Chapter VII

Is There a Retention Gap for Women and Minorities? The Case for Moving In Versus Moving Up

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ABSTRACT

This chapter will examine the “retention gap” between the goals of gender and racial diversity and the workplace/management behaviors that affect retention of individuals in those groups. Women, as well as African Americans, Hispanic Americans, and Native Americans, are represented in the information technology (IT) workforce in percentages that are far lower than their percentages in the population as a whole.
These populations are also under-represented in the educational programs that prepare people for careers as IT workers. While recruiting efforts are crucial for increasing the participation of women and minorities, it is equally important that we retain those already in the IT workforce. It is clear that nothing is gained by bringing women and minorities into the workforce to simply have them drop out or be weeded out. There is a need to deepen our understanding of retention issues for women and minorities in order to inform intervention strategies. This chapter addresses this need by providing an in-depth examination of factors affecting attraction, development, and especially retention of minorities and women in IS.

INTRODUCTION

The IS literature devoted to human resource development of IS personnel has examined the “expectation gap” between the needs of industry and academic curricula, and the “recruitment gap” between desired IT skills as expressed by Chief Information Officers versus those articulated by recruiters (Trauth, Farwell, & Lee, 1993). In a similar fashion, this chapter examines the “retention gap” between the espoused goals of gender and racial diversity, and the workplace/management behaviors that affect retention of individuals in those groups. Women, as well as African Americans, Hispanic Americans, and Native Americans, are represented in the information technology (IT) workforce in percentages that are far lower than their percentages in the population as a whole. These populations are also underrepresented in the educational programs that prepare people for careers as IT workers.

While recruiting efforts are crucial for increasing the participation of women and minorities, it is equally important that we retain those already in the IT workforce. It is clear that nothing is gained by bringing women and minorities into the workforce to simply have them drop out or be weeded out. IT recruiters suggest that replacing an IT employee can cost twice his or her salary because hiring a new IT person comes with the inherent recruiting and training costs, and the inevitable downtime during the job change (Reimers, 2001). Turnover rates of 25% to 35% have been reported in Fortune 500 companies during the late 1990s, and this “turnover culture” in IT can hamper the organization’s ability to achieve strategic business goals (Moore & Burke, 2002).

If we are to successfully counter the negative affects of the IT turnover culture, there is a need to deepen our understanding of retention issues for