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# Why don't they stay? Exploring supervisors' level of intercultural sensitivity and employee perceptions of fairness in the workplace

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## **Why don't they stay? Exploring supervisors' level of intercultural sensitivity and employee perceptions of fairness in the workplace**

### **Abstract**

*"My supervisor is nice, but she/he just doesn't understand me!" This statement may help explain some of the mixed success for predominantly white workplaces in retaining people of color. This presentation outlines a dissertation study exploring the relationship between intercultural sensitivity of leaders, and followers' ratings of workplace fairness. Demographic similarity or difference between supervisor and supervisee will also be considered as a moderating variable. Findings may help us to better understand how workplace relationships impact issues related to retention.*

### **Gina S. Matkin**

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Recruitment and retention of people of color in predominantly white workplaces has been the focus of a great many organizational initiatives. Workplace training, strategic planning, policy changes, and countless other efforts have been made, but often without great success. Assumptions are made that people of color will be most attracted to jobs with good pay, developmental and promotional opportunities, and other job perks. While these assumptions may be true, a review of the research literature reveals several qualitative studies that indicate that retention is often influenced equally by workplace relationships. Interactions with peers, supervisors, and supervisees were cited as setting the tone for either a supportive or non-supportive workplace climate.

In a recent unpublished qualitative study of faculty and staff of color at predominantly white educational institutions in the Midwest, researchers found some recurring themes. Participants indicated that although pay, opportunities, and other benefits may have initially attracted them to their positions, decisions on whether to remain were impacted most by relationships. Participants spoke of their relationships with white co-workers, supervisors, and administrators as often strained. They indicated that they had to cross barriers to get on equal footing both socially and professionally with white employees. Some spoke of being left out of social engagements; others of not being asked to collaborate on research or only being asked to present publicly on issues that related to their ethnicity or race. All spoke of being asked to perform "service" responsibilities at a higher level than white colleagues but not receiving rewards for such service. Many spoke of this as a barrier to the tenure and review process for faculty of color.

In light of these findings, a quantitative study is being conducted to explore the impact of the supervisor/supervisee relationship on employees' perceptions of fairness in the workplace as moderated by demographic similarity or difference between the leader and follower. Fairness has been linked to employee satisfaction and retention in several studies. This research is part of a dissertation study in the Leadership Studies program in the Agricultural Leadership Education and Communication Department at the University of Nebraska -Lincoln. This presentation will lay out the background, relevant research, and hypotheses surrounding the project. Questions, feedback, and critique from the audience will be encouraged. It is hoped that results of this study

can be presented at next year's conference.

**Presenter**

**Gina S. Matkin** is a Doctoral Candidate in Leadership Studies in the Department of Agricultural Leadership Education and Communication at the University of Nebraska -Lincoln (UNL). She holds an M.A. from Iowa State University with an interdisciplinary major in Women's Studies, Sociology, and Adult Education. She earned a B.S. in Biology Education at Southeast Missouri State University.

Gina has worked for the last fifteen years as a training/organizational development professional specializing in cultural diversity and awareness training. She has worked most of those years in higher education and has a passion for teaching and learning. One of Gina's most memorable Nebraska cultural experiences (not being a native to the state) was to learn that a "chicken fry" was NOT chicken.

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