

Diversity & inclusion: Race & ethnicity

Racial and ethnic diversity is considered a key contributor to organisational success. Organisational action is needed to tackle detrimental treatment of racial/ethnic minorities to promote a more diverse workforce.

RACE, ETHNICITY & NATIONALITY

Racial characteristics reflect inherited traits including skin colour, facial/cranial features and hair texture. Ethnicity refers to characteristics through which individuals identify themselves and their grouping with others. Ethnic identity includes cultural, religious and linguistic characteristics.

Race and ethnicity refer to demographic difference beyond national origin. Demographic similarities can result in different nationalities identifying themselves within a group through shared values.

DEFINING RACIAL/ETHNIC DIVERSITY

Research shows that minority and majority racial/ethnic groups define diversity differently. Minority groups perceive diversity being achieved when their own particular group is well represented; whereas for the majority group, the presence of different racial/ethnic groups constitutes diversity regardless of which group is represented.

This is important because a minority group may not perceive organisational diversity if their own group is not well represented even if there are numerous other racial/ethnic minority employees.

Research indicates that the minority

group sees diversity being in place when there is both high numerical and vertical representation; for the majority group the definition is broader – with high representation on either/both dimension.

This is important because if a workforce is to be truly diverse, there must be minority group representation both horizontally and vertically. In this way a diverse racial/ethnic profile applies across the broad spectrum of work roles and there is career progression for minorities.

RACIAL HIERARCHIES & STEREOTYPING

Diversity and inclusion actions must address where racial hierarchies exist. This can be case in multi-ethnic societies where perceptions of racial ordering lead to inequality. Different racial/ethnic groups can experience differential treatment where the ‘in-groups’ benefit from prestige effects while the ‘out-groups’ receive negative treatment.

In managing diversity and inclusion practice, it is necessary to tackle prejudice. For example, prejudiced individuals may attribute negative behaviours of one individual to the entire racial/ethnic group while positive behaviours are attributed to the individual alone. In this way negative racial/ethnic stereotyping continues if left unaddressed.

THE GLOBAL MOBILITY CONTEXT

Racial/ethnic minority international assignees can be stereotyped into particular roles. For example, when certain nationalities are associated with undertaking unskilled work, they are less likely to be accepted in managerial positions.

Studies show that negative stereotypes can be applied to those relocating between developing countries, whereas a more positive view applies to incoming



Westerners. White assignees may be regarded as experts and given the most senior/highly rewarded positions. Non-whites may receive limited responsibility and lower paid roles.

ORGANISATIONAL ACTION

Organisational action will be needed to tackle detrimental outsider status and hierarchical stereotyping accorded to racial/ethnic minority employees in their home, host and headquarters countries.

To ensure a racially/ethnically diverse international assignee profile, action must be taken to promote understanding of diversity and inclusion policy/practice among the host country’s receiving workforce.

Assignees themselves will require additional support to help adjust to interacting with different ethnic groups. They need to develop flexibility, tolerance, patience, and empathy to deal with linguistic and cultural differences.

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