Analysis on the Impact of Ethnic Diversity within Businesses from Two Cities: Eau Claire and Marshfield, with a Focus on Three Main Business Categories: Restaurants, Hospitals, and Manufacturers

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Introduction

This research project was designed to examine how ethnic diversity impacts the communities of Eau Claire and Marshfield, Wisconsin, and if these communities are adapting to the growing Spanish speaking population. After studying Spanish and Business at the University of Wisconsin – Eau Claire, we wanted to conduct research to further investigate subjects related to diversity. The University of Wisconsin – Eau Claire incorporates diversity into many of their classes, so this research could also lead to further benefits for the rest of the student population and the community. For approaching this question, we drafted surveys (in English and Spanish) and distributed them to different types of businesses in both cities. These surveys were often met with resistance, but we gathered results and came to the conclusion that even though the population of Eau Claire and Marshfield are not necessarily highly diverse, there could still be a benefit from having diversity classes and training offered to the public to help with the adjustment. Certain categories, such as hospitals and restaurants, show the most need for these programs. An indirect result gathered was that companies are intimidated to talk about diversity. For further research we recommend conducting interviews instead of distributing surveys.

Background Research

Looking into the background of ethnic diversity and what is currently happening with the subject today, some discoveries were made. Ethnic diversity is growing nation wide and people are becoming more aware of the effect it has in the workplace. Some companies have developed departments whose sole purpose is to help the effects of ethnic diversity. Different parts of the country have experienced the growth of ethnic diversity differently, however it is an issue that can be examined anywhere.

Since this research was focused on two cities, Marshfield and Eau Claire, the demographics of each city are pertinent to understanding the results of the research. Depending on the breakdown of varying ethnicities, the results could be very different. There are other factors that can affect the results such as, the size of the city and which industries are found in the cities. Another important factor that could affect someone’s outlook on the term ethnic diversity could be his or her age. Since there have been issues with race and ethnicity in the United States, age is an interesting factor to investigate.

Method

To gather our information, we drafted a survey to get the opinions of employees. This way they would feel willing to share their experiences and opinions without having to say it directly to a person. Since the topic of diversity and opinions towards the subject can be sensitive, surveys are a good option for people to voice their opinions. We also held interviews with a few employees in upper management when they didn’t allow us to distribute the surveys to their employees.

Results

There were a total of 54 employees that participated in the survey from the restaurant, manufacturing, and hospital industries from both Marshfield and Eau Claire. From Marshfield there were 13 surveys received from the manufacturing sector, 8 from hospitals, and 10 from restaurants. In the Eau Claire area there were 10 from manufacturing companies, 13 from restaurants, and none were received from hospitals due to the conflict with their diversity policy in place.

Below is a list of the major findings from the project. These were results that were relatively universal among industries and between both Marshfield and Eau Claire:

- 45% of companies surveyed have had at least one diversity meeting
- 56% of companies have a diversity policy in place
- 84% of companies said they would most likely attend a seminar on diversity
- 96% of companies say ethnic diversity is welcomed and appreciated at work
- 42.5% of companies say ethnic diversity created some to many challenges in the workplace for relationship building, 57.5% said few if any challenges
- Effect of heritage on employment:
  - 31% positive effect
  - 3% negative effect
  - 14.5% positive and negative effect
  - 45.6% neither effect

Conclusion

The major findings in this project revolve around the tensions regarding diversity. Many companies when asked to participate in a diversity related survey, declined to be interviewed or tried to avoid the issue by responding that their company is not diverse. Many companies still feel potentially threatened by the idea of diversity, which is something that should be addressed in the years to come. In general the manufacturing sector in both cities were primarily composed of middle aged Caucasians. While in the hospitals and restaurants there tended to be a more diverse population. Hispanics tended to encounter more problems with diversity, which they found more difficult to overcome in comparison to their Caucasian co-workers. Based upon the charts and tables to the left, in general most companies and industries have a positive attitude and are striving to incorporate diversity policies. However, there are still areas to be improved upon, for example 61% of those surveyed state they encounter some challenges in the workplace in regards to diversity. As our population becomes more diverse, there will only continue to be a need for more diversity practices and training to prepare individuals for the workplace.

Limitations

Conducting surveys about diversity created limitations as to how much data was collected. Most people who were asked to participate in the survey declined to answer and would not discuss diversity. It is a sensitive subject for companies, because there can be legal ramifications if they are not in accordance with diversity laws. It was difficult to find businesses that would allow us to survey their employees, which limited our results.

The reaction of companies when diversity was brought up was one of the most interesting findings, because it showed that people may not be ready to discuss the subject. For example, none of the hospitals in Eau Claire would answer any questions and other companies said they had policies against discussing the subject of diversity.

Future Research

For future research it would be interesting to look into how employees from different ethnic backgrounds view their company. This would focus more on a couple companies instead of different industries. From the results gathered, there are differences between how Hispanics and Caucasians viewed the impact of ethnic diversity in the workplace and it would be a great opportunity to further investigate these opinions.

References


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