

diversity, dignity and inclusion

from AXA ICAS, Europe's leading EAP provider



ICAS WELLBEING

WHY INVEST IN DIVERSITY WITH DIGNITY?

Benefits

It has long been recognised that organisations in which diversity is valued and employees feel comfortable in expressing their difference can benefit in a variety of ways:

- The ability to attract the best candidates
- Reduced staff turnover
- The creativity and innovation that come from tapping into diverse perspectives
- Positive customer and shareholder perceptions
- Enhanced motivation and business performance
- Increased work harmony and reduced stress related absence
- Reduced risk of time-consuming grievances, employee conflict and litigation.

Consequences

- The 2006 Employment Equality (Age) Regulations Act can only increase the pressure on managers, and will require a careful balancing act between potential discrimination and the needs of the business.
- It is estimated that upward of 18 million working days are lost each year as a result of bullying (Your People Manager, October 2005).
- With Employment Tribunal claims rising by 33% between 2004/5 to 2005/6, it would appear employers, and potentially alleged perpetrators, are increasingly more vulnerable to employment tribunal and county court claims.

In a landmark case the Law Lords potentially opened the floodgates for bullying and stress related claims when the Protection against Harassment Act 1998 was used in the County Court (Majrowski v St Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Trust). Under this Act complainants have six years to file a claim in the County Court. There is no organisational defence against vicarious liability and the complainant does not need to provide proof of physical or psychological damage to make a claim, e.g. for work based stress.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR EMPLOYERS?

Policies, procedures and guidelines work well to help staff understand the processes, but do little to gain commitment to "walking the talk", which is the demonstration of diversity in action.

At AXA ICAS we see effective and well communicated policies and procedures as the core infrastructure supporting diversity. "Working with dignity" provides the behavioural framework within which inclusion occurs, enabling a culture of "diversity with dignity". The biggest challenges are gaining a common understanding, across the organisation, of what "working with dignity" looks like; and the commitment to do so.

DEFINITIONS

Diversity

"Diversity consists of visible and non-visible differences, which will include sex, age, background, race, disability, personality and work style. Work-based diversity is founded on the premise that harnessing these differences will create a (more) productive environment in which everyone feels valued, where their talents are being fully utilised and in which organisational goals are met." *Diversity in Action*
Kandala and Fullerton

Working with Dignity

"To recognise, acknowledge and value difference in all people, and to treat others with consideration and courtesy. In addition not to disadvantage, belittle or exclude people for that which appears to make them different, regardless of what that might be." *AXA ICAS 2003*

IS YOUR ORGANISATION EQUIPPED TO MANAGE DIVERSITY WITH DIGNITY?

Developing a truly diversity-friendly organisation places significant responsibilities on managers and staff. Managers need to understand their legal responsibilities, and to be aware of the complex issues associated with the management of a diverse workforce. Staff at all levels require a broad set of

skills that include: seeing issues from others' perspectives, challenging unacceptable behaviour sensitively and providing constructive feedback.

Perhaps most importantly, employees need to buy into the concept that every individual, regardless of their position in the organisation, has the right to be treated with consideration and courtesy. They also have the responsibility to treat others as they would like to be treated, regardless of actual or perceived difference.

There are some key interventions which help to ensure that staff have the understanding, skills and support to foster a culture of diversity:

- Identifying organisational values using a "bottom up" approach, based on appreciative enquiry. (What do we do well around here?)
- Communicating and celebrating the values.

- Best practice policies, reflecting the values, which are well communicated and designed to tackle employee concerns informally, before they become formal complaints.
- Practical "living the values" workshops which provide the understanding and skills to embed the values in the organisational culture.
- Clear guidelines, well communicated, so managers and staff recognise their responsibilities.
- Managers trained so they have the awareness and confidence to manage sensitive situations proactively.
- Informal support for those who are concerned about inappropriate behaviour, e.g. internal coaches or champions, an Employee Assistance Programme.
- Access to alternative dispute resolution processes, e.g. mediation, preferably before individuals take entrenched positions.
- Regular employee communications to reinforce the value of, and need for, an inclusive culture.

HOW AXA ICAS CAN HELP

AXA ICAS believes passionately in the importance and value of managing difference effectively. Although the legislative framework is included in our approach, we focus on effecting sustainable behavioural change. We talk about courtesy and consideration, something that is not earned (like respect) but that should be the expectation and responsibility of any employee, regardless of status.

We work with you to determine and deliver the intervention that will best achieve your organisation's diversity objectives and reduce exposure to the risks of harassment or discrimination through:

- Diagnostic surveys to establish the key issues and set a benchmark for change
- Policy development and review
- Diversity with dignity awareness training
- Soft skills training
- Confidential employee support telephone lines
- Individual counselling for the victims of bullying or discrimination
- Mediation services* (not a magic wand but a safe and confidential environment to enable the parties to understand each others' perspective and agree how to do things differently in future)
- Coaching for complainants and respondents.

CASE STUDY

CLIENT: A PUBLIC SECTOR BODY

Situation: A high profile complaint of bullying together with an employee survey demonstrating concerns about bullying prompted the company to set up a small cross departmental committee to look at the issues. The group decided to provide training to ensure all employees were aware of what was and was not acceptable behaviour.

Intervention: A training programme was developed using the committee members' examples to provide case studies for a very practical, interactive and skills based workshop.

Result: The response to the workshops demonstrated raised awareness and changes in behaviour. The committee has now developed a long term plan to move the work forward, including training internal diversity coaches.

*AXA ICAS mediation services are provided in association with Conflict Management Plus Ltd.

WHY USE AXA ICAS?

As the UK's leading Behavioural Risk Management consultancy, AXA ICAS is well placed to support organisations wishing to tackle the issue of workplace bullying and harassment, or working towards a culture in which diversity is actively managed and valued. Our broad portfolio of services meets the needs of a wide range of organisations in providing strategic, preventative and support interventions. Our consultants are experienced in the field of behavioural risk, combining psychology, counselling or human resource expertise with a practical approach to developing solutions.

WHAT SOME OF OUR COURSE DELEGATES HAVE SAID:

"Interesting and provocative, and of great benefit."

"This course made me think about the way we treat other people – not just in the working environment."

"A thought provoking day, increasing knowledge and awareness in this area. Useful to work with work colleagues from other departments and learn about their experiences and points of view."

"Attended course with a little apprehension. Came out with thought provoking proactive scenarios which will help in the future to tackle any issues/challenges I have in the company."

"Very thought provoking both from a personal point of view and looking at things from a workplace perspective. Very worthwhile."

CASE STUDY

CLIENT: A PRIVATE SECTOR BLUE CHIP ORGANISATION

Situation: A directive from the parent company resulted in a request for workshops to reduce the potential for unacceptable behaviour and employment based litigation.

Intervention: A challenging, interactive half day programme was developed for senior partners and fee earners, and delivered in the UK and in a number of European capital cities.

Result: The response to the workshops indicated the materials work well across international boundaries and participants' feedback demonstrated raised awareness and positive changes in attitude and behaviour.

If you would like to find out more about how AXA ICAS can help your organisation to achieve behavioural change then please call AXA ICAS on **0800 17 0800**

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