



Rethinking workplace diversity

Harness the differences in your people to make them successful



Connect with
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Stephen Cuppello

Psychology Data Analyst
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Stephen has been a member of Thomas International's Psychology team since 2016. As well as conducting big data benchmarking studies in organisations, supporting the research and development of new tools and heading up the psychometric validation of Thomas' portfolio of assessments globally, he is the key consultant involved in adverse impact analysis as well as supporting diversity and inclusion efforts at Thomas. He has a Master's degree in Applied Psychology of Intellectual Disability and a keen interest in advocating for disadvantaged groups.

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Charlotte joined Thomas in March 2015 and has HR experience in the retail and pharmaceutical sectors. Prior to embarking on a career in HR, Charlotte graduated with a first-class honours degree in Law and this is where her passion for HR, in particular employment law, stemmed from. In November 2016, Charlotte successfully completed her CIPD Level 7 and has enjoyed a career in HR since 2011.

As Thomas's HR Advisor, Charlotte's role focuses on employee relations, employment law, performance management and recruitment, bringing fairness, equality and consistency to the business. Charlotte also works closely with managers across the business on core HR areas, including recruitment, onboarding and key HR projects.



INTRODUCTION



Workplace diversity has the power to instil feelings of belonging (O'Donovan, 2018), to increase profits (McKinsey & Company, 2017), lead to more innovation (Nathan & Lee, 2013), drive better decisions (Levine et al., 2014) and make teams more productive (Neuman et al., 1999). However, it's also been attributed with poorer performance (Guillaume et al., 2017), poorer collaboration (Forbes, 2011) and the cause of feelings of resentment and mistrust within organisations (Galinsky et al., 2015).

It's a hot topic in both HR and psychology literature and with more and more organisations embarking on diversity programmes, it's important to understand what it means, what it can bring to organisations and how to capitalise on the benefits whilst being aware of the inherent challenges. As opinion shifts from framing diversity as primarily a moral concern, this whitepaper also aims to make the case for alternative forms of diversity, such as personality, and the impact they can have.

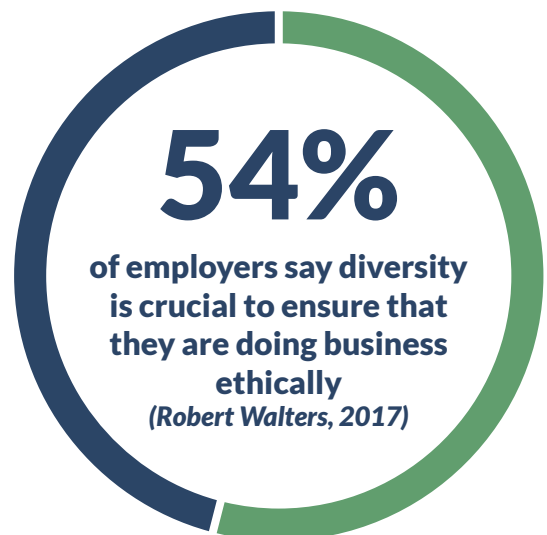
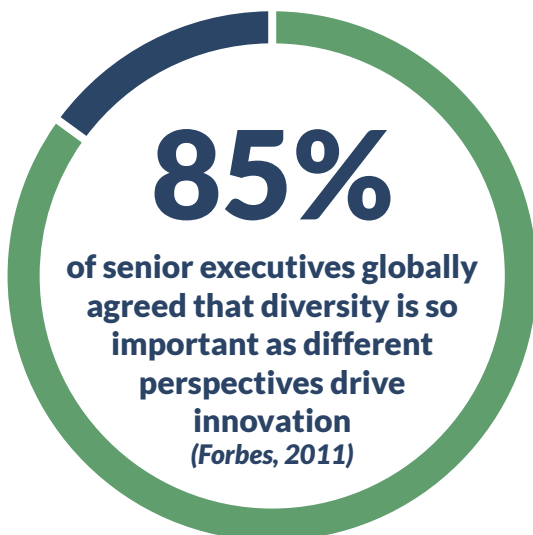
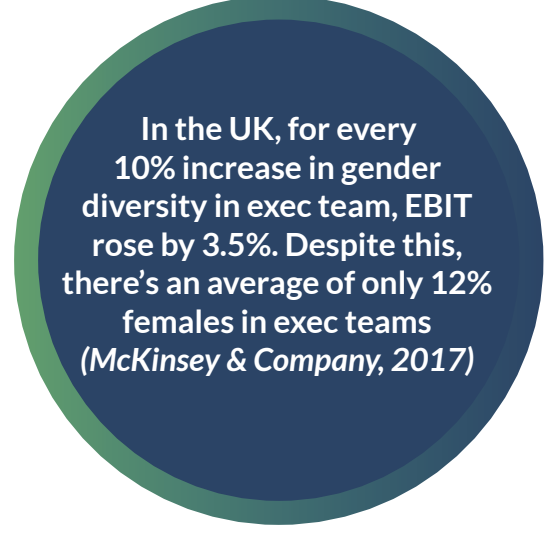
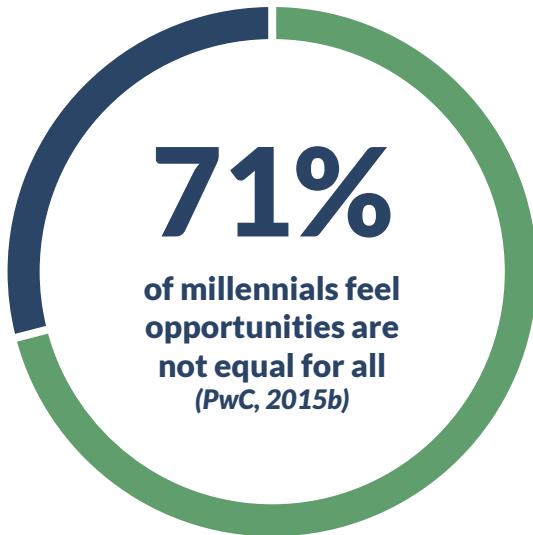
Diversity is difference. Both visible and invisible; subjective and selective; socially constructed yet based on real experience; it has the power to lead to both feelings of inclusion and of intimidation.

– Stephen Cuppello



KEY STATISTICS

1. The Case for Workplace Diversity



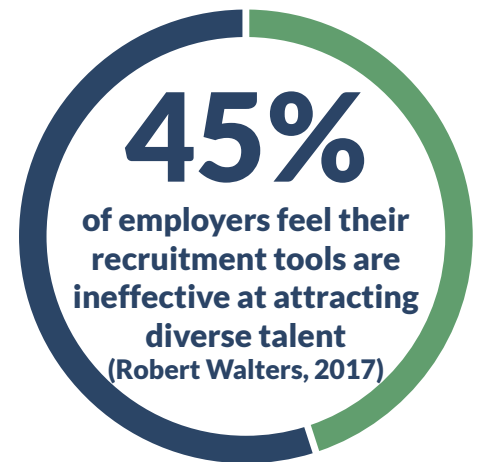
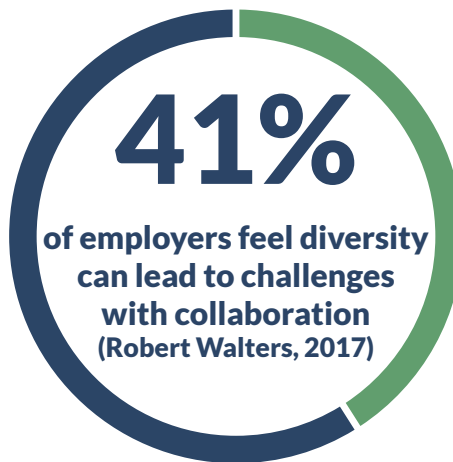


RETHINKING WORKPLACE DIVERSITY

Extraversion diversity in teams = better social cohesion (*Barrick et al., 1998*)

Adjustment diversity in teams = better team performance (*Neuman et al., 1999*)

2. Challenges to Workplace Diversity

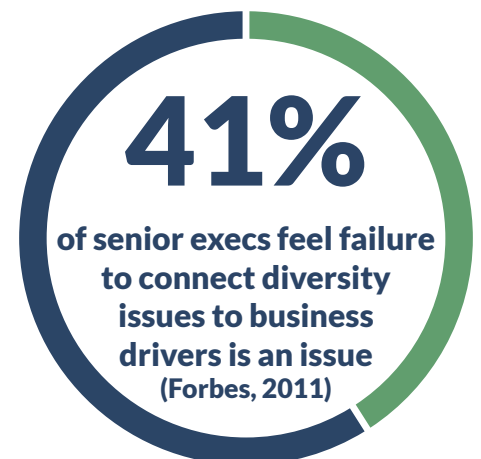


RETHINKING WORKPLACE DIVERSITY

Conscientiousness diversity in teams = worse performance (*Barrick et al., 1998*)

Agreeableness diversity in teams = worse social cohesion and more conflict (*Barrick et al., 1998*)

Diversity in well-being in teams = worse team performance (*Barsade et al., 2000*)





THE CASE FOR WORKPLACE DIVERSITY

One reason workplace diversity is so important stems from a moral argument, namely that every individual should have the opportunity to be the best they can be. It's a convincing argument and employers are bought into this idea with 54% citing diversity as something that is crucial to ensuring they are doing business ethically (*Robert Walters, 2017*) and indeed this sense of equality is assured by law (*UK Equality Act, 2010*).

Gains from workplace diversity are not just moral. Top quartile companies for diversity were found to be more likely to financially outperform industry medians than bottom quartile companies for gender diversity (by 16%) and ethnic diversity (by 35%) (*McKinsey & Company, 2017*). Organisations with female board representation outperformed those without by 26% in share price performance (*Credit Suisse, 2012*). Academics have suggested financial benefits from diversity arise from varied approaches and perspectives leading to more ideas and innovation which in turn leads to better decision making, more complex thinking and ultimately being better equipped for unforeseen challenges (*O'Donovan, 2018*).

There's a strong case to be made for the advantages of the variety of perspectives and approaches that diversity brings.

Workplace diversity brings different perspectives on how to approach tasks. Diverse senior management teams are more likely to focus on innovation (*Talke et al., 2011*) and have been found to be more likely to introduce product innovations than homogenous ones (*Nathan & Lee, 2013*).

“DIVERSITY SHAPES HOW WE VIEW SITUATIONS, AS COGNITIVE FUNCTIONING AND ATTITUDES VARY WITH DEMOGRAPHICS.”

Diverse teams also have the potential to be more productive and make better decisions. When team members approach tasks differently, task-related conflicts are more frequent. Effective handling of these conflicts results in better consideration of all aspects of the task and subsequently better solutions. In a research study, ethnic diversity in teams was found to lead to an increase in scrutiny and ultimately better decision making and performance on a market pricing task (*Levine et al., 2014*).



Another study found diverse juries deliberate more perspectives more accurately than homogenous ones (*Sommers, 2006*).

There are also more practical concerns to creating a diverse workforce. Demographics of both the general and working population of the UK have shifted and pushes for diversity are needed to attract staff with unique skills. For staff joining the workforce, 80% stated potential employer's diversity and inclusion policy was an important factor in whether they chose to join a company (*PwC, 2015b*).

Demographic shifts are an important consideration with clients as well as employees. Robert Walters (2017) reported that two thirds of employers believed a diverse workforce was needed to better serve their diverse customer base.



RETHINKING WORKPLACE DIVERSITY

Most research and industry literature has placed the matter of diversity as rooted solely in readily-detected demographics (*Jackson et al., 2003*), such as age, gender and race, and how they related to positive or negative work outcomes (*Guillaume et al., 2017*). Diversity is broader than this though.

“DIVERSITY ENCOMPASSES ANY ATTRIBUTE THAT CAN LEAD A PERSON TO PERCEIVE ANOTHER AS DIFFERENT FROM THEMSELVES.”

Personality diversity has long been proposed to have an impact on the effectiveness of teams. As early as the 50s, research found groups with heterogeneity of personality were better at solving problems (*Hoffman, 1959*). These ideas are again starting to gain traction and research attention.

Studies have also looked to investigate the interplay between demographics and personality and how this impacts workplace diversity. *Flynn et al. (2001)* suggested that the effects of diversity on teams were moderated by personality traits. Demographically dissimilar people were perceived more favourably if they were more extraverted and showed higher capacity for self-monitoring. This in turn led to greater social integration and performance. This makes sense, as being both gregarious and emotionally intelligent would allow a person to quickly get others to warm to them. Curiosity has also been found to positively moderate team performance in diverse teams (*Homan et al., 2008*). Again, this seems logical as highly curious people are more likely to appreciate novel perspectives and entertain them.





5

THE BIG 5 MODEL

Extraversion	Conscientiousness
Emotional Stability	Openness to Experience
Agreeableness	

The five-factor personality model was first proposed by Norman (1963) and describes how our personality can be defined within these factors. The model presented here is based on Digman's (1990) version. Its strong evidence base has led to it being commonly used as a personality measure in academic literature, including research into personality diversity.



HIGH POTENTIAL

Conscientiousness	Risk Approach
Adjustment	Ambiguity Acceptance
Curiosity	Competitiveness

This model of high potential was proposed by McRae and Furnham (2014) and forms the basis of High Potential Trait Indicator (HPTI). It has drawn elements from the Big Five Model and many factors are strongly correlated. Conscientiousness factors are similar, as are Adjustment and Emotional Stability, and Curiosity and Ambiguity Acceptance relate to Openness to Experience. It has the potential to be used as a tool to assess team diversity.



DISC THEORY

Dominance	Steadiness
Influence	Compliance

A model of behavioural preferences, rather than personality, DISC theory underpins the Personality Profile Analysis (PPA). There are overlaps with the academic Big Five Model: the active factors of Dominance and Influence capture elements of Extraversion and Steadiness has similarities with Agreeableness. An advantage of the PPA when looking at diversity is its ease of application to team audits, comparing individual member profiles.



CHALLENGES TO WORKPLACE DIVERSITY

Despite the apparent advantages of creating a diverse workforce, the reality is less clear cut. Firstly, it's not always an easy thing to achieve. Despite 85% of employers citing diversity as important, only 46% have programmes in place to attract diverse talent and 45% felt their recruitment tools were ineffective at attracting diverse talent (*Robert Walters, 2017*). Cost implications have been suggested as one reason for this, with 46% of senior executives feeling budget was a major hurdle to diversity (*Forbes, 2011*). Costs can certainly add up with specialist staff, employee training, adaptations to working conditions, extra support and new benefits amongst those that need to be considered.



Other business obstacles that have been reported include a lack of consensus over who is responsible for supporting diversity initiatives and programmes that have been put in place are not always executed well or not connected to business drivers.

Even when the momentum has been generated in the business and structures are in place to support diversity efforts, the path to a productive, diverse workforce isn't always straight forward.

“BIASES EXIST IN RECRUITMENT AND PROGRESSION PROCESSES.”

Job postings that unintentionally use language stereotypically ascribed to men, are less appealing to women. This isn't because they feel like they can't do the job, but that they feel the organisation is not right for them (*Gaucher et al., 2011*). Throughout the recruitment process too, there's a large body of evidence demonstrating that unconscious bias disadvantages some groups (*e.g. Uhlmann & Cohen, 2005*).



There are also potential issues when diversity exists within the business.

“GROUPS AREN’T ALWAYS SUCCESSFUL AT HARNESSING THE POTENTIAL ADVANTAGES OF DIVERSITY.”

Just putting diversity in place, without proactively managing conflict arising from differences in perspectives, will not bring benefits. It’s been suggested that the extent to which diversity can benefit a group is dependent on how apparent differences are, how well the group handles bias and how well the group can capitalise on the variety of perspectives (*Guillaume et al., 2017*). There’s also a part to play for the type of organisation. By reviewing recent studies, Guillaume et al. (2017) found that diversity only improved the performance of organisations that were pursuing growth or innovation. For those with low growth or low innovation strategies, diversity was actually related to worse performance.

Another matter involves how diversity strategies are posed to majority groups. Diversity can be viewed as a source of resentment and mistrust and this can lead to resistance which hinders progress. Majority groups have been shown to have lower workplace engagement in more diverse groups (*Tsui et al., 1992*). To give an example of this, the BBC recently suffered a significant backlash following a job post exclusively for black, Asian and minority ethnic candidates (*HR Grapevine, 2017*).

“MAJORITY GROUPS NEED TO FEEL THEY WON’T BE DISADVANTAGED BY EFFORTS TO INCREASE DIVERSITY.”

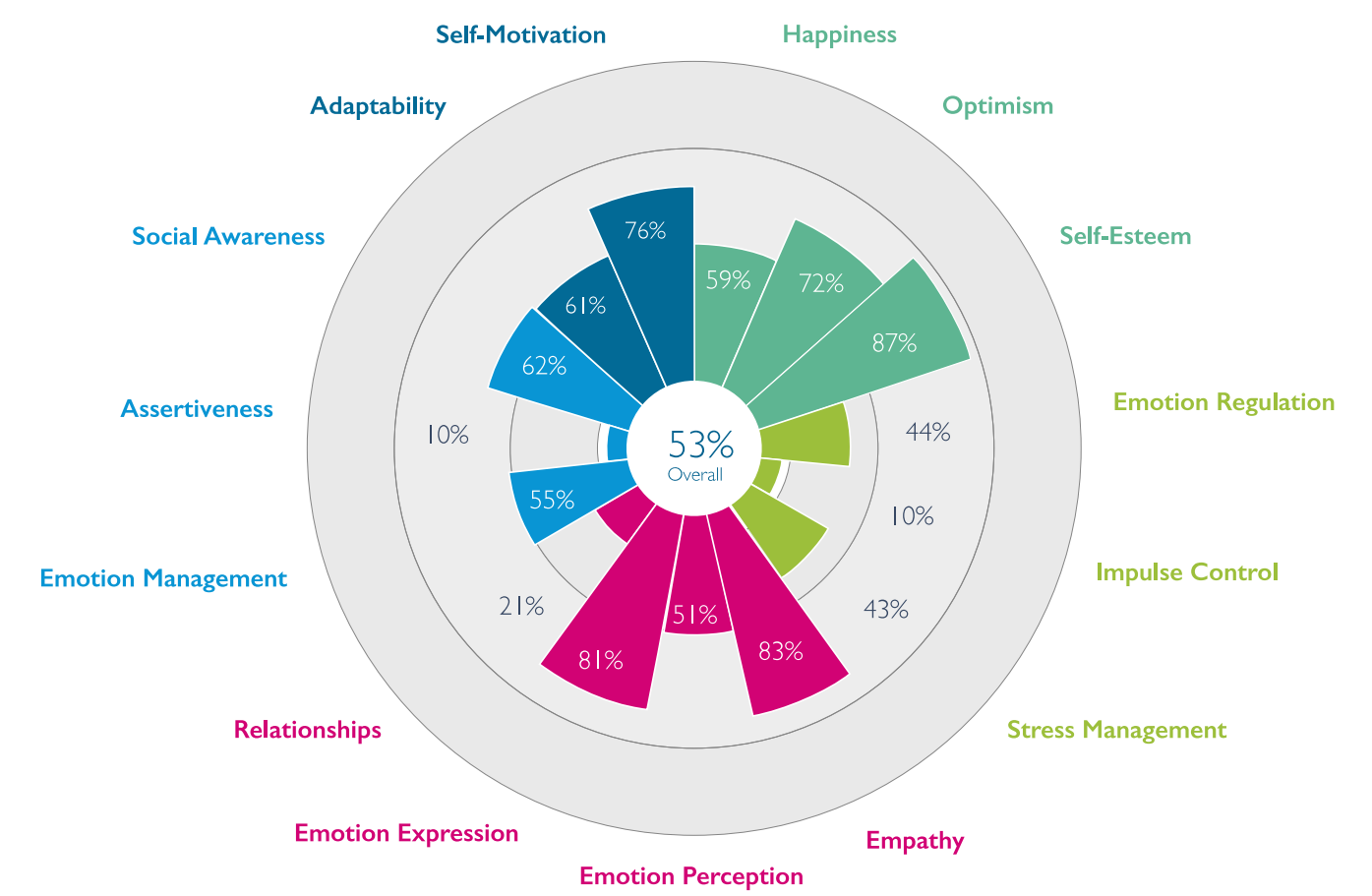




The focus of diversity and inclusion programmes is often narrow, with companies developing interventions aimed only at more apparent demographic diversity such as gender and ethnicity. We'd suggest that attention also needs to be placed on personality composition of teams. This, in itself, is not clear cut. Even when personality was first discussed, evidence was mixed (**Haythorn, 1968**). More recently, personality diversity has been found to negatively impact team social integration (**Harrison et al., 2002**). This suggests that with personality too, it might be the case that homogeneity is easier, but not more productive.

Looking at specific personality traits, diversity doesn't always benefit teams. Conscientiousness diversity in teams has been found to correlate with poorer performance (**Barrick et al., 1998**). Highly conscientious people are perhaps less productive if they perceive people are not putting in as much effort, and less conscientious people may get complacent if they feel others will pitch in. Diversity in agreeableness (steadiness) within teams has been shown to be related to worse workload sharing and conflict (**Barrick et al., 1998**). Again, if some team members are much more assertive whilst others submit to pressure, resentment may come from perceptions of injustice. There's also some evidence for emotional diversity negatively impacting team performance where team members vary greatly in well-being (**Barsade et al., 2000**). There may be difficulty in perspective sharing if there's a large divergence in how optimistic and positively group members see work situations.

TRAIT EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE



Proposed by Petrides and Furnham (2001), the Trait Emotional Intelligence model, which forms the basis of the TEIQue assessment, describes emotional intelligence as a cluster of traits and abilities. It is a very well supported model, prompting its use in hundreds of academic studies. It's a useful model to consider diversity in teams, looking at where members are largely similar or different and discussing how differences in approaches are reconciled.



HOW TO SUCCESSFULLY CULTIVATE A DIVERSE WORKPLACE

JOB POSTINGS

There are many practical changes organisations can make. Job postings should contain accurate descriptions of necessary qualifications and skills but avoid language that can dissuade minority groups from applying. Proofing tools (*such as this one; Matfield, 2014*) can help HR departments remove gender biased language from job advertisements. Postings and career sites should also be assessed to ensure they are accessible. Organisations should consider partnering with a third-party organisation that specialises in diversity. Thomas International are experienced in evaluating recruitment processes to isolate any sources of unconscious bias and potential adverse impact.

There should always be a range of stakeholders assessing CVs and the removal of personal information prior to decision making should be considered. Selection and promotion panels need to be diverse themselves to reduce bias. Transparency is key.

Criteria related to promotions and pay rises should be established in advance. Creating accountability through taking these steps has been found to reduce the gender and ethnic minority pay gap (*Castilla, 2015*). Transparency in these processes has been positively linked with higher productivity, innovation and reduced staff turnover (Armstrong et al., 2010).



DIVERSITY PROGRAMMES

Opportunities should be taken to train and educate the workforce. In a review of academic works looking at maximising the benefits of diversity, Galinsky et al. (2015) found that promoting diversity led to a reduction in bias and better intergroup interactions. Positive beliefs about diversity have also been found to positively impact whether diversity leads to greater social integration and innovation (*Guillaume et al., 2017*). PwC found educating their workforce led to staff feeling greater inclusivity where differences were valued and respected (*PwC, 2016*).



When creating diversity programmes, efforts must not be seen to exclude majority groups. When the advantages of diversity are highlighted to majority as well as minority, interventions are less likely to be viewed with resentment. On the other hand, the positive effects of diversity will be undermined if groups perceive dissimilar others as a threat. One way to achieve this is to frame programmes as all-inclusive, explicitly including majority groups. Jansen et al. (2015) found such approaches were significantly better supported by majority groups than approaches that didn't reference their groups. Interventions that encourage minority group perspective taking have also been found to help majority groups to integrate others' perspectives with their own and ultimately lead to better performance and decision making (*Galinsky et al., 2008*). Sharing of perceptions leads to greater social integration and fosters the positive effects of diversity. It's also important to quantifiably measure workplace engagements of all groups at demographic levels and ensure there are no unintended negative outcomes of diversity efforts. Another way of achieving this is to create reward structures that place value on team rather than individual goals. Strong team reward structures should positively impact team collaboration.

All diversity interventions should be robustly assessed. On finding female staff were leaving, PwC assumed this was due to a lack of support for mothers so put steps in place to better support them. More deeply analysing the data, they found it was actually younger women leaving who were being replaced by more experienced men (*PwC, 2015a*).

Thomas can support with in depth analysis of recruitment, development and attrition through adverse impact assessments and talent benchmarking.

RETHINKING WORKPLACE DIVERSITY

Diversity within an organisation can't be too narrowly focused. It's possible to feel included in some respects whilst feeling excluded in others, so efforts focusing on one or two demographics will not be as successful as more comprehensive approaches. Personality also needs to be considered when nurturing diverse teams. Most academic rationale for the impacts of demographic diversity assume that demographic differences are associated with differences in underlying attributes (*Jackson et al., 2003*), so interventions are more likely to succeed when they consciously assess these attributes. Flynn et al. (2001) found that personality moderated positive effects of diversity. Personality and behavioural motivators need to be measured and taken into account when building teams. This can be bolstered with facilitated team sessions.



PROMOTING DIVERSITY THROUGH RECRUITMENT

Harvey Nash are a global recruitment company that values the importance of diversity. In 2016, they partnered with Thomas International to evaluate whether there was any evidence of adverse impact in their robust recruitment process. Over 12 months, Thomas tracked hundreds of applicants for positions at Harvey Nash, monitoring demographic diversity, behavioural preferences and the eventual outcome of applications. Harvey Nash know that diversity is more than just demographics, and recruit with diversity in behavioural preferences, motivators and personality in mind.



Statistical analysis looked at the chance of each demographic group progressing and dropping out at each stage, using impact ratios, statistical tests and practical tests. No evidence was found that any group was being adversely impacted in the recruitment process, though we were able to make recommendations to make processes even better. Following the outcomes of the study, Harvey Nash were successful in becoming the first recruitment company to achieve the National Equality Standard, one of the UK's most rigorous and prestigious accreditations for diversity and inclusion.

Thomas International's behavioural assessment (PPA) was not shown to adversely impact any group. Looking at gender, ethnicity, age, sexuality and disability, no group was any more or less likely to have any profile. By using this tool, Harvey Nash were able to reduce unconscious bias in the recruitment process. It also allowed them to see which profiles were rarer and so could support behavioural diversity in the workplace as well as looking at which profiles were ultimately more or less successful.





CONCLUSION

Workplace diversity is far more than just a moral issue. Organisations can harness the difference in people to help them become more successful, more innovative, more skilled and better able to cater to their diverse clients' needs. However, putting steps in place to build a diverse workforce is not enough. Conflict arising from different perspectives and resistance from majority groups has the potential to hamper the effectiveness of diversity programmes. In addition to this, the omission of personality diversity from the discourse is a great oversight, especially considering widely-held assumptions that gains from demographic diversity are caused by differences in underlying traits.

Only with these factors taken into consideration can organisations fully benefit from diverse and inclusive workforces.

If you would like more information on what has been discussed in this whitepaper, or would like to talk about bringing ideas of personality diversity, staff engagement, talent benchmarks or adverse impact audits into your organisation, get in touch with Thomas who will be able to recommend the best approach for your business.

**Speak to your consultant or contact us on 01628 244 024 or
email info@thomas.co.uk**



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The Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire (TEIQue) was developed, and is continually updated, by K. V. Petrides, PhD at his London Psychometric Laboratory, currently based at UCL. It is one of the world's best-researched and most widely applied psychometric instruments. For more information about the scientific pedigree of the TEIQue, go to www.psychometriclab.com.



Our expert consultants are on hand to guide you on the best way to manage and develop your talent and improve employee engagement to ensure maximum business success.

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