

Discrimination in virtual organizations

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The International Labor Organization's (ILO) Convention 111 (Employment and Occupation) prohibits "any distinction, exclusion or preference made on the basis of race, color, sex, religion, political opinion, national extraction, or social origin, which has the effect of nullifying or impairing equality of opportunity or treatment in employment or occupation". Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was enacted to eliminate discriminations on the following protected classes: (1) Race, (2) Color, (3) Religion, (4) Sex, or (5) National Origin (Henry R. Cheeseman, 2004, p. 802).

A firm like Riordan Manufacturing, which is a virtual organization with multiple locations in different countries, has to grapple with issues related to discrimination constantly. Henry R. Cheeseman (2004) explains the categories that constitute the various types of employment discrimination, Race refers to broad categories with common characteristics such as Black, Caucasian, Asian, and Native American. Color refers to the color of a person's skin like light-skinned, dark-skinned, etc. National origin refers to the country of a person's ancestors or cultural characteristics like Hispanic, Italian, etc (p.

803). In addition to these, discrimination is possible on the basis of gender (sex) and religion. Gender Discrimination Though the prohibition against sex discrimination is applicable to both men and women, a majority of the sex discrimination cases are brought by women (Henry R. Cheeseman, 2004, p. 805). Discrimination 2 Religious Discrimination Title VII of the Civil Rights Act prohibits employment discrimination based on traditional religions, other religions that recognize a supreme being and religions based on ethical or spiritual tenets (Henry R.

Cheeseman, 2004, p. 810). Riordan's employee demographics reveal a healthy mix of race, color, origin, sex and religion. In such a demographic diversity, there is always a possibility of biased employee treatment. The different forms of discriminatory treatment are: 1. Disparate Treatment Discrimination: This occurs when a specific individual is subjected to discriminatory treatment based on his race, color, religion, sex or national origin. 2. Disparate Impact Discrimination: This occurs when the employer discriminates against an entire protected class. (Henry R.

Cheeseman, 2004, p. 803) For a company operating out of multiple locations with diverse work cultures and societal practices, the occurrence of these two forms of discrimination cannot be ruled out. Riordan Manufacturing has prime work locations in the US and China. " Many racial and ethnic groups in the United States, including blacks, Hispanics, Asians, American Indians, and others, have historically faced severe discrimination- pervasive and open denial of economic opportunities" (Rebecca M. Blank, Constance Forbes Citro Discrimination 3 & Marilyn Dabady, 2004, p.

1). In China, there has been an observation of marked gender discrimination, with women being disadvantaged quite often (Zhu Jingde, 2005, n. p). Discrimination based on national origin, race and color is also rife in China. Discriminatory practices in employment are not limited to a few countries. With multiple operation centers in all parts of the globe, Virtual Organizations need to be prepared to face issues of discrimination that might crop up. The role of a manager is critical in ensuring that there is no discrimination occurring inside the organization.

His legal and ethical duties pertaining to discrimination start with personal abstinence from acts of harassment and biased behavior. The manager needs to follow a moral code of conduct and act ethically while promoting people since 'merit' can be offered as a defense to a charge of discrimination (Henry R. Cheeseman, 2004, p. 810). He has to ensure that there is no occurrence of disparate treatment in the team he is handling. He might come across instances of members of the staff indulging in verbal slurs against other members of a different race, religion, origin, sex or color.

In such instances, he should abide by Business Ethics to safeguard the feelings and interests of a protected class. Over the years, there has been a dramatic rise in the number of lawsuits against discrimination on various grounds. Legal action can be detrimental to the reputation and growth of an organization. It is, therefore, the duty of a manager to prevent discriminatory acts to make sure that the company is not at the wrong end of the law. He has to ensure that the staff is aware of the laws against discrimination and instruct them to

Discrimination 4 refrain from harassment of fellow workers on the basis of their race, color, sex, religion or origin. Cultural practices play a huge role in discriminatory issues. For example, in most of the countries in the Middle East, it is not a common practice to employ women. And in a few countries in Asia, religion is a major criterion for the recruitment of a candidate. Unlike a democratic set-up, where people have the right to speak-up against discrimination, these countries do not encourage legal action for discrimination.

In such cases, Business Ethics play a crucial role in preventing acts of discrimination. Since a virtual organization does not operate out of a single location, it is but natural that its workforce is a mix of different races, colors, religions and origins. A company's strength is its workforce and when it is diverse like in the case of a Virtual Organization like Riordan Manufacturing, it is all the more important to focus on treating employees equally. This would ensure a healthy work-environment.

References

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