

Workplace diversities and the racial discrimination politics essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

With the nations throughout the world vast becoming ethnically and culturally diverse, the perspectives at every rung of the corporate ladder have dramatically changed. The last few years have seen significant alterations in the needs, ideals and priorities of both the employees and employers. A diversified workforce once considered a social responsibility in the otherwise profit driven competitive organizations, wherein the social responsibility and competitiveness were considered to be contradicting policies, is now notably associated with the organization's corporate objectives.

Michalle E. Mor Barak (2011, p. 148) in the book "Managing Diversity: Toward a Globally Inclusive Workplace" defines 'Workforce diversity' as the division of workforce in distinct categories having an apparent cohesion in a given national or cultural context, and that influence latently detrimental or favorable employment outcomes viz. job opportunities, treatment at the workplace, and growth prospects – irrespective of job related skills and qualifications. As the workplace is becoming increasingly diverse; the eventual pressure on the organizations has remarkably increased with regard to managing the various workplace diversity issues. Diversity, in simple terms, means the differences of age, sex, race, religion, culture, sexual orientation etc. People in the organization with these distinct demographic differences constitute a diversified workforce. The diversity dimension model given by Loden & Rosener distinctively presents the different demographics (refer Appendix A).

Racial Discrimination: An Overview & History

The United States has seen a noteworthy change in its demographic framework in the last 25 years. A significantly major proportion of America's population is constituted of people belonging to distinct races/ethnicity. The Office of Management and Budget, USA, lists down five racial categories, the American Indian, Asian, Black or African American, Native Hawaiian; and White, and one ethnic category, Hispanic or Latino (EEOC, 2006). Of all the workplace discrimination issues that are faced by the U. S., discrimination on the basis of race or ethnicity has been the most persistent throughout, with a marked increase in the concerned cases over the years. According to the U. S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), Racial/Ethnic discrimination refers to “ treating an applicant or employee unfavorably because he/she is of certain race or because of personal characteristics associated with race (such as hair texture, skin colour, or certain facial features)”. The EEOC reported that 36% of the discrimination cases filed previous year were cases of racial discrimination, allegedly about unequal employment opportunities and unethical barriers to advancement in career and promotion prospects (EEOC, 2011). A recent poll in US indicated that a significant proportion of people representing different racial groups strongly believe that there exist stark disparities in pay grades, promotion prospects and growth opportunities on the basis of race and ethnicity.

The United States has had a long history of racial discrimination, which could be traced back to as early as the seventeenth century, beginning with the institution of slavery, with importation of vast number of slaves from Africa. The first African slaves were imported to

America in 1619, when a ship carrying 20 Africans as cargo disembarked at Virginia. During the course that followed, millions of African slaves were acquired and shipped to the American continents. As per the 1860 US Census, there had been a drastic growth in the slave population, reaching over 4 million. Prior to the beginning of the slave era, the blacks and other non white immigrants had an equal status with the whites. However, with the institution of slavery, the status gradually deteriorated which eventually became the basis of the present day racism that persists in the US. Slavery and discrimination on basis of race had completely infiltrated each aspect of the American culture and social order, eventually leading to the Civil War, a turning point in the history of racism in America. The war resulted in the end of slavery in the United States, with the Congress passing amendments to the US constitution, which made slavery illegal and provided the African Americans and other ethnicities with equal rights and protection (CRFC, n. d.). Although the civil war and the subsequent amendments to the constitution put an end to slavery, drawing its roots from the colonial and slave era, racial discrimination in America still predominantly exists towards the following ethnic groups or races; African Americans or Blacks, Native Americans, Latin Americans, Middle Easterners and Muslims, and Asians.

Combating Racial Discrimination: The Laws

With the work environment increasingly becoming global, together with the marked increase in the demographic diversity in the nation, the workplace has too become prominently diverse. However, with discrimination well rooted throughout the social order, the workplace is flooded with the concerning issues. As mentioned earlier, the EEOC reported huge number of

racial prejudice cases at the workplace during the previous year. The United States government, seeking to protect the rights of the different ethnic classes and safeguard their interests at the workplace, has brought to force various laws and statutes which are directed towards ensuring equal opportunities for employment and career growth. These laws/acts prohibit various forms of discriminatory activities that take may take place in any aspect of the employment such as hiring and firing, compensations, job promotions, transfers, recruitment, apprenticeship programmes etc.

Following are the major laws and acts directed towards combating this major concern:

Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title VII

Coming into existence in the 1964, this is fundamentally the most crucial federal law against workplace discrimination, prohibiting discrimination in employment against employees and applicants in hiring, promotion, pay, fringe benefits, job training, and other aspects of employment on grounds of race, colour, national origin, religion and sex (EEOC, 2011). Employers with 15 or more employees, as well as the employers of federal and state governments fall under this act. The act not only prohibits intentional discrimination, but also practices with discriminatory effects against employees and applicants on the basis of their race, colour, religion or sex. The act created the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, an independent federal agency, for the implementation of the laws under the Title VII of the Civil Rights Act (National Archives, n. d.). It is the most important federal body against workplace discrimination, empowered to file suits against employers with prejudiced practices.

Civil Rights Act of 1991

The Civil Rights Act 1991 came into force in response to certain US Supreme court decisions, which narrowed the rights of the employees and the applicants, who had filed a suit against the employer on grounds of discrimination at the work. The act provided for the right to trial by the jury on discrimination claims (Find US Law, n. d.), and granted financial damages in event of intentional discrimination on basis of race, colour, religion, sex etc. The act amended the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and altered some of the basic procedural and substantive rights under the latter.

Immigration Reform And Control Act 1986

This Act makes it mandatory for the employers to ensure that the employees have legal authorization for working in the United States. However, the act also prohibits discrimination against applicants or employees with regard to recruitment, promotion opportunities etc. on basis of their foreign nationality or ethnicity (News Developments, 2011).

Workforce Investment Act of 1998, Section 188

Section 188 of the Workforce Investment Act provides for prohibition of discrimination concerning participation, benefits and employment. The law states that “ no individual shall be excluded from participation in, denied benefits of, or denied employment in administration or any such activity on basis of race, colour, national origin, ethnicity, sex or religious beliefs”(US Department of Labor, n. d.). The law is monitored and implemented by the Civil Rights Center.

National Apprentices Act 1937

Implemented by the Apprenticeship Training and Employer Labor Services, under this act, all the apprenticeship programs under the US Department of Labor and State apprenticeship organizations are prohibited from discriminating and need to take on affirmative action in apprenticeship programs, on the basis of race, colour, national origin, religion and sex (US Department of Labor, n. d.).

Racial Discrimination: Data & Facts

Though there are numerous laws and legal measures against racism at the workplace, the law cannot force and change the way the people at large think and feel, and subsequently act according to their perceptions and beliefs. Regrettably, as advanced as the United States has arrived in the race relations arena; there has still been a noteworthy rise in the incidences of personal discrimination on grounds of race and colour, at the workplace (AssociatedContent, n. d.).

The enforcement and litigation statistics released by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission for the fiscal year 2010 revealed a record 99, 922 cases of workplace discrimination were filed in the fiscal year ending 2010. As per the statistics, 35, 890 racial discrimination cases were filed constituting almost 36 % of the total cases (EEOC, 2011). There was a marked increase from the 33, 579 cases filed in the previous fiscal year (refer Appendix B).

A report by the US Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) further revealed the comparative unemployment figures between the African Americans and the

Whites, which evidently illustrated the striking difference that exists in the unemployment rates. According to the data, the unemployment rate for the Blacks was almost 15% compared to under 10% for the Whites (BLS, n. d.) (Refer Appendix C). Also, as stated in the report by US Census Bureau, the blacks have the lowest levels of median household incomes compared to the Whites and other races, and the trend has been consistent since many decades (refer Appendix D).

Further, a comprehensive study of the US advertising industry revealed stark disparities in the employment trends and pay grades, on basis of race/ethnicity. According to the report by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the African American professionals faced high level bias against Whites in promotion, hiring and other aspects of the employment. As per the findings, blacks are only 62 percent as likely as their White colleagues to work at high level positions, with 16 percent of the large firms not employing blacks as managers or professionals (NAACP, n. d.).

Racial Discrimination: Cases

All through the America's history, discrimination on basis of race leading to prejudices and biases in the various aspects of the social order, such as employment, education etc. has been a significant issue especially when it concerns the workplace. As mentioned, the government has enacted various laws and statutes for the protection of the rights of the individuals against discriminatory practices at the workplace, which provide them with the opportunity and right to trial against any such practice. Following are some of the cases which have proved to be a landmark in the area concerned:

In what can be called as arguably the most significant case in the history of corporate racial discrimination cases, the Coca Cola Company in 1999 had to face a lawsuit filed by four former and current African American employees who alleged that the company's policies towards the blacks were prejudiced, and subsequently they suffered and faced discriminatory practices with regard to pay grades, promotion opportunities and performance evaluations. The company in 2000 agreed to a \$192 million settlement, the biggest ever in the history of a racial discrimination case, although denying the allegations in the settlement but agreeing to alter its policies (Business and Human Rights Resource Center, 2011).

In yet another case concerning racial discrimination and harassment as reported by the Washington Post, Lockheed Martin of Bethesda, agreed on paying \$2.5 million as settlement to Daniels, an African American aviation electrician at the Lockheed plants in Florida and Washington. Daniels alleged that he had to suffer offensive racial comments and physical harassment by his employers and other white counterparts. This was the largest settlement ever in an individual corporate discrimination case as declared by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (Washington Post, 2008).

Breaking the Racial Barrier: Success Stories

Overcoming the racial barriers at the workplace is a rather challenging and demanding task, with high chances of discrimination against the African Americans and other ethnicities taking place and a consistent increase in the concerning cases. The data and statistics stated above leave no doubt that racial discrimination has a major impact on the workforce environment and the employment/growth opportunities. However, the blacks have proved

<https://assignbuster.com/workplace-diversities-and-the-racial-discrimination-politics-essay/>

themselves time and again, equally challenging the Whites in the different areas (Astonishing Lifestyle, 2011). Although the rates of success in the corporate ladder for the non whites has been considerably low, yet there have been certain significant personalities who overcame all the racial barriers at each rung of the corporate ladder to reach the top. Following are some of the chief non white personalities who have achieved great heights in the corporate world:

Kenneth I. Chenault, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of the American Express, one of the largest financial service provider companies of the United States, is an African American who has ascended to remarkable heights despite the huge wall of racial biases at workplace and proved his worth in the corporate world (Forbes, 2011). Chenault became the CEO of this huge corporation in January 2001, after the previous CEO Harvey Golub declared his retirement. He is the third African American to become the CEO of a Fortune 500 company.

Rodney O' Neal is another African American who overcame the racial wall to become the CEO and President of Delphi Automotive LLP, a US based automotive corporation listed in the Fortune 500 companies (Forbes, 2011). He also served as the Vice President of the General Motors, and President of the Delphi Interior Systems prior to Delphi's separation from GM.

Overcoming Racial Discrimination: Policy Measures & Best Practices

With increasing awareness on discriminatory behaviors at workplace, the companies now realize the catastrophic results racial discrimination can

cause the company, including large settlements towards lawsuits, public embarrassment, and divided workforce. The companies, therefore, have established and adopted various anti discriminatory policies and best practices to combat this issue. These best practices further help them in enhancing their public image and often act as strong public relations strategies.

With a view of rectifying their previous acts of discrimination or promoting robust diversity at the workplace, huge number companies have adopted and efficiently instilled Affirmative Action programs and policies in their corporate culture. Affirmative action basically refers to policies or positive steps to strengthen the representation of minorities in areas of employment etc. However, an efficient Affirmative action policy, although intended at strengthening minority representation, does not discriminate against the workforce in general in favour of minorities and promotes equal opportunity for qualified persons irrespective of their race or caste. Several corporations throughout the world have undertaken various Affirmative action policies for the purpose, which include reviewing and reforming their personnel policies, targeted recruitments, outreach campaigns, implementing internal audit and reporting system to identify the concerned problem areas at the workplace, subsequently suggesting remedial actions (US Department of Labor, n. d.). The companies have formulated various action oriented policies targeted at their Recruitment and Selection procedures, which involve formulating specialized department for evaluation of selection methods and reviewing applications, thereby ensuring unbiased and fair representation of protected classes. Under the affirmative action programs, companies often circulate

information on employment opportunities to organizations representing minorities to ensure equality in opportunities for them.

Huge corporations like AT & T, Cox Communications, Coca Cola, McDonald's and various others have been included in the Diversity Inc. Top 10 companies for the Blacks, as a result of their strong anti discriminatory policies. Companies all over the States should implement and adopt these policies in their corporate profile and the workplace environment. The companies in the Diversity Inc. list have efficient Human resource, promotion and retention policies for the African Americans, including active Black employee resource clusters, robust cross culture mentoring curriculum (Diversity Inc., 2011).

Companies can also lay down a Code of Best Practices produced by the Commission for Racial Equality and Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and implement it as a mandatory addition to the Company's governing guidelines, prohibiting discriminatory practices such as irrelevant criteria for recruitment and selections, and delayed or fewer growth opportunities for the minorities.

Companies like IBM have also set up Individual Employee Task Groups for each group at the workplace, and deal with the diversity and workplace discrimination concerns, often suggesting necessary course of actions to the issue (Enotes, n. d). Other companies can take the example of IBM, and essentially incorporate employee task groups and concerning policies in their corporate guidelines. Setting up Employee task groups has proved a significantly successful policy in overcoming the racial discrimination issues.

An increasingly popular policy measure integrated in the corporate culture by several companies at present is the No Tolerance Policy, whereby an employee is terminated on an issue of discrimination over the first offence (Associated Content, n. d.). A highly effective anti discrimination policy, it ensures unprejudiced treatment for all the employees at the workplace.

The Harassment, Discrimination and Workplace Bullying Policy at the IP Australia, Human Resource Management Group, is a key example of successful anti discriminatory policies at workplace (IP Australia, n. d.).

American Corporations can alter and review their organizational policies in accordance to the guidelines of IP Australia's discrimination policy which has proven quite effective in handling the workplace issues.

Conclusion

Despite of the various laws and acts directed towards safeguarding the interests and rights of the protected classes from discrimination at the workplace and the government's claims of successfully overcoming the racial issues, the statistics and cases stated earlier in the report, reveal altogether a different perspective of the current scenario. Regardless of the efforts, the African American classes in the country still face stark racial discrepancies in various aspects of the workplace environment. Considering the consistent increase in the discrimination cases of race filed with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, the argument is further strengthened. The report as mentioned is an appraisal of the present day scenario of the racial disparities that exist and severely impact upon the work environment. The African Americans and other ethnic minorities, despite being a part of this nation since centuries still come across prejudices and biases at the <https://assignbuster.com/workplace-diversities-and-the-racial-discrimination-politics-essay/>

workplace, often being denied well deserved growth opportunities and jobs because of their race. The blacks are still involved in the struggle across every step of the corporate ladder; often failing their endless efforts. It can be drawn from the fact that only 10 African Americans have ever in the history of corporate world, made it to the top position of a Fortune 500 company. Thus, based on the data, cases and arguments concerning this prominent issue, it can be concluded that, though there has been significant improvement in the scenario, racial discrimination does have a significantly major impact upon the work environment and the concerned growth and employment opportunities, however with proper planning and implementation of the policies and best practices stated above, the issue can be successfully combated.

Appendix

Appendix A

Loden & Rosener Diversity Dimension Model

Appendix B

Appendix C

C: UsersRICDesktopfigure07_unemployment_rate. gif

Appendix D

C: UsersRICDesktopU. S.

_Real_Median_Household_Income_by_Race_and_Ethnicity. JPG