ADVANCING OTHERNESS IN MANAGEMENT: WHY WE NEED A POSITIVE MINORITY MANAGER STEREOTYPE

Warsame Osmar

Abstract

In Western companies, a "good manager" is thought of as "white and male." Unlike the improvement in the issue of female gender and leadership roles, racial stereotyping of minority groups in management as a barrier to moving up the leadership ladder continues, originating in the management theories and models constructed predominantly from a white male's perspective. This article seeks to disrupt the uncritical "think manager - think male - *think white*" hypothesis by focusing on the deconstruction of a "negative minority manager" stereotype. Using a literature review, this paper explores how the visible 'otherness' experienced by middle-management minorities and the lack of mentors mirroring their personal success are a barrier to their upward mobility into senior executive positions. The author finds: 1) the representativeness bias that focuses on negative stereotyping of (non-white) managers leads to an adverse impact on this group's career advancement opportunities, and 2) those who do not find themselves reflected in the stereotype of a "good manager" rarely develop management skills and may be diverted from pursuing managerial careers. After a discussion of the results obtained from the literature review, suggestions on how improvements can be made to advance racial equality in management are provided.

Key words: Minority manager, management, stereotype, white manager, otherness

JEL Code: M5, J2, J7

Introduction

Ongoing demographic trends and movements in Western multi-ethnic societies, which have observed a peak in mobility (Morrison & Von Glinow, 1990), accord with the common observation that the face of management has changed over the last century. Indeed, after decades of diversity initiatives and inclusion programs, there is a consensus of opinion among scholars that while there is an underrepresentation of minorities and women in leadership positions (Wilson, 2016), positions like that of a top manager, which have typically been held by white males - a group whose net growth is actually decreasing (Jackson & Alvarez, 1992) -

will necessarily have to be filled by groups who have historically not held these positions: minorities and women.

The vertical mobility of racial or ethnic minorities in managerial jobs has attracted a noticeable degree of attention in recent years. More specifically, research on earning differentials indicates that the glass ceiling effect cannot be explained by an employee's job-relevant characteristics and is gender specific, while racial inequalities (among male workers) seem to follow a different pattern (Cotter, Hermsen, Ovadia, & Vanneman, 2001).

The notion of 'model minority' stereotyping in the US, for example, which views Asian-Americans as "good role models" - passive, well-behaved, law-abiding, and hard working - still thrives (Sakamoto, Goyette, & Kim, 2009). However, even though the stereotypes about this group tend to be more positive on the surface, there are still some negative consequences, such as the categorization that Asian-American males lack social and interpersonal skills that make them seem inadequate for leadership and managerial functions.

As with Asian-Americans, and because of the consistent racial penalties and cumulative disadvantages in employment, members of the black race, especially men, have embraced the entertainment and sport industries as arenas where they can be successful, presumably because they believe these are fields in which they can reach the top of the ladder. However, in England, where football (soccer) remains the dominant national sport, football management is still overwhelmingly white. In fact, at the top of football's hierarchy, the number of black and minority ethnic (BME) managers in English professional association football, for example, has remain unchanged for decades: there are on average between two and four managers (out of a possible ninety-two), yet black players regularly make up more than a quarter of professional club squads. The upward mobility of people of the black race to top management has stalled, meaning that even in an area with a significantly large proportion of black employees, black managers are still a rare sight.

Currently, leadership at the highest levels has remained largely a male prerogative. However, while the dominant managerial model is male, why does executive recruiting still assert that black men do not demonstrate talent or resourcefulness, and are best as sports-persons and not executives? Why has executive recruiting in today's Western societies impeded Asians from ascending to executive leadership positions? Why are woman of color more underrepresented than white women in leadership roles?

While it is acknowledged that many societies tend to transfer observations of unfamiliar phenomena onto their mental map of what is already known when confronted with the unknown (Joubin, 2019), does representativeness bias explain why Western society is not yet ready to

endorse *stereotypes* painting blacks, Asians and other (non-white) races into the 'ideal manager' stereotype? And why is 'being male and white' still a central attribute of the ideal leader prototype?

In order to answer these questions, I will review the literature that examines societal stereotypes, specifically the development of ethnic/racial stereotypes and their resistance to change, along with examining their implications for leadership aspirations. In doing so, the following point is made: a positive stereotype of a "good manager" that yields to representativeness bias may disappear or at least loosen its power to buttress prejudice when a non-conforming, (positive) reverse stereotype of a non-white, minority manager can be created. After a discussion of the results, suggestions on how to construct a referentially positive minority manager stereotype will be provided.

1   Methodology

The literature review focused on one of the potential causes of the direct impact of (negative) stereotyping on stigmatized minority employees' little or no chance for upward mobility. Using critical race theory (CRT) - a source of theoretical and practical knowledge that shows the relationship among race, racism, and power in disadvantage of the marginalized racial groups in Western societies - as a lens, I first grouped English-language articles and books published from 1969 to May 2019 by diversity management practitioners and race scholars, according to my research question on the notion of "cultural behavior" in the West that stereotypes ethnic minority groups in management, both positively and negatively. Editorials as opinion pieces, invited reactions, and reviews as responses to someone else's work were excluded as they were not original, qualitative, or quantitative researches.

Following keyword phrases were used: "Race and ethnicity in management", "management of otherness", "equal opportunities and diversity", "Employability in upper management", "gender and managerial stereotypes", "inequality related to the glass walls and glass ceilings", "multiracial organization", "minority managers", "profile of managers", "good manager", "white manager", and "leadership and racial stereotypes". Expressions that refer to diversity management, including descriptors such as race, white, black, or color with different spellings (e.g., "colour, color"), were chosen because they are often used in the literature to represent areas important to CRT. Databases such as Web of Science, Science Direct, Scopus, or Google scholar were used along with articles and books that interrogate

managerial stereotype in the Western world, with preference to leadership theories of North American origin or other Western-perspective countries.

Literature was classified into three groups based on the research question. The first group considered literature on gender and race/ethnicity minority in senior management. The research review noted that empirical literature on the link between gender equality and glass ceilings effects is rather disproportionately abundant than race equality. The second group used publications on gender, race, ethnicity, and networks. The third group deliberated on the ideals of the 'good manager' that are constructed around scholarships devoted to analyzing problems related to race and ethnic origin of middle- and upper-level executives.

2   Managerial, leadership, and racial stereotypes

The word *stereotype*, literally meaning 'solid-kind' has long had at least two connotations: rigidity, and duplication or sameness. Applied to racial and ethnic groups, a stereotype refers to a generalized mental picture or set of beliefs about certain social groups. Stereotyping occurs in workplace relationships (but is not limited thereto) when individuals attribute assumed characteristics to a person based on the former's past experiences to justify fixed and inflexible notions about a particular grouping (Finch, Jones, & Litterer, 1976). By questioning the *stereotype* of a "good manager" in this paper, I seek to disrupt the uncritical "think manager - think white" hypothesis, as this manager prototype - as known in the Western world - may imply that a certain level of personal resource is assumed (because of one's race) rather than being proven individually. Therefore, in order to understand what stereotypical characteristics people associate with the idea of 'good manager' and why race and ethnicity play an important role in executive recruiting, we take a closer look at how managerial stereotypes are adopted and why 'being *white*' is a central attribute of the ideal leader prototype, a filter racial minority groups encounter when they attempt to ascend to leadership positions. My observations as a student, researcher, and person of color living in Germany - a predominantly white country - show that people of the white race do not talk about being white or at least ignore the societal white privilege, though management, especially high management, requires recognition of the obvious existence of racial privilege. The high representation of whites at top management, which reinforces the status quo of whites as the "preferred" race creates a number of challenges for minority managers. Thus, representativeness bias that goes against minority members seeking executive positions may stem, at least in part, from the incongruity between managerial stereotypes (i.e., what makes a good manager) and racial minority members of middle

management. Tomkiewicz et al. (2001) noted that African-American middle managers think '*white*' when asked to describe a 'manager.' Furthermore, they also revealed that whites, when compared to blacks, are rated by white managers as having better managerial attributes. A recognition-based approach would also suggest that perceivers are not inclined to make positive attributions about black leaders' abilities because they are usually stereotyped negatively in terms of attributes, such as competence, that are associated with leaders (Devine, 1989).

Therefore, this paper assumes that racial minority managers' upward mobility toward a very small number of available top managerial positions stagnates because of the way ethnic and racial minorities are viewed in Western society.

3   Minority Managers' lack of mentors and networks

Mentoring usually involves a manager working closely with someone from a lower hierarchical level and out of a direct line-management relationship, to help them understand their organization and develop a career toward more senior roles. However, Lancaster (1997) ascribed the complexity in gaining access to mentoring relationships for people of color to white males occupying the "predominant mentoring class." Therefore, gaining access to mentors of the same race may be difficult for people of color because of their low numbers at higher levels in organizations. Besides internal structural barriers (e.g., lack of mentoring), the career advancement of minority managers relates strongly to the configuration of their networks; in terms of work relations, race is the strongest predictor of who will be included in their network. Ibarra (1995) found that relative to whites, minority managers in the US had fewer intimate network connections and viewed them as less valuable for career benefits. More alarming is the fact that undergraduate woman and minorities, who do not see themselves as fitting the stereotype of a 'good manager' may not develop management skills and may be diverted from pursuing managerial careers (Powell, Butterfield, & Parent, 2002). A reason for this lack of interest in taking real charge of career growth in managerial roles may be - at least in part and as described above - the discrepancy that mostly arises between leader stereotypes that are commonly accepted in Western society (e.g., white male) and racial and ethnic group members. Consequently, members of the dominant (white) group are more likely than those from the minority group to develop the self-belief, self-confidence, and self-efficacy necessary for their career growth.

4   Discussion

Undeniably, instances when minority managers gain tenure and reach the top of major international corporations should be applauded. It can be argued that such initial successes among minority managers within a corporate structure can ameliorate the levels of discrimination and create pathways that facilitate future promotions. Working toward a stereotype-free zone may seem a difficult goal to attain, but the way forward to organizational inclusion is through celebrating the achievements of those who have succeeded, either by overcoming structural barriers or by developing the necessary confidence to dream of possible success in climbing the corporate ladder. Barriers to attaining leadership positions, as perceived by members of ethnic minority groups, could cause minority managers to psychologically disengage and devalue success in these areas (Schmader, Major, & Gramzow, 2001). While it is clear that the seemingly negative stereotypes attributed to (non-white) minority managers, who seek acceptance at par with their white peers, result in difficulties for this group in ascending the leadership hierarchy, only a few researchers have focused on the implications of a 'think manager – think white' hypothesis in managerial leadership. However, studies show that women and racial and ethnic minorities still face lower chances of promotion (Reid, Reid, Kerr, & Miller, 2003), along with experiencing far greater difficulties in accessing mentorship than their white counterparts. In my attempt to try and advance otherness in management, this article proposes that ethnic minority leaders' upward mobility through the management pipeline can serve as anti-stereotypical examples that reduce implicit prejudice toward minorities in the workplace.

Norm settings and role expectations about leaders in the Western world favor the description of 'good managers' as elite individuals, and, disproportionally as white men - generally from prestige schools and universities - who tend to get hired and promoted by people with similar social (and racial) backgrounds in organizations. Therefore, in an attempt to deconstruct the 'negative minority manager' stereotype, the minority manager stereotype viewed in this paper may possess traits such as (but not limited to) autonomy (he or she should stand on his/her own feet) while advocating both intra and interracial collegial and mentorship approaches, dynamism, good communications skills in the contexts of intra- and interracial networks, or sensitivity to the issues of otherness - in particular, to issues of race, culture, gender, and ethnicity. I hope that this paper helps the reader understand the power of both positive and negative stereotypical representation of marginalized (racial) minority groups who experience a more restricted career advancement than their white counterparts.

5   Recommendations

5.1   For managers

My findings suggest that minority manager's upward progress to executive positions is hindered or slowed by the commonly accepted stereotype of a "good manager" - *white* and male. This stereotype discourages people of color in Western societies to apply for such positions, and also results in management hiring those who have difficulties accepting a non-white manager in higher managerial positions. Blatant employment discrimination against minority managers is not a thing of the past, and recognition and discussion of representativeness bias should be a part of diversity training. Therefore, I suggest that executives in charge of hiring be made aware of the extent to which the notion 'think manager – think *white*' is still present in people's minds; in other words, the tendency to assume managers to be "white" just because the vast majority of them already are. Second, if managers, and especially executives in the upper echelons of companies, wish to fortify minority success in corporate management, they need to ensure that minority members of staff in management positions are appropriately prepared in terms of training and work-related experience for such executive roles. It is also important for managers to be aware of whether their minority managers are thriving, making positive organizational contributions, and developing the commitment appropriate to an executive position, which will equip them to be efficient and capable successors to the current over-represented group of white males in top management.

5.2   For organizations/companies

While the performance of minority managers may be affected by a stereotype threat, a psychological reaction of employees is triggered by worry and concern that others may doubt their abilities due to unfair stereotypes (Daft, Kendrick, and Vershinina, 2008). Therefore, organizations need to change their fit to move away from the unconscious (or conscious) pro-white male bias. Because of stereotype threat – a mechanism that functions like a self-fulfilling prophecy and can drastically impair the career paths of groups that are stigmatized by it – I recommend that appropriate measures be taken at all levels in organizational ranks to acknowledge the existence of these stereotypes, to emphasize positive minority stereotypes, and de-emphasize negative stereotypes, and that detailed and unambiguous guidelines for hiring, training, and promotion be adopted.

Conclusions

It is evident that managing racial and ethnic diversity within the workplace is a challenging task, especially when it comes to acquiring and retaining high-potential managers of all racial and ethnic backgrounds. To achieve such a goal, it is important that we rethink how we portray and view a "model manager." Major issues ethnic minorities confront are discrimination, fewer available opportunities for career advancement, a lack of role models, and networks. The main aim of my paper was to provide an overview of the research into the way stereotypes, predominantly racial stereotypes, become embedded in individuals' mindsets that see managers and the white race as somehow intertwined. Another aim was to conduct a comprehensive analysis of research findings into stereotypes and attempt to show the importance of disconnecting the (unconsciously) activated image of a "good manager" as being presumably white (and male). I have also provided practical recommendations for both managers and companies (*see above*) that may help advance racial equality in management. Furthermore, I hope that this paper will inspire other researchers to explore the power of stereotypes and the damage they can do when their effects are ignored.

Acknowledgment

References

Cotter, D. A., Hermsen, J. M., Ovadia, S., & Vanneman, R. (2001). The glass ceiling effect. *Social Forces, 80*(2), 655-681.

Daft, R., Kendrick, M., & Vershinina, N. (2010). *Management: International Edition*. Boston, MA, US: Cengage Learning.

Devine, P. G. (1989). Stereotypes and prejudice: Their automatic and controlled components. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 56*(1), 5.

Finch, F. E., Jones, H. R., & Litterer, J. A. (1976). *Managing for organizational effectiveness: An experiential approach*. New York, NY, US: McGraw-Hill Companies.

Ibarra, H. (1995). Race, opportunity, and diversity of social circles in managerial networks. *Academy of Management Journal, 38*(3), 673-703.

Jackson, S. E., & Alvarez, E. B. (1992). Working through diversity as a strategic imperative. In S. E. Jackson (Ed.), *The professional practice series. Diversity in the workplace: Human resources initiatives* (pp. 13-29). New York, NY, US: Guilford Press.

Joubin, A. A. (2019). *Race and the Epistemologies of Otherness*. In A. A. Joubin and M. Orkin (Eds.), *Race* (pp. 193-227). London: Routledge. New Critical Idiom series.

Lancaster, H. (1997, April 1). *Managing career: How woman can find mentors in a world with few role models*. Wall Street Journal, p. B1.

Reid, M. F., Reid, M. F., Kerr, B., & Miller, W. (2003). *Glass walls and glass ceilings: Women's representation in state and municipal bureaucracies*. University Park, PA, US: Penn State Press.

Morrison, A. M., & Von Glinow, M. A. (1990). *Women and minorities in management* (Vol. 45, No. 2, p. 200). Washington DC, US: American Psychological Association.

Powell, G. N., Butterfield, D. A., & Parent, J. D. (2002). Gender and managerial stereotypes: have the times changed? *Journal of Management*, 28(2), 177-193.

Sakamoto, A., Goyette, K. A., & Kim, C. (2009). Socioeconomic attainments of Asian-Americans. *Annual Review of Sociology*, *35*, 255-276.

Schmader, T., Major, B., & Gramzow, R. H. (2001). Coping with ethnic stereotypes in the academic domain: Perceived injustice and psychological disengagement. *Journal of Social Issues*, *57*(1), 93-111.

Tomkiewicz, J., Bass, K., Adeyemi-Bello, T., & Vaicys, C. (2001). African-Americans' perceptions of requisite characteristics of business managers. *Equal Opportunities International*, *20*(4), 25-31.

Wilson, F. M. (2016). Women in management in the United Kingdom. In R. J. Burke & A. M. Richardsen (Eds.). *Woman in management worldwide* (pp. 109-120). Aldershot, UK: Gower Publishing, Ltd.

Contact

Warsame Osmar

University of Economics, Prague

Faculty of Business Administration, Business Economics and Management

W. Churchill Sq. 4 130 67 Prague 3, Czech Republic

warsame@osmar.info