Workplace Equity & Mental Models
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Issues including sexual harassment, pay equity, or other forms of discrimination can damage your organization's reputation, recruiting and retention efforts, and ultimately your bottom line. Allegations of bias and / or sexual harassment companies including Fox News, Uber, Facebook, to name a few are currently being reported and their stories should be a wake up call for all U.S. companies.

Allegations of sexual harassment at Fox News have resulted in the departure of at least two senior executives and popular news anchor, Bill O'Reilly. Fox and Bill O'Reilly have reportedly paid more than $13M dollars over the years to settle various sexual harassment charges.

Uber has allegedly ignored reports of sexual harassment and routinely allowed disparate treatment of female employees. There are many critics (see Guardian, Sam Levin, 2/21/17) that have referred to Uber as "flouting regulations and ignoring ethical and legal standards in the name of "disruption". Uber has also been criticized for misogynistic ads and their refusal to disclose data regarding the diversity of its workforce.

Facebook has faced multiple claims of gender and racial bias related to pay and promotions. Last year, a Facebook engineer gathered data that revealed code written by women was rejected 35% more often than code written by their male colleagues.

These cases and others have occurred at companies that are high performers and disruptors in their respective industries. Even if some (or all) of the allegations against are not true, it is easy to see how harassment, gender pay disparity, etc. might occur if you examine the culture of these organizations. Does the organizational culture of these companies lead to arrogance ("we are smarter than everyone else") and "technical" bias ("men are better suited for tech jobs than women")? Is it possible that the culture of these companies is based in part on their "unconscious" assumptions and perceptions (mental models)?

All organizations should take steps to eliminate sexual harassment and bias? The first step is to identify the mental models that exist in your organization and how they affect your organizational culture. Second, make sure you are taking any and all appropriate actions to identify, investigate, and eliminate bias and sexual harassment. Finally, provide mandatory training programs coupled with measures of success. Finally, there must be consequences for employees who violate the law or company rules.

Sexual harassment and gender bias will eventually have a detrimental impact on your "bottom line" as well as you reputation. It is critical to understand how mental models impacts organizational culture when you attempt to eliminate sexual harassment and bias in your workplace.

Questions?
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