

**'Managing change through diversity' –Conference on the 28-29th of
November 2007****Presentation**

Our differences are our strength. Europe has a rich society because its people come from a wide range of backgrounds and cultures. To benefit from the full wealth of skills, talents and ideas in Europe, it is vital that everyone is included.

Diversity can bring huge benefits in the workplace. Companies are increasingly recognising that diversity is not just a moral argument or a question of meeting legal obligations. In a 2005 Commission report, 83% of companies with a diversity policy in place said that it had brought real business benefits.

A diverse workforce is one with different perspectives and different ideas. Public authorities and private companies serve and address people with a wide range of backgrounds. By reflecting this in their own workforce, they are better equipped to understand their needs. Diversity makes business sense.

(http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/eyeq/index.cfm?page_id=43)

Not only does diversity make business sense, it is necessary to cope with changes in European society and the European labour market(s). We need the full potential of everyone. We need a more diverse approach to leadership. Migrants / women / older employees etc. can contribute enormously to the labour market in professional and managerial positions and leadership.

Social dialogue and industrial relations are an important part of the European labour market, and we need to analyse and develop a social dialogue approach to managing change through diversity.

We want to develop strategies for P & MS trade unions, for professionals and managers, who are often responsible for diversity management; we want to invite companies, employers' organisations and public services to share their experience and see if there are contradictions and / or overlaps between the various approaches. We also need to look at the role of public services, which can be role models and pioneers, but face somewhat different challenges.

We will also need to look at the more difficult sides of diversity. How difficult and controversial is diversity with companies, trade unions and employers' organisations? Is there a contradiction with or a danger for equality programmes? How do you communicate a diversity programme for maximum acceptance? What has to be avoided at all costs? Do the benefits of a diverse workforce go beyond easy financial gains to encompass learning, creativity, organisational growth, personal development and the ability of organisations and P&MS to adjust successfully to changes in economy and society?

Diversity management should bring - through diverse workforce - different knowledge, varied perspectives and approaches about how to actually 'do work' - how to design processes, reach goals, frame tasks, create effective teams, communicate openly & exchange ideas and lead. It's about connecting diversity to different approaches to work. The management must recognize both the learning opportunities and the challenges that the expression of different perspectives presents for an organisation. Tensions might arise as the organisation begins to make room for diversity, starts to experiment with process and product ideas, and learns to reappraise its mission in light of suggestions from newly empowered P&MS in the organisation. Real commitment of the management to the process and to giving improvement-generating change

an utmost priority is essential. The organisation must have a well-articulated mission and clear culture, which enables P&MS to be clear about what the organisation is trying to accomplish. In that sense, it is important how the management defines diversity - and what they do with the experiences of being a diverse organisation - that delivers on the promise. To what extent does the management allow P&MS drawing on their personal assets, values and diverse perspectives to do their work more efficiently and explore a potential diversity of ways of effective working, leading, viewing the 'market', managing people and learning new competences? All P&MS in the organisation grow and learn with their differences, not despite them. They are encouraged to make explicit use of their cultural experience and knowledge & competences, gained outside the organisation, to inform and enhance their work.

Within the framework of our work on responsible management, we already had a short discussion about diversity from a P & MS trade union perspective, and these were our thoughts: The role of EUROCADRES is important as leverage for identifying and solving workplace issues of 'diverse' workers: young migrants, women, ageing people, etc.

The P&MS trade union agenda is often restricted, in which the interests of skilled white male P&MS have been prioritized and presented as general interests, to the detriment of other groups of P&MS. Important in the discussion is that it is overly simplistic to talk of 'diverse' P&MS 'interests' as such.

- First, interests of all P&MS converge to a considerable extent. They share interests stemming from common needs for a good salary, security, training & education facilities, employability and good working conditions. But women, migrant workers and other 'diverse' groups also have distinctive needs and priorities.
- Second, it's also simplistic to talk about women, migrants, etc as being one homogeneous group. Again, there are certain communalities of experiences and these can begin to inform the nature of issues which unions have to address. For instance, as a result of feminist pressure, legitimate trade union issues have been expanded to include 'sexual harassment, child care, maternity leave, affirmative action, pay equality, gender gap in decision making functions, etc. However, many issues are very unlikely to be the priorities for all of the time

It's clear that making P&MS trade union structures responsive to the diversity of their members' interests requires changes in the ways these trade unions operate. Having women, young migrant workers, ageing people, etc. elected in the trade union structures is necessary to ensure the inclusion of their concerns on the political agenda. This highlights the importance of changing trade unions practices and processes at the level of the workplace in order to achieve a widening of the content of the P&MS trade union agenda: creating the opportunity for the 'diverse' workers to discuss their problems, especially in case of changes.

A 'diverse' trade union agenda must be one that emphasizes the importance of a process that enables the articulation of the diversity of interests, particularly of relatively powerless groups of P&MS. If no specific process of interest identification and articulation is installed, the interests of many diverse P&MS will remain largely unarticulated and underrepresented.

Similar to different needs within the work context, 'diverse' P&MS will experience different needs beyond their work context. These needs may refer to different expectations on work-life balance issues, child care or care for sick family members, education & training, etc. Again, important is that this different need is being acknowledged and respected. This means that any individual is approached from his or her own position, and not from the position of the norm, the modal P&MS. Managers need to take a step aside and make space for the difference. Differences can not be overruled by the norm. Conditions need to be put in place through which the difference is allowed to develop its own variety of options.

Main objectives of the project

- The project is meant to provide a social dialogue perspective to the European Year of equal opportunities for all, with a special emphasis on professional and managerial staff. The commitment of the management and P&MS is essential to the success of 'diversity management'
- Promote diversity in social change and social dialogue at all levels, considering the trade union but also the employers' side. A more 'diverse' workforce - including elderly people, ethnic minorities, disabled people, migrants, etc. - is a real need in a changing society.
- To know how the organisations defines diversity - and what they do with the experiences of being a diverse organisation. Do the benefits of a diverse workforce go beyond easy financial gains to encompass learning, creativity, organisational growth, personal development and the ability of organisations and P&MS to adjust successfully to changes in economy and society?
- To discuss which mission and culture an organisation must apply to enable P&MS to grow and learn with their differences, not despite them and to make explicit use of their cultural experience, knowledge & competences - gained outside the organisation - to inform and enhance their work. The attitude and access of people of different backgrounds to the labour market is essential (by 'inclusive' strategies)
- To help tackle demographic change. Demographic change will make it necessary to include a much larger age range; it will probably mean developing age management and integrating migrants much more urgently than nowadays. Therefore it is important to prepare and start the management of change through diversity now.

Diversity issues:

- Different angels: age, ethnic minorities, disabilities, sexual orientation, etc.
- Equality versus diversity
- Role of Diversity in social change & social dialogue at all levels: consider the role of P&MS, trade unions and employers.
- Impact of outsourcing activities
- Which culture does an organisation need to enable P&MS from a different background to enter, to grow and learn in the company or organisation (making explicit use of their cultural experiences & competences). There is a lack of transparency & definition.
- Different levels :
 - Company & organisation level
 - National trade unions: the challenges are great for P&MS trade unions
 - European level: migration & transition measures, language skills, etc...