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Managing diversity in the workplace

Raina Ng

Achieving a more diverse workforce is more than just meeting quotas. As Chartis Malaysia Insurance Bhd CEO Matt Harris points out, it is important for companies to hire the best person for the job, rather than focusing on gender or race. In fact, trying to achieve diversity for quota purposes is simply counter-productive.

A diverse workforce occurs naturally in Malaysia in terms of race and gender, Harris tells Management@Work. But managing diversity is not so much about trying to balance the different races and genders as it is about providing equal opportunity and support. A diverse workforce, if managed well, can help companies achieve optimum performance and staff efficiency.

Randstad Malaysia director Jasmin Kaur considers a diverse workforce to be one that represents society at large. This means it should include people of different ages, genders, socio-economic backgrounds, ethnicities and languages.

According to the Randstad World of Work 2011/2012 survey report, 65% of Malaysian businesses are hiring across all walks of society, which means they recognise the need for diversity and are doing their bit to create equal opportunities for people in the country.

Jasmin points out that leveraging workplace diversity is increasingly seen as a strategic move to give a company a competitive advantage. Thus, companies should focus on creating an organisational culture that nurtures and respects individual employees, and give them an opportunity to grow

within the organisation irrespective of their backgrounds.

“Managers need to be able to create a respectful and inclusive work environment for employees. This means taking into account different cultures, languages, religions and physical challenges as well as encouraging people to celebrate their individuality while working together in a dynamic team,” says Jasmin.

Companies that encourage diversity can benefit from building on their employees’ similarities while leveraging their differences, she adds.

How can a company manage diversity?

Jasmin suggests that managers look around them and make the changes needed, so that all feel comfortable and are able to function effectively. This could simply mean adjusting desks and keyboards, or it could be a little more complicated like using voice recognition software or amplified mouthpieces.

Companies could also adopt a more flexible approach, she says, and consider work arrangements and job-sharing opportunities. Above all, employers should be transparent with the staff and ensure that development, growth and training opportunities are made available to all, without fear or favour.

“Employing people from diverse backgrounds can be a steep learning curve for some businesses. While many would like to employ people from different backgrounds, they may believe it is too difficult or costly. To overcome this, have a conversation with your staff to find out what is possible, or ask potential candidates about their needs. It could be a very simple fix,” Jasmin concludes. **E**

VALUATOR

Company(Brand)	Mention	Tone	ROI
Chartis Malaysia Insurance (Chartis Malaysia Insurance)	1	0	RM 0

GIST(ENGLISH)

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