

Why is diversity 2.0 difficulty?

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People are diverse. They come from different backgrounds, have different genders, etc. Their personalities, however, are even more multifaceted. Understanding this variant of diversity and using it for the good of a team seems complex. But it is worth making the effort.

Diversity 1.0 is overdue

Unfortunately, diversity 1.0 is still not yet universally established. Prejudice against people based on their ethnic background, religion, sexual orientation, disabilities, gender, or age still very much exists. We have to do more to get rid of all kinds of misconceptions and the injustices that result from them. Having worked in the sports business, I realise how arduous this can prove. When promoting “too many” female staff members, a superior is quickly under the suspicion of having affairs with them.

Making an extra effort

And there is even more to the notion of diversity: Achieving great success in a team, a group, or a company, requires the full potential of everyone involved. It is not enough to know about and deploy staff members' expertise, their experiences, their backgrounds. Above all, it is necessary to identify, comprehend, and utilise their diverse personalities. However difficult that may be. Acknowledging gender and background is great. But it takes an extra effort to find out about people's mentalities, about how they are wired and how they come to their conclusions. Unfortunately, we tend to form an opinion (all too) quickly.

Opinions form in milliseconds

The first encounter with my wife was a disaster. She thought I was arrogant, loud, not really likeable. A few milliseconds was all it took for her to reach her verdict. People size up and form opinions of others with lightning speed. From an evolutionary perspective, the ability to do so seems quite beneficial; it allowed people to opt for flight or fight quickly. Our radar for people is located in a genetically «age-old» area of our brain.

Tend to confirm our own assessment

When radars capture an object, the information they provide is imprecise at first. Only once there is visual and radio contact, is it possible for people using them to identify what or who they are dealing with, what the intent or destination of the “object” might be. Our radar for people, too, is providing us with little information with respect to personalities or motivations. The power of the first impression, however, is enormous. Then, we tend to confirm those first conclusions, regardless of whether the first impression was negative or positive. And what is more, we rarely consider in what circumstances we formed that first impression. Maybe we were in a particularly bad mood – or in high spirits?

An open mind as corrective

In any case, all we need to gain more insight into the attitudes and actions of others are curiosity and an open mind. Unfortunately, few people, and even fewer companies, take the time to take another look. Such a closer look is absolutely necessary to achieve diversity 2.0, however. We need sufficient background information if we are to assess the perspectives and the logic of others and use them for the success of a group. Integrating these aspects allows us to create successful teams. My wife and I have been one of them for 38 years now. Even though she was less than impressed in the beginning, we went on to become a dream team.