Central Michigan University
Master of Science in Administration (MSA) Program

Course Title: MSA 698: Directed Administrative Portfolio

Submitted to: Dr. Richard L. Hayes

Submitted by: Justin Barnaby
123 Some Dr.
Somewhere, MI 12345
Work Phone: 123-123-1234
Home/Cell Phone: 123-123-123
Email: someone@cmich.edu

Course Location: Rowe Hall

Submission Date: June 24, 2018

Research Project Title:

Diversity and Organizational Behavior within Information Technology at Alma College.

CERTIFICATE OF AUTHORSHIP:
I certify that I am the author of this paper and that any assistance I receive in its preparation is fully acknowledged and disclosed in this paper. I have also cited any sources from which I used data, ideas, or works, either quoted directly or paraphrased. I also certify that this paper was prepared by me specifically for this course.

Student’s Signature: ____________________________

Instructor’s Comments:
Diversity and Organizational Behavior within Information Technology at Alma College.

Justin Barnaby

MSA 698

Central Michigan University

Author Note

Justin J. Barnaby, MSA Department, Central Michigan University.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Justin Barnaby, MSA Department, Rowe 222, Central Michigan University, Mt. Pleasant, MI 48859.

Contact: someone@cmich.edu
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Abstract

This paper will explore diversity and organizational behavior in Alma College’s Information Technology Services team as well as the organization as a whole. In order to better understand the effects of diversity on an organization, this paper will also explore different types of diversity, discrimination, defining characteristics of diversity, and potential implications for stakeholders within the campus community. In addition, this paper will explore certain positive and negative aspects of increasing diversity in the workplace.

*Keywords:* organizational behavior, diversity, Alma College, information technology
Executive Summary

Located in the largest city of Gratiot County, Michigan, Alma College is a small liberal arts college affiliated with the Presbyterian Church. Currently, the College enrolls about 1,450 students from 30 states as well as eight countries and is accredited by the Higher Learning Commission. Additionally, Alma College employs over 100 full-time faculty members in 50 academic programs and maintains a student-to-faculty ratio of 12 students for every one faculty member (Alma College, 2018).

A critical component to the success and sustainability of the College is the Information Technology Services department. Alma College’s Information Technology Services department supports core business functions, academic as well as research initiatives, and other components of the campus community. These resources necessitate innovative and efficient approaches to solving technology-related issues, as well as continuous improvement in departmental processes.

As such, a well thought out and properly supported plan to increase diversity can have positive ripple effects throughout the department as well as the campus community. In addition, diversity awareness coupled with avoidance of dangerous stereotyping behaviors can be beneficial to faculty, staff, current and future students, as well as the College’s ability to react to the changing educational landscape.

Diversity

Diversity, or the unique individual characteristics that make people different from one another, can play an important role in organizational behavior and culture. Indeed, “Over the past few decades, academicians, practitioners and organizational researchers have recognized that diversity is a phenomenon that has a wide array of affects within the workplace, and society in general (Friday, Friday, 2003, p. 863). As such, a diverse team in the Information Technology
Services department at Alma College is critical to aligning the department with the College’s mission and values. Furthermore, diversity “can contribute immensely to an organization’s ability to use all of its human capital as a strategic means to gain and maintain a competitive advantage in today’s dynamic, global marketplace (Friday, Friday, 2003, p. 864). Indeed, a dynamical diverse organizational culture is critical in an increasingly competitive environment for attracting or retaining students, faculty, and staff.

Diversity Climate

The extent to which people perceive an organization’s culture including the perception of diversity policies and organizational behaviors is known as diversity climate (Robbins, Judge, 2016). Alma College, and more specifically, the Information Technology Services team need to communicate their intentions to support campus diversity initiatives as well as reducing or eliminating discrimination in the workplace. In order to attract and retain faculty, staff, as well as students, Alma College needs a strong diversity climate (i.e. one that prioritizes diversity as well as supports ways to reduce or eliminate workplace discrimination). The expectations for the new position of Chief Information Officer for Alma College may be a visible step towards a more inclusive campus climate.

A positive diversity climate is one in which Alma College’s Information Technology Services team treats diversity as an asset and finds ways to leverage that climate to develop their employees as well as the campus community. A diverse Information Technology Services department is one that improves decision-making processes, increases team unity, and reduces employee conflict. Employees in positive diversity climates tend to perceive their organization as standing for fair practices, fair treatment, and integration of all employees (Edun, 2015). This type of positive diversity climate would be a model for the rest of the campus community.
Stereotyping

Some organizational behavior barriers may currently exist in the Information Technology Services team at Alma College including stereotyping and stereotype threat. “Stereotyping is judging someone on the basis of our perception of the group to which that person belongs” (Robbins, Judge, 2016, p. 46). Additionally, Edun (2015) states:

Besides allowing people to quickly process new information, stereotypes help to organize past experiences and assist people in making meaningful assessments of individuals and their behavior. Stereotypes not only reflect beliefs about the traits characterizing typical group members but also contain information about other qualities such as social roles, the degree to which members of the group share specific qualities (i.e., within-group sameness or variability), and influence emotional reactions to group members (p. 14).

However, many stereotyping behaviors often lead to prejudice. Prejudice can be either positive or negative, but both forms are preconceived and difficult to change. Recognition, as well as awareness, are critical components to combating perceived stereotypes and any potentially negative behaviors. In order to reap the benefits of a more diverse team, Alma College’s Information Technology Services department first needs to acknowledge the benefits of diversity in order to traverse the diversity continuum (Fig. 1).
Stereotype Threat

Coupled with traditional stereotype and prejudice behaviors is stereotype threat. Stereotype threat is the concern certain employees have that they are being treated or evaluated through the lens of a negative stereotype of a group that they are perceived to belong (Robbins, Judge, 2016). This type of behavior often causes those individuals to overcompensate for the behavior typically associated with a particular group. For example, women have often been stereotyped as weak, emotional, as well as too sensitive and thus, are often underrepresented in the leadership roles in the information technology (IT) workplace. Indeed, women may not even apply to information technology positions as “Studies have shown that the underrepresentation of women in IT is a worldwide phenomenon as manifested in enrollment in IT related disciplines and the number of women employed in the IT workforce” (Trauth, Quesenberry, Huang, 2008, p. 3). Currently, there is only one (non-leadership) role occupied by a female in the Information Technology Services team at Alma College which equals .07% of the department workforce.

Often times people in an organization such as Alma College may, unconsciously or not, exaggerate the stereotype associated with their perceived group. Some employees preemptively
stereotype themselves in an attempt to manage a perceived stereotype threat. For example, an older employee may make comments about being old and out of touch with newer technology, or they may use statements such as “back in my time” or “when I was your age”. Importantly, it is not necessary to actually be stereotyped by other people to experience stereotype threat nor must people believe the stereotype about their group or themselves is true. Rather, people need only worry that they may be stereotyped for stereotype threat effects to emerge (Kalokerinos, von Hippel, Zacher, 2014).

Alma College’s Information Technology Services team can successfully reduce stereotype threat by implementing some of the following practices: training programs for stereotype behaviors or how they may be perpetuated, reducing differential and preferential treatment of employees through more objective assessments or evaluations, explicitly banning stereotype practices or messages, confronting micro-aggressions against minority groups when they occur, as well as adopting transparent practices that signal the value of all employees (Robbins, Judge, 2016).

Diversity Positives

An organization that is aware of and avoids dangerous stereotyping behaviors can reap many positive rewards such as increased creativity as well as drive innovation. Additional positive effects may include an increased visibility of surface-level diversity traits which may lead to a positive perception of the College’s diversity climate. This positive perception may help the Information Technology Services team attract and retain higher quality employees. Additionally, the campus community may also benefit by attracting students from a more diverse pool of applicants.

Some of the other benefits of diversity may include increased employee creativity, better
social/culture awareness; a reduction in absenteeism as well as turnover, increased job
satisfaction or performance, enhanced communication, improvement in employee motivation,
and even a reduction in stress-related health issues. All important factors considering since
2014, seven of the 14 members (50%) of Alma College’s Information Technology Services team
have left the department. Successful organizations recognize the benefits of a diverse workplace
environment in retaining quality staff members.

Conversely, a non-diverse climate can increase the chances of a creatively stagnant
environment, a hostile culture, or low job satisfaction among the College’s faculty or staff.
However, if the Alma College Information Technology Services team embraces a culture of
diversity it increases its ability to be successful and play a positive role in the campus
community. Indeed, diversity may increase the ability of the team to look at a problem or set of
problems from a variety of perspectives and potentially provide more well-rounded solutions.
Obviously, this can have a positive effect in the workplace when it comes to problem-solving in
the ever-changing information technology landscape.

**Diversity Negatives**

In addition to the positive impacts, increasing diversity may have adverse effects on the
workplace including miscommunication, the creation of barriers, and dysfunctional adaptation
behaviors (Martin, 2014). Certainly, employees from different cultures may have different ideas
for solving information technology problems and although this may help a team creatively solve
problems, it may also introduce interpersonal issues. Martin (2014) also states that the impacts
of cultural diversity in the workplace may create additional negative effects that include
dysfunctional interactions, lost productivity, and difficulty in achieving harmony within a group
setting.
One negative side effect of diversity is the potential for interpersonal conflicts. For example, people from different cultures may have different beliefs, norms, and opinions on what is acceptable workplace behavior or how to achieve campus initiatives. This may present problems for the Information Technology Services team in areas involving group work that requires interacting with people from different countries. Thus, it is extremely important for members of Alma College’s Information Technology Services team to recognize cultural differences and to take appropriate steps to mitigate any potential interpersonal issues.

**Organizational Support**

The effects and success of cultural diversity initiatives in the workplace largely depend upon how well they are being supported by the College itself and managed by the departmental leaders. Indeed, “Many organizations have implemented various diversity initiatives as part of their corporate strategy, but most have not used a planned change approach to strategically align their initiatives with their long-term objectives and strategic positioning” (Friday, Friday, 2003, p. 864). A prime example of one of Alma College’s diversity investments is the creation of the cross-departmental Chief Information Officer position charged with being “a trustworthy and ethical collaborator, a strong advocate for diversity and inclusion, and an active and engaged member of the community” (Alma College, 2018). This new position is strategically important to the success of any future diversity initiatives.

With proper training, support, and planning, the Information Technology Services team at Alma College can enhance the positive and reduce the negative effects of cultural diversity in the workplace. Diversity is an important concept and plays an important role in organizational behavior. As such, diversity can help shape individual preferences for rewards, leadership behaviors, emotional intelligence, more effective communication styles, negotiation styles,
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Diversity climate, and many other aspects of behavior in the campus environment. Unfortunately, an in diversity may sometimes leads to an increase in discriminatory practices as well (Robbins, Judge, 2016).

**Discrimination**

Awareness of any potential workplace discrimination issues as a result of diversity initiatives is critical for the Chief Information Officer and other leaders of the Information Technology Services team, including Alma College’s President’s cabinet. As stated above, diversity in an organization can lead to negative behaviors such as discrimination. Robbins and Judge (2016) define discrimination as “Noting of a difference between things; often we refer to unfair discrimination, which means making judgments about individuals based on stereotypes regarding their demographic group” (p.667). Some of these behaviors include reduced employee productivity, increased conflict between team members, increased turnover, and even an increase in employee risk-taking behaviors (Robbins, Judge, 2016).

Often times many discrimination behaviors in the workplace are against state and federal laws. Indeed, laws such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibit formal discrimination such as refusing to hire someone because of their race or gender. State and federal laws have helped mitigate certain forms of discrimination, however, in many other cases, the type of negative behavior is more subtle and discreet. These types of interpersonal discrimination behaviors are harder to identify and regulate (Hebl, Ruggs, Martinez, Trump-Steele, Nittouer, 2015). Figure 2 below lists some other forms of workplace discrimination.
As shown in Figure 2 above, there can be many different types of discrimination in an organization. These negative organizational behaviors may already exist in the Information Technology Services workplace and present barriers to creating a positive diversity climate. Additionally, discrimination can take multiple forms that do not necessarily fit into neat definitions or categories. Some of the additional forms of discrimination not listed above would include bullying and emotional abuse. In addition, the frequency and intensity of the different types of discrimination behaviors may vary.

**Conclusion**

Diversity, or the unique individual characteristics that make people different from one another, can play an important role in organizational behavior and the workplace environment. As previously stated, the overall level of diversity in an organization can affect the workplace in numerous positive and negative ways. Organizations that recognize the uniqueness and diversity of individuals can create a workplace environment that attracts, as well as retains, higher quality
employees. Additionally, employees of more diverse organizations tend to perceive their organization’s culture as fair and welcoming of different viewpoints or opinions.

Furthermore, recognizing and reducing potentially dangerous stereotype behavior can help the Information Technology Services team avoid costly or damaging discrimination issues that are typically prohibited by law. Alma College and its Information Technology Services department can implement some of the following processes for reducing negative behaviors such as increasing awareness of stereotypes or how they may be perpetuated, reducing differential and preferential treatment of employees through more objective assessments or evaluations, banning stereotyped practices and messages, confronting micro-aggressions against minority groups when they occur, and increasing and supporting diversity within their organizational structure.

Creating a more diverse Information Technology Services team involves more than just hiring people of different ages or from different countries; increasing diversity involves continuous organizational support from the entire campus community. Successful organizations recognize the benefits of diversity and implement strategies designed to foster a positive diversity climate. Additionally, a campus environment free from the obstacles of negative stereotype behaviors increase the overall success and sustainability of the College.
REFERENCES


