

2. Understanding and managing challenges

What does it take to create an inclusive workplace?

Increasing the diversity of your workforce may require some adjustments that go well beyond simply hiring newcomers. It is encouraging to know that the steps you take to create an inclusive workplace will benefit all employees and will help you attract and retain a strong workforce.

Your goal should be to create an environment where people with diverse backgrounds, skills and perspectives feel valued and can contribute to your organization. Keep in mind that diversity encompasses more than just cultural backgrounds – it also reflects gender, age, marital status and other factors.

As steps are taken to create a more diverse workplace, both existing employees and newcomers may be apprehensive. That's understandable. They will have questions and concerns and you may find that as people adjust, actions or words may cause misunderstandings. This can be the beginning of an opportunity to build new awareness and understanding.

Management Leads the Way

The behaviour of managers sets an example for all employees about whether diversity is appreciated and respected, or simply tolerated.

The London Cross Cultural Learner Centre as well as some private providers, offers diversity training. See "Global Education" at www.lcclc.org.

There are many steps you can take to help ease the transition toward a more diverse workforce.

For existing workers:

- **Lead by example** – show an interest in other cultures and a respect for differences.
- **Offer diversity training** – even a short one- or two-hour workshop can help open eyes and replace apprehension and fear with curiosity and respect.
- **Seek the help and input** of employee groups, rather than mandate changes from the top.
- **Celebrate diversity** – for example, recognize and accommodate cultural and religious differences.
- **Open the lines of communication** to allow airing of concerns. If conflicts occur, listen to all views, work to understand the cause and find resolutions that are non-threatening to all parties.

For newcomers:

- **Pair a newcomer** with a willing and capable employee who can answer questions, show them around and introduce them to other workers.
- Ensure that **planning of events** and schedules is done with recognition of important holidays for people of different ethnic backgrounds and religions.
- Meet with newcomers to **discuss their experiences** and find out whether they have run into any difficulties.



Paul Hogendoorn, President and Julia Krajicek, Assembler of OES Inc.

Good morning in ten languages

OES Inc.

As Chair of the London Region Manufacturing Council, Paul Hogendoorn says the issue of workforce shortages has come up around the table among Council members a number of times.

“Many of these companies, like all businesses, are already beginning to feel the shortages in some areas of their workforce.”

Hogendoorn is also President of OES Inc., a successful London company that produces electronic control monitoring and timing systems. OES is ahead of many of other companies because OES has already discovered the excellent pool of workers available in the form of global talent.

“There are about fifty people who work for the company. When I make the rounds in the morning, I often say good morning in ten different languages. Of course “good morning” is just about the extent of what I am able to say in many of those languages, but it does put a few smiles on faces.”

Paul says the business case for hiring newcomers is clear – an available skilled workforce that brings international experience. As for challenges, Paul says, “Work ethic and skills are not a problem. Language and culture can be, but we take the time to make it work. For instance, in some cultures, businesses are much more hierarchical than here. This frequently takes more than verbal explanation; sometimes it takes intentionally role-modeling examples to illustrate the point that no one person is above any specific task, including myself. Although specific roles may have different values in an organization, as individuals, we are still equal.”

Paul says the talent on OES’s payroll is remarkable and he credits the talent, skill and enthusiasm of the skilled workers for the success OES has achieved in recent years.

“No matter what language you say it in, the contribution of a talented and dedicated workforce speaks for itself.”