

THE DIVERSITY POCKETBOOK

By Linbert Spencer

Drawings by Phil Hailstone

"I would recommend the pocketbook to managers who want to understand the whole range of issues around what is meant by diversity and what is best practice. It is clear, brief, mercifully free of jargon and helps the manager take practical steps to implement best practice in their own organisation."

Barbara M Stephens OBE, Head of HE Practice, kmc international

"A great overview, packed with ideas and practical suggestions. At its heart is the idea that everyone is unique and should be treated as such - something that 99 out of 100 organisations need to do more of. Highly recommended."

Andrew Strivens, Chief Operating Officer, Weil Gotshal & Manges

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A STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

A COHERENT STRATEGY



Addressing equal opportunity effectively, and creating a culture that values difference and seeks to benefit from diversity, requires a clear vision of the future.

Once there is a vision, which should ideally be capable of being conveyed in three or four sentences, then it is possible to develop an effective strategy designed to move the organisation towards the vision. And to then develop appropriate implementation plans to achieve the strategic priorities.

Most organisations - even those with many equal opportunity and/or diversity policies, programmes or projects - do not have a clear equal opportunity or diversity vision or a strategy for bringing about change.

I believe it is vital for organisations to have a vision of the future when seeking to deliver equal opportunity and benefit from diversity.



A STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

A COHERENT STRATEGY



Many people are sceptical about the idea of 'vision' and scoff at the thought of time spent 'visioning'. Yet most of us, when thinking about a relatively mundane activity like decorating (or getting someone else to decorate) a room in our home, will have a 'vision of the future'. Answering the question, 'What will it look like when it's done?', is one of the most important things that those charged with developing effective equal opportunity and diversity policies can do.

It is not possible to develop a credible strategy without knowing what it will look like when it's done. When it comes to the diversity agenda, a number of key elements need to be included in the list of strategic priorities, no matter what the vision.

Image, leadership and accountability are vital components. Beyond that, other strategic priorities could include: communication; equal opportunity legislation; developing a culture of equality; and developing a recruitment process designed to attract more diverse job applicants.

A STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

IMAGE, LEADERSHIP AND ACCOUNTABILITY



Every organisation I have worked with has needed to prioritise image, leadership and accountability when it comes to addressing equality issues. Addressing these issues is vital if there is to be real progress on this agenda.

How organisations are perceived by those outside, and the nature and consistency of the leadership and the extent to which the leadership is accountable and holds others to account, determines the quality of the relationships within the organisation and between the organisation and others with whom it relates.

Leaders must make it crystal clear what outcomes - in terms of quality of relationships, teamworking, individual performance, etc - they require their direct reports to achieve and what they are going to hold them accountable for. Numerical targets, relating to types of people in particular roles or grades, must only be part - and not even the most important part - of the story. Those reporting to them also need to know that there will be different consequences for them, depending on the degree of their success or failure.

A STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

A COMMUNICATION STRATEGY



Many organisations committed to equality and valuing diversity have failed to make sufficient headway because they do not have a communication strategy. Good communication is important generally, but in this context it is vital because when it comes to diversity and equality everybody believes they have something at stake, with a lot of people believing they are going to lose out.

The communication strategy must ensure that:

- All staff are aware of the diversity vision and strategy, and the role they have to play in fulfilling the vision
- Relevant partners and the community at large understand the organisation's commitment to:
 - Valuing and benefiting from diversity
 - Serving all customers/clients fairly and equally
 - Recruiting, developing and retaining increasingly diverse, talented, high-performing individuals

A STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY LEGISLATION



At the very least, organisations need to provide information, training and/or development opportunities to ensure that all staff have a basic understanding of equal opportunity legislation and are kept up to date with changes.

Relevant staff - recruitment, other HR professionals and diversity champions - should have a more in-depth understanding of the anti-discrimination legislation and the implications for the organisation's day-to-day working practices.



A STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

DEVELOPING A CULTURE OF EQUALITY



Developing a culture of equality, in which all staff believe that they are being treated equally well, is an obvious strategic priority for this agenda.

If people look on equal opportunity as, 'having an active expectation of access to - and a real choice to participate in or contribute to - activities or processes, believing that they are receiving relevant and appropriate treatment in relation to their ability and circumstances', then what staff **believe** about their treatment is important.

Addressing any disbelief, and turning it around, is vital if they are to contribute fully to the organisation. Organisations committed to benefiting from diversity cannot afford to be complacent about how their practice is perceived. Blaming the staff for being cynical and disbelieving simply won't do.

Attempting to bury bad news, from staff surveys and the like, on the basis that it will 'disappoint the board', 'annoy top management' or 'demoralise HR and middle managers', simply stores up trouble for the future.

A STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK



DEVELOPING A PROCESS TO ATTRACT MORE DIVERSE JOB APPLICANTS

Those concerned with recruitment need to check current policies and processes to discover who are attracted to apply, which groups are missing, at what point in the recruitment process do particular groups drop out, where adverts are placed, who are featured in brochures and so on. This will identify what action, if any, is necessary to ensure that women, people with disabilities, members of minority ethnic groups and others whose talents may have been under-used in the past, are encouraged and given every opportunity to contribute to the work of the organisation.

Often, organisations find that they have to take specific action to inform members of 'traditionally marginalised groups' about their organisation and the career and job opportunities available to them, and then encourage eligible applicants to apply.

The strategic intention here is very clear, but if there is to be a successful outcome, it goes well beyond the remit of the 'recruitment team'. At the very least, the strategic priorities concerned with image and communication will also be very relevant.

About the Author

Linbert Spencer

Linbert is an experienced consultant, coach and learning facilitator. He held a number of key public and voluntary sector appointments before setting up his own consultancy business in 1990. A leading authority on diversity and inclusion, Linbert has worked closely with the Cabinet Office, the Foreign Office, other government departments and agencies and organisations in the private sector advising on diversity, leadership and strategy.

He has coached many top executives, regularly facilitates learning events at board and senior management level and designed several personal and career development programmes. In 2004 his consultancy won a National Training Award.

Linbert is a member of the Police Leadership Development Board, the MOD's Defence Business Learning Advisory Board, and a Commissioner on the Churches Commission for Racial Justice.

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