Attitudes of white American male students toward work force diversity programs.

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A research study was conducted regarding the attitudes of white American male students towards work force diversity programs. Ninety five white American business students were the participants in the study. Results revealed that these white American male students gave positive opinions on the work force diversity programs and on the hiring decision with legal and political bases.

Organizations are currently facing enormous changes in the demographic compositions of the work force (Johnson & Packer, 1987). Our purpose in the present study was to explore how corporate efforts to manage this increasing diversity affect the opinions of White men.

Organizational justice is a useful tool for examining the processes and outcomes of work force diversity programs. It is particularly useful for exploring the issue of justification for such programs and the reasons that majority members may have negative attitudes toward managing diversity and may resent women and minorities. We argue that if the implementation of a diversity program is justified, White men will rate the program and the resulting hiring decisions higher and will resent the minority group less (Folger & Martin, 1986). However, when the implementation of the program is not justified, resentment toward the beneficiaries and negative views of the program will result (Daly, 1995; Greenberg, 1990).

Ninety-five American undergraduate business students participated in a laboratory experiment. All were White men, and 50% had full-time work experience.

The experiment consisted of four written scenarios in which each student was asked to assume the role of a job applicant at a large international company. All students were told that they were competing for the entry-level job with a woman/minority applicant who was a fellow student. After reading the scenarios, all participants were informed that they were not hired because of the implementation of a diversity program recently initiated by the company.

The independent variables consisted of (a) justification for the diversity program (no justification and three arguments for implementing diversity programs: the political/legal argument, the social-responsiveness argument, and the problem-solving argument; Cox & Blake, 1991); (b) race of the job recipient (White female and Black male); and (c) two attitude measures (proportionality and egalitarianism). Egalitarianism represented concern about social equality and need, whereas proportionality focused on equity and economic individualism.

We measured four dependent variables, three of which were adopted from Richard and Kirby’s (1996) Workforce Diversity Scale: resentment toward the job recipient, opinions about the diversity program, and rating of the hiring decision. A fourth scale measured perceived procedural fairness.

Resentment toward the job recipient varied by the recipient’s gender and race. The participants (all White men) experienced less resentment when the recipient was a Black man than when the recipient was a White woman, F(1, 94) = 6.53, p = .01. The participants also had more favorable opinions of the diversity program when the recipient was a Black man, F(1, 94) = 5.75, p = .02. Proportionality was negatively related to opinions about the diversity program, F(8, 94) = 2.39, p = .03.

The participants also rated the hiring decision more favorably when the political/legal argument was used to justify the program, F(3, 94) = 3.55, p = .02. They perceived more procedural fairness when either the problem-solving argument or the political/legal argument was used to justify the selection decisions than when no justification was used, F(3, 94) = 4.41, p = .02. Proportionality was inversely related to perceived fairness of the program, F(8, 94) = 2.21, p = .04.

The findings highlight the importance of justifying diversity programs in order to increase ratings of hiring decisions that result from these programs and to increase general perceptions of fairness. The results also point out differences in perceptions depending on the race and gender of the beneficiary of the program.

REFERENCES


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