

## Diversity – what's in it for line managers?

By Amanda Cook\*, 2007

The concept of diversity has been buzzing around the corporate world and gaining momentum over the last decade. Many businesses have benefited from tapping into a wider talent pool, retaining skills by being good employers, and attracting new customers through understanding their diversity.

This business case for diversity is now well understood by many organisations. The vast majority of HR Managers are aware of equality and diversity, and ensure that their organisation's policies are legally compliant and, in many cases, socially inclusive. Diversity has even made it into marketing departments, with many businesses understanding the value of reflecting the diverse nature of its target market.

So, the policies are in place, procedures have been negotiated, but how do organisations ensure that these are brought to life in day-to-day business? The crucial role of line managers cannot be underestimated when addressing this issue of ensuring consistency in practice. Line managers and supervisors are the main communicators of your diversity strategy and make it happen (or not!) every day. They are usually the main point of contact in recruiting staff and certainly in managing them. The costs of getting this wrong are high: 82% of employers interviewed by the CIPD say they are struggling to recruit skilled staff; recruitment and training costs require significant investment and, when things start to go wrong, grievances and absence caused by stress consume many hours of management time.

All these factors make a strong case that organisations need to ensure that diversity is not just the function of HR, but is filtered throughout the organisation, with line managers playing a key role. The problem with this is that many line managers lack the skills, confidence and resources to adequately implement good practice. In addition, they are not always convinced of the business case, and sometimes see diversity as bit of fluffy stuff coming from HR or a box-ticking exercise. A recent report by Opportunity Now highlights these issues in its findings:

- Only 59% of female managers and 74% of male managers interviewed feel they have sufficient training to handle instances of bullying and harassment in their team;
- Only 26% of managers report that diversity goals form part of their personal performance objectives;
- Only 10% of managers link these goals with remuneration; and
- 54% believe their organisation is failing to make a proper business case for diversity.

The report, based on a survey of 800 line managers across both the public and private sectors, concludes:

*"If managers do not see the business case reflected in the behaviours and skills which an organisation values and the way in which performance is measured and monitored, then the business case risks being a paper-based exercise that makes little impression on managers."*

It also must be recognised that line managers are the ultimate jugglers in any organisation. They are constantly juggling targets, objectives, the needs of their staff and pressure from senior management. It's no wonder that the 'diversity' ball frequently falls forgotten in the tumble.

© 2007 FrontLine Diversity

*\* Amanda Cook is an Article 13 associate and manages FrontLine Diversity. She is an IT and computing graduate with many years experience working in the field of equality and diversity in both commercial and public sector environments. Amanda is currently completing a Masters in Employment and Equality legislation at De Montfort University.*

*For further information on Article 13's expertise in CSR issues, as well as the broad experience and expertise of our 200+ associates, please contact Jane Fiona Cumming on +44 (0)20 8840 4450 or [janezionac@article13.com](mailto:janezionac@article13.com).*