

Stereotyping and the changing workforce



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The changing workforce is an ongoing trend observed in organisational settings throughout the world. However, what is the meaning of this worldwide trend? Changing workforce is an organisation behavioral trend which records a growing increase in the diversity of people in the workforce in various countries. Such diversity includes gender, ethnicity, age, and race (McShane and Travaglione, 2007, Page 8). In this essay, I am going to discuss how the changing workforce influence stereotyping in organisational settings.

Age Two main groups of people in the workforce now are the Generation X (born 1965- 1979) workers and Generation Y (born 1980-2000) workers, with those born Baby boomer generation making up the rest of the workforce. Generation X workers are more by the book and traditional compared to Generation Y workers. Gen X workers believe in experience over wild ideas and that workers should earn their praise and way up the step ladder.

Unlike the Gen X group, typical Gen Y workers are more comfortable with the fast moving IT world and prefer making use of the latest technology in their work compared to the traditional approach passed onto them by their Gen X bosses. Gen Y workers are also less respectful of the pecking order in the workforce preferring to by-pass immediate superiors to get their ideas across to higher authorities. Gen Y workers also wants to know their work is meaningful and have input into big decisions. They also prefer constructive feedback about their suggestions rather than have their suggestions quietly dismissed (Alsop, 2009, Commentary, Page 47).

As time goes by, the workforce will soon be dominated by the Generation Y in the near future as the earlier batch of the Generation X workers begin to retire. This is especially true in large multinational businesses. Thus Gen X employees will thus be stereotyped and discriminated against. One common stereotype would be older workers are susceptible to being inflexible and slow in their advancement with the fast paced technologies. Smaller companies on the other hand will tend to value older workers for their experience, low absence rates and low turnover. Thus younger workers in such companies will get stereotyped as “ inexperienced and ignorant” (Schermerhorn Jr. et al, 2000, Page 63). Gender A few decades ago, well paying jobs in the workforce were dominated by the males whereas majority of the females stayed home and fulfill the duties of a domesticated homemaker. This social phenomenon was brought about by limited access to higher education for the females which restricts their entry into the workforce, further forcing the females to become dependent on the men economically.

Furthermore, with jobs requiring specialized skills and specific training becoming directly proportional with the employee’s salary, it is becoming inevitable that the only jobs willing to employ females are also the low paying jobs. It is also during this time feminist movement then began to slowly help women attain equal rights in their quest for education and employment as laws were put in place to protect the rights of females in getting education and equal opportunities in employment, thus more females are in the workforce now as compared to previously.

This change in the workforce can be seen from the following quote, “ The typical 1950s’ ‘ nuclear family’, consisting of a white Caucasian family where dad works 9 to 5 and mum stays home to raise the average 2. 4 children, seen as the stereotype in Australia and new Zealand for so long, now accounts for less than 20% of the population” (Robbins et al, 1998, Page 40). However, even as women are being protected by the law which entitles them to equal rights as men when seeking employment, there is still a certain level of discrimination towards women whether it is during the course of applying for a job or by their colleagues and fellow peers.

In a study done in the U. S on the effects of how gender based stereotyping can undermine women’s capacity to lead, both men and women respondent cast women as better at stereotypical feminine skills such as supporting. Both men and women asserted that men are better at “ taking charge” skills such as influencing superiors and delegation. While this result largely conforms to gender stereotype, both men and women saw themselves as better problem solvers as compared to the opposite sex and problem solving is one of the key qualities associated with effective leadership.

Since males far outnumber female in top management positions, it is this stereotype that dominates the current corporate thinking and thus might contribute to the fact that although females hold more than half of all management positions, they make up for less than two per cent of U. S Fortune 500 and Fortune 1000 CEOs (Amble, 2005). Race and Ethnicity Racial and ethnic group diversity has become an integral part of the changing workforce due to non-discriminatory immigration and employment

law in many countries. For example, more than half of Australia's immigrants came from the United Kingdom and Ireland in the late 1960s.

Now, these countries only make up 15% of the immigrants and more than 25% of the immigrants come from various parts of Asia (McShane and Travaglione, 2007, Page 9). With this much diversity in the workforce, it is inevitable that stereotype happens. The United States would make a very good example whereby stereotype against race of the minority happens. Life for the average African-American has improved remarkably, with the median black household income rising from \$22,300 in 1967 to \$32,100 in 2006 and most blacks today are middle class in the America.

Even so, the gap between the Whites and the Blacks is still the same as before as the median household income of the Whites has also increased. Black's median household income is still only 63% of the Whites (Atlanta and Harlem, 2008). This meant that while employers are more willing to pay and employ Blacks, they increased the salary of the Whites as well. Most White Americans still consider effective or intelligent people of colour to be against the norm, a successful person of colour would be startling.

Most White Americans have the perception that African-American and Hispanic are not smart enough and cannot be successful business people as most of the time they see people of these races on television, they are either singing, or dribbling a basketball (Thomas and Wetlaufer, 1997). Generally, it is the minority group that will be negatively stereotyped. Reflection and Discussion Singapore being a multi-racial, multi-cultural country with a

population of more than 5 million, our workforce diversity would therefore be high.

It is therefore important to learn and know how stereotyping would affect organisational settings in Singapore. Firstly, when selecting a potential employee, employers should not have a pre-determined mindset on the different groups of people during the selection process. It will be unfair to those candidates who are perceived in the weaker and non-favourable group as during the selection process, there will be a level of biasness against candidates in these groups and favouritism shown towards candidates in the stereotyped stronger group.

This will lead to organizations losing out on potentially good employees who might be better than those candidates that the organisation chose in the end. Meritocracy should be the basis during the selection process. Secondly, employers and superiors should not assign employees and subordinates work based on perceived stereotypical mindsets of the workers as it will be counterproductive because it prevents the workers being fully utilised based on their strengths. Bosses should try to get to know more of their subordinates and assign them work based on their strengths and weaknesses.

As a future employee of the workforce, it is essential to be more sensitive to other colleagues who may be stereotyped in a negative manner. While it is human nature to stick with certain groups they are comfortable with based on personal interest and hobbies, it is wrong to ostracise people based on their gender, age or race. It is therefore important to take initiatives to get to

know co-workers who are not part of the clique to find out if they happen to have the same interest and therefore invite them to the interest group or to find other common interest with them and try to form another social circle with the other employees.

In this way, there would then be an increase in the diversity of social circles and thus a bridge between the different groups is formed and co-workers can in turn get to know members from different groups. Conclusion In conclusion, stereotyping occurs whether or not there are changes in the workforce. The difference being, with changing workforce, workers whom used to be in the majority group will find their position more threatened with this added competition, thus the stereotype and prejudice against the minority group becomes stronger.

In order to deal with stereotyping in this changing workforce, the main challenge would be for employers need to deal with the diversity and individual differences among their employees in order to achieve maximum productivity for the organisation.