Effects of Policy Change on Nonstigmatized Employees

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Although advocating for more supportive policies to protect lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgendered (LGBT) employees is indeed a worthwhile goal, King and Cortina (2010) did not emphasize the potential effects of policy changes on nonstigmatized employees. Beyond impacting the work experiences of LGBT employees, it is reasonable to assume that a change in policy will also affect the emotional well-being and behaviors of nonstigmatized employees. Although overlooked by King and Cortina, the well-being of nonstigmatized employees should not be dismissed by organizations and industrial–organizational (I–O) psychologists. Instead, efforts should be undertaken to consider the reactions of nonstigmatized employees to such a policy change and incorporate those insights, along with those designed to protect LGBT workers, into a more strategic and hopefully effective policy. In order to properly administer an effective policy change, organizations will need to consider the effects on nonstigmatized employees if changes in stereotypes and prejudice are ever to be realized.

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Changes in Policy Versus Internalized Attitudes

As discussed by King and Cortina, a majority of U.S. residents are proponents of equal employment rights but still consider same sex relationships to be wrong. These findings suggest that public policy is amenable to change without a widespread reduction in prejudice to LGBT employees. Prejudicial attitudes are shaped by powerful moral and political forces that are resistant to change and seek expression, if not overtly, then certainly through more implicit means (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995). A change in policy is likely to reduce the number of overt expressions of discrimination, but this does not mean there is a change in internalized negative attitudes. The expressions of prejudice are likely to be implicit forms of discrimination when overt forms are socially reprehensible (Crandall, Eshleman, & O'Brien, 2002). Subtle or implicit forms of discrimination are the product of changes in socially acceptable behavior without the change in internalized attitudes (Crandell et al., 2002; Greenwald & Banaji, 1995). These subtle forms can become prevalent because they are easily rationalized to appear socially acceptable (Gaertner, Dovidio, Anastasio, Bachman, & Rust, 1993). Although policy change will likely decrease overt forms of discrimination, an organization that encompasses a nondiscrimination policy toward LGBT employees should put forth every effort to limit implicit forms of discrimination and help facilitate the internalization of an egalitarian working environment.

Effects on Nonstigmatized Employees

A shift from overt discrimination to subtle discrimination is only one expected behavioral change in nonstigmatized employees because of the implementation of protective LGBT policies. Another change might be less satisfaction or productivity in one's job in response to perceptions that the once stigmatized employees are now being preferentially treated. This perception, stemming from relative deprivation concerns (Crosby, 1976), may not only explain hostile and resentful attitudes toward LGBT employees but may also account for motivations to undermine the organization or to expend less effort in the performance of one's duties. Similarly, any increases in benefits and rights of LGBT employees might result in high prejudiced employees becoming dissatisfied with different characteristics of their own jobs (e.g., satisfaction with promotional opportunities; James, Brief, Dietz, & Cohen, 2001). In addition, an influx of LGBT individuals may also result in the sexual orientation of all employees being questioned by prejudiced organizational members. Because of this suspicion and possible subtle discrimination toward new LGBT employees, some heterosexual employees may be concerned that their sexual orientation is now in question by other organizational members and vulnerable to the consequences of the sexual stigma. More specifically, when an individual encounters an LGBT employee openly or their own sexual orientation is questioned by others, he or she might be motivated to engage in self-presentation strategies to prove their heterosexuality (Herek, 2009). These changes in intergroup interactions will also include employees who chose avoidance because of fears of appearing prejudiced (Plant, 2004).

Facilitating Change in Internalized Attitudes

To avoid the negative effects of policy change on nonstigmatized employees and the subtle forms of discrimination, attention should be given to the adaptation process of nonstigmatized employees. The process of adapting to social norms or policy includes an initial state of hesitancy, followed by acts of suppression that are driven by external motives to conform. Finally, the individual will internalize the change in social norms and develop a greater sense of identity (Crandall et al., 2002). Ultimately, an organization should strive to build a greater sense of identity and internalization.

Although suppression can lead to the inhibition of negative attitudes and thoughts, at least in the short term (Macrae, Bodenhausen, Milne, & Jetten, 1994), suppression is not the most effective strategy of adaptation. Suppression has paradoxical effects in that the extensive conscious action to suppress thoughts by the perceiver may actually lead to greater activation of the unwanted thoughts (regarded as a boomerang effect, Macrae et al., 1994) and a preoccupation or obsession with the negative stereotypes (Wegner, Schneider, Carter III, & White, 1987). Because of these concerns, several strategies to help facilitate internalization or a common in-group identity have been developed and thus should be considered by future researchers examining policy change.

Encouraging Empathy

Facilitating empathy among employees in intergroup relations is one possible mechanism to lead to a common in-group identity (Stephan & Finlay, 2003), which in turn could reduce subtle forms of discrimination and change internalized attitudes (Gaertner et al., 1993). In addition, fostering greater empathy is associated with more positive attitudes toward homosexuals (Johnson, Brems, & Alfor-Keating, 1997). With moderate success, training exercises have been used to develop empathy (Stephan & Finlay, 2003). The increase in empathy by nonstigmatized individuals is associated with an increase in compassion-related emotions, feelings of injustice, and negative emotions evoked by the suffering of the

stigmatized individual (Davis, 1994). Cognitive dissonance may also arise when empathy is developed in prejudiced people. The uncomfortable dilemma that results from current empathetic concerns and prior negative attitudes might lead to attitude change by the nonstigmatized individual (Rokeach, 2003).

Although empathy can have positive effects on the internalization of egalitarian views, those designing strategies to foster greater empathy in the workplace should be aware that negative side effects could also occur. Greater identification could lead to a fear that the suffering experienced will extend to the nonstigmatized individuals. In other words, a highly empathetic heterosexual employee may also experience the aggravations that LGBT employees might face (i.e., a felt stigma; Herek, 2009). In sum, empathy facilitation can lead to the internalization of egalitarian views and the reduction of subtle forms of discrimination. However, employers should be aware of the potential side effects that can occur if the development of empathy is not properly facilitated.

Increasing Contact Between Straight and LGBT Employees

Similar to efforts to increase empathy and develop a common in-group identity, Allport (1954) and Pettigrew (1998) suggest that an increase in contact with stigmatized individuals will help facilitate change in internalized attitudes. The contact model originally required four criteria for positive results: (a) equal-status members, (b) common goals, (c) intergroup cooperation, and (d) the support of legitimate authority (Allport, 1954). An additional criterion was later added in which the possibility of becoming friends with the outgroup member must exist (Pettigrew, 1998). When relevant to do so, findings have also shown that a common in-group identity can be achieved through such things as common uniforms as well as by establishing superordinate goals (Dovidio, Gaertner, Isen, & Lowrance, 1995).

Although the recategorization of groups can lead to the decrease in prejudice because of newly shared identity, there is some concern for negative effects. If there are several smaller groups (e.g., departments or teams) nested within a larger group (e.g., an organization), each smaller group will likely view itself as prototypical (Wenzel, Mummendey, Weber, & Waldzus, 2003). Although such a fragmentation might act to undermine employee cohesion, as long as group differentiation occurs without regard to one's social identity (e.g., sexual or other stigmatized identity), one's role and social identity within the organization will be "cross-cutting" within the organizational structure (Brewer, von Hippel, & Gooden, 1999). Previous investigations attest to the effectiveness of cross-cutting category memberships as a means to reduce prejudice (Hewstone, Islam, & Judd, 1993).

In sum, there is no superior method to help facilitate the adaptation process to changes in policy and social norms. Each model of in-group identification and internalization can potentially lead to either internalization or increases in prejudice. Without a proper model to help facilitate changes in internalized attitudes, the beneficial effects of policy change will be limited. In fact, without considering the effects of policy change on nonstigmatized employees and attempting to facilitate the change in internalized negative attitudes, we doubt whether policy change will achieve the objective of an egalitarian work environment. To develop a more egalitarian work environment and limit both implicit forms of discrimination and the suppression of negative attitudes, managers should consider the facilitation of empathy and in-group identity by means of superordinate goals (Dovidio et al., 1995), "cross-cutting" (Hewstone et al., 1993), contact between stigmatized and nonstigmatized employees (Pettigrew, 1998), and cooperative learning techniques (Stephan & Finlay, 2003).

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