveness of workplace diversity management practices. We extend theory and research on relational demography by focusing on senior leaders in the organization and proposing that the influence of CEO and CDO demographic characteristics may also be contingent on key identity-based and relational processes, including value threat, perceptions of stigmatization and the quality of the CEO–CDO relationship (LMX). Although female and racial minority leaders are expected to support the advancement of other women and minority group members, emerging research suggests that this is not always the case. Considering factors such as one's status and numeric representation, perceptions of value threat may moderate this relationship. For example, value threat in the form of collective and competitive threats and accusations of in-group favoritism influence how CEO and CDOs may perceive and act on their demographic identities. Moreover, one's relational identity may impact whether a threat to one's identity is perceived and whether an individual is inclined to develop effective dyadic relationships with others and to support diversity in organizations. In addition, the quality of the relationship between the CEO and CDO may further moderate these relationships. While the relational demography literature has indicated that leader–follower demographic similarity may foster LMX, we argue that CEO and CDO minority status will exert a stronger influence on diversity outcomes when they possess a high LMX relationship with their counterpart. On this basis, we caution against assuming that women and racial minority leaders will readily support other women and minority groups given the multiple motivations at play and the moderating influence of key identity-based and relational processes.

Limitations and directions for future research

We acknowledge that there are certain limitations to our analysis. First, to focus and simplify our analysis and discussion, we examined two primary demographic characteristics (race

and gender); we did not explore the influence of CEO and CDO intersectional identities. Previous research indicates that there may be considerable diversity in the intersectional identities of female leaders (e.g. on the basis of race, sexual orientation, cisgender, educational and class backgrounds, immigrant women) as well as other demographic groups (e.g. minority men and minority women). Furthermore, the hidden privilege among women of color (see [Atewologun and Sealy, 2014](#); [Atewologun et al., 2016](#)) may also complicate these relational dynamics. In this respect, we acknowledge that extending “minority status” to all women and/or racial minority groups may inadequately capture the full scope of the effects of relational demography. The role of overlapping discrimination (resulting from multiple identities) could serve as an important moderator in each of the propositions we advance. Given the need for research in this domain, we encourage future research to explore the influence of intersectionality among senior organizational leaders and the workplace policies they implement.

Related to the issue of how to operationalize and test the effects of different components of relational demography, we encourage future research to broaden the scope of the diversity outcomes that are examined. Although we argue that research is needed examining the influence of the relational demography of senior leaders on established organization-level diversity outcomes (implementation of workplace diversity practices, representation rates), scholars should also consider more in-depth measures of these constructs and alternative measures that go beyond simply assessing whether certain workplace diversity practices exist or not. For example, researchers could examine not only whether diversity and inclusion practices are being developed and implemented but also how they are being developed (e.g. in consultation with employees) or how ambitious these policies may be. In addition, the motivation behind the adoption of diversity practices may be of interest. Some organizations may implement diversity policies and practices in superficial ways to present themselves as being committed to diversity management (e.g. posting diversity and inclusion statements on their website) but they do not enact policies or practices that embody a more serious, profound commitment to diversity and inclusion (e.g. setting-specific diversity goals at each level and tracking progress). We would argue that stronger CEO–CDO relational dynamics and a deeper commitment to diversity should cultivate more ambitious diversity and inclusion policy formulation as well as more deliberate implementation and performance monitoring. Furthermore, although the concepts of diversity and inclusion are to some extent overlapping ([Chavez and Weisinger, 2008](#); [Roberson, 2006](#)), there is merit in ensuring that both workplace diversity and inclusion are measured and targeted for improvement in organizations ([Oswick and Noon, 2014](#)). Measuring employee perceptions of inclusion, including components of both belongingness and uniqueness, in addition to the implementation of workplace diversity policies and practices, can provide a more in-depth assessment of whether diversity and inclusion goals are being achieved in organizations ([Chung et al., 2020](#) (in press); [Roberson, 2019](#)).

Second, we acknowledge that some of our propositions may be difficult to test empirically due to challenges associated with accessing large samples of CEO–CDO dyads who represent each of the demographic configurations outlined in [Figure 2](#). In this regard, the use of targeted (non-random) sampling methods (to increase sample sizes) and the use of more in-depth qualitative research methods (with smaller sample sizes) may assist in exploring the propositions outlined in this research. Likewise, some of our arguments may be tested by assessing employee perceptions of their senior leaders. For example, scenario-based experimental methods may be used to test perceptions of leader legitimacy in the four dyad configurations ([Figure 2](#)).

Finally, we acknowledge that other factors that are structural, contextual and/or relational in nature may play a role in influencing the working relationships between the CEO and CDO. For example, although our theorizing focuses on the moderating role of social identity and

relational processes, structurally, we note that different bases of power (see [Raven, 1992](#)) may also affect relational processes between the CEO and CDO. Likewise, recent research has suggested that individual differences relating to one's use of social power (seeking to exert dominance over others or to acquire higher levels of prestige/status) may significantly influence the relationship between a leader and their follower ([Maner, 2017](#)). We encourage future research to explore these power dynamics and how different indicators of "deep-level" diversity (not only "surface-level") among senior leaders may impact an organization's workplace diversity and inclusion efforts. Likewise, contextually, there may be other key stakeholders that contribute to an organization's workplace diversity initiatives beyond the CEO and CDO. For example, in addition to CDOs and HR managers, line managers are also cornerstones in implementing diversity practices and conveying an organization's support for diversity and inclusion ([Guillaume et al., 2014](#)). Corporate boards are also playing an increasing role in determining organizational diversity outcomes (including the gender and background of the CEO) (see [Cook and Glass, 2015](#)). Research has suggested that a critical mass of women on corporate boards may result in a greater frequency of appointing female CEOs that are supportive of diversity initiatives ([Konrad et al., 2008](#)). Lastly, although unions have traditionally been focused on establishing job security and protecting other rights of workers, they have recently displayed commitment to advancing the rights of women and racial minorities in collective bargaining exercises ([Dickens, 2000](#); [Kirton and Greene, 2006](#)). To this end, we also call for more systematic study of how key stakeholders, including corporate boards and unions, may impact CEO and CDO's commitment to diversity as well as their strategies for implementing diversity practices in organizations. More broadly, national context (e.g. the USA, Canada and Europe) may also play a role in whether senior organizational leaders adopt diversity policies and practices. In this regard, institutional isomorphism and different legal regulations governing diversity may be an issue for future consideration. Indeed, it may be important for empirical studies to directly measure and assess the impact of such contextual factors in order to isolate the relational and identity dynamics that we theorize will predict diversity outcomes of interest.

Finally, in addition to increasing the proportion of underrepresented group members, it is also important to foster a climate of inclusion to achieve diversity goals ([Mor Barak et al., 2016](#)). Consistent with our model underlining the importance of high-quality relationships between senior leaders, respectful treatment among coworkers and a positive diversity climate have been identified as potential moderators of the effects of relational demography on employee work perceptions ([Chattopadhyay et al., 2016](#); [King et al., 2017](#)). While our current theorizing focuses on the role of demographic and relational configurations of senior leaders in implementing diversity policies and increasing the numbers of underrepresented groups in organizational roles, diversity climate may also be an important factor to consider in future theorizing either as a contextual moderator or outcome of these processes.

Applied implications and conclusion

In practical terms, our model and propositions inform our understanding of how CEO and CDO demographic characteristics may influence the implementation of diversity practices in organizations and signal that efforts to select and develop CDOs with strong relationship-building capabilities may enhance their effectiveness as diversity leaders in the organization. For example, organizations can incorporate the assessment and development of interpersonal skills, including empathy and perspective-taking into their training systems, which can strengthen individuals' relational identities and build a greater sense of trust, acceptance and inclusion in the organization ([Jackson and Johnson, 2012](#)). Likewise, efforts to inform and train leaders (including CEOs and CDOs) on relational models of leadership (LMX) and the value of diversity in organizations may assist in building strong relationships that support effective diversity

management. Presenting workplace diversity in a positive manner and taking steps to build a supportive diversity climate (i.e. including both “fairness-discrimination” and “synergistic” components) may further assist in fostering a relational mindset in the organization, potentially yielding more favorable diversity outcomes (Brickson, 2000; Dwertmann *et al.*, 2016; Guillaume *et al.*, 2014).

Taken together, our model and propositions serve as a theoretical foundation upon which to examine how the demographic characteristics of CEOs and CDOs combine with identity-based and relational processes to influence workplace diversity outcomes. In this way, we extend research on relational demography and LMX to advance conceptual arguments that diversity outcomes depend upon more complex processes than only on the surface-level characteristics of senior leaders. There is growing concern over why organizations are not hitting their diversity goals and why diversity activities are not effective. This in turn raises the questions of who determines organizational diversity efforts and why are they implemented. Our model posits that senior leaders can exert positive strategic influence in moving organizations forward in their quest for diversity and inclusion. Thus, the characteristics and motivations of organizational actors leading and implementing diversity practices is a next logical path for diversity research[6]. Our conceptual framework and focus on CEOs and CDOs serves as a catalyst for much-needed research on these key actors and how their self-perceptions, values and the relationships they forge contribute to effective diversity management in organizations.

Notes

1. We use a generic term “Chief Diversity Officer” to denote the most senior manager who has responsibility for championing and implementing diversity management. Other titles may include Affirmative Action Office or Employment Equity Officer.
2. In order to illustrate how social identity processes affect support for or undermine organizational diversity efforts, we denote white males as representing the dominant group and women/minorities as minority (subordinate) groups (in Figure 2). We acknowledge that this is an etic view of demographic categories in diversity work (see Tatli and Ozbilgin, 2012), and it is possible for African Americans, Asians and other minorities to be in positions of privilege (Atewologun and Sealy, 2014). We also acknowledge that this operationalization focusing on gender and race does not take into account the complexity of intersectional identities (e.g. sexuality, able-bodiedness, social class).
3. We note that the relationship between organizational actors and diversity outcomes is not a simple one (see Guillaume *et al.*, 2017; Kochan, Bezrukova, Ely, Jackson *et al.*, 2003; Joshi *et al.*, 2011; Van Knippenberg and Schippers, 2007), but use this as a launching point to develop our more complex propositions.
4. We note that some leaders may be interested in preserving the status quo or lack motivation to promote diversity (e.g. status maintenance, social dominance, see Maclean *et al.*, 2014).
5. n.b. Most of the controversy however relates to her racial (mis)identification.
6. We thank an anonymous reviewer for highlighting this next step in diversity research.

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