
Learning From Others: Expanding Diversity and Inclusion Across Our Borders

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Organizations have grown to be global and, consequently, more diverse. The process of “managing diversity” has taken a central role in the United States as well as in other Western cultures, such as the United Kingdom (Kandola & Fullerton, 1998). Even in historically more homogenous cultures, the influx of more diverse workforces and customer bases has increased the need to consider the diversity of one’s workforce (e.g., Devine, Baum, Hearn, & Devine, 2007). Moreover, many organizations have initiated diversity and inclusion activities. Hays-Thomas and Bendick (2013) asked whether voluntary professional practice standards should be created to professionalize these diversity and inclusion practices. We infer that the authors are focusing exclusively on US organizations because we know that multiple organizations in other countries, specifically the UK, have already united to create benchmarking tools or standards on diversity and inclusion. Therefore, in this response, we hope to encourage our colleagues to consider learning from other

countries and allow inclusion to transcend geographic boundaries by providing one example, the UK.

Benchmarking in the UK

The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) is the government agency in the UK that has a statutory remit to promote and monitor human rights and to protect, enforce, and promote equality. It has a code of practice that guides employers on what is expected of them in a number of key areas including, for example, equal pay, disability, and recruitment. In addition, there is a mandatory legal requirement for all public bodies to have made efforts to:

- “Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimization and other conduct prohibited by the Act.
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.” (www.equalityhumanrights.com)

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So there is guidance of various sorts available to employers to help them meet their statutory obligations. However, this approach is unidirectional, where information flows from the EHRC to the organizations. A growing need was recognized for organizations to benchmark on these fronts in order to determine their relative diversity progress compared to similar organizations. To address this need, a UK group called *Business in the Community* (BITC) established benchmarking standards in the areas of gender and race 11 years ago. Originally, separate standards were provided based on race and gender, but a unified set of standards has now been developed. The standard measures two broad areas described as *inputs* (e.g., business cases, policies, and practices, supplier diversity) and *impacts* (e.g., workforce profiles, recruitment metrics, maternity return rates, pay gaps). The results of benchmarking comparisons on these diversity assessment tools are confidential and provide participating organizations with sector-specific performance data, feedback, and action plans to achieve specific diversity goals (diversity.bitc.org.uk). Combining the standards for race and gender clearly makes sense, but this benchmarking procedure is still limited to these two strands of diversity. In the meantime, there are other organizations that provide similar benchmarking surveys for sexual orientation and disability.

These standards have assisted organizations by giving them a set of actions they can take, and by providing a sense of direction and purpose. There has unfortunately been almost no systematic evaluation of the impact the standards have made in practice. One issue in publicly sharing results is confidentiality and privacy of the organizations' data. The groups conducting the analyses and audits are membership only, and little information is made available to non-members on trends and results. Another issue is the consistency of the data. That is, the members change; new organizations join and others leave, creating a challenge in terms of comparison and identification of trends. Nonetheless,

data do exist, and learning from these processes and experiences could prove valuable for the United States. In addition, it appears that the BITC has recently recognized the need to share some results. In collaboration with Towers Watson, BITC initiated the first BITC Workwell benchmark of FTSE 100 companies (the 100 companies listed on the London Stock Exchange with highest market capitalization). General results were released on April 16, 2013. It was found that "diversity and inclusion was the highest scoring area out of a total of 25 indicators, highlighting the importance our leading businesses place on equal opportunities" (raceforopportunity.bitc.org.uk/Workwellbenchmark).

New Benchmarking Developments

A new organization has recently been established in an attempt to create a new benchmark that covers all the legally protected strands of diversity. Called the *National Equality Standard* (NES), the purpose of this organization is to create a system of auditors who will independently assess each organization that wishes to be audited. The audits will provide organizations with a detailed and comprehensive report on the extent to which their policies and activities fit with best practice. There are 20 founding organizations, including Microsoft and Cisco. Once audited, national certification will be awarded if all diversity requirements have been satisfied. The UK's EHRC is involved in developing the NES. However, this new entity is interesting as it is primarily a business-led approach that is attempting to bring about sustainable change. Whether the NES succeeds or not will only be evident over time. However, the developments give an indication of the thinking in the UK on this topic. First, organizations do want to benchmark to evaluate how they are doing and what they can learn from others. Second, managers of organizations desire to create one entity as opposed to having a fragmented, piecemeal approach. Whether the benchmarking itself encourages or hinders progress is another

discussion altogether. Over time the impact of the benchmarking initiative will be evident. Nonetheless, much can be learned from our colleagues' experiences in other countries that can aid the SHRM group's initiative.

The NES is a response not only to the desire to establish what best practices related to diversity might be but is also a response to the frustration at the lack of diversity at senior levels in many UK and European organizations. Increasingly, calls are being made for quotas to be set, particularly for women in non executive director roles. Norway has established such a policy that includes sanctions for companies that fail to meet mandated targets. Governments are also taking steps to act as role models. A recent review estimates that approximately half of the countries in the world have adopted or recommended some element of an electoral gender quota (Whelan & Wood, 2012).

Additional Points to Consider

The encouragement of good practice, the provision of a standardized system, and the opportunity to benchmark are certainly benefits of this proposed approach for all organizations. Care must also be taken to ensure that diversity and inclusion initiatives do not have undesirable effects, such as tokenism for minority group members, and are perceived as fair by majority group members. To properly ensure the adoption of any new voluntary standards, we should consider the implementation process. In addition to monitoring what organizations "have done" in other cultures to implement diversity and inclusion initiatives, practitioners in the United States should also evaluate more specifically the procedures that may result in positive outcomes (including intangible results such as high quality group member relations and employee job satisfaction). Managing fairness perceptions is essential if initiatives are to be accepted and viewed as important by all organizational members (Heilman, Block, & Lucas, 1992; Shore et al., 2011).

Moreover, we need to recognize that diversity and inclusion is more than numbers—it is manifested in the *interactions* we have with others, between individuals and between groups. In short, diversity management must address the ways people deal with each other. Therefore, diversity and inclusion issues occur at all levels in the organization and especially at the top, making a focus on "inclusive leadership" essential. To accomplish inclusion, we each need to recognize our biases, including our unconscious biases, and the effects that those biases may have on our interactions with others. A growing body of literature suggests that although explicit goals for diversity may be set, implicit biases may affect our ability to successfully achieve those goals (e.g., Macan & Merritt, 2011). "While our prejudices may vary, we're all the same in having prejudices" (Kandola, 2009, p. 3). Until we can acknowledge our unconscious biases, they will interfere with true inclusion no matter what standards are set in a country. As industrial–organizational psychologists, we also have an important role to play not only in creating such standards but also in evaluating their effectiveness across various aspects and levels, including how they affect individuals, teams, and organizational culture.

Summary

We are a global society. We need to remind ourselves to reach across the borders and not stay cooped up in our own geographic locales. Many countries around the world have employment discrimination laws (Myors et al., 2008) that aim to advance the diversity and inclusion of individuals in the workplace. The SHRM group did the right thing to look beyond their expertise and commission a literature review of diversity metrics (Ramsey, 2011). Can we also expand our reach to colleagues and information from other countries to learn from them? Can inclusion transcend our borders? Can we begin to shed even our unconscious biases? We believe so

and encourage our colleagues to learn from countries that are also struggling with these issues of professional standards for diversity and inclusion initiatives.

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