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## **Black Lives Matter and the impact on human resources**

**Nada Alotaibi**

Ph.D. Student, School Public administration, Jackson State University

J00945901@students.jsums.edu

**Abstract.** The occurrence of the Black Live Matter protests has led to media focus on racial inequality in organizations. Expectations are that the management of the various organizations realize that they have a social responsibility to their customers and other stakeholders to ensure that their workplaces are inclusive and diversified. Many organizations were forced to react to Black Lives Matters' protests of 2020 as a way of showing solidarity with the Black community in its demand for equal treatment of its members. However, Black Lives Matter protests and appeals are less likely to affect the managerial process of the HR managers of most large organizations significantly. Aspects such as human resource planning, employee remuneration, and benefits administrations, performance management, and employee relations are less likely to witness any change. Such events have occurred in the past, but little transformations have been made in the managerial process of these organizations.

**Keywords.** Black Lives Matter, discrimination, organization, employee

### **Introduction**

During the current age of uncensored communication, information tends to travel faster than in the past. In addition, the details have become more transparent, giving the recipient the freedom to deduce it based on their understanding. Due to this development, most events that occur in one part of the globe are likely to affect the perception of the rest of the world's population. In the past, information sharing was mainly controlled by large media firms, which could control the nature of details shared concerning a particular event. That way, people were denied the right to enjoy truthful communication since governments and corporations influenced organizations. However, in the current corporate world, companies have to show a genuine reaction to a certain event, failure to which their sales could suffer. When the issue of Black Lives Matter resurged in 2020 after the death of George Floyd in the hands of police officers, organizations were forced to takes a stand to declare their position concerning the matter. The event that transpired after the ablation of the protest left most companies reflecting on their internal environment to assess if it matches their stand concern the issue of systematic racial discrimination.

### **Current Problem Concerning the Event**

Systematic racial discrimination has been a major issue in the United States for several decades. The minority feel that they are not treated as equal to the white in the community. The

matter touches on many areas, including political representation, employment, incarceration, education, and human rights. In this paper, the employment aspect of the Black Lives Matter was explored. Extensive academic research indicates that Black Americans experience different treatment from their white counterparts (Gal et al., 2020). The issue of systematic racism can be easily demonstrated using data collected and analyzed by multiple scholars. It is evident that banks, schools, companies, government agencies, and law enforcement have policies that intentionally discriminate against Blacks. Data indicates that in 2019, the employment-population ratio of Black Americans was 49.6% compared to 53.4% and 52.8% of Whites and Hispanics, respectively (Gal et al., 2020). This data indicates that black persons were less likely to be hired than whites were. In addition, 16.8% of the black population was unemployed compared to 12.4% of whites (Gal et al., 2020). The disparity indicates a gap between the two races that can be blamed on systematic racism in the American community. Concerning managerial positions, the whites hold 41% compared to 31% that of the blacks (Gal et al., 2020). In addition, a study involving 675 Fortune 500 and S&P companies indicated that only 8.7% of their CEO were black (Gal et al., 2020). The glaring difference in the representation of the black community among the senior position could be explained using another explanation apart from racism. It is unimaginable that the African American community lacks people that can hold the said positions.

Historically, persons, private companies, prisons, and organizations have enslaved the black community through illegal detention, coercion to work, and underpayment (Opie & Roberts, 2017). For instance, there is a major disparity inequality in payment between blacks and whites. Although matters have improved, the issue remains contentious in the American labor market. Today, black workers earn less than their counterparts earn and experience more wage theft (Opie & Roberts, 2017). Additionally, African Americans experience more discrimination in hiring, evaluation, promotion, and other aspects of employment (Opie & Robert, 2017). The issue remains contentious since, despite the demand for change through various avenues, minimal changes have been experienced. The connection between racial discrimination and unfair treatment in the workplace is evident in many aspects.

Many organizations have been famed for their efforts to embrace diversity. However, despite the efforts, reports of black people being mistreated continue to persist (Ashburn-Nardo, Thomas, & Robinson, 2017). The community would expect that the changes in the corporate world concerning racial diversity would help reduce the number of complaints concerning systematic discrimination. In addition, studies would record a significant drop in statistics indicating unfair treatment against the blacks; however, no such achievement has been made so far. The problem persists, and the death of George Floyd is an indicator of a system-wide cover-up of social injustices committed by various systems. The matter rekindled the need to fight for just treatment at work and any place.

### **Importance of Black Lives Matter**

In the current environment of free distribution of information, there has been a growth in the number of corporate activists who have dedicated their time to unearthing and exposing any form of unethical behaviors within a firm. Such development has made it paramount for organizations to make changes in their operations to ensure that their actions are aligned with the code of ethics. The human resource department is one of the areas where if not carefully managed, it can result in serious reputational damage for an organization. Importantly, the happening of the Black Lives Matter protest led to the scrutiny of the hiring policies of various major companies as they declared their support for the movement. It was seen as hypocritical

for organizations without proper representation of African Americans in their workplace to comment in support of the ideals of the movement. The highlighting of such double-speaking from executives of large business forces some of them to reassess their operations.

### **Implications of Black Lives Matter**

As much as the Black Lives Matters was a political statement, the movement has had an impact on the operations of major businesses. It was reported that 62% of employees indicated that they were more likely to work for an organization that supports the movement (Colletta, 2020). In addition, about 86% of those respondents claimed that they would be influenced by a positive response of an organization to the issue of racial injustice (Colletta, 2020). Due to the movement's ability to highlight the issue of racial injustice, employees are now seeking transparency at their workplace concerning diversity. Seventy percent of the respondents to a survey indicated they were more willing to work for a company that would be more forthcoming concerning its commitment to diversity (Colletta, 2020). Additionally, a majority of the respondents claimed that they would turn down any job offer from a company that does not value inclusiveness and diversity (Colletta, 2020). Due to the recent protests, employees have become more aware of racial discrimination within the workplace. The matter may have appeared non-existent until it was raised during the protest. Unlike in the past, where people would experience a surge in their need to demand change, and then it would fade away. However, widespread social media campaigns and street protests have entrenched the matter in the minds of most people.

During and after the protests were done, the media outlets started evaluating the reaction of major organizations towards that matter. Reviews of their operations were also conducted to compare their response and their internal operations. All focus turned on Wall Street and Silicon Valley to evaluate the so-called corporate giant of the American economy. An evaluation by the Washington Post indicates that most organizations have made minor efforts to address the matter despite previous outcries. Indeed, the authors of the article insinuated that some of the reactions by certain notable companies were nothing but PR stunts (Tracy, McGregor, Merle & Tiku, 2020). Major organizations are reported to have been pushed by employees or the fear of losing customers in this show of solidarity with the movement. However, in this push by the various groups, organizations have been forced to examine their role in fostering inequality and discrimination in the country through biased hiring, pay, and promotion, creation of toxic work environment culture, and customer discrimination (Tracy et al., 2020). The Black Lives Matter protest forces these organizations to look inward and assess their workplace policies.

In a bid to divert attention from their inadequacies, the organization highlighted several firms made pledges. For instance, Twitter declared June 19 a corporate holiday to celebrate the end of slavery; the Bank of America pledged \$1 billion over the next four years to promote economic and racial equality (Tracy et al., 2020). Walmart promised to stop locking up multicultural hair and beauty products in display cabinets, while Sephora reserved 15% of its shelves space for products from black-owned companies (Tracy et al., 2020). Such moves were deliberate attempts by organizations to divert the attention of the public from their human resource department's statistics.

Organizations become concerned about their image in the market, given that they have failed to address the same problem that was affecting the rest of the institutions in the United States.

These firms feared that after the movements were done condemning the government for its failure to address police brutality and racial profiling, they will turn to the corporate sector.

It is no evidence if companies in Wall Street have made any efforts to change their workplace. The Black Lives Matter movement had a wider reach than was expected.

### **Social Impact on HR Managers**

The human resource managers are involved in the planning and execution of recruitment plans policies, which places them at the center of the controversy raised by the Black Lives Matters movement. HR managers are tasked with ensuring that an organization maintains a near- balance representation of different races in their workplaces. Therefore, when the issues of inequality at workplaces were raised, the HR manager of the various companies must have been concerned due to their application of racially motivated approaches in hiring, promoting, paying, and termination of employees. Given that most organizations do not meet the suitable proportions of black people working in their companies, the HR department understood that future needs to address matter could arise soon. It is likely that HRs of various companies have embarked on planning how to achieve diversity in their organization. The fact that huge companies lack a suitably diversified workforce is a looming threat since any form of exposure would result in losses of market reputation and sales. The Black Lives Matter highlighted problems that exist in society, including companies, which tasks the HR managers with the duty of identifying the issue with the company and addressing it promptly. Such a task requires a thorough assessment of the current record and the formation of a team to help address the matter before it graduates into a PR nightmare. Consultation with senior management would be vital in this case.

### **Literature Review**

#### **History of Black Lives Matter**

Most people become aware of the works of Black Lives Matter after an incident that occurred on May 25, 2020, when a black man, George Floyd, died while being subdued by police officers in Minneapolis (Mir & Zanoni, 2021). During his arrest, a police officer knelt on his neck for several minutes while his head was pressed against the pavement. Despite pleas from Floyd and other civilians, the police officer continues applying pressure until the detainee lost consciousness. It was later established that George Floyd had died from asphyxiation due to the pressure applied to his neck by the officer (Mir & Zanoni, 2021). A video of the incident was shared widely on social media resulting in widespread protests in the United States and parts of Europe.

The movement was started in 2013 after the acquittal of a suspect accused of killing a 12- year-old Trayvon Martin in Florida. The black community was outraged by the issue and felt that the court system had favored the suspect because he was white. Some members argued that if a black person had killed a white, the court would have found him guilty. The Black Lives Matters movement protested the decision and demanded that the person be retried since evidence indicated that he was guilty of executing the young black person. However, despite these protests, the case was never reopened. The 2014 police killing of Michael Brown in Missouri and Eric Garner in New York in 2015 infuriated members of the black community, even further forcing more people to join the movement (Mir & Zanoni , 2021). . In addition, the suspicious death of Sandra Bland in a police cell worsened the situation since people had noticed a trend, and nothing was being done. Despite attempts from a government official to condemn the movement, it only becomes strong.

The Black Lives Matter organizations draw their principles from black activities such as Dubois, who made significant changes for the communities in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Mir & Zanoni, 2021). It highlights that capitalism is an embodiment of racism since a majority of American and European wealth is built on the slave labor of the black community. The movement also claims that it, by extension, a part of the civil rights movement of the 20<sup>th</sup> century led by people such as Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcom X (Mir & Zanoni, 2021). . Importantly, the movement demands equal rights and equality in the treatment of the black community by the government and other institutions. It claims that black people are systematically denied access to safe neighborhoods, affordable housing, well-funded schools, access to healthy food, public services, and healthcare. The Black Lives Matter also argues that the community it represents is underrepresented in key industries such as academia, corporate organizations, and media. Color has continued to deny black people equal opportunities and resulting in a huge wealth gap.

### **Black Lives Matter and Workplaces**

Among the places that the Black Lives Matter movement seeks to have addressed is the racial discrimination experience at workplaces. This form of injustice trace back to the period of slavery in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Opie & Roberts, 2017). Until 1885 slavery was legal in the United States, wealthy plantation owners possessed people who worked on their farms without pay (Caldwell, 2017). The Black contributed significantly to the creation of the U.S. wealth since, during the slavery period, the country exported the largest volume of cotton to Europe. Indeed, the product contributes to half of the country's export, and it was exclusively grown using slave labor. After the abolishment of slavery in 1865 by the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment, the whites in the government devised a new plan of obtaining free labor from the blacks (Opie & Roberts, 2017). A jail system was created whereby convicts were punished by being forced to work free while serving their sentences. Besides, corporations could hire prisoners for cheap through the convict leasing program. Due to the demand for free labor, a large of black people were arrested and convicted to long jail term even when some were innocent. The practice was sanctioned by the government since it was highly lucrative, as companies would pay local governments to lease convicts (Opie & Roberts, 2017). Surprisingly, the system is still legal, and prison officials can use convicts to provide free labor, as they deem necessary. Since the black community is disproportionately locked-in state and federal prisons, the issue would majorly affect it.

In 1964, the Civil Rights Act was passed, which illegalized discrimination of a person based on their color, race, religion, sex, or nation of origin at workplaces (Caldwell, 2017). The Act also created the Employment Opportunity Committee (EEOC), which is a federal agency tasked with ensuring cases of discrimination are addressed. The organization helped cut the level of racial discrimination from 70% in 1965 to 50% in 2005 (Opie & Roberts, 2017). Despite the legislation, racial discrimination continues to exist in workplaces. Most organizations operate under Euro Norms, which are an informed approach aimed at suppressing the black culture in the workplace (Opie & Roberts, 2017). Assessments are conducted based on the norms, which result in black people being rates lower than their counterparts due to cultural stereotyping. Black Lives Matter advocate for the end of such practices within major organizations.

### **Racial Discrimination in Corporate America**

Black Lives Matter activities have highlighted the glaring issues of racial discrimination in the corporate organization of the United States. Most major companies have struggled with the issue of diversity for a long period. The corporate culture of the United States appears discriminative towards African Americans. For instance, in the banking industry, only 2.2 % of Morgan Stanley's senior executives are black, while in JPMorgan, Wells Fargo, and Bank of America, the proportion is 4.0%, 8.0%, and 5%, respectively (Tracy et al., 2020). The percentages are similarly low in the technology sector. The representation of the black community in senior management positions at Facebook is 3.1%, Google is 3.6%, Slack is 4.4%, Twitter is 2.7%, and Microsoft is 2.7%. Essentially, only a few organizations have at least a 4.0% representation of black people in their senior executive position. Considering the African Americans population in the United States and those with academic qualifications, these percentages are not representative of the community. It is evident that racial discrimination happens in this organization, despite their claim of practicing social responsibility (Nagele, 2020). Corporate social responsibility dictates that an organization address any social injustices associated with its operations (Caldwell, 2017). Many social media campaigns have been mounted to compel organizations in the tech industries to stop discriminating against their workers. The number of people supporting black employees against corporate racial discrimination has increased, showing that people have started noticing the problem (Tracy et al., 2020). However, major U.S. multinationals have done little to address the situation despite their public commitment to diversity and inclusion.

### **Managerial Process as an HR Manager**

The Black Lives Matter protests and appeals are less likely to affect the managerial process of the HR managers of most large organizations significantly. Aspects such as human resource planning, employee remuneration, and benefits administrations, performance management, and employee relations are less likely to witness any change (Noe, Hollenbeck, Gerhart & Wright, 2006). Such events have occurred in the past, but little transformations have been made in the managerial process of these organizations. However, if some organization decided to change its operations to address the matters raised by the Black Lives Matter movement, it could make certain changes to hire, develop, and train black people. Human resource managers could address the issue of a disproportionate number of black workers at their firms through the utilization of the appropriate human resource planning methods. The HR manager would be required to ensure that recruitment is conducted fairly to ensure that only the qualified individuals are hired regardless of their race, ethnicity, gender, and color. However, to counter the current population of Caucasian workers at an organization, quotas could be set in the next recruitment to ensure that more black people are high to reestablish the necessary balance. Similarly, the selection process should be designed to offer each applicant an equal chance of being selected. The discriminative hiring process needs to be addressed to ensure that a certain group of people is fairly excluded from the hiring process. Similar measures should be taken when addressing training, induction, orientation, evaluation, promotion, and layoff ((Noe et al., 2006). The HR manager is tasked with the duty of ensuring that the people in charge of these processes implement the necessary policies. An organization could also consider developing anti-discriminations policies, which can be used in human resources planning.

The employee remunerations and benefits administration is another area that the human resource management of an organization should reassess to ensure that people are paid

compensated equally despite the difference in race, gender, or ethnicity. The Black community claims that they earn less than their White counterparts, despite performing the same roles at a company. Such matters should be addressed to ensure that fair compensation is done across the organization. Performance management would also be a vital area that would have addressed to ensure that employees from different communities receive the same training for a particular role. In addition, employee relations should be conducted in a fair non-discriminative approach. HR managers are trained in handling such a situation. The right tools and resources should apply to ensure that all that the employee-employer relationship remains healthy.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Future research should be conducted on the negative potential of allowing Black Lives Matter activities and stands within an organization's workplace. Sometimes civil rights movement could evolve into violent and radicalizing elements in the community; especially, the leadership loses focus on the course that the movements aim to pursue. Organizations should be ready to identify such negative elements and eliminate them before they gain toxicity. Another area of research will be to assess if the impact of Black Lives Matter influences gender inequality at workplaces regarding women. The research would be expected to test the impact of the movement is single or multifaceted. Given the Black Lives Matter is not as active as it was a few months ago, most organizations have become less proactive in their participation in social justice for the black community. It would be interesting to evaluate what would happen to companies that promised changes and did not deliver when another wave of Black Lives Matter happen. Future research should investigate this matter to assess the nature of consequences and their extent.

### **Conclusions**

Social media has created a platform where people can share their views about issues. Due to the freedom of distribution of information, communication of information that could hurt an organization is likely to have a major impact on its reputation, given that the detail reaches more people and an uncensored format. Many organizations were forced to react to Black Lives Matters' protest of 2020 as a way of showing solidarity with the Black community in its demand for equal treatment of its members. Most organizations engaged in several actions to demonstrate their understanding of the plight of African Americans experiencing systematic discrimination. However, some of these reactions were considered PR stunts since the same firms are perpetuating the vice they are fighting externally within their workplaces. Most firm firms in the United States have a substantially disproportionate workforce, where black workers are conspicuously few in numbers. The occurrence of the Black Live Matter protests has led to media focus on racial inequality in this organization, which could force their resource departments to act. However, based on experiences, the organization could act, meaning that the Black will continue to experience racial discrimination. It is expected that social media will keep the matter alive until meaningful changes are witnessed in their human resource planning, employee remuneration and benefits administration, performance management, and employee relations. Expectations are that the management of the various organizations realize that they have a social responsibility to their customers and other stakeholders to ensure that their workplaces are inclusive and diversified.

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