

EMEA DIVERSITY NEWS 39 EDITORIAL

by Michael Stuber, Owner Manager



EMOTIONAL, PERSONAL AND POLITICAL

The recent heated discussions over quota re-ignited by EU Commission Internal Market & Services Member Barnier reveal the true nature of Diversity: It is an emotional, personal and political issue in any sense of the words. Forget about the former choice of ‘social’ or ‘economic’ approaches. We are (finally) down to the pure power play and mediocre media manoeuvres. For the past few years, researchers and practitioners have seen waves of focused to comprehensive programmes, and a constantly developing discussion involving arguments, data and a few dogmatic positions.

The current reality shows a different yet questionable quality. A number of high profile people are involved (by the Media) in a public discussion creating a strongly personalised exchange of views and opinions. Inevitably, this also leads to unfortunate and even unprofessional phrases by some of the world’s most global managers, such as Deutsche Bank CEO Josef Ackermann’s hope “that the boardroom will sometime become more colourful and prettier”. In an already emotionally charged environment, this statement on women has led to strong and sometimes inappropriate public reactions, wiping off all efforts international CEOs have given to Diversity for more than ten years, which have led to measurable progress. But this progress does not seem to be enough for those who aim at equal shares, aka fixed quota. Not only is this attitude unfair and discouraging for those who have made efforts, it is also inappropriate regarding the very different situations in various industries or countries.

Today’s discourse is also fuelled by a number of myths which have managed to change opinion simply through repetition: 1_ Past programmes have failed 2_ Quota quickly achieves a critical mass. Data does not prove either of the two with the exception of the Norwegian supervisory boards, which are a true exception in the corporate world as members are elected or appointed on a regular basis. Upper Management is a different story as it involves a step-by-step career development process.

Regardless of where the quota discussion leads us, I hope it won’t destroy the support for Gender and wider Diversity we have won all together over so many years. And I hope it will help us understand the enormous influence of each individual’s personal experience, attitudes, values and preferences on the way he or she drives Diversity. In working with leaders and experts, I have always emphasised the emotional nature of Diversity. From now on, let’s be more upfront about this: it will make our jobs a bit more challenging, but a lot more authentic at the same time.

In this spirit: Enjoy reading!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'MS' or similar initials, written in a cursive style.

Michael Stuber

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Content

DIVERSITY DIMENSIONS	ORGANISATIONAL STRATEGIES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Gen Y1: A Communication Perspective ■ Avila, Spain: Disability Access City Award 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Gender Quota I: Davos World Economic Forum ■ Diversity Charters: Austria, Norway, Sweden
POLICY DEVELOPMENT	BUSINESS CASE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Gender Quota II: National Level ■ EU Ratification of the UN Disability Convention 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Gen Y2: Managing and Developing Young Professionals ■ ‘Flexible Work Models: How to Bring Sustainability in a 24/7 World’
MEDIA & BITS	NEWS ABOUT US
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ French Equality, Diversity and Social Responsibility Labels 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Promoting Diversity through Slowfood
IMPRINT	

DIVERSITY DIMENSIONS

Gen Y1: A Communication Perspective

In the recent study ‘Millennials in the Workplace: A Communication Perspective on Millennials, Organisational Relationships and Performance’, Professor Karen Myers and Kamyab Sadaghiani from the University of California, Santa Barbara investigate the impact of communicated values and expectations of Gen Y. Many ‘Millennials’ have distinctive characteristics that may make interacting with them different from with previous cohorts, but then again, each generation has arrived in the workplace with its own unique set of qualities.

The study overall compares communication styles across the various generations in the workplace, highlighting common myths about Millennials which have resulted from miscommunication and misunderstanding. Particularly unique about Millennials is the amount of attention they have received—not only from their parents, but from scholars, popular literature, and popular press. Critics depict Millennials as self-centered, unmotivated, disrespectful, and disloyal, but these characteristics can likely be rendered false through constructive interaction. Different elements are considered to be “foundational” for this generation, such as strong relationships with supervisors, a strong desire for lots of open communication and valuing teamwork and collaboration. Studies also claim that more than other generations, Millennials develop commitment to individuals, especially supervisors with whom they can develop meaningful relationships. Although challenging to integrate at first, this generation is likely to have different, often broader, perspectives about the world marketplace, work relationships, diversity, and information technologies which can in turn enhance organizational performance and productivity.

Avila, Spain: Disability Access City Award

Avila, situated west of Madrid, received the EU’s first Access City Award for its commitment to becoming more disabled-friendly. Through mindful town planning since 2002 in collaboration with disabled and elderly people’s organisations, Avila has improved accessibility to public buildings, provides the private sector with incentives to make similar moves and has improved access for the disabled to tourist attractions and jobs. The annual award is part of the EU’s strategy to improve access for the disabled and ensure their rights across the bloc.

Avila, along with Barcelona, Spain; Cologne, Germany, and Turku, Finland were finalists for the award, chosen from among the 66 European cities that entered the competition. Improving accessibility for people with disabilities is one of the key planks of the European Disability Strategy for 2010-2020. The award was launched to increase awareness of the difficulties disabled people encounter in urban areas and celebrate cities that have removed some of the barriers to their mobility. Among other proposals, the strategy outlines actions to promote access for the disabled to buildings, transport and other services, and information and communications technologies.

ORGANISATIONAL STRATEGIES

Gender Quota I: Davos World Economic Forum

The World Economic Forum has introduced a quota for female executives at the 2011 Davos summit and at least one of the five delegates sent by “strategic partners” must now be female. A WEF spokesman said, as a membership organization, there is a limited amount that they could do to improve female representation in boardrooms and governments and the quota is a way to nudge members in the right direction. At previous Davos meetings, the participation of women ranged from 9 to 15 % between 2001 and 2005, and this rose to between 15% and 17% from 2006 to 2010.

2011’s gender quota seemingly resulted in a reversal of progress as women comprised only 16% of participants. Shockingly, 20 of the “strategic partners” could not find a single qualified woman in their organisations, and opted to forego their fifth ticket and simply bring four men. There are currently no women in the WEF’s Managing Board or Managing Directors. 22% of the Foundation Board, 27% of Senior Directors and 50% of Directors are female.

Female quotas are a controversial approach to tackling gender inequality. Kirsty MacArthur, a relationship director at Heartwood Wealth Management, a U.K.-based wealth-management boutique, said of quotas: “I feel uncomfortable with positive discrimination. Women should achieve success based on their own merit, not as part of a quota.” This is the first time a minimum quota for women has been used at the annual meeting of the world’s business leaders. Information on corporate gender quotas imposed on the national level continues in ‘Policy Development’.

Diversity Charters: Austria, Norway, Sweden

Austria, Norway and Sweden have joined in the newest European trend: Diversity Charters. In an effort to band companies together towards a common goal of supporting, motivating and monitoring Diversity efforts, these new Diversity Charters signal that European companies are taking their range of top talents seriously. Diversity charters are among the latest in a series of voluntary diversity initiatives aimed at encouraging companies to implement and develop diversity policies and represents a fundamental commitment to appreciating and treating people fairly in business organizations.

For more information on the Charters, or to sign up, visit:

Austria: <http://www.charta-der-vielfalt.at/>

Norway: <http://www.diversitycharter.no/>

Sweden: <http://www.diversitycharter.se/>

POLICY DEVELOPMENT

Corporate Gender Quota II: National Level

In January 2011, the French government passed a gender quota law for corporate boards, which will become legally binding in 2017. Medium and large companies are now required to fulfill 40% women in their administrative and supervisory boards. Board decisions will still be valid for companies which do not meet the quota, but board election will be invalidated and members will not be paid for attending meetings. This hurts boards which resist gender equality, but will not penalize the companies. France now joins Norway with gender quotas on corporate boards.

Germany may soon be passing similar legislation as Labour Minister Ursula von der Leyen would soon like to see legally mandated gender quotas for executive and advisory boards in Germany's leading companies. In draft legislation to be presented this year, she will demand a gender quota of a minimum 30 percent of both genders on boards as well as sanctions for companies which do not respect the law. In an interview with the financial business paper 'Handelsblatt', Diversity expert Michael Stuber challenged the appropriateness of quotas, especially for general management. Based on his experience, he warns of "the high price" that quota-based progress has to pay. The British are less optimistic on the validity of gender quotas as Mervyn Davies, the head of the British government's inquiry into gender inequality, said the UK would only consider adopting quotas as a "last resort" if better gender balance in companies is not reached through less direct measures.

Before the individual members of the European Union have a chance to make their own decisions, the Commission may require these measures as Internal Market and Services Commission Member Michel Barnier stated publicly in January 2011. EU Justice Commissioner Viviane Reding will state her opinion after meeting with the chiefs of European companies this spring. Women represent just one in 10 board members of the EU's largest publicly-listed companies, even though they make up nearly half the workforce and more than half of new university graduates. "I have not been an advocate of quotas for women in senior business posts in the past, but given the lack of progress in this area, we might in the future have to consider taking initiatives at the European level," the Commissioner said in a written statement. In his 'Handelsblatt' interview, Stuber calls this interpretation "purely political and interest-driven". His analysis shows that in many areas, the Public Sector did not make more progress despite the de-facto quota in place in many countries. In any case, experts do not think that a legally binding EU-wide quota is likely to pass the complex decision-making process. Such a quota would also be difficult to design given the very different situations in the member states, the various sectors and on the many different labour markets.

EU Ratification of the UN Disability Convention

The European Union has officially ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities on 23 December, becoming the first intergovernmental group to sign on to any human rights treaty. This represents a major policy shift toward enforcing human rights for all Europeans

and putting disability at the top of the human rights agenda. In the European Union, more than 80 million persons have a disability, representing 15% of the residents from 27 countries. 11 of the 27 Member States still have to ratify the treaty.

All the institutions of the European Union will now have to endorse the values of the Convention in all policies under their competence, ensuring mainstreaming of disability: from transport to employment and from information and communication technologies to development cooperation.

BUSINESS CASE

Gen Y2: Managing and Developing Young Professionals

In ‘The Guide to Managing and Developing Young Professionals’, what Gen Y (or Millennials) want from the workplace is assessed and presented along with best practices on how to recruit, manage and develop young professionals. This survey of over 2,300 respondents helps identify the most important aspects of a job for individuals of different generational backgrounds and fields of work. Four areas are covered in-depth, including recruitment, retention, management and development.

Many relevant key findings are discussed and highlights that what Gen Y wants more than any previous generation is a good work environment. This includes the ability to make friends at work, receive constructive feedback and have a fair boss. In addition, common myths about the generation were defied. For example, contrary to the popular belief that money is less important to Gen Y than other elements of the job, the study found that money motivates Gen Y more than any other factor. In addition, there is a common misperception that Gen Y craves challenge, innovation and other creative qualities of a job. However, ‘Baby Boomers’ actually demonstrated a stronger interest in “Challenging and Innovative Work” than any other generation. Revealing many key insights about the newest generation of talent, this guide provides a data-driven, comprehensive and practical analysis of intergenerational workplaces.

‘Flexible Work Models: How to Bring Sustainability in a 24/7 World’

For business leaders, a major task in a talent-starved global economy is to attract, retain and promote outstanding performers. In the constant war for talent, flexible jobs can be a powerful tool to overcome this challenge. As some 86 percent of Millennials expect flexibility from their employer, this new research by Bain & Company shows the benefits of a tailored, widely-used flexible work system. So far, very few companies have mastered the art of carefully designing and implementing effective flexible job models.

While many companies offer flex-work such as part-time, telecommuting and leaves of absence, this latest research shows that this is not enough. To be effective, companies need to ensure that two things happen: First, flexible work programs must be tailored to meet specific employee needs. Second, companies need to give visible evidence that these models work and are supported by

management. Only then do employees feel comfortable taking advantage of flex options, which, in turn, generate greater adoption and eventually lead to a shift in the firm's culture. The rewards can be huge: increased employee satisfaction, loyalty and retention.

MEDIA & BITS

French Equality, Diversity and Social Responsibility Labels

As of 2011, 40 organisations have received France's Professional Equality label, effecting more than 800,000 employees. Since 2005, French companies have had the opportunity to apply for the label, recognising organisational commitment to equality through equal treatment and parental support. Run jointly by the French Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs and AFNOR Certification, a rigorous 6-month process of review and investigation of equality in nominated companies is processed into a report. The report is then submitted to a labelling commission consisting of state representatives, trade unions, employees and employee organisations.

Along with the Professional Equality label, organisations can be nominated for the French Diversity Label, which addresses other forms of discrimination. Additionally, the French Social Responsibility Label is available for customer relations centres and celebrates excellence in HR practices in call centres. These labels are open for companies, NGOs and the public sector and recognises those who are firmly committed to equal treatment within their organisations. For more information, visit:

Label Egalité professionnelle: <http://www.afnor.org/certification/lbh002>

Label Diversité: <http://www.afnor.org/certification/lbh004>

Label de Responsabilité Sociale: <http://www.alrs.asso.fr/>

NEWS ABOUT US

Promoting Bio-Diversity through Slow Food

Just as many other years, 2011 has begun at full speed. On this occasion and in thanking our top clients for their continued business, European Diversity Research & Consulting has made a donation to a special Diversity-related organisation.

The 'Slow Food Foundation for Biodiversity' supports our field beyond the usual and addresses worldwide needs. Through projects across over 50 countries, Slow Food protects the global diversity of nutrition and sustainable farming techniques. These efforts not only improve the quality of life in Europe and developing countries, they additionally promote and protect the cultural identity of the local people along with animal well-being. More information and brochures can be found at the website <http://www.slowfoodfoundation.com/eng/publicazioni.lasso>.

IMPRINT

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