

MANAGING FOR DIVERSITY.

Checklist 152

» INTRODUCTION

Recent years have seen increased awareness of and interest in diversity issues. In the UK, this is due, in part to a growing body of equal opportunities legislation, culminating in the Equality Act of 2010. The Davies Report on women on boards in UK listed companies has also drawn attention to gender diversity at a senior level, and the report set out targets for businesses over the coming years to achieve in respect of female representation at board level.

Legal frameworks of this type have meant that many organisations have had to review their procedures and processes in order to make sure they comply with the law. Yet diversity is about more than just access to the same opportunities and any organisation aiming to be truly diverse needs to go beyond targets and laws relating to equality. Diversity is about the positive benefits that a mixture of individuals with differing characteristics and perspectives can bring to organisations and those who work in them. Equality of opportunity is a narrower concept, which is discussed further in our checklist on introducing an equal opportunities policy. (See Additional Resources below.)

Businesses are also increasingly recognising the commercial and organisational benefits of diversity in their organisations. Some of these benefits include: higher staff retention rates; better understanding of customer needs; and an increased likelihood of getting fresh and innovative ideas to boost performance.

Unfortunately, there are still too many individuals and organisations that are 'diversity-sceptics' – those who can't or won't see the benefits that diversity can bring to an organisation. At the same time, many of us work in diverse environments, and even in more homogeneous workplaces, employees could well be dealing with clients from a variety of backgrounds, particularly in global businesses. Therefore, in the face of the trend towards greater diversity in both the workplace itself, and in the societies and markets that organisations serve, it is up to managers to make the most of this new, more diverse world that we all find ourselves in.

Greater diversity, and the benefits that diversity bring, will only occur if there is genuine enthusiasm for the concept throughout the organisation. Actions taken to encourage greater diversity should not be tokenistic, isolated instances, but should be part of a broader mindset that sees diversity as an important part of any successful company.

This checklist therefore takes a holistic view of managing diversity in an organisation, yet also gives readers hands-on practical advice for ensuring that their organisation gets the most out of diversity.

» DEFINITION

The concept of diversity encompasses any sort of difference between individuals. These could be differences in ethnic origin, age, disability, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, family status,

religion, education, social class and even personality or attitudes. The management of diversity involves developing and implementing inclusive strategies through which a network of varied individuals are integrated into a dynamic workforce.

Diversity management goes beyond what is required by legislation designed to promote equal opportunities and prevent discrimination. It comprises an approach which recognises and values differences and aims to make positive use of the unique talents and perspectives within the workforce. The focus is on individuals, rather than minority groups.



ACTION CHECKLIST

1. Identify diversity champions

If efforts are to be made to increase diversity, there need to be people throughout the organisation who can really drive the changes required. Think carefully about who to choose as your diversity champions. There need to be sufficient members of rank and file staff on board to ensure that any changes are actionable and realistic, but securing the commitment of senior management is vital in order to make diversity management both a reality and a strategic priority.

Approach directors and managers in your organisation and convince them of the advantages of active diversity management. Present both the business and social cases for a diversity initiative. Some of the most common reasons given include:

- › the realisation and development of potential within employees
- › improved employee engagement, motivation and empowerment
- › better morale and job satisfaction, leading to greater productivity
- › improved employee retention leading to reduced recruitment and training costs
- › an increase in the flow of ideas, leading to greater creativity and innovation
- › greater flexibility within the workforce
- › the recruitment and promotion of those with the best skills and abilities, leading to competitive advantage
- › compliance with the requirements of the Equality Act and the elimination of discriminatory behaviour
- › reduced risk of expensive litigation and reference to employment tribunals
- › a workforce that is better equipped to serve a diverse customer base and diverse markets, leading to high levels of customer satisfaction
- › improved ability to compete in global markets
- › improved communication in multi-national corporations
- › enhanced corporate image as the organisation is seen as a socially responsible employer.

These diversity champions can then come together to form a team of people who take the steps outlined below to encourage diversity in the organisation.

2. Conduct a diversity audit

In order to be effective at managing diversity, you need to be aware of the current levels of diversity and how these differences affect your organisation. Whilst some characteristics, such as ethnic origin and gender are usually readily apparent, there are some areas e.g. religion and sexual orientation that are less immediately obvious.

Plan and conduct a diversity audit to gauge existing levels of diversity. You will need to assess both qualitative and quantitative evidence, focusing on people, processes and strategies. Find out:

- › which kinds of difference affect the ability of individuals to achieve their potential in your organisation
- › the extent to which these differences create disadvantages or advantages for employees
- › how organisational procedures and strategies affect different groups of employees.

Some data gathering methods include:

- › questionnaires - design these with your target audience in mind, and ensure anonymity and privacy for respondents
- › individual and group interviews - consider who should conduct these and how to create an informal and frank atmosphere
- › focus group discussions - you could, for example, talk to groups of female, disabled, ethnic minority or older employees
- › unobtrusive observation - a discreet walkabout can be very revealing although be careful not to be too biased by what you can observe in a short period of time
- › document surveys - examine written procedures, personnel records, customer complaints, publicity material and any other documentary evidence within the organisation
- › benchmarking - look at organisations similar to your own for examples of good practice to follow and of bad practice to avoid.

3. Create a vision for diversity

A vision is important because without it, actions you take to increase diversity may be uncoordinated and even contradictory. A core of guiding principles will help make diversity programmes and projects actionable and cohesive. The vision will need to relate to the organisation's overall vision and mission statements, and to any other current organisational initiatives.

You will need to determine which areas of diversity the vision covers. Many UK organisations focus on the characteristics covered by the Equality Act 2010 but an organisation which is truly committed to diversity will need to consider other areas, particularly any characteristics highlighted by your diversity audit.

Some targets or objectives based on the vision will provide focus. Ensure that goals are specific and achievable. Possible objectives might be:

- › an increase the proportion of women in the workforce to 50 per cent
- › to enable more flexible working practices, such as homeworking
- › to facilitate recruitment from a wider geographical or cultural area.

4. Communicate the vision

However impressive your vision is, there is no point in having one if it is not known or understood by the wider workforce. Consider calling a meeting, or incorporating an item on the diversity vision into staff briefings and team meetings across the organisation. It is usually helpful to send people details beforehand to allow them time to consider it and take it in.

Remember that communication is a two-way process. Encourage feedback from your employees as the vision will never become a reality if most employees are unengaged and feel their views have not been taken into account. This feedback can occur both during and following any meetings that take place. Use this opportunity to have a discussion on difficult issues – a frank approach where people feel able to raise objections is likely to lead to a better eventual outcome.

5. Consider the organisational culture

Having an organisational culture where employees are comfortable with difference and feel they can be themselves is a major element of being a diverse organisation. A 'diversity-positive' culture will go a long way to ensuring that employees feel that their diversity is not just accepted, but welcomed.

Think about how teams operate and how decisions are made. Are the opinions and contributions of a variety of employees acknowledged, or does attention tend to be given to those who shout the loudest? Are women or other groups excluded from key company networking events? Your diversity audit should help inform your answers to these kinds of questions. Think about the actions that you as an individual and your organisation can take to change organisational culture, if necessary, to make it more inclusive.

6. Consider diversity training

Whilst training budgets may be tight, diversity training can ensure that employees are up-to-date on current thinking on diversity and are able to turn this thinking into practical action. For example, training may help a manager to coordinate flexible working more effectively.

The need for managers in particular to receive this kind of training is paramount, as they are the ones who will be making decisions that affect diversity on a daily basis. Training is likely to take the form of a kind of awareness-raising. This may help people to become aware of and reconsider the assumptions they make and challenge ingrained behaviours and customs. The aim in such programmes should be to celebrate differences, rather than to just comply with legal frameworks.

Diversity training could also be incorporated into induction procedures in the future so that all employees are clear that diversity is a priority for the organisation from the start of their employment.

7. Create a practical action-plan

Having already come up with a vision which sets out targets and objectives for diversity, you need to think about how these can be achieved in practical terms. Set out an action plan as to how you will achieve these objectives.

Define the finer details of the programme, specifying exactly how the planned changes will be brought about. Hold brainstorming sessions to produce ideas for action, then compose an implementation plan which coordinates actions and sets a timetable for implementation. Make sure the plan includes regular reviews. Before the programme starts, you will need to decide what should be measured and monitored and ensure that data gathering forms an ongoing part of the plan.

Some of the steps suggested below are likely to form part of the action plan.

8. Review organisational practices, procedures and policies

Systematically check through all policies and procedures (particularly those relating to recruitment and retention) and consider the impact these have upon diversity issues.

For example, it has been argued that the growth of unpaid internships, particularly in certain industries, has led to a lack of diversity in terms of new recruits to those sectors. Only those who can afford to remain unwaged are able to undertake unpaid positions for a significant length of time, so those from poorer backgrounds are unable to get the experience necessary to acquire a paid position. In order to make sure that talented individuals are able to obtain positions in your organisation, regardless of their background, you may wish to consider changing your policies and practices to ensure that all long-term work placements are paid at the minimum or living wage.

9. Develop employee networks

Employee diversity networks are an excellent way of connecting employees from a particular group and giving them a voice. They are particularly effective in larger companies, and common network groups include those

aimed at women, ethnic minorities and individuals who identify as LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender).

Additionally, networks are increasingly seen as useful from a business perspective as they can be used to generate ideas and make suggestions about how to make the company's products and services more appealing to a diverse audience. Networks are typically involved in organising activities such as: regular meetings, newsletters, special events and online forums.

In order to develop effective networks, be clear about why they are needed, their purpose and the contribution they will make. This does not mean however that managers should "control" the network – they usually work better if a "bottom-up" approach is taken, with the involvement of senior management limited to a supportive rather than directive role.

10. Develop a mentoring scheme

Mentoring is another method by which companies can improve their talent management of certain groups. Mentoring is a form of employee development whereby a trusted and respected person – the mentor – uses their experience to offer guidance, encouragement and support to another person – the mentee.

Mentoring may need to be targeted at specific groups – e.g. women managers – or you may decide to have a more open and flexible scheme. Consider whether mentors can be sourced from within the organisation, or whether participation in an external mentoring scheme will be required. Our checklist on developing a mentoring scheme (See Additional Resources below) provides further guidance.

11. Monitor and review

Your organisation's diversity will change – particularly if the measures you take are effective – so don't let your diversity vision and action plan stand still. Consider conducting a regular diversity audit. Monitor progress over fixed periods of time e.g. six months or a year, and make adjustments as necessary. Where problems occur, review your diversity vision and action plans.

It is also important to highlight successes so people can see that the efforts made in managing diversity are worthwhile.

» POTENTIAL PITFALLS

Managers should avoid:

- › handling diversity issues insensitively, or in a way that could stir up ill-feeling
- › invading employees' privacy
- › failing to consult and gain commitment throughout the organisation
- › implementing policies and programmes without first communicating them to those involved
- › mistaking equal opportunities for diversity management
- › seeing diversity as merely a question of legal compliance
- › falling into an "us" and "them" mentality. Diversity is about inclusiveness

» ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

BOOKS

The diversity dashboard: a manager's guide to navigating cross-cultural turbulence, Deborah Swallow and Eilidh Milnes

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Oxford: Infinite Ideas, 2013

Managing equality and diversity: theory and practice, Savita Kumra and Simonetta Manfredi
Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012

Promoting diversity, IDS HR studies, no 970, July 2012
London: Incomes Data Services

The dynamics of managing diversity: a critical approach, 3rd ed., Gill Kirton and Anne-Marie Greene
Oxford: Butterworth Heinemann, 2010

Managing diversity and the business case: research into practice, Mustafa F Ozbilgin, Gary Mulholland, Ahu Tatli and Dianah Worman
London: Chartered Institute of Personnel Development, 2008

This is a selection of books available for loan to members from CMI's library. More information at:
www.managers.org.uk/library

JOURNAL ARTICLES

Great leaders who make the mix work, Boris Groyberg and Katherine Connolly
Harvard Business Review, vol 91, no 9, September 2013, pp 68-76

Leveraging diversity, Jane Farrell
Training Journal, May 2012, pp 22-27

RELATED CHECKLISTS

- 062** Introducing an equal opportunities policy
- 082** Developing a mentoring scheme

INTERNET RESOURCES

ACAS www.acas.org.uk
Section on Equality and Diversity includes an online advisory booklet.

Women in Management (WiM) www.wimuk.co.uk
Women in Management is a network of the Chartered Management Institute

ORGANISATIONS

Business Disability Forum
Nutmeg House, 60 Gainsford Street, London SE1 2NY
Tel: 020 7403 3020 Web: www.efd.org.uk Email: enquiries@businessdisabilityforum.org.uk

Employers' Forum on Age
32-36 Loman Street, London, SE1 0EH
Tel: 0845 456 2495 Web: www.efa.org.uk

Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC)
Fleetbank House, 2-6 Salisbury Square, London EC4Y 8JX
Tel: 020 3117 0235 Web: www.equalityhumanrights.com



NATIONAL OCCUPATIONAL STANDARDS FOR MANAGEMENT & LEADERSHIP

This checklist has relevance for the following standards:

- › Unit BA7 Promote equality of opportunity, diversity and inclusion
- › Unit DD1 Develop and sustain productive working relationships with colleagues



MORE INFORMATION

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