

Unveiling Power Dynamics: Diversity Interpretations, Management Practices, and Inclusion Perceptions in the Workplace Revelando dinámicas de poder: interpretaciones de la diversidad, prácticas de gestión y percepciones de inclusión en el lugar de trabajo

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Abstract: the current diversity management literature highlights a lack of empirical investigations into nuanced diversity characteristics within specific contexts, with a predominant focus on the USA, Europe, and Asia. This article addresses these gaps by exploring the intricate relationship between interpretations of workforce diversity dimensions and ensuing diversity management practices, shaping perceptions of inclusion or exclusion. Workplace diversity is viewed subjectively, influenced by contextual factors like industry and location. A case study was conducted in June 2022 within a Japanese automotive company, gathering qualitative data through techniques such as semi-structured in-depth interviews and non-participant observations were made during two guided visits. AtlasTi was utilized for the analysis of results. Findings reveal that socio-economic differences' interpretation is swayed by power imbalances in labor relationships. Diversity management practices aligned with the dominant group exacerbate inequality among demographic groups, establishing metaphorical «glass ceilings» for minorities and fostering exclusion perceptions. Considering the case study's limitations, the research contributes to the diversity management discourse, prompting a reevaluation of practices to mitigate unintentional inequality perpetuation in the workplace.

Keywords: diversity at work; diversity management; inclusion-exclusion; gaps; workforce; inequality.

Resumen: la literatura actual sobre gestión de la diversidad destaca la escasez de investigaciones empíricas sobre las características matizadas de la diversidad en contextos específicos, con un enfoque predominante en EE.UU., Europa y Asia. Este artículo aborda estas brechas explorando la intrincada relación entre las interpretaciones de las dimensiones de diversidad laboral y las prácticas de gestión, dando forma a percepciones de inclusión o exclusión. La diversidad en el lugar de trabajo se aborda subjetivamente, influenciada por factores contextuales como la industria y la ubicación. Se llevó a cabo un estudio de caso en junio de 2022 en una empresa japonesa, se aplicaron entrevistas semi-estructuradas y observaciones no participantes durante dos visitas guiadas. El análisis de la información se hizo a través del software AtlasTi. Los hallazgos revelan que la interpretación de las diferencias socioeconómicas se ve afectada por desequilibrios de poder en las relaciones laborales. Las prácticas de gestión de la diversidad alineadas con el grupo dominante exacerbaban la desigualdad entre grupos demográficos, estableciendo «techos de cristal» metafóricos para las minorías y fomentando percepciones de exclusión. Reconociendo las limitaciones del estudio de caso, esta investigación aporta al discurso sobre gestión de la diversidad, instando a una reevaluación de prácticas para mitigar la perpetuación no intencionada de la desigualdad en el entorno laboral.

Palabras clave: diversidad en el trabajo; diversidad gerencial; inclusión-exclusión; brechas; fuerza laboral; desigualdad.

1. Introduction

Workforce diversity holds critical significance after the profound socio-cultural and economic shifts brought by globalization have profoundly impacted the composition of the workforce. Consequently, the concept of workforce diversity – referring to «the variety of differences and commonalities among individuals within a work unit» (Roberson, 2019, p. 70) – has gained prominence within both academic and industrial spheres. The importance of managing diversity emerges from the recognition that disparities in employees' socio-demographic backgrounds, experiences, and viewpoints might benefit the organization, provided they are effectively managed (Yang & Konrad, 2010; Salau *et al.*, 2018). However, ignoring these differences can also lead to challenges such as conflicts and elevated turnover rates (Roberson, 2019).

The framework of interaction between diverse workers implies a perception of inclusion-exclusion where individuals with interpersonal differences of age, race, gender, etcetera evaluate their opportunities to fully participate in organizational life and therefore, in achieving organizational goals. Mor Barak & Cherin (1998) propose that individuals undertake an assessment of their perception of inclusion-exclusion by the extent to which they perceive themselves as integral to three factors of organizational processes: access to information and resources, participation in work groups, and the capacity to exert influence on decision-making processes. Employees' behaviors are significantly shaped by their perceptions of inclusion or exclusion within the social system, indicative of their alignment or discord with the group. Furthermore, individual actions within the organization are molded by how they interpret the organizational culture and attribute meaning to managerial behaviors.

Thus, effectively managing and harnessing the potential advantages of diversity requires the formulation and execution of adept practices and policies that cultivates an inclusive organizational environment (Heitner, 2018). Inclusion, hence, is an essential aspect that goes hand in hand with diversity and is pivotal to unlocking its benefits. Embracing and incorporating differences can not only enhance performance but also foster creativity and innovation (Guillaume *et al.*, 2014). Instead, neglecting inclusive practices and processes can erode the inclusion and performance of diverse workers.

The way employees perceive diversity, encompassing their awareness and acceptance or rejection of both similarities and differences (Lauring & Selmer, 2012), plays a crucial role in influencing their attitudes and behaviors within the organization. Research indicates that employees' perception of how well an organization integrates diversity is positively correlated with their perception of the organization's ethical virtue (Rabl *et al.*, 2020). Furthermore, positive interactions with diversity management initiatives have been found to foster favorable behaviors among employees as a reciprocal response (Aryee *et al.*, 2002).

Consequently, the implementation of managerial practices aimed at managing a diverse workforce stands as a central theme within contemporary organizations. Such practices focus on enhancing workplace experiences and outcomes for minority or diverse groups such as women, ethnic and racial minorities, and individuals with. However, research shows a lack of consensus on the effectiveness of diversity initiatives (Nishii *et al.*, 2018). While some practices do succeed in increasing minority representation (Richard *et al.*, 2013), others suggest that implementing these measures may yield no improvement or even a reduce workforce diversity (Kalev *et al.*, 2006).

The difficulty in defining an effective diversity management intervention arises from the inconsistency in their outcomes, as well as the separation between macro and micro levels of research (Nishii *et al.*, 2018). Additionally, these divergent results have led scholars to advocate for context-specific studies (Joshi & Roh, 2007) and empirical explorations citing the unique meaning that arises concerning diversity, organization, and work (Zanoni *et al.*, 2010). Furthermore, understanding how to leverage the potential benefits of diversity while mitigating associated challenges stands as a central issue in ongoing diversity research (Lambert & Bell, 2013). In terms of location, research has been conducted in the USA and Europe, and some attention has been directed toward Asian countries such as India, South Korea, and China (Yadav & Lenka, 2022), meanwhile the need for research in Latin American countries remains pronounced.

Diversity management becomes central when labor market flows exhibit elevated rotation rates. This is the case in the local automotive industry, which, because of its exponential growth, has imposed hard working conditions on workers such as long working hours and commuting time, low wages, and rotating shifts. Consequently, workers transition from agriculture and marginal work into the automotive industry has created a fluid job ladder, where workers frequently shift between marginal employment positions without persisting towards higher-paying roles.

This study aims to respond to the call for more empirical research within such highly dynamic labor markets. It does so by considering the unique contextual factors and conditions specific to the Automotive Industry in central Mexico, which are further described in the results. The research questions guiding this article are: a) How do organizational workers interpret workforce differences? b) What diversity management practices are implemented in such organizations? And c) Are these practices perceived as inclusive or exclusive?

This article unfolds as follows: first, we outline the theoretical framework, drawing upon prior research on diversity management, diversity perception, and organizational inclusion. Subsequently, we detail the research methodology encompassing strategy, data collection, and analysis. Following this, we present the study's findings, contextualized by a brief overview of the automotive industry's development in Guanajuato and an introduction to the organization. We then provide a detailed narrative of the interrelationship between diversity dimensions, diversity management practices, and ensuing perceptions of inclusion. The ensuing sections encompass a discussion of the research findings, implications for practice, and a conclusion.

2. Methods, techniques and instruments

2.1. Theoretical background

The Interpretation of Differences

From an epistemological perspective, interpretive tradition views diversity as a socially constructed phenomenon in constant evolution (Omanovic, 2009). It delves into the analysis of labor dynamics and social group practices to uncover the meaning or interpretation that organizational actors attribute to workforce diversity (Lauring, 2009). In essence, the interpretive tradition seeks to document and examine how participants perceive, interpret, understand, or assign significance to the social and biological distinctions that exist among them.

The study of diversity has been motivated by concerns about the challenges faced by administrators and top management (Freeman & Lindsay, 2012; Rao, 2012). This has extended to the impact of diversity on the organization itself (Richard, 2000) or the management of disparities between employers and workers in favor of the organization (Foster, 2005). Hence, these studies have focused on the organizational and managerial implications of diversity in work contexts, creating the field of organizational inclusion theory. Organizational inclusion centers on creating environments where individuals from diverse backgrounds feel welcomed, valued, and able to fully contribute to the organization's success. It does so use key concepts such as inclusive leadership (Ferdman, 2014), psychological safety (Edmonson, 1999) and intersectionality (Hill & Bilge, 2016). This field currently includes studies such as cultural of diversity on virtual teams (Shachaf, 2008) and the mitigation of negative effects of group diversity on outcomes (Cunningham and Sagas, 2004). Regarding cultural differences in organizations, Cox's (2005) work discusses the benefits of cultural diversity, outlines strategies for managing diversity effectively, and explores the role of leadership in fostering an inclusive workplace.

Discourse studies focus on comprehending the discursive processes through which negotiations unfold concerning the distinctions that manifest in diverse work environments (Ostendorp & Steyaert, 2009) while acknowledging the influence of the organizational context. Some studies explore the discourse of the value of diversity in multinational settings (Tomlinson & Egan, 2002), while others examine resistance or compliance from minority groups embedded in discourses of bureaucratic control (Zanoni & Janssens, 2007).

However, critical studies of organizations have detected disparities between the discourse and the actual practices implemented, showing that such discrepancies arise from the conflicting interests of organizational actors (Lauring, 2009; Lorbiecki & Jack, 2000). To address the complexities that power dynamics introduce, the dialectical analysis has been proposed. This perspective focuses on the negotiations between work actors with divergent interests, leading to specific power dynamics shaped by the unique characteristics of the social context and the interpretation of practices (Omanovic, 2013).

Within the realm of literature focusing on diversity, multicultural organizations stand out as a prominent area of study. According to Lauring & Selmer (2012), a multicultural organization is distinguished by a substantial representation of individuals from diverse nationalities among its workforces. These organizations are dispersed globally, with their operations spanning various countries, and are recognized as multicultural due to the interactions among individuals from different national backgrounds (Adler and Gundersen, 2008). Additionally, these companies have been portrayed as having a unique work environment marked by specific and challenging job requirements (Hennart, 2010; Rozkwitalska & Basinska, 2015). Challenges stemming from cultural differences and language diversity have consistently been recognized as hurdles in earlier studies

(Rivera-Vazquez *et al.*, 2009; Stahl *et al.*, 2009). Consequently, employees are expected to adapt to cultural diversity and engage in communication using the corporate language (Lauring & Klitmøller, 2015; Rozkwitalska & Basinska, 2015).

Diversity Management Practices

Diversity Management Theory is a multifaceted framework that addresses the strategic and organizational approaches to fostering diversity and inclusion within the workplace. This theoretical perspective emphasizes recognizing and leveraging differences among individuals to enhance organizational performance, innovation, and employee well-being. To effectively navigate diversity, organizations often implement human resources practices that aim to harness the creativity and problem-solving capacities inherent in their employees (Yang & Konrad, 2011). Simultaneously, these practices are geared toward mitigating potential negative repercussions such as conflicts and an increase in turnover rates (Roberson, 2019).

Diversity management has two primary perspectives: the business case and the ethical responsibility stance. The first contends that diversity encompasses unique competencies, perspectives, and resources that are challenging to replicate, thus conferring competitive advantages (Richard, 2000; Olsen and Martins, 2012). This translates into benefits like enhanced creativity, innovation, and other outcomes related to behavior, emotional attachment, and organizational processes (Jackson *et al.*, 2003). This perspective, then, views diversity as valuable due to its potential positive consequences, including reduced intergroup biases, improved performance, and positive employee attitudes (van Knippenberg & Schippers, 2007).

In contrast, the ethical responsibility perspective arises from criticisms that suggest social justice and equality are compromised when organizations adhere to the business case rationale (Noon, 2007); hence, argues that diversity is an essential human right, and is tied to notions of social justice and equal opportunities. One important paradigm shift was made by Roosevelt Thomas (1992) who moved the focus from affirmative action to diversity management emphasizing the proactive management of diversity and the need for organizations to move beyond compliance towards embracing diversity. Researchers (Bleijenbergh *et al.*, 2010) contend that the business case even might produce resistance toward diversity management practices when these lack a foundation in principles of equality and equity. Particularly, critical perspectives on diversity challenge the utilitarian view of differences (Noon, 2007) and emphasize how context-specific processes mirror existing power dynamics and contribute to their perpetuation, resistance, or transformation (Zanoni *et al.*, 2010).

There is a growing recognition that prioritizing equality and inclusion in diversity management practices is crucial. Research by Choi and Rainey (2014) highlights the positive impact of organizational fairness on the effectiveness of diversity management efforts. Similarly, Roberson and Stevens (2006) emphasize that employees' main concerns regarding diversity management focus on issues such as discrimination, fair treatment, and interpersonal relationships. While all employees react to instances of injustice, minority or diverse employees often experience and interpret instances of unfairness differently. This distinct interpretation underscores the heightened importance of fairness within diversity management, particularly for such employees (Mamman *et al.*, 2012).

The Inclusion – Exclusion Continuum

The concept of inclusion within work settings has gained significance, even in the absence of a comprehensive theoretical foundation and limited empirical exploration (Panicker *et al.*, 2017). Inclusion implies equal opportunity for members of marginalized and non-marginalized groups to participate and contribute to organizational life while supporting employee's efforts to engage with their authentic selves at work (Shore *et al.*, 2018). This notion primarily stems from social identity theory which explores the mechanisms by which individuals develop feelings of social identification by bonding through shared group affiliations, thereby creating in-groups and out-groups (Shore *et al.*, 2011). Central to inclusion is the experience of treatment that meets the worker's need for both belonging and uniqueness (Shore *et al.*, 2011), hence, inclusion serves as an advantage stemming from the integration of diverse groups, allowing them to leverage their differences for enhanced collaboration (Kuknor & Bhattacharya, 2020). Other perspectives view inclusion as a spectrum that ranges from exclusion to inclusion, depicting it as an ongoing process where individuals assess their own interactions with peers and the environment (Mor Barak & Cherin, 1998). Organizational inclusion focuses on creating equal opportunities for all individuals to be acknowledged and valued. This involves removing barriers that hinder the participation of specific groups or individuals. Some scholars suggest that promoting inclusion

can help resolve workplace conflicts by fostering an organizational identity that appreciates diversity and embraces each member's unique contributions (Jansen *et al.*, 2014).

2.2. Methodological research

A case study was conducted in June 2022 within a Japanese automotive company. Data was collected through sixteen semi-structured in-depth interviews with individuals representing the diversity of the workforce. The key interview criteria were the interaction with non-Mexican workers, to highlight the conditions of a multinational organization. From the total of 600 workers, only 154 are white collar, which means this are the positions who more frequently work directly with non-native personnel. In addition, and because the topic of the research is diversity, three blue collar interviewees where considered. The interview guide was focused on key aspects of a diverse and inclusive environment such as participation in work groups, comfort expressing diverse opinions, support for diversity, and decision-making processes. A non-disclosure agreement for sensitive topics was established with the company; the purpose and use of the information gathered was informed to participants at the beginning of the interview.

Additionally, non-participant observations were made during two guided visits to the plant and open interviews with key informants such as human resources manager and production manager. Documentary research included the worker database, internal work regulations, and organizational website (table 1, next page).

Table 1. Interviewee's profile and interview duration.**Tabla 1.** Perfil de los entrevistados y duración de las entrevistas.

| Interviewee | Sex | Age in years | Role | Seniority in years | Work experiences | Interview duration in mins. |
|-------------|--------|--------------|------------------------------|--------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1 | Female | 22 | Production line leader | 4 | First employment | 60 |
| 2 | Male | 35 | Continuous improvement staff | 6 | Call center employee | 33 |
| 3 | Female | 34 | Logistics manager | 6 | Footwear factory | 32 |
| 4 | Male | 29 | Supervisor | 7 | First employment | 20 |
| 5 | Female | 26 | Shopping | 4 | First employment | 59 |
| 6 | Male | 19 | Blue collar | 6 | Construction | 19 |
| 7 | Male | 38 | Maintenance Manager | 7 | Chemical products supplier | 51 |
| 8 | Male | 32 | Financial planning | 5 | Local factory | 32 |
| 9 | Male | 38 | Quality manager | 8 | Measurement technician | 60 |
| 10 | Female | 33 | Quality manager | 6 | First employment | 86 |
| 11 | Female | 43 | Blue collar | 5 | Agriculture | 30 |
| 12 | Male | 42 | Resources Human Manager | 8 | Local factory | 45 |
| 13 | Female | 45 | Quality Inspector | 6 | Automotive industry | 61 |
| 14 | Female | 32 | Accounting staff | 8 | First employment | 35 |
| 15 | Male | 33 | Blue collar | 5 | Agriculture | 60 |
| 16 | Female | 32 | Accounting staff | 8 | First employment | 55 |

Source: Authors' elaboration

Fuente: elaboración propia.

The information analysis strategy adhered to an interpretative perspective on diversity identifying socially defined categories that emerge from specific social or biological attributes. These categories were conceptualized as paired categories. For instance, in the context of age as a distinguishing factor, the paired categories were delineated as «old» and «young.» Table 2 provides an overview of these distinctions and their corresponding categories (table 2, next page).

Table 2. Paired Categories.**Tabla 2.** Categorías Asociadas.

| Diversity dimension | Paired categorization |
|---------------------|---|
| Nationality | Japanese - Mexican |
| Sex | Male - Female |
| Age | Young - Old |
| Academic background | Bachelor's degree - Non bachelor's degree |

Source: Authors' elaboration.

Fuente: elaboración propia

Attributes were ascribed to each category to establish a linkage between the interpretation and the corresponding diversity management practice. Subsequently, the assessment of inclusion- exclusion perception was conducted across three dimensions: 1) involvement within work groups, 2) participation in decision-making processes, and 3) access to critical information and resources (Mor Barak & Cherin, 1998).

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Contextual drivers of workforce diversity

The Japanese Automotive Industry in Guanajuato, Mexico

The automotive industry (AI) in Guanajuato has expanded due to its strategic geographical location, inflow of foreign direct investments (FDI), and trade agreements with key regions and nations. Guanajuato's AI landscape has been positively impacted by the presence of major Japanese vehicle assembly companies, including Honda, Toyota, and Mazda. This has led to the development of a strong supply chain and the establishment of 284 Japanese-affiliated companies in the state, making Guanajuato a historical recipient of Japanese direct investment.

The factors contributing to the concentration of AI manufacturers in Guanajuato are: a) location, the state occupies a pivotal position within the Bajío region, renowned as a prime hub for automobile production in the country; b) infrastructure, the state's well-developed highway infrastructure facilitates connectivity with the United States border and with Pacific seaports; c) industrial policy, government policies aimed at attracting FDI encompasses investments in transport infrastructure, and notably favorable tax incentives; and d) young and well skilled workforce (García Garnica & Martínez Martínez, 2018, Cluster Industrial, 2021).

Collectively, these influences positioned the state as the nation's leading automobile producer for the initial eight months of 2022, manufacturing 22% of the entire national production (Horta, 2022). This was accomplished through the creation of 44,000 direct employment opportunities, fostered by Japanese automotive firms up until the year 2020.

AUTOK: A Japanese Automotive in Central Mexico

AUTOK is a multinational corporation of Japanese origin, operating across twelve plants globally and employing over 11,000 individuals. Specializing in automotive products, the company operates at two distinct levels within the automotive industry: Tier 1, functioning as a direct supplier to automotive assemblers, and direct sales to the public through online portals and physical sales points. Although its sales operations initiated in Mexico in 2005, the construction of its first Mexican factory commenced in 2014.

AUTOK employs approximately 600 workers, of which 154 occupy staff and middle-management positions and the rest are operators. The company's organizational structure comprises two distinct warehouses with their respective production processes operating under a singular administrative umbrella. While senior management roles, finance positions, and sales responsibilities are occupied by Japanese expatriates, the number of Japanese workers has experienced fluctuations over time. Management rotations, which align with Japanese employment practices that mandate changes every three years, have introduced a sense of instability within the local workforce.

3.2. Diversity Dimensions, Management Practices, and Their Consequences

Cultural Diversity

Nationality is the primary source of workforce diversity within this organization. This implies the collision of two distinct work cultures – encapsulating values, interpretations, and the intrinsic significance of work as an integral facet of social life. Notably, disparities extend to the realms of resource accessibility and decision-making power. The Japanese management team possesses the knowledge, economic leverage, and hierarchical authority to dictate the parameters within the organization. Under this imbalance of power, the construction of the «other» often leads to the categorization of Japanese work culture as superior or efficient, in contrast to the local work culture, which may be labeled as inferior. Figure 1 (next page) explains the process from diversity interpretation to the perception of inclusion-exclusion it causes.

These power dynamics allow the Japanese management to implement practices aligned with their perceptions of the Mexican workforce. Simultaneously, local workers tend to accept these conditions due to the perception of multinational automotive employment as an opportunity to acquire industry-specific experience and skills. Nevertheless, workers have emphasized the necessity to adapt the Japanese production and work organization system to the local work culture, viewing it as strategic to engender consensus on organizational practices and policies. Regrettably, this aspiration has remained unrealized. Japanese management has diligently pursued the implementation of the work organization and production system, incorporating only the essential financial modules to comply with local regulations.

Workers distinguish a boundary where their agency encounters a barrier – a territory wherein they find themselves constrained from initiating discourse or contributing to the discourse at hand. In essence, this marks a point where decision-making authority is vested predominantly in Japanese managers and expatriates. This establishment of power engenders a prevailing hegemony where the pronouncements of Japanese personnel hold sway, consequently fostering an environment where deference to their judgments is considered paramount.

The ramifications of these practices reverberate negatively throughout intercultural relationships. This positioning is characterized by Mexican workers being relegated to the fringes of decision-making processes and elevated hierarchical positions. As a worker stated, «I find myself inhibited from expressing dissenting viewpoints contrary to those held by my Japanese superior. I often wonder if this repression stifles the impetus for innovation or the pursuit of novel and divergent approaches» (Personal communication, engineer).

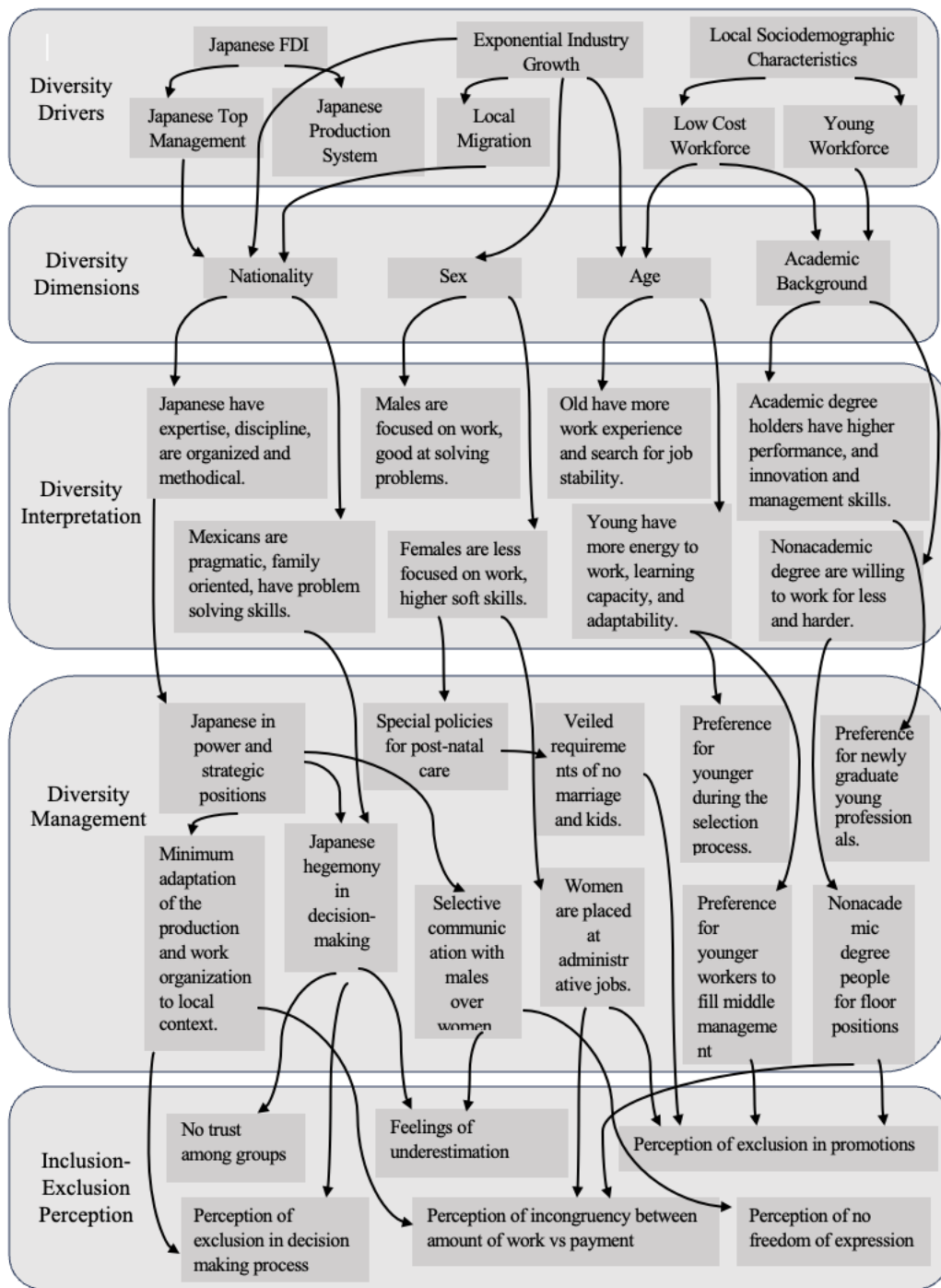


Figure 1. Process from diversity interpretation to the perception of inclusion-exclusion it causes.

Source: Authors' elaboration

Figura 1. El proceso desde la interpretación de la diversidad hasta la percepción de inclusión-exclusión que provoca.

Fuente: Elaboración propia.

Sex Diversity

Sex diversity is a defining facet within the workforce composition, with women representing an equal share of the organizational population. However, the prevailing treatment and work conditions create a perceptible hierarchical positioning that casts women into a subservient role relative to their male counterparts. A prominent instance of cultural friction between local workers and Japanese expatriates emerged due to the employment of women in roles perceived as masculine by Japanese management. This circumstance, influenced by the prevailing power imbalance between Japanese and Mexican workers, engendered a conspicuous division between genders, positioning women in a subordinate stance to men.

The nascent categorization relegated Mexican women to initially undertake routine tasks bereft of significant authority, even in instances where their roles encompassed decision-making or strategic responsibilities. This phenomenon illustrates the complex interplay of intersectionality wherein minority groups find themselves doubly marginalized. This dual disadvantage appears to impede the professional advancement of women within the organization. To redress this situation, female workers resorted to direct appeals, urging their supervisors to recognize their competences.

Despite the proactive measures, women have undertaken to ameliorate their working conditions, the fundamental challenge remains the delicate equilibrium between their professional commitments and personal lives. For women, the personal realm entails not only their own careers but also the encompassing responsibilities of child-rearing and household management. A finance staff member articulated the predicament, sharing, «My days away from home leave me with little quality time to spend with my daughters. It's an option worth considering—to explore other job opportunities. Perhaps I might accept a reduced salary in exchange for more substantial moments with my children» (Personal communication).

The juggling act between home and work responsibilities renders it nearly untenable for women to channel the same fervor and dedication as their male counterparts toward their professional ascension. In response to these challenges, organizational management has implemented a series of human resources initiatives intended to foster a harmonious equilibrium between domestic and professional realms.

Women strive to achieve a sense of contentment in both their professional roles within the company and their responsibilities outside of it. Regrettably, the task proves nearly insuperable given the staggering demands inherent in both contexts. Several variables contribute to the gap that obstructs women's entry and advancement within the manufacturing workforce: minimal to nonexistent participation of fathers in child-rearing duties, lack of support networks to facilitate equilibrium between work and personal life, limited formal work experience, and the absence of comprehensive public policies and childcare facilities. Some women have even expressed that their aspirations for a thriving professional career have led them to opt against having children, this is a disguised demand by the organization, as a female worker shared:

When discussions about my career within the company arose, my Japanese supervisor asked, 'Do you plan to marry? Do you intend to have children at some point?' To this day, I don't to become a mother—perhaps a fortunate choice for the company. Nonetheless, I perceive it as an obstacle, particularly when aspiring to advance within any organization. I don't think this phenomenon is exclusive to the automotive sector or Japanese organizations; it pertains to women in general (Personal communication, logistics manager).

Despite grappling with gender-based discrimination imposed by Japanese management, women have exhibited remarkable resilience and strategies in addressing this issue. These strategies include forthright communication with their superiors and counterparts to gain insights into Japanese work culture. Yet, these efforts have proven insufficient in establishing the same sense of inclusivity for women within the organization as their male counterparts enjoy.

Age Diversity

The organization has strategically incorporated young engineers and recent graduates into key managerial roles to bolster its workforce. This approach prioritizes individuals lacking previous work experience, facilitating their assimilation into the organizational culture. As a result, a youthful and adaptable human capital has been cultivated, aligned with the organization's evolving demands. However, as labor opportunities proliferated, the organization expanded its hiring criteria to encompass a broader age range. On certain occasions, individuals

with careers in disparate fields, such as agriculture or household management, transitioned to factory work for the first time, even at ages nearing 45 years.

Throughout life stages, individuals shift their perspectives and expectations regarding work. Consequently, divergent attitudes towards work's purpose and behaviors emerge among the organization's workforce, causing an environment marked by discriminatory preconceptions in which older workers are perceived as «unwilling to make an extra effort or grow themselves further» (Personal communication, maintenance staff).

What stands out within the discourse surrounding intergenerational relations is the ease with which generational stereotypes are tolerated. Such stereotypes influence both personal and organizational decisions relating to careers, work life, and interactions with colleagues. Age prejudices also seem to obstruct the organization (and individual work teams) from capitalizing on the knowledge and skills accumulated through years of work experience.

The policy of hiring young, freshly graduated professionals, who have gained experience in the company had the consequence that such group «struggles with the problem of being promoted so quickly that they're unsure how to handle it.» (Personal communication, financial planner). This means, young engineers lack the managerial soft skills required to assume mid-management or strategic positions. Specifically, this group lacks leadership, communication, and teamwork abilities vital for becoming an effective manager. This deficiency «becomes evident... stress starts to mount as they don't know what to do, they're unsure how to resolve issues» (Personal communication, financial planner).

This rapid ascent for young professionals has been a consequence of the organization's corresponding growth. However, it is not expected that this pattern will persist as the company has achieved a stage of stability in its production operations. Moreover, further advancement beyond mid-management roles is challenging, as a significant portion of these positions is occupied by Japanese workers or Mexican professionals with extensive experience in the automotive industry across other regions of the country. For middle-aged workers, the work environment is less favorable due to age-based discrimination, as they infer that they might not receive the same employment opportunities as their younger counterparts.

Academic Level Diversity

The distinction between workers with university degrees and those who have acquired job-related skills through practical experience is significant. This distinction arises from two situations: a) the increase in the number of young engineers from local universities that meets the organization's demand for white-collar positions (related to operational administration), and b) the escalating production demands requiring more supervisors and quality leaders at the operational level (individuals directly engaged in production tasks), who predominantly acquired their skills through hands-on experience within the company. The latter group aspires to continue growing within the organization but faces the obstacle of lacking academic credentials to access higher-level positions.

The perspective of middle management has highlighted the comparison between learning derived from work experience with theoretical and practical knowledge obtained through formal education as «something that can't be cultivated on the job, these values—though I don't want to use the word 'primitive' because it carries a negative connotation—are a bit more experiential» (Personal communication, quality manager). The implication that workers without degree «won't possess the same speed or fluency to perform tasks as effectively. (meanwhile) The person with a degree suggests what to do, and that is extremely valuable» (personal communication, quality manager) has become a critical factor in evaluating worker performance, leading to the identification of a college education as a competitive advantage. The management practices implemented have yielded positive outcomes in terms of workers' professional development and their ability to align with the company's work culture. Furthermore, it has been observed that this group demonstrates elevated levels of work commitment due to the organization granting them their initial job opportunity.

Nevertheless, this approach has also triggered conflicts within labor relations. The initial higher salary provided to those with a college education, in contrast to workers who have learned through experience, has generated feelings of frustration, and led to the perception of a glass ceiling. Workers in the latter category express their frustration over the incongruence between their job activities and skills and the economic benefits that should be obtained. This discrepancy in recognition and compensation has contributed to their sense of being held back or limited in their career advancement within the organization.

Workers perceive having a formal college degree as essential to accessing better job opportunities both within the organization and the broader job market. Consequently, among the positive aspects that workers perceive in their current employment the implementation of a four-day working week for those directly involved in production stands out. This arrangement represents a distinct advantage for the employees in the organization.

3.3. Discussion

The Impact of Power Imbalance on the Understanding of Workforce Diversity

The presence of organizational diversity and its management is influenced by socio-historical relationships, as noted in the research by Omanovic (2009). In the context of AutoK, this is reflected in the prevailing dominance of Japanese work culture, positioning them as the expertise holders and, consequently, the power holders in the automotive industry. The resulting unequal power relations stemming from these socially constructed positions give rise to tensions, contradictions, and negotiations, particularly concerning the diverse perspectives, skills, and sociodemographic characteristics of the workforce.

Hence, work diversity dimensions exist within a larger framework of power dynamics that assign certain value to such distinctions. This process recreates the power imbalance among social groups because the hegemonic groups have the capacity to ascribe and maintain the organizational values of each diversity dimension. These assigned values, in turn, create mechanisms of discrimination, wherein certain characteristics are labeled as more valuable, leading to the perception of who qualifies as a «good» worker or someone who is «almost like us» taking as a parameter the categories created from the hegemonic group's perspective (Janssens & Zanoni, 2005). Therefore, a critical lens should be applied when interpreting and analyzing workforce diversity, considering the underlying power dynamics and the potential for discrimination and bias based on sociodemographic characteristics. The consequences of not considering power dynamics and discrimination in the interpretation of workforce diversity can lead to biased and inaccurate conclusions about the experiences and challenges faced by underprivileged groups, such as women and older workers.

The dialectical process of diversity production (Omanovic, 2013) reveals that contradictions emerge and find resolution throughout this entire process. In this specific case, the primary source of contradiction was the disparities between work cultures, and the resolution was based on organizational power, primarily held by the Japanese administration. Consequently, owing to the limited bargaining power in negotiations, diversity practices align with the Japanese approach, leading to unresolved tensions regarding the criteria and pathways for professional advancement within the organization.

Regrettably, the interpretation of diversity dimensions continues to perpetuate the power imbalance within the workforce, placing women, older workers, and individuals without an academic degree at a disadvantage compared to their counterparts. This implies that workforce diversity is connected to the disparities present in the broader society where the organization operates.

Limited Conceptual Foundations for Diversity Management Practices

Diversity management practices, primarily guided by Japanese directives, are centrally oriented towards achieving organizational goals, aligning them with the business case rationale and pragmatic, market-based appeal (Cox, 2004). This approach tends to sideline the social purpose of inclusion and organizational justice, even challenging the legitimacy of such perspectives (Noon, 2007). While the business case emphasizes the potential competitive advantage from diverse perspectives, it's crucial to acknowledge that merely viewing diverse employees as sources of different perspectives and skills overlooks the underlying issue of social justice. Organizational social justice involves recognizing minority groups in the workforce and implementing fair and inclusive management practices fostering their development, irrespective of differences (Colquitt, 2001).

The processes of assigning value and institutionalizing these distinctions are further reinforced by human resources practices related to recruitment and promotions, legitimizing the unequal distribution of organizational resources (Noon, 2007). Despite the meritocracy notion being touted as the basis for accessing resources, inequalities persist along sociodemographic lines. These are widely perceived by organizational members, observing how human resources practices and their lack of transparency create barriers for individuals from minority groups.

Organizations may embrace diversity as both terminal and instrumental values (Olsen & Martins, 2012). In the context of dual-value organizations, diversity is considered crucial for achieving organizational goals, while simultaneously being valued for its intrinsic importance. To effectively realize this dual value, it is

imperative to provide training not only for human resources management but, notably, for Japanese top management.

Diversity management practices designed to address diversity can perpetuate inequalities if not implemented thoughtfully and context-sensitively (Zanoni, *et al.*, 2010). The findings underscore the need for organizations to critically examine their diversity management strategies and consider broader structural factors contributing to these dynamics.

Human resources policies often have a short-term focus to meet current personnel requirements but lack a comprehensive conceptual framework on the significance and implications of a diverse workforce (Zanoni, *et al.*, 2010). Management practices may be implemented based on intuition and mediation between expatriate managers' directives and local labor market conditions. Managing diversity complexities increase with differing viewpoints among expatriate and local managers. Leadership within organizations becomes crucial for driving the social change required for inclusive workplaces. Effective leaders ensure team members feel included in critical organizational processes. The complexity of global production chains demands leaders who understand intercultural and international relations and local labor diversity rooted in community socioeconomic contexts.

While awareness of diversity is growing among managers, creating organizational systems providing equal opportunities for professional growth is a collective effort. Managing diversity effectively becomes a social endeavor encompassing both internal and external factors, emphasizing everyone's dignity as unique human beings with distinct capacities.

The Ramifications of Experiencing Exclusion

Diversity management practices at AutoK perpetuate inequalities among social groups as they lack thoughtful and context-sensitive implementation. The findings underscore the necessity for organizations to critically evaluate their diversity management strategies and account for broader structural factors contributing to these dynamics. However, at AutoK, this critical examination is hindered by a power imbalance between Japanese top management and the local staff. Notably, there is a noticeable absence of acculturation or integration processes (Olsen & Martins, 2012) into the Japanese work culture, placing the responsibility squarely on the shoulders of the workers.

Organizational decision-making and problem-solving involving diverse groups possess the capacity for enhanced creativity compared to homogenous groups. This is attributed to the wealth of resources available to them during the creative generation phase of the process (Yang & Konrad, 2011). This is not the case.

The potential drawbacks of diversity are rooted in what van Knippenberg *et al.* (2004) describe as social categorization effects. These effects involve distinguishing between in-group members, who are perceived as subjectively similar, and out-group members, who are perceived as subjectively dissimilar. This social categorization has resulted in negative consequences for disadvantaged groups due to the presence of intergroup biases. These biases disrupt working relationships by diminishing elements such as active listening, information exchange, and trust. Consequently, the collaborative aspects of organizational decision-making and problem-solving within diverse groups are hindered by these biases. This underscores the importance of implementing strategies to mitigate such negative effects and cultivate more inclusive and effective working environments.

Despite the imperative for historically marginalized groups to actively participate, as they are likely to bring novel perspectives, knowledge, and ideas to the organization (Yang & Konrad, 2011), the perception of low involvement among discriminated groups may be impeding creativity in idea generation.

Embracing uniqueness within a group setting can lead to enhanced group performance (Shore *et al.*, 2010). This occurs when a distinctive individual is not only accepted as a member of the group but also when the group places value on the specific unique characteristic possessed by that individual. However, the feeling of being a member of the group is not present for the discriminated groups, whilst the groups with characteristics that appeal to Japanese top management can easily feel like insiders.

Eliminating the barriers that hinder the complete engagement and contribution of every employee within the organization (Roberson, 2006), entails making deliberate endeavors to integrate all employees into the mission and functioning of the organization, valuing their individual talents. In the specific context of AutoK, this involves facilitating access to organizational resources for all employees (Mor Barak, 2000).

The consequences of perceived exclusion carry substantial weight, exerting adverse effects on pivotal organizational metrics, notably organizational commitment, and job satisfaction. These impacts are currently manifested in the turnover rate, highlighting the urgency of addressing issues related to inclusion and diversity at AutoK. Failure to mitigate these concerns may exacerbate turnover and compromise the overall organizational performance and workplace morale.

Inclusion practices (Roberson, 2006) consisting of collaborative work arrangements and conflict resolution procedures are a good way of involving diverse employees in decision-making processes. Implementing practices that promote uniform treatment of employees while simultaneously recognizing individual differences is crucial. This entails strategies such as recruiting ethnic minorities based on individual capabilities rather than ethnic membership, forming teams with diverse ethnicities for roles of equal status, and fostering high task interdependence to facilitate regular and substantial communication among team members. These practices contribute to creating an inclusive and equitable work environment that values individuals for their unique skills and talents rather than predefined characteristics.

4. Conclusions

The purpose of this article was to deepen the understanding of how diversity is experienced and managed within the specified industry and geographical context. To comprehend the diversity phenomena three main points were addressed: the interpretation of diversity dimensions, the implementation of diversity practices and the resulting perception of inclusion or exclusion in the organizational life. Main findings demonstrate that workforce diversity is configured into four main distinctions, and each of them creates a specific characteristic of the dynamics of interaction among workers.

The four main dimensions of diversity found within the organization were nationality, gender, age, and academic background. In terms of cultural diversity, power dynamics emerge based on nationality, leading to imbalances where Japanese management dictates organizational parameters, creating a perceived sense of inferiority among the local workforces. In the context of sex diversity, despite equal representation, women face hierarchical positioning challenges, and organizational initiatives aim to address the balance between professional roles and personal responsibilities. Regarding age diversity, generational stereotypes impact intergenerational relations, with young professionals lacking certain managerial skills and middle-aged workers perceiving age-based discrimination. In academic level diversity, distinctions between workers with degrees and practical experience arise, with the organization hiring young engineers with degrees, resulting in conflicts related to recognition and compensation for those with practical experience and a perceived glass ceiling for career advancement.

This study is subject to several limitations. Firstly, its focus on the automotive industry in Guanajuato introduces context-specific factors that may limit the generalizability of findings to other sectors. Caution should be exercised when applying conclusions to industries with distinct characteristics. Secondly, temporal constraints pose a challenge, as the dynamic nature of industries and workplaces means that conditions may have evolved post-2020, potentially impacting the relevance of the study's results. Additionally, the study's limited geographic scope raises concerns about the generalizability of diversity challenges in this region to those in other parts of Mexico or different countries.

Results and discussion suggest potential avenues for future research. Firstly, conducting longitudinal studies to monitor changes in workforce diversity and management practices over an extended period within the same organization could provide insights into how dynamics evolve and are influenced by contextual factors, such as industry and/or geographical region. The option to implement a comparative analysis across different industries or regions may help identify variations in diversity challenges and management practices, contributing to a broader understanding of diversity dynamics. Exploring organizational interventions is another avenue to comprehend and address diversity issues, involving experimental studies or case studies of organizations implementing successful diversity initiatives and proposing tailored solutions for overcoming challenges.

In conclusion, successful diversity management goes beyond a superficial approach of leveraging differences for competitive advantage. It requires flexible and customized approaches, ethical leadership, a commitment to justice and inclusion, and a collective effort involving all levels of the organization and society. Furthermore, it is crucial for multinational organizations to critically examine their power dynamics, discriminatory practices, and the broader societal context to create inclusive environments that foster equitable opportunities for individuals from diverse backgrounds.

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