

Workforce Diversity

Taking Advantage of Our Differences

The following Fact Sheets are available on line at www.aofp.ca:

1. Becoming an Employer of Choice
2. Employee Turnover
3. Using the Turnover Calculator
4. Fostering Employee Commitment
5. Keeping your Good Employees
6. Employee Engagement
7. Essential Skills
8. Workforce Diversity
9. Managing a Family Business
10. Rewards
11. Recruiting Foreign Workers
12. Orientation
13. Employee Empowerment
14. Introducing Technology
15. Effective Appraisals

How can this Fact Sheet help me?

When people with different experiences, backgrounds, and perspectives come together in the workplace, there is potential for greater communication challenges and increased conflict. This fact sheet shows you how to avoid these difficulties and use workforce diversity to your advantage.

Challenges and Opportunities

Managing a diverse workforce can be challenging, but it is worth the effort. Diversity in the workforce can prove to be a source of strength and, ultimately, a great competitive advantage. Diversity management, however, goes far beyond complying with legislation or implementing an employment equity plan.

Diversity management involves integrating all members of the workforce and using their diversity to make the organization more effective. Programs are required that will make the organization more flexible, encourage the exchange of new ideas, improve problem-solving and decision-making by inviting different perspectives, and create a respectful and accepting work environment.

Organizations that can attract, engage, retain and capitalize on the skills of a diverse workforce will have a competitive advantage over those that can't. They can attract more diverse employees and customers. This is a key to success in a global economy.

Workplace diversity includes:

- Age
- Gender
- Ethnicity (including culture, nationality, language, and race)
- Values
- Physical and intellectual ability
- Familial obligations
- Sexual orientation
- Educational level
- Economic class
- Personality type
- Physical appearance (e.g., height and weight)
- Skill
- Experience
- Other differences

Case Study

The Carriere Foods (Ontario) Inc. Tecumseh Plant is proud to be the first employer for many local immigrants.

To overcome language and cultural barriers during the selection process, the company encourages new immigrants for whom English is a second language to bring another person with them to the interview to act as an interpreter. The company also makes its orientation package available in languages other than English and draws on its bilingual employees as facilitators during orientation.

To overcome the wariness about authority that is common in many cultures, the company has developed an innovative approach to discipline and conflict resolution that focuses on understanding and resolving the root issue. As a result of all of these efforts, the company has achieved much success in its ability to recruit and retain immigrant workers.

If only age-, gender-, and culture-related barriers were removed, an additional 1.6 million Canadians would be able to participate in the workforce. This represents a significant untapped labour market.

Attracting a more diverse workforce is a viable solution to the labour shortage facing the food and beverage processing industry.

Solutions

There are many types of diversity programs:

- Diversity training for managers and employees.
- Diversity-related networks, councils or task forces.
- Diversity marketing (e.g., advertisements, sponsorships of community events).
- Cultural events and celebrations.
- Conferences, forums and other diversity-related learning events.
- Targeted recruitment campaigns.
- Diversity-related lunch and learns.
- Specific accommodations for persons with disabilities.
- Flexible work hours or work arrangements.
- Work-life initiatives.
- Quiet rooms (e.g., prayer rooms, breastfeeding rooms).

How do I start?

1. Assess your organization with regards to managing diversity and building an inclusive culture. Ask yourself the following questions:

- To what extent is your organization committed to diversity? How is this commitment demonstrated?
- Has your organization identified key business reasons for investing in diversity and inclusiveness? What benefits might your organization experience? What challenges might you face? How could you overcome those challenges?
- Is diversity an explicit part of your employer brand or competitive advantage?
- To what extent does your organization value diversity and seek to build an inclusive culture?

2. Focus on developing supervisors and managers.

Helping managers and supervisors understand diversity and how to manage it effectively is critical. The characteristics that are needed to communicate effectively with a diverse group of employees include:

- The ability to accept the limitations of one's knowledge and perceptions.
- Tolerance for ambiguity.
- The ability to appreciate and communicate respect for others' habits, culture, values, and beliefs.
- The ability to demonstrate empathy.
- The capacity to be flexible.

References

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The following Fact Sheet may be helpful:

11. Recruiting Foreign Workers

This resource is available on line at www.aofp.ca under Workforce Development.

- The willingness to learn new ways of behaving and managing.
- The ability to manage change in situations where people have a variety of opinions about what needs to be done and how it should be done, particularly when resources are limited.
- The ability to be open-minded in order to recognize and appreciate differences.
- The ability to remain sensitive to the stress that being in a minority group might entail.

Helpful Websites

Diversity Best Practices: www.diversitybestpractices.com

Workplace Diversity Update: www.diversityupdate.com

Ontario Gateway to Diversity: www.equalopportunity.on.ca

Diversity Central: www.diversitycentral.com

Ontario Human Rights Commission: <http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en>

Jurisdictional Labour Home Pages: http://www.labour-info-travail.org/library_e.shtml

Canadian Human Rights Commission: www.chrc-ccdp.ca

Canadian Council on Rehabilitation and Work: www.workink.com

Harassment Guides: www.ohrc.on.ca/english/guides

ADVANTAGES OF BEST PRACTICES

- More qualified job applicants
- Better trained and informed employees
- Better health and safety practices
- More engaged and productive employees
- Fewer line interruptions
- Fewer product quality problems
- Easier implementation of new technology
- Lower absenteeism and employee turnover
- Higher sales per employee
- Higher market value to book value