Including Diversity
[Extract from larger publication]
By David Newport

Some years ago I met a retired college principal who referred to someone as 'never amounting to much' – Pygmalion effect suggests the support the individual got from the principal was to the level the principal felt the individual would reach – and that's what happened. Others around the principal concurred, either through politeness [unlikely in the context], their own existing beliefs and their attribution of expertise to the principal. I argued the point of the Pygmalion effect and was quietly moved to the edge of the principal's sphere of contact. The topic never cropped up again when I was there.

Introduction

A paper by the Diversity University suggests that one of the signs of a healthy, diverse organisation is that: "Diversity becomes a way of life. Organisations know they have achieved meaningful change [to value diversity] when they can dismantle all of the things they put in place to get there (diversity councils, committees, affinity groups, diversity training etc), and when these things are dismantled there is no expression of concern from those groups who needed these efforts to create a level playing field. They acknowledge that diversity has been so embraced and so woven into how the organisation thinks, operates, and conducts business, that it is a way of life" [Diversity University, 2005].

Though this suggests a value to having a diverse organisation the questions remain:
- ➡ Are such organisations successful too?
- ➡ Does such an organisation have a better bottom line?
- ➡ Does such an organisation have a competitive advantage?
- ➡ How so? What is the link between greater 'diversity' and performance?
- ➡ Critically, what is the link between diversity and performance over and above a less or non-'diverse' equivalent?

There are potential benefits to having a diverse organisation. In the next few pages my aim is to clear the fuzziness associated with diversity and inclusion, and to identify the real benefits, and a broad-brush route to achieving them.

What are inclusion and diversity?

They are phrases describing an element of societal evolution. Though the concepts have been around since homo sapiens first evolved, the current use of the terms describes particular social issues that have arisen in more populace, multicultural and 'liberal' societies [the US and UK in particular].

From the days of Emily Pankhurst, in countries where groups can have their say, those groups [not necessarily always the minority in the population] have often vocalised their desire to be involved in the determination and governance of that society. Since 1901, the female proportion of the UK population has consistently been higher than the male – they were not a minority overall, just in the group they wanted to access. From Emily, and her cohorts call for involvement we have seen recourse to positive discrimination evolve into diversity policies and now the move to inclusion. With each step a softer approach that recognises both the changes to date, and the poor return on confrontational and enforcement approaches in a relatively open society.

Intrinsically whether it be through positive discrimination, diversity or inclusion the call is for those involved to include all interested parties, and for the governance to include representation from all self-determined social groups. Beside this is the different concept of a level-playing field. We'll come back to these later when I

address fairness and meritocracy.

The argument for inclusion has not been based on performance per se. IE: inclusion of people from such social groups will lead to better performance. It has been based on more fundamental human drivers – the desire to survive and thrive in society. These are arguments from the groups who feel excluded, or their advocates – "we want to be/must be included." Being included is perceived to accord certain rights and provisions whether tangible or intangible, as well as potential insight into the excluded group. In a society such as the UK it is often seen to be a right of anyone to be involved in whatever they want to be involved in.

From the perspective of those in the group where involvement is sought, the desire for inclusion is often not perceived as reason enough, even if the individual has the 'right' to do so.

Here are some definitions from companies involved in the areas. These are amongst the better ones, though I feel that there is still something missing about the connection between inclusion/diversity and performance benefit:
"Inclusion is the base from which we operate. In our experience, Diversity is important, but it is not always the answer. Diversity is sometimes understood as the external and visible display of difference in an organisation. Inclusion, on the other hand, is a deeper, cultural commitment to valuing the unique contribution of every individual, regardless of background, colour, gender or age.

Therefore, a diverse organisation may not necessarily be inclusive, however an inclusive organisation will usually be diverse. Inclusion takes diversity to another level and transforms it from a minority driven cause into an opportunity for all people" [www.performancethroughinclusion.com/about_us.htm].

 "Diversity is becoming a key item on the agenda of leading companies as they are coming to terms with demographic change, social expectations, organisational developments new ways of employing people and organising work, and relationships with customers and other stakeholders. Diversity not only includes race, ethnicity and gender, but also ability/disability, education, age, class and many other differences.

By clearly understanding our commonalities and our differences we can support each other's efforts to create healthy, inclusive organisations where people of different social and cultural groups, all people, feel welcomed, included, and respected so they can contribute their best work to the organisation" [www.socialinclusion2000.co.uk/bcp.html Gallant 2000 Ltd].

What are the drivers for diversity and inclusivity?
Generally three drivers are quoted, just to be different I've unearthed a fourth.

"Morally we want to do it. Legally we have to do it. Commercially it makes good sense to do it" [Performance Through Inclusion website, 2005].

- ➡   The moral prerogative
- ➡   The legal requirement
- ➡   The commercial opportunity
- ➡   The protection of an existing approach

The moral prerogative – in a diverse society organisations have a moral obligation to actively involve people from all areas of society.

As a lecturer on ethics once said to me – "whose morals are we talking about – whose ethics?" As Tom Wright [2004] says, even in the loving Anglican church, a clear decision one way or the other about embracing diversity would have raised the questions from one party or the other in the debate: "How do we

know? [it's the correct decision] and Who says?" Decisions about direction or purpose engage some people and exclude others, that is their nature, and part of their value.

The legal requirement – it would appear that the decision for celebrating all differences comes from those who have a voice in government and the courts. They will enforce equality. Allied to European Directives the UK has legislation to address unfair discrimination in respect of race, age, sexual orientation, religion or [religious] belief, and disability.

Unfortunately this emphasises the simple categorisation of people [see later]. The criteria for equality in terms of defining fairness is not specified as most cases are unique, or context specific. Such criteria are developed through case law and precedent.

Interestingly when looking into government attitudes to diversity opinions vary. With respect to the Constitutional Reform Bill discussions in January 2005 the following was stated:
"In relation to England and Wales, the Government's intention is that guidance will be issued to the [Judicial Appointments] Commission requiring it to encourage diversity in the pool of candidates available for selection. This is clearly outlined on the face of the Bill in clause 58(3), while clause 57 emphasises that, in relation to any actual selection, merit is the only criterion. The Government believes that this strikes the right balance."

The commercial opportunity – behind which are four concepts:
1.   A more diverse group of people in the organisation provides for more diverse input.
2.   A more diverse group of external stakeholders is better accessed and served by a more diverse group of internal stakeholders.
3.   Demographics in the UK suggest that there will be a need for more workers in the future not available from within the current UK population.
4.   Organisations are part and parcel of society and increasingly their corporate social responsibility encompasses the demonstration of equality, as well as involvement with diverse sections of the community. The aim is to provide greater connections and stronger relationships with the community.

The DTI website states:
"Unfair discrimination in employment is wrong…It is bad for the businesses which are denying themselves access to the widest pool of talent and not sharing in the benefits - such as increased motivation, lower turnover of staff and access to wider markets - that a diverse workforce and effective equality policies can bring" [www.dti.gov.uk/er/equality/]

The protection of an existing approach – I recently met someone from a legal firm who have implemented a diversity policy to protect their existing diversity as they grow.

What does this say about the firm, its approach to growth, its market and the broader environment?

According to various sources the argument seems to be that:
"We can build environments that bring out the best in one another. This in turn leads to greater performance and hence to greater profits" [www.socialinclusion2000.co.uk/bcp.html… Gallant 2000 Ltd].

This is valid, and yet there is **still** no explicit link to inclusion or diversity.

The commercial opportunity
Commenting on each of the four ideas:

1.   This is true only if input is required or valued. As happened in the early call centre days, and to a degree still happens, if all that is required is human automata, diversity is not very valuable. Reading scripts direct from screens doesn't engender a need for anything more than good script followers. It is also only true if communication and goals are sufficiently clear and good to elicit and value the input. Many organisations have people with lots of insights and ideas that are not elicited. As a result those individuals either mentally turn off, or leave.

2.   For a global business diversity of race tends to occur by default because of language and location. In practical terms it is usually a challenge, in terms of planning, resourcing and economics, to have appropriate levels of like to like service. Added to which if you only have like serving like, you tend to undermine point 1: by reinforcing the simple categorisation. You don't engender the concept of inclusion within the stakeholder community, or society at large [the moral drivers?]

3.   This has some validity in terms of labour movement, though it tends to presume the same need for labour and distribution of industries as at present, in an increasingly global economy.

4.   Corporate social responsibility has part of the thread about building rapport with communities, and we'll come back to that imminently.

As to the DTI paragraph, the access to a wider pool is spot-on. It is important to note that the benefits cannot be directly linked to wider talent pool. Perhaps this is recognised in the penultimate word "can".

Fairness and meritocracy

It could be said that I might have missed the point, and that inclusion is actually about fairness of opportunity to be involved, or to contribute, as was implied earlier. It could be about meritocracy, as Lord Falconer mentioned, or a combination of the two.

Fair opportunity – what does that mean? Does that mean at a point in time [an interview perhaps] or in life, or education. Society is inherently unfair because human nature is to be unfair – we are a competitive animal. Fair competition is idealistic – as in reality fairness is subjective. What I believe to be fair in a situation might not accord with your views. If real fairness existed there would be no need for laws. We would all have a common understanding of fairness, and in being fair would resolve any issues amicably and in a fair way. Society and all human interactions would be thought of as win:win. Life would be peachy!

Throughout our evolution it is survival of the fittest that has enabled our development to date – it is thought by many to be genetically encoded. In the context of survival fairness comes a meagre second place, it is a privilege afforded by those that thrive. The nature of diversity is that we don't all see the world in the same way – so fairness is inherently a challenge. Perhaps that is why our laws are peppered with 'reasonableness' instead.

What is meant by the provision of a fair opportunity for people to contribute value? Does it mean anyone can apply and have the same interview.? Or is it about making adjustments, such as flexible working, for one potential candidate that aren't or wouldn't be offered to others? If so, is that fairness or positive discrimination, something explicitly discriminatory? Is it about moving location to ensure access that is not needed for others? Is it about an extended induction or training period? Unfortunately going down the second route of adjustments seems to enter that world of explicit discrimination, or 'reasonableness'– a very broad legal topic, set against a question of commercial value in a market environment where shareholder value is critical.

Okay, what about meritocracy, social systems formed on the basis of talent and intellect, not birth or wealth. To do this properly one has to be objective, and have very clear criterion. In fact this works better in a situation of automata where human relationships don't exist. Criteria are best used when they are tangible. The world of SLAs, KPIs etc in call centres, for example.

Human relationships by their nature involve politics, friendship, patronage, favours, support, enablement and access to social networks – the talent of communication, and the intellect to play the game. To overcome the challenges of such issues and achieve a form of meritocracy in a non-automata situation, all those in the system must actively trust each other. Such trust is only found in organisations where there is a clear, common purpose to which all are committed.

Avoiding the factors of birth and wealth could philosophically lead to Lilliputian approach to child up-bringing and a radical change in the societal perception of money as a key reward for success. If money does not afford better opportunities for oneself, family and friends then it is de-valued. In effect for meritocracy to work wholesale major changes in organisations and society would need to take place.

Always when fairness and meritocracy are put forward as existing they come from one group's set of beliefs…back to inclusion or exclusion of others.

Why does this all seem a little wary of diversity and inclusion?

My wariness is for three reasons:
1.   It is driven by categorisation at a gross level. What you focus on is what you get [check any good psychology text]. If you focus on categorising people you highlight the difference, rather than the commonality. Groups that work well together are founded on the commonality amongst members. The differences only come to the fore once the team has found strong common ground.
2.   Including the groups noted above has no direct link to performance over and above that which currently exists. Why not? Firstly because the categories don't relate to capability and appropriateness of individuals. Secondly because the people that make up organisations are inherently diverse as everyone is unique. Thirdly because having different people can only add value when the organisation itself has a culture that engenders success.
3.   Successful teams and organisations tend to be cult-like – they have a strong culture founded on the clear, communicated common purpose. This enables real empowerment. Those who don't buy-in don't stay and undermine performance. Those who stay are highly likely to make decisions aligned to the common purpose, with colleagues who will support them to do so. By default such a culture operates to exclude people [or invite only people who will live the culture].
4.   The challenge for better performance is about the culture and common purpose of the organisation not about a different slant on diversity [to individual uniqueness]. If there is a clear, communicated and bought into common purpose, and all decisions align to that purpose performance is far more likely to increase, especially if the proposition or offering has a market which values the proposition. This is true the world over in any group of individuals.
5.   There are structural models for teams, and thus organisations that engender better performance that depend on commonality first and foremost, and then controlled and selected difference.

Fundamentally it's back to front. This comes back to the thread, which is a social expectation from particular individuals and groups to be involved, now supported by law.

The factors affecting inclusion

Without going into lots of psychological background, the key issues are about rapport and perceived value. This is true for any situation where someone wishes to become involved in a group whether readily invited to join or not. Oh, that means motivation is another factor…I'll leave it at the first two as they cover the main issues.

Rapport:
When given a choice we primarily socialise and interact with those with whom we have things in common – they are like us in the particular context in which we interact.

Visual cues are the first active cues we use to determine whether we might have some communality with someone. Interestingly the primary categories cited for inclusion are visually based:

➡   Race, age, gender, disability [in part].

The secondary [in profile rather than importance] categories are possibly visually cued [appearance/manner] or relatively easily identified by behaviour.

➡   Sexuality, education/class, religion, disability.

Our visual cues link into deeply embedded schemata [our personal mental encyclopaedia]. If someone looks different we are less likely to feel affinities with them, and less likely to want to affiliate if it jeopardises the acceptance of us in the group. Why so? Because society and cultures have deeply ingrained shared schemata developed over many years. Intrinsically if someone appears different to your social group your instinctive desire to survive might perceive them as a possible risk or threat.

This is not the case for everyone, some of us have learnt that such visual cues do not reflect the mind set of the person concerned.

Regardless of their visual appearance most people find it harder to communicate with others who have a different perspective on life, different experiences, different needs or different language to them. Why? Because they probably have less in common, and as a result they find it hard to relate to other person's world let alone talk in their terms.

The harder it is to develop rapport the less effort is often expended in doing so. A calculation is made on cost and benefit [perceived value], relative to achieving goals. Unless the relationship value is sufficient then the relationship will be curtailed. In an increasingly volatile or seemingly pressured world of work [or life] such a calculation is usually made earlier in the interaction.

When you look at social groupings people are drawn to people like themselves. Because that's who they feel comfortable with, and with whom they feel they have something in common. Both these make communication in their minds much easier – rapport is easier to establish. In many respects it doesn't matter whether this is the case, it is whether the participants believe it that is important. Whatever they believe they will make it so.

NB: This is true whether or not the two parties involve anyone with any of the overt differences cited in most diversity literature.

Perceived value:

Perceived value may be within a role or potential within the organisation through promotion. It may have nothing to do with the work itself, as it is in the eyes [or rather the mind] of the receiver, rather than the deliverer.

Perception of value is interdependent with rapport. The better our rapport the greater the likelihood that you'll perceive me [or what I offer] as valuable.

Perceived value isn't related to whether an individual comes from a group cited in diversity or not. It relates to the goals of the individual 'gatekeeper' and their group. If they perceive value to them and the organisation there is a greater probability of being invited to join.

Pause for thought

In essence that which holds a group together determines who's in the group. The thing that holds groups

together is value toward a common goal [common purpose] and being able to work together collaboratively [rapport and ease of communication]. The commonalities are the foundation of inclusion. If you have commonalities with the group with which you wish to be involved, you're more likely to be included.

Some differences within the group can enable debate, if facilitated well. This doesn't necessarily lead to better decisions or performance because debate is not a key driver of performance. Other differences lead to debate or division that undermine performance.

…and diversity is usually based on differences.   Diversity often seems to suggest celebrating differences, potentially juxtaposed to human nature.

As Tom Wright [2004] stated in an article about debate in the Anglican church: "'celebrate difference' and 'embrace the Other'. In other words, we must be a broad church without nasty, rigid boundaries…but one must distinguish the differences which must not make a difference and those which are bound to do so…As the Yale theologian Miroslav Volf argued in his award-winning Exclusion And Embrace (1996), random "embracing" risks colluding with behaviour which should instead be questioned. To celebrate all differences (not that anyone does, but some talk as if we should) is to collapse into soggy Anglican niceness, a simpering, "tolerant" parody of genuine Christian love."

Applying this to other organisations suggests the performance will not be as good as it could be. Most successful organisations don't aspire to 'nice' performance, they aspire to excellence. Reading the following suggests the church as any organisation should aspire to 'celebrate all differences'.

"Inclusion [is] a process where the varying needs of a community, and the groups which constitute it, are recognised, prioritised and met. It is the positive management of diversity, to which all organisations should aspire" [Suffolk County Council, 2002].

As an aside it is worth noting that normally any form of prioritisation offers the option of discarding needs, and not meeting them. That's why things are prioritised. To have a priority is to have the 'right of precedence over others' [Collins English Dictionary, 1986].

And…?

Many organisations don't perform as well as they might for reasons of:
➡ No clear, common purpose.
➡ Unclear or conflicting goals.
➡ Unaligned decision-making.
➡ Constraint rather than empowerment.
➡ Having a culture that doesn't exclude people.
➡ Having a silo'd organisation.
➡ Poor leadership.

Society is much like that. Lots of different groups all wanting their say. Unclear common purpose – perhaps the clearest is let's include everybody – not helpful as this leads to the equivalent of Tom Wright's "…soggy Anglican niceness, a simpering, "tolerant" parody of genuine Christian love."

Where there is no clear purpose sub-groups and individuals develop their own goals [as happens in society]. As soon as such a situation occurs the probability of tensions between sub-groups and individuals increases. Tensions that are more difficult to resolve, as there is no common purpose to use as a frame of reference. The more silo'd a society or organisation the more likely that it will be expending effort in addressing tensions.

People, when given a choice, group with other people like themselves. If this is encouraged or allowed [as it is in most societies] it reinforces the perception of difference that impacts that society's, or that organisation's, behaviour.

So where's a solution?

Yes there is one that will take us a long way toward inclusion. It may have appeared at times as though I were arguing against inclusion, and to a degree I am. Partly because I believe in the positive capacity and intent in everything everyone does [in their world], partly because I don't believe in the overt categorisation of people on the basis of race, age, gender etc. Such categorisation [to which humans are prone] is too mis-leading.

The solution has three parts, for organisations, and for society:
- ➡ Get organisations performing better – places where those involved can healthily contribute in whatever way is mutually agreed [win:win] to a financially successful organisation over time [aligning organisational behaviours]. Understanding systemic patterns of behaviour.
- ➡ Educate a better understanding of human nature. People may look or appear different on the surface, it is underneath that matters [helping all concerned re-define their mental schemata].
- ➡ Educate a better understanding of human nature to improve the application of great communication and rapport skills.

A culture that engages its stakeholders, encourages them and values them in the pursuit of a common, clear, valued purpose is more likely to be successful. Organisations that thrive have the privilege of affording fairness [in broad terms], and are more likely to have trust and open communication [signs of rapport].

A culture that encourages the development of relationships with a range of stakeholders [including the rest of society] is in a better place to include diverse people who have a common vision.

Summary

Where there is a clear, valued common purpose trust and open communication can exist. Where trust and open communication exist inclusion is easier. It is purpose, trust and open communication which enhance performance, not inclusion or diversity. Inclusive communities are symptomatic of better cultures not the other way around. Multicultural is not the same as inclusive. Multicultural is akin to diversity – where there are representatives from lots of different sub-groups – they may not have the same common purpose, and thus a multicultural society is not necessarily going to perform well. In fact multi-cultural societies often perform worse because the individuals become 'silo'd' in like groups, heightening differences and increasing tensions.

Point 1:
Everyone is unique.

Point 2:
Collaboration is about common purpose.

Point 3:
Communication is about common ground.

Point 4:

Diversity is sometimes understood as the external and visible display of difference.

Point 5:
Inclusion is a group commitment to valuing the unique contribution of every individual, regardless of background, colour, gender or age [the visual displays of difference].

Point 6:
Organisations may not value the unique contribution of their staff regardless of background, because it is not currently in the culture or working practices to do so.

Point 7:
People are drawn to people like themselves.

Actions:
➡   To effect change, rather than highlight differences, consider celebrating commonalities first.
➡   Provide learning opportunities that reinforce commonalities whilst preserving each individual's self-concept of uniqueness.
➡   Provide learning opportunities to develop the application of great interpersonal communication skills.
➡   Understand the organisation's systemic patterns of behaviour, its purpose, values and beliefs, which determine behaviour, and its performance. Raise awareness of how these may be leveraged to enhance performance and broaden opportunities for inclusion.

Corollary

If an individual is declined access to a group they want to join, they may move on, or they may become vocal. If they become vocal it can be perceived as whining, aggression or confrontation. This will tend to draw the group's attention to the differences between the group and the individual, reinforcing any concerns the group may have.

Intriguingly even if the group agrees or succumbs to involve the individual, that doesn't mean that the individual will really be involved – they may find themselves within a culture that pushes them out and excludes them even though they are now in the group. Many examples can be found where this is exactly the case. It takes a strong and resilient individual to last in such a culture and to achieve anything, because they have to do both of the following:
➡   Prove their value.
➡   Change or accede to the culture.
An easy example borne of both fact and folklore, is the female executive who gets promoted to a senior role – perhaps the only female amongst the senior ranks. How often is she perceived to be more of a male than the males? No doubt she has taken opportunities and proven herself of value to her colleagues in some way. To be seen as more male than the males is indicative of her acceding to the culture in order to survive. For an individual to change a culture when they are not at the very top is challenging, the higher probability is that they will accede – most people do.

If an organisational culture, more so than a societal one, excludes you the first question to ask is whether you really want to join it. If you do, you would do well to decide whether to accede or commit yourself to change at the start rather than later. Remembering that confrontation only serves to highlight differences rather than commonalities. Cultures rarely change for one individual unless that individual is right at the top. Cultures can change though it usually takes a rare individual, and appropriate circumstances.

NB: This again is true whether the individual is from one of the groups cited in diversity or not.

References

Tom Wright, 2004. "Blindly embracing diversity will damage unity: Face to Faith," The Guardian, Saturday October 23,
Refering to the challenge faced by the Windsor report for the global Anglican church "how to remain as a family, despite diversity."

Joint Committee On Human Rights Seventh Report, 29 January 2005
Appendix 4a: Letter from Rt Hon Lord Falconer of Thoroton QC, Secretary of State for Constitutional Affairs and Lord Chancellor, Department for Constitutional Affairs re the JCHR's 23rd Report of Session 2003-04 on the Constitutional Reform Bill