

The Art of Diversity

Gain Competitive Advantage Through Engagement

Najla Turk

Introduction – Interconnectedness

‘Education is not the learning of facts, but the training of the mind to think.’ –Albert Einstein

No longer are we isolated within one country; we have become an interconnected planet sharing the same natural resources. In fact people on Earth are the one and only ‘human resource’ intricately connected and intertwined. I liken people to traffic on the superhighways; thousands of people going about their day in a fast-changing world of work yet no matter how well planned the roads, collisions are inevitable.

For a moment, step back and assess the people in your workplace. How effective are your written guidelines in handling negative situations? How well equipped are you to manage diverse people? Are you struggling to ignite in others the light and hope you hold in your candle, regardless of race, gender, age, faith or ability?

Written from the perspective of a diverse individual and employee, I have personally experienced the challenges of assimilation within the Western workplace. In a professional capacity as a multicultural education and coordinator, I have extensive experience training and inspiring thousands of students from almost every corner of the world. As well I have over ten years’ experience advising many departments how best to engage and utilise talent from diverse individuals.

The one key lesson I can share in order to drive your organisation forward is that your human resource must be seen as the most valuable resource that you have. Whether they are on the factory floor or a colleague in a large multi-dollar organisation, addressing diverse talent in the workplace should not be tokenism.¹

Understandably embracing diversity and implementing inclusive practices can be challenging. Yes each person has a unique attitude to work and the mix of baby boomers, gen X, single mothers, the disabled; youth and the culturally diverse can all form a mighty concoction.

Are you dealing with high absenteeism or poor performance and productivity? Worse still are your diverse employees partially or intentionally disengaged? A UK White Paper (2015) on employee engagement and competitive advantage noted only 37% of employees have a clear understanding of what their organisation is trying to achieve.² Working in a dynamic environment where change is ongoing and achieving organisational goals and targets are paramount, managing diversity is critical to gaining competitive advantage.

Are you expected to bring about the necessary change to help ensure your organisation survives in today’s competitive world of work? It will benefit you to ask additional questions to further explore why your employees are not engaging or performing well.

¹ King, M L, 1964, *Why We Can't Wait*, Beacon Press, Boston

² Insights 2014, ‘White Paper, Employee Engagement, viewed 10 August 2015,

<<http://insights.com/files/employee-engagement-white-paper.pdf>>

What strategies and skills can eliminate cultural barriers or manage a defiant youth? What resources are needed to support the vision impaired or the single mother? How should you address racial or religious differences? You may have some experience and knowledge, but overall do you feel that you are in the dark with respect to cultural sensitivities? Maybe you are disengaging and no longer feeling satisfied in your job. You ask yourself, 'Why should I meet the needs of diverse employees? How is it my responsibility to manage the issues of a single mother, the challenges of a newly arrived migrant with language barriers, or to know what the indigenous community are experiencing? I didn't sign up for this!'

Managing diversity may be considered complex but not necessarily so. The strategies are simple and the benefits to the organisation are numerous:

- Increased productivity
- Higher staff retention, and reduced employee turnover
- Greater staff engagement
- A competitive advantage in your industry
- Improved profitability

With empathy, sensitivity and a simplistic approach shared in this book, results can be phenomenal.

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Employees will sense you're coming from a place of humility and authenticity; you will demonstrate value for the development and needs of your diverse workforce. As a result there would be fewer incidences of failed team projects, workplace disputes, absenteeism or high turnover of staff.

Now is the time to put your own spin on leading and managing diversity. Be innovative, inclusive and creative. This is about creating energetic flow between all employees regardless of their differences to enjoy workplace harmony, a positive culture and reconnection with people -your human resources. And doing this will make it much easier for you to achieve business success, measurable targets, meet deadlines and stand out in front of higher-level management or board members.

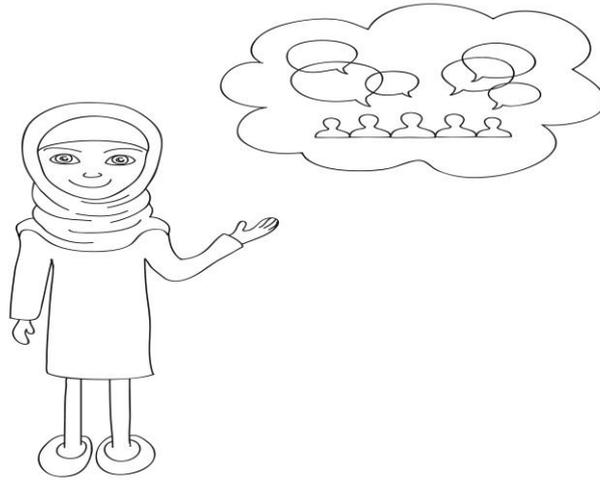
I understand there are legal obligations to recruit diverse individuals; but if workers are dissatisfied, stressed, resigning, disgruntled or disengaged the organisation is far from achieving quality customer service, profitability and competitive advantage.

Behind every incident of workplace conflict, failed project management and disruption to the flow of productivity is an inability to manage the diverse human resource. As a result of these issues an individual's health is affected resulting in high turnover and absenteeism. Why would anyone, employee or otherwise, go to work to feel the ill effects of stress?

To truly understand and manage diversity is an art. The art of diversity requires you gain a deeper understanding of others and through using refined leadership skills you can help develop individual capabilities.

I congratulate you on taking action to create a new culture of learning whereby you can help open the floodgates to building a happier, engaging and productive workforce.

Core Factor



‘Most folks are as happy as they make up their minds to be.’ – Abraham Lincoln

I’d like to begin this chapter with the parable of a Mexican fisherman and a Harvard businessman.

A vacationing American businessman stood on the pier of a quaint coastal fishing village in southern Mexico and watched as a small boat with just one young Mexican fisherman pulled into the dock. Inside the small boat were several large yellowfin tuna.

Enjoying the warmth of the early afternoon sun, the American complimented the Mexican on the quality of his fish. ‘How long did it take you to catch them?’ the American casually asked.

‘Oh, a few hours,’ the Mexican fisherman replied.

‘Why don’t you stay out longer and catch more fish?’ The American then asked.

The Mexican replied, 'With this I have more than enough to meet my family's needs.'

The businessman then became serious. 'But what do you do with the rest of your time?'

Responding with a smile, the Mexican fisherman answered, 'I sleep late, play with my children, watch ball games and take a siesta with my wife. Sometimes in the evening I take a stroll into the village to see my friends, play the guitar, sing a few songs ...'

The American interrupted. 'Look, I have an MBA from Harvard and I can help you to be more profitable. You can start by fishing several hours longer every day. You can then sell the extra fish you catch. With the extra money, you can buy a bigger boat. With the additional income that larger boat brings you, before long you can buy a second boat, then a third and so on, until you have an entire fleet of fishing boats.'

Proud of his own sharp thinking, he excitedly elaborated a grand scheme, which could bring even bigger profits. 'Then, instead of selling your catch to a middleman you'll be able to sell your fish directly to the processor, or even open your own cannery. Eventually, you could control the product, processing and distribution. You can leave this tiny coastal village and move to Mexico City, or possibly even Los Angeles or New York City, where you could even further expand your enterprise!'

Having never thought of such things, the Mexican fisherman asked, 'But how long will all this take?'

After a rapid mental calculation, the Harvard MBA pronounced, 'Probably around 15–20 years, maybe less if you work really hard.'

'And then what, senor?' asked the fisherman.

'Why, that's the best part!' answered the businessman with a laugh. 'When the time is right you'll sell your company stock to the public and become very rich. You would make millions!'

‘Millions? Really? What would I do with it all?’ asked the young fisherman in disbelief.

The businessman boasted, ‘Then you could retire happily with all the money you made. You could move to a quaint, coastal fishing village, where you could sleep late, watch ball games, take a siesta with your wife. You could stroll to the village in the evenings where you could play the guitar and sing with your friends all you want.’

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The moral of the fisherman story is that people will continually ask questions in order to ascertain ‘What’s in it for me?’ Notice how many questions the fisherman asked in search of an answer that would satisfy him.

What you value, appreciate or need isn’t necessarily important to others. The first core factor is meeting the needs of your clients and customers, not your own needs. Then it’s about providing quality service. Do you have the awareness and ability to meet the diverse needs of your customers?

As a servant leader, your role is to motivate employees to have a shared vision. Your organisation’s focus will vary from that of your employees. Before you aim to encourage your diverse people, have the conversation and find out what they value.

In a 2012 Forbes report, recruitment and consultant firms performed periodic employee engagement surveys. In the US and Canada it was found that only 19% were satisfied in their jobs, compared to 21% who were somewhat unsatisfied and an alarming 44% who were unsatisfied. A more in-depth study of 30,000 employees highlighted 56% around the globe wanted to leave their jobs because they were somewhat or totally unsatisfied.³

³ Adams, S 2012, ‘New Survey: Majority of Employees Dissatisfied’, Forbes, viewed 10 August 2015, <<http://www.forbes.com/sites/susanadams/2012/05/18/new-survey-majority-of-employees-dissatisfied/>>

Diverse employees are looking for flexibility because they value time, yet many organisations aren't able to shift their thinking and procedures to accommodate. Instead of paying wages to strictly work certain hours per day or week, many employees would rather be paid for performance.

There is a high likelihood your diverse workers would prefer to enjoy work flexibly and produce better outcomes within the time allowed rather than work rigid hours. The flexibility would suit working parents or disabled staff. How many parents are up most of the night with sick children? Wouldn't they love the flexibility to recoup their energy over a sleep in? How many mature-aged employees are experiencing health issues and need the time for appointments?

Some working mothers may value family time over the workplace; therefore, working additional overtime hours may not appeal to them. Also, an employee may be bound by a bundle of cultural obligations because their community is collectivist whilst Western people generally value individuality above all else. There are no right or wrong values, but it is important to be aware that the employee may be part of a larger collective family and therefore carries added family responsibilities.

What would be valuable for the employee is flexibility on a case-by-case basis. If flexibility is what your employees need in order to satisfy cultural, religious or family obligations, why not take the risk? I have been asked on many occasions, 'How do I manage workplace equality?' Or, 'Why should I offer flexibility for one person and not others?' Again, I'll stress that it should be a case-by-case analysis.

Everyone should have equality of opportunity – however, there are cultural differences that migrants wish to preserve. Organisations can contribute to workplace equality by bearing in mind cultural, religious or family distinctiveness.

Some workers may have reasonable requirements that need to be satisfied logically and emotionally irrespective of organisational policies and protocol. Your role is to share the organisational vision; make it attractive and encourage employees to become involved and committed. Be an active listener and aim to meet the needs of employees, yet all the while being clear and communicative in clarifying the expectations of the organisation.

A valuable strategy to help transform values is to discuss your country's core values and one's commitment to it, the workplace and community. For example: Australia has a national identity with key values such as freedom of speech, religion, democracy and having a 'fair go'. Australia is also a vibrant multicultural society, integrating many cultural perspectives into white Anglo-Saxon culture.

What does it mean to have a commitment to your country? What core values will you share?

To further make a positive difference for your organisation, consider the mix of your people. When an organisation looks like the market it serves, there's going to be a greater chance that your customers will want to do business with you.

There are benefits to having culturally diverse workers, as they become a significant part of your total workforce. Your customers may relate to your employee because they're from the same background – the advantage to the organisation is that you can increase productivity and efficiency in customer service. Another advantage of having ethnic employees is that they can learn from one another. When working in a customer service environment, diversity draws out talent and the benefits to every customer is greater.

Another core factor is to recruit talent from the four corners of the world, because diversity increases the odds that an organisation will attract different types of creative people with different skillsets and ideas. In the book *The Rise of the Creative Class*, Richard Florida discovered a clear correlation

between diversity and economic achievement. The study was based on an analysis across all fifty US states, yet the results would likely be similar in any other developed country.

As a culturally competent servant leader, your role would be to recruit the right talent – but more importantly to develop, manage and maintain it. Diversity can increase creativity to motivate and stimulate new ideas; as a result, innovation arises from the interaction of ideas from different sources.

Managed well, the variety of perspectives will cause the organisation to flourish in productivity. Therefore, it's evident that cultural diversity complements productivity and enhances decision-making in the workforce.

Avoid poaching talent from your competitors instead of promoting internally where possible. The disadvantage is the increase in salary. Not to mention that an employee hopping around companies could eventually go to your competitors once they get a better offer. Your best solution is to develop the individual capabilities of potential employees.

To enhance workplace practice, you need to understand that just because diverse employees are working together, it does not mean that they're going to share the same values or attitude. Given that each individual is unique, it's important to address their uniqueness and find out what it is that they hold in high regard.

For instance, traditionally Australian indigenous people are very frank and they may state that they do not have the same work attitude. Similarly the fisherman, puzzled by the whole strategy, responded, 'Isn't that what I am doing now?' It is important to also understand that other cultures have a cultural difference to working and careers.

Invest the time to learn about the individual. Who are they? What do they have to offer? You need to be able to access the full potential of your people because it's all about delivering great productivity.

Once you identify their background, mindset and attitude towards work, then work towards building a relationship and giving them a sense of self-worth in the workplace. It is not uncommon for young people, the disabled or newly arrived migrants to work in a job until they are tired of it before withdrawing and going elsewhere. What would that cost your organisation to recruit, train and develop? What would it cost in lost productivity?

This behaviour is likely to come from a patterned behaviour and negative self-talk. Once I asked a manager, 'What is your biggest problem?'

She replied, 'It's getting the workers to work.' Active disengagement is not uncommon.

What ways can you help engage and retain staff? How can you help them feel valued and respected as individuals? Can you help minimise the barriers experienced by a person from a non-English-speaking background with a disability? Be innovative! Ask yourself, 'What is important to them?' Lack of appropriate knowledge surrounding disability and negative ethnic stereotypes does not allow people with disabilities to assimilate very well in the workplace. By having an inclusive culture, equality is promoted and diverse people are valued, at which point your chances of engaging people increases.

As a servant leader, if you invest the time and attention to find creative ways to retain diverse employees, it would be in everyone's best interest. Employees from different backgrounds will have different ways of thinking and different standards and behaviours to yours. Let me stress that diversity, and even cultural diversity in itself, is not the problem. The problem is the failure to address diversity at a management level.

It is one thing to have a diverse workforce but it is a truly different ball game to refashion a diverse workforce into one of inclusiveness. In support of this statement, one-third of the participants of a global survey say they are unprepared to combine diversity with an inclusive culture to drive value for

the organisation. Australia, Portugal and Poland ranked poorly and are lagging with capability gaps in addressing inclusion.⁴

What can you do about managing this risk? Look at your workforce composition in detail. What are their range of characteristics? What are their skills? Is English their second language? In which country did they gain their qualifications? What are their skills and experiences? Informally assess their English language and literacy level. What is their training aptitude like? How long have they resided in the country?

I have met many overseas-skilled migrants who struggled to find work upon first arriving to the country, and upon employment they found they didn't understand the new work culture. They weren't able to assimilate or effectively communicate with other co-workers for various reasons. When your people are not engaged and they don't have a cohesive array of thinking, then there's disengagement – tasks will not be accomplished, irrespective of the size of the organisation.

This is why it's important to familiarise yourself with cultural practices to help create a highly effective connected team – through team engagement you can improve the company's competitiveness. This is your challenge. Engagement is key to high level performance and productivity.

You may find *The Individual in the Changing Working Life*⁵ an interesting read. Teamwork experiments showed that homogenous teams outperform diverse ones in the initial period of a team project. However, over a longer time frame the diverse teams performed equally and were more creative. These results indicate that it does take extra time and effort to manage cultural diversity, yet the creativity and boost in performance are the rewards to be reaped.

⁴ Bourke, J, Smith, C, Stockton, H & Wakefield, N 2014, 'From Diversity to Inclusion', Deloitte University Press, viewed 10 August 2015, <<http://dupress.com/articles/hc-trends-2014-diversity-to-inclusion/>>

⁵ Naswall, K, Hellgren, J & Sverke, M 2010, *The Individual in the Changing Working Life*, Cambridge University Press, UK

It is the organisation's responsibility to implement initiatives that validate diversity. This will require a change in planning. Managers need a realistic time frame whereby change would require analysing situations. Begin with a situational analysis and look at workforce characteristics such as age, gender and ethnicity. Consider minority groups and culture, as they should also be represented. Their beliefs, opinions and customs should not be regarded as alien or 'other', but as an aspect of your organisation's culture.

Furthermore, plan to evaluate your policy and procedures in regards to diversity, because this truly reflects conscious corporate responsibility. As a result, you will experience a decrease in liability due to employee complaints because you are better able to understand their differences in mindsets, culture, behaviour and talent. Over time measure your progress against the organisation's vision and mission statement.

Management must genuinely want to treat individuals equally and to give them every opportunity to commence employment, sustain their jobs and develop personal skills, abilities and talent.

Just as the fisherman had his set values and beliefs, so would every member of your organisation. Familiarise yourself with workplace policies such as EEO (equal employment opportunities) or the equity and diversity practices for the purpose of legislative reporting.

Workers shouldn't be refused opportunities or be forced to leave the organisation because they can't relate to the organisational vision and subsequently have no motivation to improve on their work performance. It's important to note that this is a common problem amongst most organisations, irrespective of their cultural background or age. One manager was honest in saying, 'If I put pressure on those who don't have the right work ethics, I can recruit younger people because I can better manage them.' That's the wrong approach!

According to American psychologist Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs, everybody needs a voice – therefore, it is important to give staff an opportunity to speak out. Allow them to have a voice. Allow employees to ask questions, as no question is a stupid question. Observe the different languages that people speak and give them opportunities to share different cultures, mindsets and experiences. Be aware of tradition and experiences. Allow people the opportunity to build relationships, because first there must be a relationship between the manager and the employee. Without this there can be no effective communication productivity or engagement.

With this information you're able to select or change processes and tailor them to the needs of your diverse workers. This can be a great learning opportunity. Maximum learning occurs between challenges and learning. As Benjamin Franklin said, 'Tell me and I'll forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn.' This way you accommodate every unique characteristic you have in the workplace and create a culture of learning from the management all the way down to your employees.

Offer diversity initiatives around women's employment, youth and disability. Implement change in a warm and friendly manner. Be open and honest about the necessary change needed to retain staff for a long-term period – irrespective of the group that we're dealing with.

If the working hours don't permit, you provide training opportunities that help them improve their skills and respect and teamwork.

Take this on board and embrace diversity. By following the strategies in this book you are in a better position to successfully manage your diverse people.