



Managing Cultural Diversity in the Workplace

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One of the things that struck me about Peterborough when I first visited here was the number of different ethnic and national cultures filling our city. It is interesting to see that a lot of the issues relating to the management of diversity within the workplace is as apparent within our own cities as it is within multinational organisations.

A number of problems exist with the way in which many companies are managing issues relating to 'cultural diversity'. Some companies understand that managing diversity is central to employment equity initiatives, but try to address it by offering an additional training programme to managers. No attempt is made to apply such training to real issues in the organisation or to integrate it with other strategic initiatives.

It is generally understood that managing diversity is a critical competency required of line managers within a company. It concerns the management of people irrespective of race, gender, ethnic background, religion, disability, sexual orientation, age, and so on. Many so-called 'managing diversity' programmes not only confuse the relationship between managing diversity and employment equity, but also confuse managing diversity with managing national or ethnic culture.

So How SHOULD WE MANAGE DIVERSITY?

Managing diversity successfully within the workplace is not something that a company or individual is going to achieve by attending a training programme, or by learning how to differentiate between different ethnic and national cultures. It is a strategic company objective that needs to be integrated into both the company policies and procedures, and the organisational culture as a whole.

Critical Considerations Before Starting a Managing Diversity Project

Managing Diversity is the responsibility of everyone in the company, not just the Human Resources Department. Whilst HR Departments are often commissioned to introduce Employment Equity and Diversity programmes, the responsibility for the success of this within the company lies with the leadership of the company. For this reason.....

Commitment of top management and the executive committee is essential. The number one cause of failure for initiatives involving people is the lack of commitment by top management. It isn't enough for the Directors to talk about their commitment to managing diversity in their company, they need to embody it.

Introducing Employment equity and managing diversity are strategic objectives and need to be managed as such. Like all other strategic objectives

of the company, this needs to be translated into a formal policy with specific implementation objectives

Consult with employees. If this is going to be successful, you need to ensure that all staff are involved in the process – even if you are concerned about negative feedback. What is often overlooked is that managing diversity is a skill that **all** employees in the workplace need to master, not just the managers.

Introducing the Programme

There are seven critical activities.

Undertake an Audit. This needs to cover current policies & procedures, workforce composition and recruitment trends.

Undertake a Climate Survey. This needs to cover perceptions of employment equity and diversity and employees' perception of success or failure in these areas. These can be undertaken through questionnaires, focus-groups or electronic surveys.

Form a Committee for Managing Diversity in the Workplace. This should be a mixture of management and staff.

Develop a formal policy statement for the company's approach to managing diversity in the workplace. It is recommended that advice be taken from an experienced outside party in developing a policy statement for your company.

Appoint a Diversity Support Person. This could be a member of the HR Department or a line manager. Their role is not to take the strategic responsibilities away from the Managing Diversity Committee, but to deal with day-to-day issues.

Develop reward and appraisal systems to include performance in the managing of people and diversity.

Combine Dignity, Diversity and Equity training. Probably the most critical element of the process. This will develop the ability of managers to communicate with subordinates and peers in such a way that is perceived as dignified, mature and motivating.

The process of managing diversity is something that affects not only people in the workplace, but all of us living together in Peterborough. If we can optimise the process in our companies, what is to stop us optimising it in our community?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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