

## Diversifying: It's Not Just Job Variety

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Michigan's 2006 election is quickly approaching. One of the issues being heavily discussed in the governor's race is diversification of the economy. Something Governor Jennifer Granholm and her opponent, Dick DeVos, are not arguing over is the state of the economy and the fact that something needs to be done to improve the job market. They even have similar plans for diversification. Governor Granholm's plans will "allow us to invest...in emerging sectors that promise tremendous job growth [in] alternative energy, the life sciences, homeland security, and advanced manufacturing" (Granholm). DeVos plans to "pursue and recruit companies to come to Michigan in emerging fields such as life sciences, alternative energy, and manufacturing information technology" (49). Both of these ideas about diversifying have good foundations to build on, but increasing the types of jobs can only do so much.

Popular notions among the public tie economic diversification to different kinds of jobs, increased globalization, and a transition from industrial jobs to technology fields. People even feel diversification would make Michigan's top industries—automotive and manufacturing—more flexible by producing a variety of goods. However, politicians and Michigan citizens are not using the term diversify to its full extent, and until they do, diversification's variety of benefits cannot be accomplished. Thus, an extended definition is necessary to show all of diversification's capabilities and to improve Michigan's economy.

An extended and improved definition of diversify adds to the dictionary definition of the word. Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary defines diversify as follows: "to make diverse (composed of distinct or unlike elements or qualities) or give variety to." The definition that

would be most beneficial is: diversifying, in terms of the economy, is an increase in the fields of work and the number of women and minorities that are in workplace leadership positions. To show why the extended definition is the most acceptable explanation of the term, women and minority's qualifications and examples of their successes will be provided. Also, possible opposing arguments to the extended definition, rebuttals to these arguments, and assumptions about why the proposed definition has not been implemented will be discussed.

African Americans are one sector of minorities that are earning college degrees at higher rates than ever before. The number of African Americans earning bachelor's degrees in 2004 was more than twice the amount in 1990. Since 2001, master's degrees awarded to African Americans have increased by 41% ("Solid Progress"). Degrees awarded to women have also increased significantly. Now, women earn over half of all bachelor's ("Bachelor's Degrees") and master's degrees ("Master's Degrees"). These statistics, along with the fact that women constitute for nearly half of the workforce in America (Gettings et al.), sound promising; however, only ten women are Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) or presidents of Fortune 500 companies, and only twenty women are at the top of Fortune 1000 companies in 2006 ("Women CEOs"). The numbers are even more startling for African Americans. Only four African Americans are CEOs of Fortune 500 companies ("Black CEO").

Women and minorities should not be moved to the head of companies just to satisfy a quota or make the company appear diverse and accepting; they should be in charge because of their experiences, education, and perspectives. Women have traditionally been children's primary caretakers. A woman's household duties—which may include but are not limited to cleaning, cooking, managing schedules, appropriating funds, counseling, resolving problems, hosting social events, and much more—give her the experience and qualifications necessary to

run a successful business. It is obvious why many women refer to themselves as “domestic engineers.”

Some of the qualities that make women worthy of and needed at the helm of companies are their skills in flexibility and multitasking. They are also more likely to compromise and seek the opinions of others than men are. According to studies, women also: strive for openness, are more available to staff, delegate power to staff better, respond faster when assistance is needed, are more accepting of all people, and recognize problems in a faster and more accurate manner. Also, the appreciation that women express and their open style of communication make staff more satisfied (Krotz).

Companies whose uppermost positions are dominated by white men lose the valuable, varied perspectives that women and minorities offer. The two group’s different upbringings and histories can bring new outlooks to the corporate world. For example, if a person was raised in Asia or a traditional Asian environment, they would be familiar with Asian customs, such as greetings, gift exchanges, and business relationships being developed during dinner. Thus, an Asian American may be able to offer companies a better way to interact with others and work with Asian businesses.

The capabilities and successes of women and minorities can be seen in the work done by Indra Nooyi, the CEO of PepsiCo. Before becoming the CEO in August of 2006, India-born Nooyi was the Chief Financial Officer (CFO). The company credits her “with transforming the company's global strategy” (Kavilanz) when consumers began to purchase more health-conscious products like juice and water. Nooyi restructured the company, acquired Tropicana, and merged with Quaker Oats (Kavilanz). Her tactics have kept the company successful.

Those opposed to the extended definition may argue that it is unattainable, that it is furthering affirmative action in the economy, or they may say women and minorities are not qualified or able to run a successful organization. A varied workforce, however, is attainable. Acceptance of women and minorities in the workplace has increased since the Civil Rights Era. Unfortunately, the change has been slow. For less represented groups to become a common part of a company's command, unbiased hiring and more recruitment of women and minorities for upper-level positions needs to occur.

Seeing the extended definition as a step toward increased affirmative action is the wrong idea altogether. Affirmative action debates are a completely separate essay; this definition is based on hiring women and minorities because of their qualifications and experiences and not because they are part of the minority group. Everyone should be treated equal no matter what their race, class, or gender is. People should be granted college acceptance or employment if they have made an effort to obtain requirements (assuming that opportunities for attainment were provided). Hiring workers or selecting students because they are a specific gender or skin color and not because of credentials prevents equality by discriminating against those who worked hard to obtain education and experience.

People who believe that women and minorities are not capable or qualified are unaware of the successes of the two groups in corporate America. One woman, Margaret (Meg) Whitman, has proven to be a huge force in the booming Internet age. She is the CEO of eBay. eBay, the world's most valuable Internet brand, has deflected competition by Amazon.com and Yahoo! with Whitman at the helm. She has quickly fixed problems, kept profits high, and has tried to keep eBay users safe by eliminating fake and dishonest sellers and buyers. On top of her

work, she also serves on the boards of eBay, DreamWorks Animation, Proctor and Gamble, and the Gap (MacDonald and Schoenberger).

There are many reasons why common definitions of diversify differ from the proposed explanation and why the broader definition has not been implemented. Some reasons are that people fear change and shifts in power, the current definition is easier to accomplish than the proposed one, and people are not looking at the whole picture. With the lengthened meaning of diversification, the entire society would have to make major changes. Transformations would have to begin with hiring practices. Women and minorities combined earn more degrees than white men, who hold the most upper-level positions. This leads to the conclusion that corporate recruiters and hiring staff need to hire with more equality.

Another reason why the definition of diversify has not improved is because any additions make the definition harder to reach. The current definition has resulted in many plans for improvement. As it stands, it is a time consuming, challenging endeavor. The proposed definition would require much more time, preparation, and work if it were embraced, and people are not willing to wait longer for an economic turnaround.

Finally, the current definition is strong today because others have not thought about long-term, corrective measures, such as a varied workforce. Politicians are working toward a quick fix in order to have high approval ratings. The governor and her opponent's definition is simply variety because they want to prove they can be successful immediately. Neither of them have thoroughly contemplated the future of Michigan's economy or ways to permanently change and improve it.

Diversifying is a way to vary the jobs that are present in Michigan's economy and to make Michigan's workforce more unique, representative of the state's population, and better

equipped to deal with various situations that arise in businesses. Women and minorities—the main components to a unique workforce—are neither lacking education nor experience. They are receiving more degrees, have much needed innate abilities, and are having ample success at the forefront of major companies. The proposed definition will not only improve Michigan’s economy but it will ensure that equality remains one of America’s founding principles.

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