Why research managers should care about equality, diversity and inclusion

The whats and whys of diversity - and how to make it work.
What is diversity – and why should you care?

• Parameters: Gender, ethnicity, race, social class, sexual orientation, religion, physical ability, cultural background.

• Not only a question of being allowed to be yourself but having dignity, acknowledging your background and given space to make your contributions be heard.

• Important as a tool to build community and improve the sense of belonging for everyone to enhance their commitment and performance. It ensures universities maintain their relevance in a fast-changing world and increases their societal impact through fostering social cohesion and will not attract the most talented researchers.

• Why research management and research:
  • Bibliometric analysis found that scientific research papers from more ethnically mixed groups of authors were more likely to be in higher-impact journals and gained 5-10% more citations.
  • Increasing nature of global challenges, threats and research – supporting societal challenges. International collaborations are the new ‘interdisciplinarity’.

• An important dimension if "societal challenge" is more than a buzzword.

• The presence of someone from a different identity group makes the others generate more ideas and construct more complex arguments.
We are all part of different cultures and groups, and different inputs and changes across cultures make our identity dynamic.

It is important to belong to a culture. It lends meaning to our actions and forms our ways of thinking and acting.

It is a general human trait to wish for acceptance and the ability to make ourselves understood, and to make a constructive contribution to results within our community.

Membership of a group means to be ‘in’ - to feel right and comfortable/validated, and the cultural community lends group identity and contributes to its members’ personal identities through shared language, behavior and self-perception.

Two dangers:
- The mere exposure effect: Our brain rewards us with a warm feeling when we are in familiar surroundings.
- Project similarity: When we believe we have more in common with people from other cultures than we actually have.
Working with cultural intelligence

• Culture definition: Culture is the filter through which we interpret our existence and orient ourselves in order to direct our actions. Culture is not a thing, but a community which is generated and maintained, and which is subject to gradual change in response to our mutual communication.

• Cultural intelligence definition: Cultural intelligence is the ability to act appropriately in situations where cultural differences are important, and the ability to make yourself understood and to establish a constructive partnership across cultural differences.

• Cultural intelligence is judged on the results of the encounter, not on the participants’ intentions or thoughts. An intelligent result of a cross-cultural encounter is the creation of a shared understanding across all the participant cultures – an understanding which will enable the parties to get on with their work.

• From "Cultural Intelligence" Plum et al.
Biases and stereotypes

• Stereotypes are never neutral, and they form our relationships to others.

• We react quickly and make judgements because our brains are wired that way.

• Stereotypes reflect more on ourselves and our views than the reality of the other person. We focus on negative features in other cultures in order to promote positive features in our own culture. That’s why we have more stereotypes about the cultures that are most like our own.

• The best antidote to stereotypes is knowledge.

• Step one is acknowledging biases and then taking action.
We're here! We're queer! Get used to it!

• LGBTQ+ people have experienced discrimination and stereotypes for many years. Despite progress re: rights and equalities many community members are still not out at work.

• Strategies needed on day to day basis – telling colleagues about sexual orientation/gender identity, where can/do you travel to, talk about family, chatting about your weekend etc.

• Straight acting/passing – good or bad? A question the community grapples with.

• Not everyone wants to be out but..... Some have no choice.

• Visible or invisible differences

• Performative progressiveness – accepting queer / LGBT people on the terms of the cisgender heterosexual majority.
Tips, tricks and tools

• Turn off autopilot
• Going meta – over and over again.
• Understanding your own biases and stereotypes - acknowledge them when they arise.
• Understanding your own culture and associated preconceptions
• Respect individuals not culture. Do challenge people on their culture, just know when and how.
• Challenge the stories you tell yourself about others. (also in minor groups)
• Remember, sometimes people are idiots. The problem is recognising when it is idiocy and when it is cultural differences.
• Be a visible ally – call out discrimination
• Remember that all traditions and norms aren’t necessarily rational or explainable but are still things you are obliged to do.
• Don’t reduce people to one thing. Avoid focusing on one single cultural difference.
• Think about supporting researchers: Are research designs inclusive enough to generate enough value and impact?
• Ground rules: Management styles, handling of disagreements, decision-making processes, positive and critical feedback, methods of problem solving and the degree of freedom to choose methods.
What to do after the webinar?

- Looking at your office, research group, department etc. How diverse are you considering: Gender, race, nationality, sexual orientation, ability, age etc.?
- If not very diverse, why? Are you hiring too narrowly? Are you not a welcoming place for minorities? How can you find out if not?
- If nobody is out in the team, does that make you a good leader?
- When you create a group – how diverse is it?
- Have you witnessed conflicts between minority groups? If not, is that because they are not there? Or because nobody knows how to deal with it? Or because they don’t think it will be taken seriously?
- Have any researchers or colleagues expressed concerns on being open about religion, sexuality? Have any incidents been reported? How were they handled?
- How do Zoom/Skype meetings impact on diversity? Can people be themselves and offer different perspectives?
Where to find us

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Watch out for our podcast:
“The Diversity in Research Podcast”
Coming soon in a pair headphones near you!