

Diversity Management – The New Management

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An increasing number of people from varying backgrounds are playing a greater role in the Barbadian labour market. This diversity reflects not only population changes due to immigration and mobility within the region, but also an increasing recognition of marginalised groups in the labour force.

Diversity refers to the differences between individuals and covers many areas such as age, sexual preferences, skills, tenure, learning styles and nationality. We find these differences everywhere in society and therefore a diverse workforce and labour market demands a response which is integrated, proactive and effective. In recent history, a variety of researchers have detailed the benefits of proactively embracing diversity management which includes:

- Improved performance/productivity
- Increased creativity/flexibility
- Higher quality problem-solving
- Improved understanding/penetration of markets
- Increased staff morale and job satisfaction
- Improvements in staff retention/less absenteeism

Diversity efforts in the workplace facilitate the exchange of new perspectives, improve problem solving by inviting different ideas, and create a respectful, accepting work environment, all of which make good business sense.

Best Practice in Diversity Management

In the book *Beyond Race and Gender*, R. Roosevelt Thomas defined managing diversity as “a comprehensive managerial process for developing an environment that works for all employees.” Diversity Management is the key to unlocking the benefits of a diverse workforce and established best practices include the following:

- The development of a formal process that is contained in rules or procedures.
- Top management support while being primarily decentralized giving managers a sense of ownership.

- Diversity training is not limited to managers, but is extended throughout the workforce.
- A review process or committee should be established to maintain responsibility for establishing policies, providing technical assistance, reviewing/approving plans, and monitoring progress toward the achievement of goals.
- Accountability for the results of diversity programs is another attribute of best practice organizations. While valuing and integrating diversity are lofty goals, to be effective, organizations must use more measurable criteria to evaluate success in managing diversity. The use of metrics, surveys, focus groups, management and employee evaluations all assist in providing useful information.

The Position of Older Workers

One area of Diversity that is generating much interest is the position of older workers. Not only is it a well documented fact that Barbados has an ageing population, but as we continue to increase the pensionable age there is a resulting increase in the aged working population. In order to prevent older workers from leaving the organisation, to retain their knowledge and experience, and keep them in an optimal employable condition, a special policy aimed at older workers can be implemented. The employability of workers decreases as they grow older and therefore remember the following:

1. People who do a lot of brain-work keep their mental capacities much longer! And with the added wisdom and years on the job they can be a tremendous asset to an organisation.
2. Older people are less often ill, but once they are, it takes longer for them to recover (and they develop more serious illnesses).
3. Older people find it more important to have work that is creative and meaningful, and where they can use the expertise they gathered over the years.
4. The increased life-experience means that they often are better at dealing with conflict or emotionally loaded situations.
5. Having done the same work for a long time usually means that they are very good at what they do, but it is not easy for them to learn new things or start a new job in their own or a new organisation.

Any organisation that wishes to survive in the new multicultural and all inclusive environment must learn to embrace workers from every facet of society. By embracing diversity not only will there be appeal to wider markets but it also allows the business to benefit from the life experience and creative abilities of its different employees. Once managed well, diversity can only be beneficial to any enterprise.