

Diversity & inclusion

Diversity recognises that everyone in the workforce is unique. Harnessing differences creates a productive environment and, where all are valued in an inclusive environment, talents are fully utilised and organisational goals are achieved.

THE NEED FOR EQUALITY/ EQUITY AND DIVERSITY

There are three main rationales underpinning equality and diversity in the workplace. These are the social justice, human capital and business case arguments. Recently there has been a focus on equity in the workplace. Although the term equality seems to be less well used today, it remains important.

Equality legislation sets out to provide equal opportunities for minority groups. In this respect, the business agenda focuses on organisational processes that lead to discrimination, and addresses these through equal opportunities actions. The aim is to give all an equal chance in the workplace.

The social justice argument draws upon moral and ethical arguments for treating people equally. The human capital argument focuses on practical outcomes, being concerned with the resource value of employees.

The business case argument builds on social justice. It recognises differences and the importance of tailoring practice equitably but focuses on individual needs. It also links to the human capital perspective through a focus on market

competitiveness, corporate reputation and brand. Employers who are socially responsible and ethical employers are attractive to the best talent.

EQUALITY LEGISLATION

Equality legislation is a feature of most countries. In the UK, the Equality Act (2010) provides protection against unfair treatment based on protected characteristics. These are: gender; race; religion and belief; sexual orientation; gender reassignment; disability; age; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity.

In other countries employment legislation may not be as comprehensive and certain factors may not be recognised (for example, same-sex marriages) or be illegal (for example, homosexuality).

DIVERSITY CHARACTERISTICS

Diversity embraces a number of other personal characteristics. These include class, personality, culture, background, language, accent, body size and work-style. Informational, knowledge and values diversity are other characteristics.

INTERSECTIONALITY

Everyone has their own individual characteristics representing a mix of protected, visible and non-visible differences. Intersectionality recognises that everyone is characterised by multiple interconnected social categories and each of these has a dimension of inequality or power.

In essence, the concept recognises that “the whole is more than the sum of the parts”. Disabled women of colour, for example, potentially experience discrimination that goes beyond a combination of gender, disability and race/ethnicity.



THE NEED FOR INCLUSION

Organisations can employ a very diverse workforce and keep statistics to prove this. However, if minorities gain access to employment but remain in the lowest grades, then the value of diversity is lost. Equity is needed to underpin an equal share of career and income opportunities. Inclusion is critical to ensuring equity.

Organisational commitment to equity requires inclusive employment policies and working practices. Top level board and senior management support is required. Organisations must listen to and value the contributions from all of their employees if they are to benefit from the full range of workforce talent and achieve success in an increasingly global landscape.

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