

Process tool for diversity

A process tool¹ for diversity shall be able to give the company opportunities to increase profits through diversity management. The tool shall improve the company's achievements by learning about other successful experiences and processes. The issue involves looking outside of the culture in the organisation, company, industry or business area, local community, country or region to understand how others achieve good results. A process tool directed to diversity will give the business a helping hand in understanding the process behind the results. By using others' experiences the company will be able to improve in the performances of diversity in fields being investigated.

The process contains the following 4 steps:

1. A thorough understanding of one's own procedures and processes.
2. Analyses of other businesses' processes.
3. Comparison of own achievements with others' performances.
4. Implementing necessary measures to fill the performance gap.

The process tool must not be seen as a one time procedure. The tool will only be efficient if it is a continuous and integrated part of the business. The aim is continual improvement in securing a consciousness about the process and using the tool on both costumers' and users' relations as well as on own employees and recruitment processes.

Diversity is not a new concept

In Norway the Statistic Central Bureau of Norway (SSB) conducted research in 1989 on the significance of immigration for the development of the Norwegian population. Immigration during the 80s constituted more than half of the population growth for each year. Compared with other industrialised western societies with low fertility rates, the tendencies in Norway were much like other European countries. Norway had an immigration stop in 1975 while there was still a need for workforce importation.

The statement that "the belief that the immigrants at the starting point have a lot of valuable competence that should be much better utilised", is in many cases misinterpreted. This is illustrated by the existence of a national action plan for utilising immigrants' competence, but no national plan on how to develop competence. The question of qualifying for the future will be a crucial point for the business community if they are to be able to utilise the workforce already available in the labour market. The Norwegian Competence reform states that the immigrants' main obstacle for attending "ordinary" employment is that they lack the necessary competence that is asked for. It is underlined

¹ The Diversity Mirror is developed by stiftelsen MiA (Diversity at Work) and build on experiences from the Netherlands and Denmark. It is further developed for the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration within Norwegian public services.

that many immigrants have a relevant and high competence that has not been thoroughly utilised, but it is not converted to the actual work market. The aim of the reform is to contribute to improving and utilising the immigrants' competence.

Some companies have their own diversity strategy and the Norwegian government has an action plan for improving immigrants' competence (2001–2006). Many organisations in business and commerce and employees' organisations have developed documents for guidelines, action plans and strategies directed to diversity. The consciousness directed to diversity has improved with the development of the internationalisation and globalisation of the work market and of trade and production.

General appraisal

A way to counteract discrimination in the working life is to development a demand that diversity is taking for granted (as a standard). To do this, some general appraisals of the business have to be undertaken.

- identify how today's praxis is agreed to what would be ideal
- identify how diversity as a strategy is integrated in the main areas of the company's organisation
- identify key areas for further development by investigating the situation at the workplace
- prove to the organisation by concrete examples the benefits with diverse workforce in the company

The diversity strategy in the company should harmonise with current laws and regulations. The company must in addition be willing to take individual considerations as it is important to be aware that a standard is not the same as a negotiated deal or a law act. A standard has to be accepted voluntarily by the understanding that it is gainful for the company to improve diversity thinking. To standardise diversity in the company shall be a tool for customers' and users' satisfaction as well as for improving the work environment and recruitment opportunities.

Some important questions

In the recruitment process the company should be aware of how the application forms or the application process are presented to avoid that there will be no unnecessary communication barriers or misinterpretation. The company should know that applicants to vacancies are from all groups, including immigrants and refugees. Everyone in the organisation must be informed that the recruitment process is directed to improve the company's diversity profile. It may also be necessary to have a system for investigation of the competence of the immigrants and refugees, and whether their skills are relevant for actual employment.

The competence development in the company has to have a programme of action and an objective. There should also be a training programme directed to the need of qualification also for language minorities in the company. Other employees should also be able to participate in these training

programmes as the training shall be a part of a company culture based on equity and diversity values. There may be also Norwegian employees who will have problems following the “normal” in-job training programme. Likewise many immigrants and refugees will not have any problem following ordinary training courses, and must be offered development opportunities on all levels in the company.

The company should for social reasons give information in a positive manner to all employees about immigrant employees’ languages, religious background, social and cultural activities, etc. if agreed. If the company is established in a major city or in an area with a number of ethnic minority inhabitants, it can be an advantage to promote the company’s diversity profile in the local community, both as an opportunity for recruitment of ethnic minorities and/or to offer the company’s services to ethnic minorities living in the city or the local community. It will also be an advantage to participate in a network of gainful cooperation with other companies who have experiences in diversity. This may develop good examples that can be utilised by an ethnically and culturally diverse local community. There are many advantages to recruiting by non-traditional sampling methods to develop and secure a diverse workforce that reflects the diversity in the local society. The company can be in touch with immigrants’ organisations, humanitarian organisations, and others working with immigrants and ethnic minorities in the local community.

The demands for a vocational and communicative competence in the company will also demand that the company offer adapted training programmes to language minority employees. Work leaders, employees, union representatives, and colleges must take part in or support and follow up the adapted training programmes. The whole workplace must participate to avoid barriers that may be obstacles for immigrants and refugees to participate in the in-job training programmes. The company must see the development of all employees’ understanding of the cultural and social conditions for ethnic minorities as an objective or aim to avoid tendencies of discriminating attitudes. It may also be important through positive profiling to have social events that visualise all groups of employees to avoid negative stigmas. This makes it necessary to develop an internal network for sharing diversity competence and experiences. By this the minority speaking employees will have an opportunity to be stimulated to creativity and vocational development and to prove their professional skills in their work even without accepted skill certificates.

Diversity must be thought of as voluntary and not seen as an annoying instruction. A standard for diversity may certify the company both to keep within the discrimination laws and regulations besides securing that the company is directed to market demands for diversity. Many Norwegian companies are also a part of an international group of companies and may also adapt the diversity policy to the group’s demands. This means that Norwegian companies will have to participate in directing towards diversity thinking and be a part of the international competition for the best employees and market share.