

Research and Solutions to Common Problems in the Workplace

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Abstract: This paper summarizes four common problems in the workplace through a study of the Rio Tinto workplace: sexual harassment, gender discrimination, racial discrimination, and workplace bullying. These problems not only cause personal physical and psychological distress, but also result in persistent emotional and psychological hostile treatment of employees, taking out negative emotions on people around them, customers or colleagues. This can ultimately lead to the development of disruptive behavior in the workplace, further impacting company effectiveness. In the next part of the article, this paper proposes solutions to the above problems. Specifically, it is not only the individual level that needs to make corresponding efforts to prevent suffering from similar unfair phenomena, but also the state, society and workplace need to make corresponding efforts to improve the workplace environment and further enhance the productivity of companies and the work experience of employees.

Keywords: workplace, sexual harassment, gender discrimination, racial discrimination, workplace bullying

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

After everyone has a job, work takes up a lot of time in life. In this case, whether there is a comfortable working environment is very important for employees. On the one hand, a more comfortable environment and state of mind can make employees have a higher passion for work and improve their work efficiency. On the other hand, for the enterprise, a harmonious workplace relationship will also enable it to produce higher efficiency. But inevitably, in any company in this world, there will always be various workplace problems, such as sexism, bullying, sexual harassment, racial discrimination, etc. Although these problems are prevalent in all companies, few people think about what kind of companies create these problems and how companies can manage their employees to reduce these problems. In addition to these external causes, people who are subjected to bullying or gender discrimination rarely think about how to defend their rights.

1.2. Related Research

1.2.1. Gender Discrimination

Coffeman et.al. experimented to study whether companies discriminate against gender for candidates with the same resume. This paper found that firms were more biased towards men for candidates with the same resume. Also, it found that this is mainly due to the reluctance of firms to hire groups that are perceived in beliefs to be less capable of doing the job. In addition, it summarizes some evidence that can describe gender differences [1]. Bilan et.al. examined whether employee compensation is related to gender and whether it affects the company's revenue. This article found through the study that gender equality is not achieved in companies worldwide. Such a phenomenon is also present in developed countries, but a better breakthrough was achieved in Ukraine. In addition, the article found that gender discrimination occurs mainly among women younger than 35 years old [2]. Kobrynowicz and Branscombe investigated whether victims of sex discrimination can perceive that they have been discriminated against. Also, this article examined whether or not the characteristics of an individual could influence whether or not they were discriminated against. It found that for women, the higher the need for recognition, the less likely they were to feel discrimination. But women were more likely to feel gender discrimination if they suffered from depression [3].

1.2.2. Sexual Harassment

Maypole et.al. found that in the workplace, the main group of people who are sexually harassed are women. Furthermore, this article discusses how groups that receive sexual harassment can defend their rights through reasonable means and extends the field to the social level [4]. Cortina and Areguin examine what sexual harassment is and how it manifests itself in the workplace. This article found that what is commonly thought of as sexual harassment is forcing someone to have sex, but this is not the case; sexual harassment is more of a defiance of the opposite sex and a form of harassment of the other person's self-esteem. The article also found that sexual harassment is prevalent in the workplace and is not limited to women, but is also experienced by men [5]. Hunt et.al. specifically examines the individual and organizational causes of sexual harassment. This article suggests that sexual harassment should be avoided from the perspective of organizational training. This article suggests that sexual harassment should be avoided from the perspective of organizational training, not just from the perspective of individual enhancement or improvement of individual perceptions [6].

1.2.3. Workplace Bullying

Bartlett et.al. examined previous scientific studies and summarized them. This article found that the previous studies did not specify what workplace bullying is. However, workplace bullying does have serious effects on individuals, including negative effects on physical health and personal emotions. The effects on the individual extend to damage to the organization [7]. Rayner examined data from a 1994 survey of primarily part-time students. This article found that more than half of the endured reported experiencing workplace bullying and that there were no gender differences in this phenomenon. In addition, it found that people who are bullied in the workplace are more resistant than perceived [8].

1.2.4. Racial Discrimination

Deitch et.al. examined the issue of racial discrimination in the workplace. This article found that racial discrimination is not an emergent phenomenon, but a daily experience. People who are

discriminated against suffer from pervasive racial discrimination over time. It also found that this discrimination affects the physical health of the discriminated people [9]. Ahmed et.al. examined the multifaceted health effects of racial discrimination in the workplace. This article found that the restriction and marginalization of the population had a significant negative impact on health of this population. The main surface of this is the development of low self-esteem in this population, which is also a sign of mental ill health [10].

1.3. Objective

In response to the various problems faced in the workplace, this paper examines the relevant papers from four aspects: gender discrimination, sexual harassment, workplace bullying, and racial discrimination. In the following analysis, we will use the workplace research report of Rio Tinto Group as an opportunity to analyze each problem in the workplace from four aspects and propose further solutions to these problems. This report will help companies to understand how to improve the environment and thus improve their productivity.

2. Problems

In 2021, Rio Tinto requested an investigation by former Australian Sex Discrimination Commissioner Elizabeth Broderick & Co. The investigation is part of Rio Tinto CEO Jakob Stausholm's efforts to reshape the company's image after the company blew up two 46,000-year-old Aboriginal cave sanctuaries in Western Australia in 2020, drawing criticism from the community. The report is an independent study of 10,000 Rio Tinto employees. The report covers a quarter of Rio Tinto's workforce and spans five years and is 85 pages long. The findings, based on one-on-one interviews, show that nearly 30 percent of women and 7 percent of men said they had been sexually harassed at work. Of those, 21 female workers also reported cases of actual or attempted rape or sexual assault. The study also revealed that nearly half of all employees who were commissioned by Rio Tinto to conduct an external review of workplace culture at the mine said they had been bullied. In addition, one anonymous employee said that he encountered racial discrimination in every corner of this company. Taken together, this report from Rio Tinto's published survey exposes sexism, sexual harassment, bullying, and racial discrimination in Rio Tinto's people management.

2.1. Gender Discrimination

Gender discrimination in the workplace is not only manifested in unequal employment opportunities but also obvious differences in employment treatment, promotion opportunities, and other aspects. Compared with explicit discrimination before employment, the latter is more insidious and more difficult to qualify and regulate. Since enterprises need to pay compensation and insurance costs for female employees who have given birth and adjust their employment arrangements, they also bear more economic expenses. Some enterprises simply do not hire women to avoid such economic expenses. These regulations, which were originally designed to protect female workers, have become a "scare" for companies that do not want to hire women. When selecting employees, companies should consider equality as the first consideration, not the gender of the employee.

2.2. Sexual Harassment

Women are the main victims of sexual harassment in the workplace. Men and supervisors make up the majority of sexual harassment perpetrators. It is clear that many women in the workplace face not only gender oppression but also resource and power oppression when they are sexually harassed. This shows that sexual harassment in the workplace is a concentrated manifestation of unequal gender and

power relations. In addition to quid pro quo sexual harassment by superiors against subordinates, there is also hostile sexual harassment among colleagues that is unfriendly to women. Sexual harassment is a manifestation of gender discrimination and is a result of the operation of gender power relations. Whereas sexism involves the objectification of women, sexual harassment demeans and objectifies women. The harm caused to women by these acts is widespread and profound. The unequal gender power structure allows men to sexually harass women with impunity. This is the fundamental reason why sexual harassment exists.

2.3. Workplace Bullying

In the workplace, an employee is frequently in conflict with someone. But as an employee, he or she instinctively believes that conflict is normal in the workplace. Specifically, it includes abusive management from upper management: managers hurt the bully through a series of behaviors, including sabotage, harassment, bullying, neglect, humiliation, etc., which negatively affects his daily work. Workplace rejection from co-workers: Ostracism or discrimination from co-workers in the workplace, including indifference, social isolation, and avoidance of eye contact. Co-worker rejection causes employees to lose their organizational identity and the value of their presence in the organization is not perceived.

Collective isolation and rejection from subordinates to superiors: Leaders in the workplace belong to relatively strong groups and are also more likely to offend. As a result, subordinates form small groups on their own, venting their dissatisfaction with each other's leadership, and collectively excluding their superiors in their daily work activities, intentionally or unintentionally. This form of bullying is often difficult to resolve and even difficult to detect. Workplace bullying not only hurts self-esteem and affects employees' physical health, leading to a series of complications including headaches and insomnia, but also increases the risk of employees suffering from psychological and mental illness. Meanwhile, for the corporate culture, employees in a workplace bullying environment tend to form a negative corporate culture atmosphere, making employees dissatisfied and complaining mentality towards the management and development of the company, which may lead to slack work, less satisfaction, increased absenteeism, and decreased productivity.

2.4. Racial Discrimination

Racial discrimination does not only exist in society but also occurs in the management of companies. The latest Asian-Australian Leadership Report from research and consulting firm Cultural Intelligence shows that just under 5 percent of Asian Australians succeed in rising to senior management, with only 1.6 percent of executives becoming chief executives. This is due to three main reasons: cultural bias, stereotypes and institutional barriers. In terms of cultural bias, Western leadership styles place a premium on self-promotion and decisive, direct communication. This leads them to often misunderstand people who maintain a silent, humble and respectful attitude, assuming that they lack confidence. In terms of stereotypes, the exemplary image of the leader in the workplace is very 'white' and very masculine, and that is a clear 'salesman' style of leadership. This brings about direct discrimination against other people who do not fit this profile. In terms of institutional barriers, the existing leadership is more inclined to promote people of the same race, which will result in companies not selecting people based solely on their ability. And to a certain extent, it creates racial discrimination.

3. Solution

The workplace problems mentioned above are deeply rooted in the workplace, especially sexism and racial discrimination, which are not only in the workplace but also in society, and have deep cultural

reasons behind them. Sexism and racial discrimination in the workplace are the mappings of these two problems in society. The history of human evolution is a history of industrial evolution. In the thousands of years of human civilization, patriarchal clans have dominated. Therefore the idea of male superiority over females has always existed in society. And racial discrimination is also a legacy of the history of human development. Therefore, it takes time to eradicate the workplace culture that discriminates against women and minorities, which has long been a hardcore problem rooted in the soil of society and culture. If male-dominated workplace power is unchecked and female employees are chronically disadvantaged, then discrimination is the norm and sexual harassment is inevitable.

Therefore, the solution to each problem in the workplace requires a comprehensive approach from all aspects of society.

3.1. National Initiatives

The country needs to learn from the effective legislation and practical experience of other countries around the world. Under the existing legal framework, we need to establish a legislative program that focuses on prevention and remedies to effectively address the existing problems of workplace discrimination and workplace bullying. Urge relevant industries to develop policies and measures for the fundamental prevention of workplace discrimination and workplace bullying. The state should take measures to highlight various policy systems, public education, and public opinion guidance. Severe penalties are imposed on organizations with employment discrimination in legislative provisions.

3.2. The Societal Solution

The situation of individuals is determined by the macro environment, and it is difficult to improve the situation of individuals when the macro environment is not changed. The macro-environment here, besides legal protection, focuses on the division of roles of women in society and whether it is female-friendly or not. Building a female-friendly society is not a one-day process. The key to improving the macro environment is to enhance their social power and voice and thus improve the division of labor in society as a whole. Gender discrimination in society comes not only from external groups but also from within. Many women will think of themselves as weak, insufficiently competitive, and poorly resistant to pressure, etc., and have the idea of backing off and giving up on the workplace. Women need to overcome psychological barriers and not set a fixed framework for themselves.

Likewise, it is important to emphasize cultural diversity in society, where different ethnic cultures are part of the culture. It is important to accept this diversity in an inclusive and friendly form and treat minorities equally.

Some bullying behaviors by superiors towards subordinates are aberrant behaviors such as excessive monitoring of work, loud reprimands and arranging for subordinates to take on personal matters, which are ignored as ordinary work behaviors in the eyes of the general society, but these are very common leadership bullying behaviors. Therefore, society should call for the elimination of bullying to start with these small things, so that employees can wake up and increase their awareness of self-protection.

3.3. The Way at the Company Level

The way at the company level is the main battlefield and the backbone of the company that can eliminate workplace problems. The following suggestions will be made from the company's employment process.

3.3.1. Selection and Recruitment

Ensure that job descriptions and requirements in job advertisements are free of gender bias, and racial bias. Take affirmative action to remove vertical and horizontal barriers based on gender and racial discrimination in the recruitment process. Ensure equal representation of men and women on hiring committees as well as ensuring the presence of ethnic minorities. Ensure that the interview and screening process is gender-sensitive and racially sensitive. Articulate the organization's commitment to gender equality and reflect gender equality in employment contracts without unfair terms for women.

3.3.2. Training and Development

Training and promotion within the company should be fair and equitable, ensuring that women and minorities have equal access to all activities. To ensure equal opportunities, an audit committee could be established to review training and promotions within the company to ensure that men and women have equal access to training and career development opportunities. Specialized institutions can also be established to provide special skills training for women, breaking the traditional skills gap between men and women. Provide women with non-traditional female positions while maintaining the company's normal operations. At the same time, instead of fixing the positions that women hold in defense, they can be rotated periodically so that women can have more job opportunities to expand their skills. In addition, provide training for managers to change their traditional mindset of non-gender-specific job assignments and increase gender sensitivity. Establish a mutual support mechanism where women can learn not only from other women but also from men. At the same time, the company has to make long-term human resource planning in which a human resource/career development plan is made for all employees.

3.3.3. Performance Evaluation

Clear performance criteria are set within the company and do not discriminate against women and minorities. The performance review process is determined by a gender-aware panel, which determines the criteria, content and structure of the review interview. These procedures need to be regularly reviewed by an established person or organization to ensure fairness and integrity.

3.3.4. Promotion System

Make adjustments to the company's current promotion system to provide more opportunities for women and minorities to advance. For example, changing job hierarchies and adding new levels; creating new promotion paths for jobs that do not have room for advancement to ensure horizontal and vertical mobility. In addition, we will provide opportunities for women and minorities in non-traditional management positions to ensure diversity in the company's management positions following the company's actual situation.

3.3.5. Salary

Adjust wage and salary rates so that there is no gender discrimination or racial discrimination, and eliminate situations where equal work is not paid equally. Ensure (1) the same pay for the same value of work (2) the same working conditions/hours for the same value of work (3) equal pay for equal work.

3.3.6. Work Environment

Gender-friendly infrastructure and amenities need to be installed in the company. All machines, equipment and tools in the company should be accessible to all genders. A dedicated organization or department within the company should be set up to focus and work on family crises and stresses for both men and women, such as providing the necessary counseling, flexible working hours, or other support for those who need it. Regular communication meetings are held to allow for interaction and understanding among employees within the company.

3.3.7. Prevent Sexual Harassment

Special regulations on the prevention and control of sexual harassment in the workplace should be established. The regulations should specify the specialized agency for prevention and control of sexual harassment in the workplace and its specific responsibilities, as well as the telephone number for complaints, and the obligations of the company's management to prevent and control sexual harassment in the workplace. The company shall stipulate the procedures for receiving complaints, investigating and collecting evidence, identifying and dealing with sexual harassment, as well as the penalties for sexual harassers. The rules and regulations related to sexual harassment in the workplace shall be made known to all employees in a public manner. Include prevention and control of sexual harassment in the workplace in employee induction training and management training. Without violating employees' privacy, install monitoring equipment in the office legally and without leaving "dead spots" to prevent sexual harassment and to help preserve evidence of sexual harassment. Avoid separate or overly private office spaces by using group or semi-closed offices.

3.3.8. Prevent Workplace Bullying

First, as with sexual harassment prevention, companies must establish appropriate prevention, monitoring and grievance task forces, along with clear penalties for bullies. Second, when selecting a leader within the company, the company needs to seek the evaluation of the person by other staff members within the company to prevent bullying before the staff member assumes the position. Pre-employment training is also needed before the leader takes office to prevent bullying after he or she is promoted. Finally, psychological counseling and placement measures should be done for the bully so that he or she can get out of the psychological barrier and get back to work as soon as possible.

3.3.9. Regulatory Compliance

The company will provide regular training for management so that they are familiar with all current laws and national policies regarding gender equality, workplace bullying, sexual harassment in the workplace, and racial discrimination. Also, the company has a management system in place that requires all staff to comply with and enforce relevant laws and regulations.

3.3.10. Shape a New Workplace Culture

Set up flexible activity arrangements within the company, provide employees with family time and childcare space, and offer other benefits to ease the burden on their families. Share the benefits of streamlining the size of the business by improving the working environment and conditions for employees. Design gender-equitable work models and mechanisms to ensure and encourage equal participation of women. Strive for zero tolerance of gender discrimination and cultural diversity in the workplace and workplace culture, which can also improve productivity. But the potential benefits can only be realized if organizations are intentional about creating a diverse workplace climate.

Companies should also develop a growth plan for the next five years, review the achievement of goals each year, and use diversity as an important indicator of a company's success.

4. Conclusion

In this paper, through the literature review and the study of the workplace research report of Rio Tinto Group, we uncovered the problems of gender discrimination, sexual harassment, workplace bullying and racial discrimination in the workplace. These problems will not only cause personal physical and psychological distress but will also cause persistent emotional and psychological hostile treatment by employees, taking out negative emotions on their surroundings, customers, or colleagues. This will eventually lead to the creation of workplace disruptive behaviors, further affecting the effectiveness of the company. Each workplace problem occurs for different reasons, but there are also commonalities. To solve these workplace problems, society, companies, and individuals need to work together, and the national government needs to enact sound laws. Society should pay attention to these workplace problems and promote the right cultural orientation to build a female-friendly society and emphasize cultural diversity. Companies need to strictly enforce laws and establish reasonable rules and regulations. Eliminate bad workplace culture from the daily processes of company operations and solve workplace problems. Individuals should resolutely defend their rights and bravely fight against workplace discrimination and workplace bullying. This article focuses more on how to prevent workplace discrimination at the company level. There is still a lack of detailed and strict protection for the national society and individual level, especially the law-making and the society. For future research, we need to further focus on how to legislate at the national level to effectively prevent workplace discrimination.

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