creating
inclusive and
harmonious
workplaces

A Manager's Guide

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inclusive and
harmonious
workplaces

contents

INTRODUCTION

Managing teams is becoming increasingly challenging with the rising diversity of our workforce. While diverse teams collectively present a greater wealth of experience and ideas, they often have a greater variety of communication styles, motivations, working approaches and norms, making for more complexity in team management.

The purpose of this guide is to provide managers like yourself with strategies and tips to be more effective in managing your diverse teams.

Who is this guide for?

If you are a supervisor who manages an individual or a team who has a profile different from your own (for example, different age group, nationality, race, culture and gender), this guide is for you!

How to use this guide?

This guide has been organised into two main sections:

Section 1 tells you can be more effective at understanding and managing your diverse team members. You will learn more about:

- → How to be a more inclusive manager (**page M8**)
- → Managing across generations, nationalities and cultures (**pages M11**-**M15**)

Section 2 focuses on how you can help your team members work better with each other. You will find out more about:

- → How to create an inclusive and harmonious team culture (**pages M16**-**M19**)
- → How to resolve team conflicts (**page M20**)

A series of self-reflection exercises are included to help you assess the extent to which your decisions, behaviours and team cultures are inclusive. Use these to identify areas where you would like to change or improve. Read the tips to give you ideas of actions or strategies you can adopt in your identified areas.

Challenges of managing diverse teams

The following are some typical challenges faced by managers and supervisors. Have you encountered any of them?

- → Challenges in communication between employees of different nationalities
- → Difficulty in recruiting, managing or retaining individuals of different generations
- → Lack of teamwork and cooperation between team members
- → Formation of in-groups and out-groups within teams

These challenges can impede the performance of your teams and affect employee engagement and team morale.

It is therefore important that you, as a manager, are able to effectively manage your diverse team and create an inclusive and harmonious environment to maximise your team's performance.

MANAGING TEAM MEMBERS OF DIFFERENT BACKGROUNDS

Having a diverse team brings fresh ideas and innovative approaches. The challenge is that these members will also have different communication styles, understandings and expectations. Effective management is important to enable the team to work effectively together and help all members reach their full potential, thereby harnessing the advantages of a diverse team.

A look within: how inclusive are you as a manager?

All of us have preferences based on our experience and level of awareness which influence our decisions and behaviours as managers. It is important to understand how your preferences affect your decisions as they influence your effectiveness at managing diverse teams.

Take a minute to reflect how your preferences may have affected your decisions as a manager. Use the reflection exercise (**page M6**) to help you.

Identify areas where you would like to change or do better to be a more inclusive manager. Think about strategies and actions which you can take to be more effective at managing your diverse team. You may find the tips and strategies on **pages M8** to **M10** helpful.

HOW DO YOUR PREFERENCES AFFECT YOUR DECISIONS AS A MANAGER?

Recall recent work situations you faced. Take a moment to think about the decisions you have made as a team leader:

In recruitment...
→ Do you typically hire the same "type" of person? Do factors such as age, nationality, race/culture, gender affect your decisions?

In team arrangements and work assignments...
→ Are your decisions on work allocation based on the task specifications and capabilities of the staff?
→ Are you providing the best development and skill-building opportunities to all in your team?

In providing feedback and evaluating performance...
→ In evaluating performance, do you consider factors based on the profile of the person unrelated to his/her demonstrated results?
→ How well do you know each of the employees you supervise? Do you know what motivates them, how they like to be recognised, how they learn best?
→ Do you prefer people with styles or backgrounds similar to yours?
→ Do you offer more feedback to certain members of your team more easily or more regularly? Why?

In your day-to-day interactions...

→ Do you make assumptions about your colleagues and team members based on their profile (e.g. age, nationality, race/culture, gender)? Do you test or clarify your assumptions before making decisions based on them?

→ Do you believe there is only one right way of doing things? Are you open other ways which may accomplish the same goals?

→ With whom do you eat lunch with regularly? Are your lunch buddies of a certain background/profile?

→ Do you take immediate action with people you supervise when they behave in ways which show disrespect for others (e.g. cultural jokes?)

After reviewing these questions, are there specific areas where your preferences for certain profiles, styles or backgrounds, which are not related to team members' performance or capabilities, have affected your decisions as a manager?

Identify the areas which you would like to change or improve. For ideas on strategies and tips to address them, read **pages M8** to **M10**.

💡 TIPS AND STRATEGIES
HOW TO BE A MORE INCLUSIVE MANAGER

1. **Respect differences**. Value the uniqueness of every individual.

2. **Keep an open mind**. Be open to new ways and approaches and encourage your team to do so.

3. **Build self-awareness**. Be aware of your own behaviour and beliefs and how they may affect the way you treat others. Be proactive in asking for feedback to understand other people's point of view.

4. **Get to know your team members on an individual level**. Be careful not to stereotype someone based on his/her profile. Get to know and understand your team members and adapt your management style to meet their needs. (Go through the reflection exercise on page 7 to ascertain how well you know your team members).

5. **Acknowledge differences in communication styles and languages**. Be mindful that some employees may have difficulty expressing themselves in our business language, English. Be attentive and take time to clarify any doubts. Be prepared to vary your communication style to communicate effectively with your team members if necessary. Consider enrolling these employees for English language courses.

6. **Make decisions based on team members' abilities and task specifications**. Avoid assigning projects, assessing performance, selecting training participants or assigning roles and responsibilities based on factors such as gender, nationality, culture, or age, unless specific traits are necessary to perform the job.

HOW TO BE A MORE INCLUSIVE MANAGER

⚠ **Caution**
Be careful in making assumptions about team members based on your preconceptions, even when well intentioned. Make sure to clarify the assumptions before making decisions based on them.
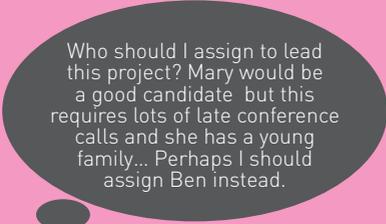
Who should I assign to lead this project? Mary would be a good candidate but this requires lots of late conference calls and she has a young family... Perhaps I should assign Ben instead.

Sigh... I got passed over for yet another plum project... Why are all the good opportunities given to Ben? After all the hard work I've put in, perhaps it is time to move on...

Boss

Mary

HOW WELL DO YOU UNDERSTAND EACH OF YOUR TEAM MEMBERS?

Being effective in managing diverse team members is not just about managing others the way you would like to be managed. It is also about understanding them well enough to treat them the way they would like to be treated.

Take a minute to list down all the members in your team and think about how well you understand them.

Team member	Motivation	Communication	Preferred management style
Name of team member #1	What motivates this team member? Some examples are: ➜ Compensation ➜ Recognition ➜ Challenging work ➜ Meaningful work ➜ Development opportunities ➜ Flexibility ➜ Strategic decision making ➜ Supportive colleagues ➜ Autonomy ➜ Organisational vision	What is the preferred communication style of this team member? For example: ➜ Individual one-to-one discussions ➜ Team meetings ➜ Email ➜ Telephone ➜ Text messaging ➜ Memos	How does the team member like to be managed? ➜ How often, and in what form, does he/she like to receive feedback? ➜ What do they value from a supervisor? (e.g. clear direction, democratic approach, coaching and advice)
Team member #2			
Team member #3			
....			

MANAGING ACROSS GENERATIONS AND NATIONALITIES

A study on Inclusive and Harmonious Workplaces conducted by the Ministry of Manpower in 2010 found that managers and organisations faced the greatest challenge in managing diverse teams of different generations and nationalities. This was often due to differences in culture, communication styles, attitudes, perspectives and social norms.

To improve your understanding of your team members of different generations and nationalities, Boxes 1-1 and 1-2 on **pages M12** and **M14** highlight the different characteristics of the different employee groups, and provide tips on how you can be more effective in managing them.

Note: These groupings are not intended to stereotype individuals based on their profiles. Rather, they serve to provide insights into the patterns of differences between generational groups.

There are great variations amongst individuals and each individual may not demonstrate all the characteristics identified with their profile. It is important to get to know all team members at an individual level to understand their personal characteristics and how you can bring out the best in each of them.

BOX 1-1: MANAGING ACROSS GENERATIONS

Gen Y
Born after 1980

Perceived strengths:
➔ Good at multi-tasking
➔ Technologically-savvy
➔ Confident
➔ Short attention span
➔ Global world-view
➔ Achievement-oriented
➔ Likes to have fun at work

Gen Y

Tips for bringing out the best in them
➔ Involve them in decision making
➔ Provide mentorship, coaching and advice
➔ Show willingness to embrace and consider their ideas
➔ Provide a fun, employee-centered workplace
➔ Be flexible – find ways to allow them to pursue the activities they enjoy (e.g. unpaid leave to travel)
➔ Provide stimulation through a variety of roles
➔ Set ground rules early, particularly around social networking and technology usage.
➔ Provide clear direction, support and regular feedback

Gen X
Born between 1965 and 1980

Perceived strengths:
➔ Ambitious
➔ Adaptable
➔ Technologically literate
➔ Independent and likes autonomy

Gen X

Tips for bringing out the best in them
➔ Be approachable, encourage ideas.
➔ Provide challenging and varied work
➔ Use performance-based rewards and promotion
➔ Take time to be personal and acknowledge them individually for contributions
➔ Involve them in decision-making
➔ Offer professional development opportunities
➔ Help them see how their contributions achieve organisation's goals
➔ Provide mentorship
➔ Provide clear direction and support
➔ Provide regular feedback

BOX 1-1: MANAGING ACROSS GENERATIONS ↙

Baby boomers
Born between 1946 and 1964

Perceived strengths:
- → Dedicated and hardworking
- → Good team players
- → Respect for authority and hierarchal structure
- → Experienced

Tips for bringing out the best in them
- → Provide challenging and varied work assignments
- → Be prepared to be flexible to allow them to balance family and work responsibilities
- → Provide recognition for their contributions
- → Show respect for their inputs, knowledge and experience
- → Use them as mentors to transfer knowledge and experience to younger generations
- → Be coachable. Tap on their experience

Baby Boomers

Traditionalists
Born before 1946

Perceived strengths:
- → Strong work ethic
- → Experienced
- → Disciplined
- → Stable
- → May be reluctant to speak up
- → Avoids conflict

Traditionalists

Tips for bringing out the best in them
- → Be prepared to be flexible in work arrangements and working hours
- → Provide recognition for their contributions
- → Show respect for their inputs, knowledge and experience
- → Provide freedom and flexibility for them to do their work. Avoid micromanaging them
- → Provide clear and direct communications
- → Continue to offer development opportunities
- → Use them as mentors to transfer knowledge and experience to younger generations
- → Be coachable. Tap on their experience

BOX 1-2: MANAGING ACROSS NATIONALITIES AND CULTURES

The following are some differences between cultures/nationalities which may cause challenges at work:

Language - Languages differ across cultures. Even when a common language is used, the same words may have different meanings. Non-verbal communication (e.g. body language, gestures) also differ.

→ **Direct vs indirect** - The degree to which communication is made explicit across cultures may vary. Some cultures assume more commonality of knowledge than others, and communicate in more indirect ways.

→ **Perception of time** – In some cultures, time is seen as a limited resource whereas others view time to be more plentiful. This may result in differences in the sense of urgency in tasks.

→ **Perception of hierarchy** – The extent to which hierarchy is respected and valued varies across cultures.

→ **Perception of individual vs collective** – Some cultures value individual uniqueness and independence, whereas others expect people to prioritise the collective good over their own preferences.

Example of differences in communication style

Pursuant to our request for my opinion regarding my personal availability for a face-to-face meeting to discuss our mutual concerns about the matter in question, I would like to propose for your consideration that the best utilisation of our time would be to multitask by holding said meeting concurrently in conjunction with the consumption of the mid-day meal.

Let's have lunch

Indirect

Direct

Tips on how to manage challenges arising from differences in communication and perspectives

→ Listen carefully and clarify. Ask: "When you say this, do you mean…". Ask team members to go over their assignment with you.

→ If necessary, change your communication styles to accommodate other members in the team. Rephrase your sentence. Use alternative forms of communication.

Solicit feedback about your own communication and management style.

→ Be approachable. Develop an atmosphere where team members are comfortable asking for assistance

→ Avoid jargon and slang. Using Singlish can be confusing. Keep the message simple and straight to the point.

→ Help team members understand the organisation values and norms. Share organisational values, structure, working norms and expectations at the onset.

BUILDING AN INCLUSIVE AND HARMONIOUS CULTURE WITHIN YOUR TEAM

In addition to being able to effectively manage your team members, it is also important to build a culture of inclusiveness and harmony within the team to facilitate effective communication, trust and teamwork between team members.

How well does your diverse team work together?

First, think about how well your diverse team is working together. You can use the reflection exercise on the next page to help you.

HOW WELL DOES YOUR TEAM WORK TOGETHER?

The following are some dimensions which indicate how well a team works together:

1. Level of communication and interaction

→ How effectively and frequently do your team members communicate with one another?

→ Do all your team members interact with one another in informal settings (e.g. during lunch, company activities, after work)

→ Do conflicts or misunderstandings occur often?

2. Level of collaboration

→ Does your team work towards a common goal, or do individual interests prevail?

→ Do you notice any cliques, within your team?

→ Are team members willing to share information and resources with one another?

3. Mutual care and support

→ Are team members proactive in offering help to those who need it?

→ When a new team member comes on board, are the incumbent members proactive in helping them settle in?

→ Do team members treat one another with respect?

4. Team morale

→ Are team members energized about coming to work? Do they appear to enjoy working together?

TIPS AND STRATEGIES
BUILDING A CULTURE OF INCLUSIVENESS WITHIN YOUR TEAM

The following provide some suggestions on how you can foster a more inclusive and harmonious team culture:

1. **Focus on common goals**. Establish a common team vision or objectives which will transcend team members' differences and encourage all to work towards a common goal.

2. **Remove "us" and "them"**. Do not draw the line between different employee populations within the team.

3. **Communicate to your team members the importance of sustaining an inclusive culture**. Emphasise the importance and benefits it brings, such as enhanced team productivity and a more harmonious work environment.

4. **Emphasise behavioural expectations that are likely to foster an inclusive environment**. Have regular conversations with team members (e.g. during mentoring sessions, performance review, team meetings) on their ability to work effectively as a diverse team and discuss possible areas of improvement.

5. **Recruit with inclusive values and behaviour in mind**. Beyond recruiting team members based on merit (relevant skills, knowledge, experience, etc), you should also keep in mind the attitudes and behaviours which new members may bring to the team. Refer to box 2-1 for some sample interview questions.

Box 2-1: Sample interview questions

Some questions which you can ask to gauge candidates' inclusive values and behaviour include:

➔ Can you provide an example of an instance where you had to work with a difficult colleague? How did you overcome it?

➔ Give an example of how you adapted your own working or communication style to work with different team members or work situations.

➔ How well do you work with new colleagues? What do you do to establish a working rapport with them?

➔ Have you worked with colleagues of different profile (e.g. generation, nationality)? What do you think is important in making the relationship work?

6. **Orientate new team members**. When bringing new team members on board, clearly define team values and expected behaviours at the start. Encourage incumbent team members to welcome and help new team members settle in.

7. **Seek out perspectives of team members of different profiles**. Diverse groups provide greater variety of insights and experiences. Encourage full participation and involvement by all team members. For example, invite more participation during team meetings by doing a quick go-around to invite every person to provide an opinion, or form break-out groups for discussion.

8. **Address biases and intolerable behaviour promptly**. Behaviour that are offensive to other team members should be addressed quickly.

9. **Provide opportunities for employees to increase understanding and interaction with each other**. Provide opportunities for employees to bond on common interests. Some things which you can do include:

   → Organise regular team lunches bearing in mind dietary restrictions due to cultures or religions.

   → Organise informal activities to help employees interact (e.g. sports activities, family outings)

   → Celebrate special holidays of the nationalities/cultures of team members, and encourage them to share more about their respective cultures to facilitate understanding between colleagues.

10. **Be a role model.** Walk the talk and practise what you advocate.

TIPS AND STRATEGIES
MANAGING CONFLICTS WITHIN YOUR TEAM

Even when teams are effective in working well together, conflicts can arise. Within diverse teams, conflicts often result from differences in values, social norms and languages. It is important to resolve matters quickly so that they do not spiral downwards to affect team cohesion.

The following are some tips on resolving workplace conflicts arising from differences in team members' backgrounds, values and communication styles.

1. **Identify the root of the problem and clarify each party's position to avoid ambiguity**. Sometimes, misunderstandings lead parties involved to believe that a conflict exists when actually it does not. Listen and articulate respective positions clearly so that each party agrees on and is clear about the root of the issue.

2. **Facilitate understanding of the other party**. If the root of the conflict is due to the difference in cultural norms or values, focus on helping each party understand each other's needs, cultural norms and values. Encourage both parties to discuss the issues, collaborate and/or compromise.

3. **Involve a neutral mediator**. If the conflict is due to a difference in values or languages of different nationalities/ cultures, it is sometimes helpful to enlist the help of a trained mediator who understands both nationalities/ cultures.

4. **Commit to the solution**. Once a mutually agreeable solution has been reached, summarise and review what the parties have agreed upon. Identify where potential issues may arise and the role each party must play in being aware of his or her own communication styles or behaviour. Reiterate the inclusive values and behaviour they should commit to as a team.

5. **Resolve conflicts quickly**. This will minimise impact on morale, communication, cohesion and trust in the team. Stay committed until the conflict is resolved.

SUMMARY

In summary, the following are the top 10 things to keep in mind in managing diverse teams:

To be a more inclusive manager in your behaviours and decisions:

1. Know yourself. Understand your preferences and how they affect your decisions and behaviours towards your team members.

2. Respect differences

3. Understand your team members at an individual level. Do not stereotype or make assumptions about team members.

4. Make decisions based on team members' qualifications and task needs.

5. Acknowledge differences in communication styles and languages

To build a culture of inclusiveness within your team:

6. Focus on common goals

7. Communicate to your team members on the importance and expectations of an inclusive environment

8. Address and resolve biases, intolerable behaviour and conflicts promptly.

9. Create opportunities for team members to understand and interact with each other

10. Walk the talk. Be a good role model

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Ministry of Manpower (MOM)

MOM formulates and implements manpower policies in Singapore. The MOM website provides various resources relating to our workforce and workplace, including resources to foster inclusive and harmonious workplaces.

For more information, log on to:

http://www.mom.gov.sg/

Address:

18 Havelock Road Singapore 059764

Contact number:

(+65) 6438 5122

Tripartite Alliance for Fair Employment Practices (TAFEP)

TAFEP was set up to promote the adoption of non-discriminatory and responsible employment practices among employers, employees and the general public. Those who have encountered workplace-related discrimination are invited to contact TAFEP for advice and assistance.

TAFEP provides a range of services, tools and resources, including training workshops, advisory services, and educational materials, to help organisations implement fair employment practices and comply with employment legislation.

For more information, log on to:

http://www.fairemployment.sg/

Address:

122 Middle Road, #05-02 Midlink Plaza Singapore 188973

Contact number:

(+65) 6838 0969

Human Capital Singapore (HCS)

HCS is the approved national centre for Continuing Education and Training. It trains and develops people managers so that they can re-design critical HR processes, identify and build needed competencies and deploy best HR practices to meet the changing expectations of the industry.

HCS conducts training programmes under the HR Workforce Skills Qualifications programme developed by the Singapore Workforce Development Agency. One of the courses conducted by HCS "Develop a strategy for managing diversity", helps learners to:

1. Identify key issues and characteristics of diversity to support the development of diversity management strategies;

2. Facilitate the development of policies and procedures targeting specific diversity needs within an organisation; and

3. Identify criteria to evaluate the performance of diversity management strategy and define specific measures to be used.

For more information, log on to:
http://www.hcs.com.sg

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