Prejudiced Individuals as Real Strategists

Emmanuelle Kleinlogel is a PhD candidate in organizational behavior at the Faculty of Business and Economics (HEC) of the University of Lausanne. Her research focuses on prejudices expression, employment discrimination, and moral disengagement. She is a co-author of a book chapter about research on intergroup conflict and its implications for diversity management. emmanuelle.kleinlogel@unil.ch

The expression of prejudices is a complex phenomenon. It started to receive an increasing attention by scientists during the three last decades. Prejudice can be broadly defi-
from discrimination and broadly speaking to prevent from unethical behaviors. Codes of conduct define the ethical standards of an organization, such as the rules on security, and how to interact with clients, applicants, and co-workers. Research on codes of conduct effectiveness reveals that they are an effective tool to promote ethical behaviors under three conditions: (1) they should be actively part of the organizational culture, (2) they should be promoted by managers, and (3) it should have sanctions in case of non-respect towards these rules. However, these three conditions are often not met, making the presence of codes of conduct not always effective. In addition, discrimination is not only the result of prejudice and stereotype expression, it is also a compliance phenomenon. Employment discrimination through compliance towards an authority figure instruction is a well-established phenomenon. Individuals tend to comply with a discriminatory instruction as soon as the instruction comes from a legitimate authority figure. Indeed, based on the conceptualization of prejudice expression as a conscious process, the legitimacy of the authority provides to individuals a non-prejudicial argument to justify their discriminatory behavior. For instance, they might argue: “I did not discriminate against women. I have just complied with the instruction I received from my boss.”

Recently, scientists have started to study the interplay between codes of conduct and such instruction on hiring decisions. Findings are promising since codes of conduct were found to have a positive effect. When advised by their supervisor to discriminate against minority candidates, individuals demonstrated less bias against these candidates in presence of codes of conduct than in absence of such codes. The presence of codes of conduct had the effect to counteract the powerful effect of an authority figure on individuals’ decision making.

How can we explain the effect of codes of conduct? Does it make individuals’ aware about the immorality of their conduct? Does it make individuals fear sanctions in case of non-compliance towards these rules? Does it prevent individuals to execute their strategy of subtly prejudice expression? Despite these questions cannot be answered yet, the presence of codes of conduct within organization seems to be the right direction to prevent from prejudice expression and discrimination.

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