Evidence Review Paper: Exploring the Stereotypes of Leaders in the Business World

Leadership in 21st Century

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Introduction to Stereotypes

Stereotypes are always present in society, and often in the business world as well. According to the *Encyclopedia of Applied Psychology*, the definition of stereotypes is as follows; "Stereotypes are cognitive structures containing our knowledge, beliefs, and expectancies about social groups" (Crump, 2004). These beliefs arise from personal experience, social norms, and people's understanding of the world (Crump, 2004). These stereotypes or "pictures in people's head" are prevalent in the business world, especially when looking at leaders of corporations. With the presence of these stereotypes, it makes it nearly impossible for business leaders to make unbiased work decisions. This can hinder a person's opportunities in the work force because of the boss's stereotypical thinking driving their decisions.

Leadership Prototype

When someone asks what a good leader looks like to them, everyone has a different idea in their mind. Stereotypes often drive people's thoughts about who qualifies as a good leader. In *the Journal of Applied Psychology*, four experiments were conducted to investigate whether race is a factor of the business leader prototype. The first two experiments concluded that being Caucasian is considered an attribute of the business leader prototype, because participants who were considered leaders were more likely to be white than non-white. In study one, this occurred regardless of base rates about the organization's racial composition; Study two found that the racial composition of organizational roles in the business industry and the types of racial minority groups in the organization (Rosette, 2008, pg. 758). Rosette discusses the leader prototype and how race is a significant attribute.

These prototypes develop from experiences with leaders. Rosette's (2004) example is if someone does not have experience with a military leader they might define this category of leadership based on preconceived ideas. Some significant progress has been made to try and diversify the work place and break down racial barriers, one example includes Geert Demuijnck's theory of equality in the workplace being a moral obligation that every organization should practice. The issue of racial stereotypes in business comes from one's idea of the leader prototype.

Racial Stereotype: African Americans

Stereotypes can form from many different characteristics, a common stereotype deals with race. One such racial stereotype is African Americans in the workplace. *The Journal of Organizational Behavior* published a study in 2008 testing the relational demography model of workgroup identification: testing the effects of race, race dissimilarity, racial identification, and communication behavior. This study was conducted between African Americans and Caucasians. The participants of the study included 211 undergraduates (98 black and 113 white). The research focused on the workgroup dynamics when diversity was present. One conclusion from this study was that individuals who highly identified with their workgroup—they shared the same race as coworkers and superiors—had correspondingly stronger emotional commitment to the group, therefore were more productive and efficient. The study also points out when racial dissimilarity occurred, there were extensive negative perceptions in the workplace, and this limited the group's effectiveness. This research illustrates that if an employee has a leader of the same race, they are more effective and productive. The study also implies that employees engage and communicate more if they are in an environment where they feel comfortable. Most participants were more comfortable with people who identified as the same race.

Racial Stereotype: Asian American

The stereotype surrounding Asian Americans is also prevalent in the business world. In 2012, The Alliance For Board Diversity (ABD) Census released the percentage of board member in Fortune 500 companies that held board seats based on gender and race. It states that 73.3% of the board members were white males, leaving just 26.7% of the remaining seats for women and minorities. Broken down this leaves 13.4% white women holding board seats, 10.1% minority men holding seats, and just 3.2% of minority women holding board seats (Missing Pieces, 2012). This reinforces that minorities have less opportunity to hold higher positions than the dominant white male leader. Asian Americans are often looked at as inferior to the typical older white male leaders, this ideology is researched in experiments that explore the average American's perception of race and leadership. One such experiment is, "Asian American and workplace discrimination: The interplay between sex of evaluators and the perception of social skills" (Lai, 2013, pg. 311).

Lai's (2013) experiment tested how white males and females perceive Asian Americans versus white job candidate. The research provides background on why Asian Americans were chosen for this study as opposed to other races, "The Asian American population reached about 5 percent of the U.S. population in 2010. Largely due to their high educational attainment and occupational achievement, Asian Americans are often considered to be the 'model minority'" (Lai, 2013, pg. 312). Lai explains that they are typically stereotyped as industrious, hardworking, self-disciplined, good at math and science, and intelligent, but they are also seen as quiet, shy, unpopular, reserved, too traditional, and placing less value on a leisurely life (Lai, 2013, pg. 312). These preconceived ideas of Asian Americans hinder the participant's decision

making during the experiments, this translates into business leaders making biased decisions in the work place based on their preconceived ideas.

With these preconceived stereotypes, Lai conducted this research to prove if the typical stereotype of an Asian Americans was still present in the workplace. Similar to women and other minorities, Asian Americans experience workplace discrimination. Lai found that when the employers were informed of the race before the hiring process, they were more likely to bias and stereotypical thinking when making decisions. This is another reason why it is hard for minorities to hold high positions, the leadership roles are predominately controlled by white males who, just like Lai's (2013) study found racial stereotypes that prohibit them from making an unbiased business decision.

Religious Stereotypes

Stereotypes are not just formed on race, they are also formed on other factors such as religion. One such religion that recently has been facing barriers in the workplace are Muslims of the Islamic religion. Ali Kadi, a doctor of management in organizational leadership, conducted research on the challenges that Muslim Americans face when advancing into leadership positions in the legal field. There were two cases that included 10 Muslim Americans in leadership positions and 10 in non-leadership positions. The results of Kadi's (2014) study showed that discrimination and lack of opportunities, training, mentoring programs, support and guidance, and influential leaders hindered participants' advancement into leadership positions (Kadi, 2014, pg. 34). Kadi attributes these barriers to the negative racial stereotype placed on Muslims after September 11, 2001. This stereotype of all Muslim American being "terrorists" greatly hinders opportunities for well qualified Muslim candidates. When conducting interviews as part of Kadi's research, some common themes arose: barriers to advancement, lack of mentoring

relationships, lack of leadership preparedness, and lack of support aids. With the stereotype that Muslims are dangerous to society, most companies are unwilling to hire Muslims for even entry level positions. This limits the percentage of Muslims with limited opportunity to work their way up the corporate ladder, therefore keeping the stereotypical white male holding high offices.

Gender Stereotypes

Within business, gender stereotyping is also a problem. This happens a lot with women being hindered by a glass ceiling. Organizations have traditionally been managed by men, and with more women entering management positions, professional relationships at work are often strained because of gender stereotypes. In *The Journal of Business Ethics*, a study was conducted to test the effects of sex and organizational status. Some background information was given to the reader, including women's norms,

> "The importance of relationships for women is reflected in such tendencies as (1) women's emphasis on assisting others' goals; (2) the emphasis on establishing the security of intimate relationships prior to consideration of personal achievement; (3) women's tendency to define themselves in relation to others; (4) women's inclination towards self-disclosure and the development of close relationships with others" (Devine, 1990, pg. 84).

This is opposite of men who emphasize work and achievement and have low emotional investment in others. The results of the study stated that the men were not comfortable with women taking over the management positions within the organization. This is another reason as to why women are not given the opportunity to advance in the work place; their male counterparts feel threatened by them advancing up the corporate ladder.

In another study conducted by John Adams, Frederick Lawrence and Sharla Cook analyzed stereotypes of women in the work force. The study was conducted with over 1,700 women who were entering male-dominated skilled labor fields. This study hypothesized that a clear, significant, and quantifiable relationship exists between the perceived existence in the workplace of stereotypic attitudes toward working women and the productivity of women, represented by their socialization into the working environment (Adams,1979, pg .581). This study focused on how the women were socialized into the male-dominated work force when obvious gender stereotypes were present. This proved that there was a strong correlation between the men's stereotypical attitudes towards their female counterparts which decreased productivity of the women because of the socialization techniques used by their male counterparts. Both of these studies show that women are at a disadvantage in the workplace because of their male counterparts. This hinders women in the workplace because of stereotypical thinking and biased decision making based off of these stereotypical thoughts.

Age Stereotypes:

Another stereotype that is common in the business world is the stereotype of a significantly older job applicant. In *The Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, a study was conducted to see if the applicant's age was a factor in the decision making process of the interviewer. The participants in this research included applicants with the age range of 33-66 years old. There was a strong preference for applicants whose age ranged from 42-48 years old. The least likely to be hired were applicants who were 54 years or older. This occurs because of age discrimination which is strongly correlated with the bias against older workers (Richardson & Smith, 2013, pg. 35). This is a stereotype that is common but often not acknowledged as a problem in the business world.

Another study that was conducted that examined the role of applicant age in the selection process was Perry and Bourhis's (1998) study also found the *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*. This research also proved that younger applicants were chosen over older applicants even though both of the applicants were equally qualified. Perry and Bourchis's (1998) study states that bias against older workers is common and a very subtle form of discrimination. This is another stereotype present in the workplace that prohibits a group of people from opportunities because of bias in the hiring process. Leaders need to be made aware of this subtle form of stereotyping so that it can be removed from the hiring process and from the business world all together.

Stereotypes Outside the Business World—In Sports

Stereotypes also exist outside the world of business, such worlds as athletics. Most collegiate and professional sports coaches are comparable to the stereotypical leader: older white males. A study was conducted to test whether sexist beliefs indicated an individual's gender bias when choosing managers or coaches. The researchers of this study explained that they were going to test the "think manager, think male" ideology within intercollegiate athletics therefore reforming the idea to "think coach, think male" (Aicher & Sagas, 2010). The study focused on determining the traits attributed to coaches. The research gives background information explaining, "Similar to management positions, the majority of top positions in intercollegiate athletics are occupied by men; manifesting a masculine gender norm for the position. Women have been limited to just 21.3% of athletic director positions, and 42.4% of women's teams have a woman as head coach" (Aicher& Sagas, 2010).

The experiment's hypothesis stated that traits attributed to successful head coaches will be more consistent with masculine traits as compared to feminine traits. The study

concluded that the intercollegiate sports context has similar research because sports organizations are perceived as more masculine as opposed to feminine. This research shows that women are not expected to be successful head coaches. The researchers also state that intercollegiate athletics is a male dominated profession and therefore gender stereotypes are ingrained into the social fabric surrounding athletics (Aicher& Sagas, 2010). The study's results indicated that coaches were ascribed to higher levels of masculine characteristics compared to feminine characteristics. This reinforces the stereotype that minorities have a glass ceiling and various barriers to becoming leaders because of stereotypes formed by society.

Another study that was conducted to test stereotypes present in the athletic world was an experiment by Melanie Sartore and George Cunningham (2013). This experiment was conducted to examine the influence of socially held stereotypes with the presence of discrimination in intercollegiate athletics (Sartone & Cunningham, 2013, pg. 70). The study was conducted with undergraduate students as the participants. The study tested whether sport related racial stereotypes influence promotability ratings when of applicants differing by race and qualification levels. The research concluded that White raters relied on racial stereotypes when evaluating potential candidates for a head coaching position. This study reinforces the idea that in organizations, whether it is sports related or not there are disproportionate amount of decision makers who are White. These decision makers and basing their decisions off of stereotypes and not taking the most qualified applicant because of these stereotypes. With both this study and Aicher and Saga's study this proves that unbiased decision making is a problem not only in the business world but in the sports world as well

Stereotypes Hinder Decision Making: African Americans

When people have strong ideas and thoughts about stereotypes, it is hard for them to make unbiased decisions. In the *Journal of Business and Psychology*, research was done on applicant race, job status, and racial attitude as predictors of employment discrimination by Lathonia Stewart and Richard Perlow (2001, pg. 1670). The hypotheses being studied was that racially biased people are more likely to hold negative stereotypes about African Americans than less biased people when hiring and evaluating candidates for positions. One hundred and eighty one people participated in this study, eighty eight females and ninety three males; 93% percent were white, 5% percent were black, and 2% had other racial backgrounds (Stewart & Perlow, 2001, pg. 1671). The research was conducted to see if evaluator's attitude toward blacks were predictors of unfair selection decisions.

The study concluded that people with negative attitudes towards African Americans had more confidence in hiring those candidates in lower level positions as opposed to high status jobs which were given to white counterparts whom had also interviewed. The opposite was true for people who had less bias against African Americans. This illustrates that bias and stereotypes affect people in getting hired and also obtaining high leveled positions within organizations (Stewart & Perlow, 2001, pg. 1671). With the presence of stereotyping it makes it impossible to make proper and ethical decisions.

Avoiding Stereotypes/Bias is a Moral Obligation

Knowing that stereotypes and bias are present in the business world is a concerning notion. Non-discrimination in resource management should be a moral obligation according to Geert Demuijnck (2009). He argues that it is a moral obligation for companies to accept their moral responsibility to not discriminate in the workplace. Demuijnck also points out that the principle of non-discrimination is unanimously considered one of the founding principles of

democracy. Under this notion, America, being a democratic nation, should not have discrimination. This translates into the hiring process of a corporation; there are laws in place that ethical managers should follow when recruiting, hiring, promoting, and treating employees. To combat the unethical decision based on stereotypes and bias, Demuijnck suggests that there be regulations and strict punishments. With strict punishments and regulations this will deter people from making unfair and biased decisions in the workplace, making the workplace more ethically sound.

Two professors from Washington University in St. Louis and the University of Virginia agree with Demuijnck's ideas that stereotyping and bias need to be stopped. Michelle Duguid and Melissa Thomas-Hunt's approach to promoting the decrease of stereotyping however is different. Through their research together they concluded that increasing awareness of the prevalence of stereotyping can help motivate individuals to resist natural inclinations to these thoughts. They conducted studies to research people in the workplace were biased. They found correlations between their study and other studies of unconscious bias stating, " --most of us use stereotypes all the time without knowing it" (Duguid & Thomas-Hunt, 2014). After determining that participants were unaware of their decisions that were biased, they tried to bring this to the attention of the participants. After doing this they reevaluated the participants, some of which acknowledged that they had made biased decisions. This proved that some of the participants were unaware that they were making biased decisions but once it was brought to their attention they were made aware of their stereotypical thinking. Through education workplace bias and stereotyping can be eliminated.

Conclusion: Stereotypes and Bias are Detrimental to the Workplace

In conclusion, stereotypes of race, religion, and gender are present in the workplace and are often detrimental to organizations. These stereotypes arise because of the leadership prototype that is formed from society's preconceived notions about successful leaders. Experiments have been conducted to prove that stereotypes and bias still currently exist in society and the workplace. It is an organization's moral obligation to combat this issue of stereotypes and biased within the work place, to make sure that proper and ethical decisions are being made. With the presence of stereotypes and bias, minorities will continue to struggle to climb up the corporate ladder because of the glass ceiling effect. If stereotypes and bias can be removed it allows these minorities in the workplace to have more opportunities and to advance.

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