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# Embracing Diversity

guidance for managers

[www.managers.org.uk](http://www.managers.org.uk)

Diversity is not new. Differences between individuals and styles have long been recognised as being important to team performance. Greater understanding, respect and value for the benefits that 'difference' can bring are becoming more and more relevant for modern organisations as a result of an increasingly diverse customer base and labour market, and the introduction of legislation designed to prevent discrimination in the workplace.

### What is diversity?

Diversity in the workplace acknowledges, includes and values any difference between individuals. Encouraging and harnessing the different talents can enhance the performance of the organisation. Also, in creating a genuine culture of respect and value, job satisfaction and employee retention are likely to increase.

### Is Diversity the same as Equal Opportunities?

Diversity in the workplace relates to treating everyone equally. Equal Opportunities relates to the legislation that aims to outlaw discrimination.

### Diversity strands

Diversity is the acceptance of any difference, such as hair colour, weight, belief etc. The Home Office has created 6 'strands' of diversity to categorise common differences.

- race
- age
- gender
- sexual orientation
- disability
- religion or belief

These strands are not intended to be exhaustive. Some common additions include social background, mental or physical capabilities, and many other factors which cause people to have different perspectives on the same set of facts, views or issues.

### What is diversity not about?

- It is not about reducing standards
- It is not about removing our prejudices; it is about recognising that they exist and then ensuring they are questioned before we act
- It is not a distraction from more important issues. Like quality, it is a standard by which performance is measured
- It is not just about language and political correctness. It is about establishing relationships and not something to be scared of 'getting wrong'
- It is not about obtaining a 'quota' of diverse individuals and then ignoring or homogenising their differences. This 'surface diversity' can create cultural conflicts

### The growing importance of diversity in the workplace

#### • *The legal case*

There is no one 'diversity act', but a series of acts covering the 6 strands of diversity. These offer legal redress to those who feel they are being discriminated against, such as:

- Race Relations Act 1976
- Employment Equality [Age] Regulations 2006
- Sex Discrimination Act 1975
- Gender Equality Duty 2007
- Employment Equality [Sexual Orientation] Regulations 2003
- Disability Discrimination Act 1995
- Employment Equality [Religion or Belief] Regulations 2003
- Equality Act 2006

In 2005, the number of sex, race and disability discrimination cases rose by 42%, and tribunals awarded £5.5m compared with £5.1m in the previous year. An organisation with an effective diversity policy is likely to be more risk resilient

(both in avoidance and mitigation) in any industrial relations issue that leads to an employment tribunal.

- *The business case*

Effective diversity policies can be beneficial to an organisation in terms of the bottom line. Amongst these benefits are:

- *Recruitment and retention of staff*

The employers' skill survey 2002 (Institute for Employment Studies) found that 16% of organisations with 5+ employees had vacancies which proved difficult to fill. There are clearly competitive benefits to be gained by employers who take every step to recruit from the widest talent pool. Equally a company which can cater for the diverse needs of its staff is more likely to retain them, saving on knowledge loss and cost of recruiting new staff.

- *Improved morale and job satisfaction, leading to greater productivity*

If discrimination and unfair treatment can be reduced this is likely to have a knock-on effect on grievances and relations within the organisation. In turn this may reduce absenteeism and labour turnover by enhancing employees' attachment to the organisation and have a positive effect on labour productivity.

Also there is research suggesting that diverse teams are more creative and innovative as a result of their multi-dimensional perspectives, as well as being more productive.

- *Positive public image*

Nowadays a negative public image is likely to damage business image and, in turn, revenue. A business that is well known for putting the principles of diversity into practice both in the workforce and the suppliers it uses is more likely to project a positive public image in the community and market place.

- *Access to untapped markets*

A more diverse workforce would potentially be able to facilitate ideas and initiatives relating to new target markets.

The customer base in the UK is becoming increasingly diverse: currently 1 in 12 UK residents is born overseas, and by 2014 it is projected that there will be more people over 65 than under 16; so the ageism of the past is no longer economically viable.

In many cases, for companies seeking new clients within the market, particularly in the public sector, targets and quantifiable data relating to the work of the company on diversity are a pre-requisite for many proposals and tenders. This is often known as 'supplier diversity'.

- *The ethical case*

Some businesses are implementing diversity policies simply because it is the right thing to do. Organisations are, in general, aware of changing social values and that the public has high expectations in relation to social justice issues such as ethical investment, fair trade, individual human rights and environmental impact.

Employees too have growing expectations of work environments that promote inclusion, respect, equity, and openness.

### **Barriers to diversity in workplace**

In some instances there can be resistance in an organisation to spending the time and resources necessary to develop and implement an effective diversity policy. There can be a number of reasons such as:

- **Inherited social systems:** these are established systems advantageous to one group of people, limiting to another.
- **Mistaken understanding:** it may be felt that the organisation is already diverse. This understanding is gained by individuals using their own feelings as a guide, which may be implicitly prejudiced, and not any form of objective policy or guidelines.
- **Piecemeal projects:** an ad-hoc diversity policy created reacting to periodic events is unlikely to achieve its objectives in comparison to a structured coherent strategy.

- **Political correctness:** some individuals may be of the perception that diversity is a box-ticking exercise, which will have no real impact on the functioning of the organisation.

### **Tackling resistance to diversity efforts**

Resistance to the changes that may occur in creating an inclusive working environment can occur at various stages in the change process, from the beginning where there may be a lack of understanding to why the change is important, through to implementation as changes become a reality and have the potential to affect work practices. The following strategies can be helpful in tackling resistance:

#### *Clear, effective communication:*

It is vital to widen understanding, identify issues and include people in the resolution of issues.

Inform staff about the business case for change, why it is important, and what is happening.

Establish as broad a definition of diversity as makes sense for your organisation.

Create opportunities for senior management to demonstrate support and understanding of diversity initiatives.

#### *Education:*

Integrate the business case (specific to the organisation) and other driving forces for diversity into all management development education programmes.

Strengthen the skills available within the organisation to address and deal with resistance to inclusion or conflicts arising as a result.

#### *Programmes and Processes:*

Create ongoing forums for discussion of diversity and inclusion issues.

Use internal channels (eg: focus groups or staff networks) to brainstorm issues related to resistance and possible solutions.

### **Steps in developing an effective policy**

1. Gain top level support
2. Assign financial and human resources to the programme
3. Decide what you want the programme to achieve and set goals accordingly
4. Assume there will be special training needs amongst managers and staff
5. Establish current levels of diversity management in your organisation
6. Conduct a gap analysis
7. Identify areas where change is needed
8. Write a diversity policy
9. Compile a diversity action plan
10. Carry out a small pilot to obtain feedback
11. Establish the organisation's starting point
12. Set the programme in motion
13. Monitor and review – gather evidence for improvement
14. Establish an ongoing programme

It may be beneficial to contact similar organisations which have made in-roads into a diversity policy in order to discuss the practical benefits and any problems that have been encountered.

## Further information may be obtained from:

### **Chartered Management Institute**

[www.managers.org.uk/subjectsearch](http://www.managers.org.uk/subjectsearch)

Online information centre available to members including books, journal articles, and checklists

[www.managers.org.uk/researchreports](http://www.managers.org.uk/researchreports)

A directory of research reports published by the Institute

**ACAS** (Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service) – [www.acas.org.uk](http://www.acas.org.uk)

Online advisory booklets for employers on age, religion or belief, and sexual orientation

**Age Positive** – [www.agepositive.gov.uk](http://www.agepositive.gov.uk)

A campaign promoting the benefits of employing a mixed-age workforce that includes older and younger people

**Commission for Equality and Human Rights**  
[www.cehr.org.uk](http://www.cehr.org.uk)

A non-departmental public body aiming to reduce inequality, eliminate discrimination, strengthen good relations between people and protect human rights

**CIPD** (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development)

[www.cipd.co.uk/subjects/dvsequl/general](http://www.cipd.co.uk/subjects/dvsequl/general)

General resources, news reports and surveys

**Disability Rights Commission** – [www.drc-gb.org](http://www.drc-gb.org)

Information regarding disability for employers and the individual

**Employers' Forum on Age** – [www.efa.org.uk](http://www.efa.org.uk)

Independent network of employers recognising the need to attract and retain employees at any age

**Employers' Forum on Disability**

[www.employers-forum.co.uk](http://www.employers-forum.co.uk)

Leading employers' organisation focused on disability as it affects business

**Equal Opportunities Commission**

[www.eoc.org.uk](http://www.eoc.org.uk)

Information on sex discrimination in the workplace

**EU Campaign – for Diversity, Against Discrimination**

[www.stop-discrimination.info](http://www.stop-discrimination.info)

Information on the EU campaign against discrimination

**Institute of Business Ethics** – [www.ibe.org.uk](http://www.ibe.org.uk)

Information on best practice in business ethics

**National Centre for Diversity**

[www.nationalcentrefordiversity.com](http://www.nationalcentrefordiversity.com)

An independent campaign group for diversity in all sectors across the UK

**Stonewall** – <http://www.stonewall.org.uk>

Providing information for employers on sexual orientation

This document is intended for guidance only. It cannot claim to be comprehensive and appropriate to each individual member or circumstance. Expert opinion should be always be obtained in cases of doubt.

**This leaflet and other supporting information on diversity is available for download from the Institute's website: [www.managers.org.uk/bestpracticeguides](http://www.managers.org.uk/bestpracticeguides)**

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- develop, support and recognise the skills and achievements of **managers** throughout their lives
- work with **employers** to identify and develop the necessary management and leadership skills that drive performance
- influence **stakeholders** to address the challenges that face today's managers and leaders

For further information on the Institute and its activities, visit [www.managers.org.uk](http://www.managers.org.uk)



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