

Publication: Success from diversity – vitality from difference

Good practices for diversity management

Can diversity be managed and what are the goals of diversity management?
What sort of measures do Finnish organisations have in place to promote their diversity efforts?

These and other questions are discussed in a publication of the Finnish Ministry of Employment and the Economy targeted at directors, managers and other actors in companies and other organisations who are interested in giving value to diversity. The publication has been produced as part of the *Equality is Priority (YES)* project.

What is it all about?

- **Diversity refers to the differences and the degree of pluralism among an organisation's staff, clientele and other stakeholders.** People are of different ages and represent one gender or the other, and everyone has their own ethnic or national origin and language, religion or belief. We are different in terms of our physical capacity, our health and our sexual orientation. Diversity also refers to differences in outlook, opinions, knowledge and skills, activities or needs and expectations.
- **Diversity management is a way to maximise the benefits of diversity and minimise its drawbacks.** Diversity management means being aware of the impact of diversity among the staff and clientele, discovering the opportunities that diversity brings with it, and seeking solutions to the challenges it poses.
- **Diversity is a challenge for management and the production of services.** Diversity among staff can nevertheless be seen as a competitive edge and diversity among clientele as a business opportunity.
- **In many Finnish organisations diversity management has already become part of everyday life.** The publication describes various solutions for exploiting the knowledge and skills of a diverse workforce and identifying the needs of customers. The examples presented will hopefully help other organisations to develop their own personnel and customer service solutions.
- **Diversity management is based on the principles of human rights and equality.** In studies the subject is also approached from the perspective of "business case for diversity" and social and corporate responsibility.

What is needed is goal-directed diversity management

As competition for markets and a skilled workforce intensifies, an organisation's reputation and image as an employer count much more to job-seekers, customers and partners. Attitudes to diversity among staff, job-seekers and customers now carry far more weight than they used to in personnel recruitment and the production of services.

Diversity impacts on different areas of management

The publication presents various practices that have been perceived as good for the management of diversity in different organisations. Diversity is examined from the viewpoint of staff, customers and other stakeholders. Examples of diversity management practices include those relating to recruitment, staff inductions and customer-oriented product development.

The practices presented in the booklet obviously cannot be transferred directly to another organisation. One purpose of the publication is in fact to encourage dialogue between organisations in order to develop practices and strategies that support diversity.



EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICES

Positive action

- An employee with a disability who drives to work was given his own parking space in the company's car park. No such facility is available to able-bodied staff. Employees with disabilities also have the opportunity to work at home. (IBM)
- Cashiers in a supermarket are seated flexibly at checkouts that make it easiest for them to work in. For example, employees who wear hearing aids sit at cash desks where there is minimum background noise. (Kesko Corporation)

Responsible diversity

- The company works in partnership with an NGO to employ mental health rehabilitees and support their return to work or familiarise them with working life with support from a work coach. The aim is to help rehabilitees find their own place in society, raise awareness and increase tolerance among staff and customers. (Helsinki Cooperative Society HOK-Elanto in cooperation with the Helsinki Clubhouse)

Diverse teams

- The aim is to build ethnically diverse teams in order to highlight different points of view, profile solutions and encourage innovation in the teams. The composition of the teams also reflects the notion of commitment: it is easier to commit the countries concerned to decisions when their representatives are themselves involved in planning and carrying out the various functions. (KONE Corporation)

Diverse knowledge and skills

- A recruitment and workforce solutions company is implementing the 3+1 operational model, where a 'diverse' job-seeker is also always presented to the employer-client, if there is one in the group of qualified applicants. During the recruitment process the operational model and the principles of positive action are explained to the client. (Manpower Inclusive)
- Whenever new employees are taken on, the company aims to increase the number of people of different ages and from different continents in the organisation. Attention is also paid to the number of women in the company. The recruitment process makes use not only of the conventional application channels but also social media, such as Second Life, Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn. (Nokia Corporation)
- All job applicants go through the same recruitment process but requirements regarding language skills may vary according to the job the person is applying for. There is less urgent need for language skills in production than in customer services, for example. (Itella Corporation)

A clear and thorough induction process

- The induction period for new bus drivers lasts from one to three weeks, depending on previous experience and skills. It starts with a theory session and driving test, after which the trainee can practise in traffic, under supervision. The supervisors are part of the company's training organisation, and they are thoroughly trained for the job. The supervisor accompanies the new employee for as long as is required: from a few days up to two weeks, giving feedback at the end of each shift and advice on how to improve. Induction materials include clear and informative pictures and illustrations, and, if necessary, the written materials are studied and explained in a Finnish language course tailor-made for employees with a foreign background. The work shifts are planned in such a way that everyone can attend the language course, where, for example, trainees can practise using Finnish in traffic and at the depot. The language course also covers basic topics connected with living in Finland, such as schools, day-care centres and housing. (Helsingin Bussiliikenne Oy [Helsinki Bus Traffic])

EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICES

Solutions for working time and work arrangements

- When planning shifts, efforts are made to accommodate religious minorities so that the employees concerned may, if they so wish, reconcile work and practising their religion. For example, the company tries to organise work shifts on Fridays in a way that suits those of the Islamic faith.
(Helsingin Bussiliikenne Oy [Helsinki Bus Traffic])
- If necessary, cashiers in a supermarket are seated in pairs, with the employee with the poorest Finnish getting help from his or her Finnish-speaking fellow employee.
(Helsinki Cooperative Society HOK Elanto)

A focus on well-being at work is an investment

- The job description of the company's work well-being manager covers promotion of the staff's well-being. For example, the occupational health care unit and managers have together produced a tailor-made well-being at work programme for the over 50s. It includes a work book, advice on life management and exercises (50+ group).
(Helsinki Cooperative Society [HOK Elanto])

Clear rules

- The rules of the workplace – on tolerance and general behaviour, for example – are made clear to new employees right from the start. Supervisors and human resources management immediately intervene in cases of possible discrimination, racism or other unacceptable behaviour.
(Helsingin Bussiliikenne Oy [Helsinki Bus Traffic])

Networking and communities

- There are five active communities in the company, the relevant issues being women, sexual orientation, disability, cultural background, and work and family life balance. They all sustain diversity among the staff and offer an opportunity for networking and peer support. The communities aim not just to increase networking between members but also to present diversity in a positive light to all the staff. A mentor is appointed at management level for each community. The mentor's role is to support the community's activities. Efforts are also made to involve people who do not belong to these groups. For example, heterosexuals are encouraged to take part in activities organised by the LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transvestite) group.
(IBM)

A range of tools for communications

- Although the company's working language is Finnish, the well-being at work survey that is conducted every year, the main internal bulletins, and summaries of the staff magazine are in several different languages (Finnish, Swedish, Estonian, Russian, English, Arabic).
(Helsingin Bussiliikenne Oy [Helsinki Bus Traffic])
- A conscious effort is made to present diversity among the staff in a positive light in internal communications and other information channels.
(Helsinki Cooperative Society HOK Elanto)

Know-how goes both ways

- The company encourages own-initiative mentoring between young and more experienced employees. Mentoring goes both ways and is based on the needs of either party. This way both reap the benefit. The company also makes use of a diversity mentoring programme in which, for example, an employee who belongs to a sexual minority and a more experienced person at management level form a mentoring pair. The aim is for the person at management level to learn about issues that relate to the minority in question and gain new perspectives.
(IBM)

EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICES

Customer-oriented services and product development

- Customers and partners are included in the product and service development process through virtual networks, where customers can interact with the company's employees. The networks are tools to gather information and to present new views and ideas to aid the development of products and services.
(IBM)
- Reasonable accommodation is regarded as an integral part of the business operation. For example, when lifts are being designed, one major business area is to make it easier for people with disabilities and those with reduced mobility to move around. Moreover, unimpeded movement on the company's own premises is also an important and natural factor for the branch of industry the company represents.
(KONE Corporation)
- A survey has been carried out on accessibility on the Church's premises and a leaflet on the subject is being produced. Certain churches have had induction loops installed for hard of hearing parishioners. Furthermore, in one church there is a simultaneous interpreting facility for services. Account is also taken of the needs of other language groups, for example by organising services in English and events and ceremonies in other languages.
(The Federation of Evangelical Lutheran Parishes in Tampere)

Stakeholder cooperation looks to the future

- The company collaborates with training organisations, e.g. in the form of practical training for students with an immigrant background. The company regularly provides work experience for students in adjusted education in educational institutions at upper secondary level. The company employs 'occupational guides' who promote the integration of employees with an immigrant background into working life.
(Peikko Finland Ltd)

Tools for assessing quality and effectiveness

- The Finnish Institute of Occupational Health has developed a method for assessing age management. It can help examine and develop the models of age management that exist in different companies and organisations. The assessment method is primarily intended to be used by human resources management representatives and occupational health care and occupational safety and health actors. The method takes the form of an online test, in which the respondent receives immediate feedback on various aspects of his or her organisation's age management practices. The use of different tools is also suggested as a way to develop the organisation's age management system.
(Finnish Institute of Occupational Health)

The *Success from diversity – vitality from difference* publication was produced as part of the sub-programme of the *Equality is Priority (YES)* project that promotes equality and diversity in working life and business.

Organisations involved include the Confederation of Finnish Industries (EK), the Finnish Business & Society FiBS ry, the Church Employers Organisation, the Commission for Local Authority Employers, the Central Organisation of Finnish Trade Unions (SAK), the Office for the Government as Employer and the Finnish Disability Forum. The YES project has received funding under the European Union Programme for Employment and Social Solidarity – PROGRESS (2007–2013).

The booklet was published in October 2010 in Finnish (*Menestystä monimuotoisuudesta – elinvoimaa erilaisuudesta*) and Swedish (*Mångfald och olikhet – nycklar till framgång och styrka*) and can be found at www.tem.fi.

Further information:

Liisa Männistö, Project Manager (forename.surname@tem.fi, tel. +358 50 396 3655)

Seija Jalkanen, Senior Legal Adviser (forename.surname@tem.fi, tel. +358 50 396 0195)

