

Chapter 1

Workplace Discrimination: The Most Critical Issue in Managing Diversity

Shikha Sharma

Punjabi University, India

Nimarta Mann

Punjabi University, India

ABSTRACT

Diverse workforce is now a global phenomenon. The quality of interaction between people of diversified cultures in the organization has significant association with the marketing, managing, as well as human resource functions. The majority organizations are indulging in diversity management programmes so that they can benefit from the varied skills. But discriminatory behaviour against people of different backgrounds than majorities in the workplace act as a hindrance in taking full advantage of workplace diversity. This chapter reveals different forms in which discrimination can arise in a discrimination-free environment. The organizational as well as individual factors that cause discrimination at the workplace are discussed. The aftereffects that are related to discriminatory behavior at work, which render both employees as well as organization at disadvantage, are also highlighted. The chapter will help by highlighting the issue faced by thousands of employees every year and suggesting steps that need to be undertaken to remove discrimination from the workplace settings.

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INTRODUCTION

With rise in globalization, organizations are becoming more multifarious. Interaction between organizations as well as individuals of different cultural backgrounds is also increasing at a fast pace, which has led to opening of broad employment opportunities throughout the globe. Employers are interested in hiring employees of diverse backgrounds to take advantage of different kind of skills, technical knowledge and experiences. Having diverse workforce is advantageous for both employees as well as organizations as it augments opportunities for new markets, employment, innovation, and organization's image (Esty et al. 1995). A variety of intelligence, expertise and characteristics are required by organizations in order to achieve success. Diverse employee pool assures that an organization has extensive mixture of knowledge and expertise at workplace which takes them on verge over others.

With the various benefits involved there also arise some negative aspects that are related to the effective management of diverse workforce. Organizations dedicated to diversified manpower wish to build an atmosphere where everyone, irrespective of their demographic, social, cultural, economic or any other differences in their background, does their best for the organization. Workplace diversity actually means building an environment where all members of organization can work collectively and with harmony regardless of their disparities. Effective management of diverse workforce involves making most out of the different and unique talents but certain barriers act as hindrance in this.

One of the most critical issues which are prevalent in this respect is of Workplace Discrimination. Workplace discrimination denotes to differential treatment while recruiting, assigning job positions, evaluations and payments. Several types of harassments also come under workplace discrimination (Devah, 2009). It involves treating persons differently mostly because of their gender, age, race or physical appearance. For example if there is a situation where a female candidate is offered a lower salary package than a male candidate for the same job responsibilities, or a candidate is denied employment due to age, then in both cases female candidate as well as aged candidate are victims of workplace discrimination.

Merely having the knowledge of what workplace discrimination means cannot help any organization in getting rid of it until and unless the reason for its origination in the work settings is identified. By having knowledge of the major reasons that lead to creation of a work environment that is not supportive of diversity helps organizations to take preventive measures.

Workplace discrimination can be anticipated at different levels of employment decisions, such as, hiring, compensation, Promotions, Fringe benefits, authority allocation, trainings, etc. On the whole, it precipitates and intensifies in equal treatment at workplace.

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