

Strength in breadth



SEEING PEOPLE IN TERMS OF STEREOTYPES RATHER THAN SKILLS IS A GUARANTEED WAY TO CUT DOWN YOUR INTAKE AND DEVELOPMENT OF TALENT. **HANNAH COWLEY** REPORTS ON THE BUSINESS BENEFITS OF EMPLOYEE DIVERSITY.

Recruiting and developing the right person for a job isn't always easy, but many businesses are making the task even harder by stereotyping employees and potential employees by race, gender or age.

That's the message of a report, "Opening Up Talent Business Success: Integrating Talent Management and Diversity", from the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development. The report says that making the integration of diversity into talent management a corporate priority during periods of economic uncertainty will help businesses outperform competitors through their people.

One of the report's authors, Claire McCartney, says: "By opening up talent opportunities, organisations will benefit from a stream of differing views and practical answers to problems, helping them to reflect increasingly diverse customer needs and remain ahead of the competition."

So employers shouldn't assume that older employees will want easier jobs or shorter days, or that young employees will want more demanding roles. By recognising which job roles will suit individuals, employers make their businesses more efficient by getting maximum benefit from their staff.

The report urges businesses to treat staff as individuals. Managers should be able to recognise the skills of each individual working for them. That way, the business extracts the maximum talent from each employee. The public sector is particularly good at acknowledging that all employees have talents, regardless of the level they are working at. It is important that employers do not regard only those at the top of the hierarchy as talented.

Box 1: What's it mean?

Diversity, or equal opportunity, means not excluding anybody on the basis of race, gender or age, and is part of talent management, which is about making the best possible use of employees. The business case for diversity is that a company that employs a diverse workforce (both men and women, people of many generations, people from ethnically and racially diverse backgrounds, and so on) is better able to understand the demographics of its market and so better equipped to thrive than one with a more limited range of employee demographics.

According to the report, talent management has become a big concern in all economic sectors. It urges businesses that have not yet caught up with the larger, more successful firms to start using the skills of all their employees in ways aligned to business objectives.

Report co-author Dianah Worman says: "It is alarming to see the wide gulf between the leaders and followers. There seems to be confusion about how to link talent management with diversity without breaking the law, resulting in the issues being dealt with separately so that organisations miss out on the benefits of a joined up approach."

McCartney and Worman advise organisations to recruit and develop many diverse groups. A wide representation of people from different ethnic minorities, genders and age groups gives companies unique perspectives.

Credit Suisse, BT, NHS Tower Hamlets, the London Organising Committee for the Olympic Games and Guardian Media Group are all examples cited in the report of organisations that do not just comply with the discrimination laws, but also strive to be as diverse as possible so that they can get the right person for each job role. They seek to remove stereotyping from their approach to attracting and developing people with the skills, abilities and potential to contribute their best.

The authors believe that their research – undertaken with a series of focus groups, involving more than 100 people, including HR directors and talent professionals – offers invaluable learning for organisations that have so far failed to make the connection between talent management and diversity, or are struggling to see the business advantage of doing so.

The report makes the message for businesses loud and clear: incorporate diversity into your talent management plan, or lose out to your rivals.

Hannah Cowley is a writer for The Treasurer.
editor@treasurers.org

