

Divided by the Same Language?

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Equal Opportunities and Diversity Translated

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RUNNYMEDE



1. Introduction

Since the introduction of the first equal opportunities legislation, 30+ years ago, time, energy and money have been directed towards developing the 'best' equality and diversity policies and practices. And we have made notable progress – both in the way we speak about difference and in how people behave towards each other.

Within organisations, however, internal struggles persist between the intention to eradicate all forms of discrimination and inequality, and the outcome – which preserves pay differentials between men and women, and sees few women, minority ethnic people or those with disabilities reaching the top.

A yawning divide exists between our stated intentions, both verbal and written, to be fairer and more inclusive, and where we end up. Organisations express high values and aspirations so long as individuals do not have to change what they do.

Does the very language of equal opportunities and diversity itself create an area of miscommunication, in which organisations thereby set themselves up to fail? And if so, what can we do to communicate more effectively?



Aims and Scope

In this booklet we aim to:

- Look at definitions of equal opportunities and diversity as used by the leaders in the field of promoting both concepts
- Review how the language of equal opportunities and diversity affects organisational outcomes
- Provide a strategy to help organisations develop positive and beneficial equal opportunities and diversity communication.

We believe that working with the recommendations of this booklet will support the cooperative development of a clear, precise language of equal opportunities and diversity that will encourage companies in particular to:

- agree on the scope and usage of the terminology;
- develop greater clarity on the meaning of diversity, in particular, and
- devote more effort to translating what we believe and say about equality and diversity into what we do.

Our target audience is equality and diversity practitioners, and policy-makers whose task it is to express company or organisational policy, in either internal or external communications.

2. Doing the Research

A myriad of organisations have been set up to further the cause of equality and diversity, either by developing and policing legislation in this area, or else by supporting employers and individuals in moving beyond the law towards implementing best practice.

As we are now to a large extent a web-based society, our research consisted of reviewing the information and guidance these organisations present on their websites.¹ We researched representative organisations from the following categories:

- The Equality Rights Commissions
- Employer-led organisations
- Employer and Trade Union umbrella organisations
- Business networks
- Governmental organisations
- Intergovernmental and voluntary organisations

Because we regard them as leaders in the field of equality and diversity rights enhancement, we have looked to these organisations to see what they provide as information on equality and diversity in the public domain. We have also reviewed the websites of large British and American companies in our search for a sense of how the corporate world addresses these issues.

Main Findings

Our review of how organisations present themselves on their websites yielded the following findings:

- Virtually every organisation uses the term 'equal opportunities'
- Far fewer organisations use the term 'diversity'; and those that do, tend to be from the private sector, business umbrella and networking organisations, and government agencies
- A variety of terminology has evolved from the core terms 'equal opportunities' and 'diversity'. This terminology develops as a series of qualifiers to indicate which group is being talked about, as in: gender and race equality; or ethnic and age diversity
- Employer-led umbrella organisations, such as Opportunity

¹ We've supplied on p. 8 a list of helpful organisations and their web addresses.

Now, RFO, EFD and EFA, all espouse and promote best practice on the business case. While other organisations did not necessarily mention the business case on their websites, it is evident from the language used that the language choices of businesses in particular are driven by strong business case strategies: 'diverse marketplace', 'supplier diversity'.

- Legislation still exerts a strong influence over the whole notion of rights, with the Commissions and Intergovernmental organisations like the EU and ILO commonly using legalistic terminology. This is true too of the language of 'anti-discrimination and social justice'.

- In qualifying 'diversity' only British Telecom has taken the terminology further, with its talk of 'cultural, language and behavioural diversity', which is less to do with what divides, or distinguishes between, groups than with what connects them.

3. Evolution of the Language

Over the last decade, in the UK, there has been a noticeable shift away from talking about 'equal opportunities' to talking about 'equal opportunities' and 'diversity'. Some took the view in the early 1990s that we needed to stop talking about equal opportunities altogether in favour of diversity. Current thinking is that both terms have value.

What has not developed in tandem, however, is guidance on how the two terms are to be used, how they differ from or resemble each other, or what relationship they have to each other. As a result, **sometimes the two are used together, sometimes separately and sometimes interchangeably, creating confusion about what the real focus in organisations may be.**

Definitions

'Equal opportunities' has come to be associated, broadly, with the *legislative framework covering race, gender and disability*. Its thrust is more towards rights and responsibilities, and anti-discrimination. 'Diversity' on the other hand is seen as adding another dimension to 'equal opportunities'. It encompasses all types of difference beyond those covered by the legislation and focuses in particular on the needs of the individual. It is also concerned with the culture of the organisation, and adds value through a sort of enlightened self-interest, usually in association with a well-developed business case.

Other, different, interpretations and uses of the term 'diversity' can be encountered in the US since the move away from affirmative action signaled the arrival of the term. There 'diversity' has come to be associated in many quarters with women or ethnic minorities, rather than being inclusive of 'everyone'.

The Moral Argument

It's also worth examining the language set used when invoking the 'moral argument'. We most often encounter this language being invoked by campaigning organisations, which are very values based – so we hear about 'rights', 'fairness', 'respect', 'inclusiveness' and 'social justice'.

The moral argument is woven into all aspects of 'equal opportunities' and 'diversity' language, but most particularly into the legislative framework. It is based on the premise of 'the right thing to do', as guided by the individual and collective conscience, or an unwritten code of conduct based on societal notions of right and wrong – see the EOR case study opposite.

4. Equal Opportunities – Definitions

Traditional Interpretations of Equal Opportunities

Practitioners in the field of equal opportunities are by now very familiar with its language. It is about:

- Providing a framework for complying with the law
- Ensuring equal access to opportunities
- Affording legal protection from discrimination for particular groups, such as women, ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, and (in Northern Ireland) religious adherents
- Taking positive action to redress imbalances in the workforce between the majority and minority populations.

The website terminology of Equal Opportunities includes:

- equal opportunities
- equality
- equality and social justice
- disability equality
- disability issues
- gender equality
- gender mainstreaming (a phrase that suggests a strategy for integrating gender issues into all aspects of organisational life so that it becomes business as usual)
- race relations
- racial/race equality

Case Study - EOR's Postal Survey

In July/August 1999, the publication Equal Opportunities Review carried out a postal survey to discover what organisations meant by being 'an equal opportunities employer'. Responses were received from 140 organisations (out of 1,050).

The survey found that for the majority of employers, equal opportunities and managing 'diversity' are not distinct concepts, but are a complementary means to achieving equality of opportunity in the workplace.¹ It also found that several organisations believed there was no difference between the two concepts, or that 'diversity' was a repackaging of equal opportunities.

Others saw equal opportunities as making sure no group was disadvantaged, while diversity was seen as making a virtue of difference and actively promoting it as being beneficial to the organisation. A number of organisations mentioned the more individualistic approach of diversity, as opposed to the group focus of equal opportunities.²

Certainly, as more groups that have not previously been embraced under 'equal opportunities' or anti-discrimination law from Europe become included, a case begins to emerge for both 'equal opportunities' and 'diversity' to grow in currency rather than diminish, as we search for ways to express the notion of being more inclusive.

¹ EOR Number 87, Sept/Oct 1999. EOR's survey highlighted examples of significant differences in interpretation of 'equal opportunities' and 'diversity' by different employers.

² Railtrack plc, for example, regarded managing 'diversity' as following from the practical application of the equal opportunities policy, and Montpet UK Ltd considered that managing 'diversity' was 'covered by equal opportunities'. Other organisations such as Granada Group plc, Barclays Bank and Aberdeen City Council believe that equal opportunities policies provide 'the level playing field' from which managing 'diversity' can be developed. Dacorum Borough Council considers that 'equal opportunities' is about getting people 'in' and managing 'diversity' is about keeping them and developing them. The RAF regards managing 'diversity' as the active encouragement and management of the diverse workforce.

Benefits of Equal Opportunities Language

Equal opportunities legislation has provided useful language with which to tackle the issue of discrimination. The focus on 'opportunities' is beneficial in moving organisational climates away from a 'them and us' mentality to create an optimistic tone of hope and future prospects.

Requiring organisations to produce their own 'equal opportunities' policies and action plans has also helped to embed the notion within the organisational psyche, even if only to ensure that the organisation does not fall foul of the law.

It is important to remember that:

- There continue to be some groups who experience discrimination in the workplace, and therefore need the protection of the law
- The focus is on creating a level playing field for opportunities and removing barriers to participation for those groups
- Equal opportunities benefits everyone in being a visible symbol of fairness and inclusion
- It is obligatory, by law, for organisations to comply with equal opportunities legislation
- Organisations that endorse this legal obligation establish a sound basis for eradicating discrimination in all its forms

Misinterpretations of Equal Opportunities Language

The expression 'equal opportunities' has attracted a bad press. One of the difficulties, it seems, arises from the word 'equal', which then becomes associated with:

- treating people the same (positive action's intention of creating a level playing field to which everyone can aspire is the cause of much misunderstanding)
- positively discriminating in favour of the groups covered by legislation (white males, for example, may consider themselves to be excluded from the favoured groups)
- focusing exclusively on only one group (so, in some organisations, equal opportunities becomes associated exclusively with the group whose cause has received the most attention, often women or ethnic minorities, and, increasingly since the Disability Discrimination Act [DDA], people with disabilities).

Examining the Equal Opportunities Statement

A characteristic of equal opportunities statements is that they tend to be 'away from' texts – so, moving away from discrimination, rather than moving towards, say, a celebration of 'diversity' and all its potential.

For example, many equal opportunities statements are designed to demonstrate the company's attempts to comply with the law. Our featured statement from HSBC (see p.4) identifies groups that are not to be discriminated against, and prescribes how they shall be treated.

In addition, HSBC's policy statement takes a particular stance on disability, spelling out what the company will do to comply with the DDA. There is some recognition too of 'diversity' in the phrase 'we value the individual'. Nonetheless, it is clear that this is an 'equal opportunities', and not a 'diversity' statement.



Example of an Equal Opportunities Policy Statement - HSBC

We seek to employ a workforce which reflects the diverse community at large, because we value the individual contribution of people, irrespective of sex, age, marital status, disability, sexuality, race, colour, religion, ethnic or national origin.

We will treat our employees with dignity and respect and will provide a working environment free from unlawful discrimination, victimisation or harassment on the grounds of sex, age, marital status, disability, sexuality, race, colour, religion, ethnic or national origin.

We will not tolerate acts which breach this policy and all instances of such behaviour, or alleged behaviour, will be taken seriously, be fully investigated and may be subject to our disciplinary procedures.

We will make every effort if an employee becomes disabled to retain them within the workforce, wherever it is reasonable and practicable to do so.

We will install facilities for people with disabilities in existing premises, wherever practicable to do so. Whenever we invest in new or refurbished premises, every effort will be made to provide for the needs of staff and customers with disabilities.

We will also provide banking services and products to our customers and clients without any form of unlawful discrimination.

Copyright: HSBC Bank plc, London 1999

5. Diversity – Definitions

The language of diversity is about:

- maximising the potential of **all** the workforce
- valuing the individual contribution
- including everyone, not just those covered by legislation
- increasing flexibility, innovation and creativity by building a diverse workforce
- creating a culture that values individual difference of all types (including background, personality, etc.)
- developing a business case approach that connects diversity with success in the marketplace

How are people meant to infer all of the above from the single word 'diversity'? Could this explain why so many 'qualifiers' have emerged to elucidate the kind of diversity being described at any one time?

The website terminology of Diversity includes:

diversity
 age diversity
 cultural diversity
 cultural, language and behavioural diversity
 diversity of cultures, people and ideas
 ethnic diversity
 managing diversity
 race and diversity
 supplier diversity
 minority supplier diversity
 diverse marketplace
 diverse workforce
 the business case

Benefits of 'Diversity'

At its best, 'diversity' allows for a more inclusive, all-encompassing approach, that broadens equal opportunities out beyond specific groups and legislation. It focuses on creating a particular culture that is accepting of difference and, **unlike the 'away from' flavour of 'equal opportunities', 'diversity' allows for a greater sense of 'towards': an embracing of the value that differences can offer and the contribution they can make to enhancing organisations and society at large. Diversity seeks to express a higher value of harmony and, at its most elevated, a peace that comes from people 'feeling' valued and appreciated, no matter what their background.**

'Diversity' also encompasses the sort of personality, behavioural and cultural differences that avoid making, say, white males from Oxbridge or MBA students feel alienated by the typical 'equal opportunities' group-based approach.

A significant contemporary feature of societies in general is that one person's attributes may fit several of the categories covered by the equal opportunities legislation.

The often-cited example of the 'black, female, disabled lesbian' is a case in point. The concept of 'diversity' embraces all of those differences, yet seeks to deal with 'individuals' rather than fit people into one category or another. The use of the term 'cultural diversity', for example, moves beyond ethnicity to encompass religious differences.

'Diversity' also allows for a **celebration** of the differences and the contribution that each individual is able to make.

The Business Case

A feature of organisations that seek to work with 'diversity' as a way of increasing their effectiveness is that they will have developed a 'business case' for diversity.

Often they will have looked at different minority groups in terms of the benefits they can provide. So, for example, they will have examined the value of the 'pink pound' or the 'ethnic minority marketplace'. They will have thought about how to attract and retain the best people, regardless of the group they belong to. And they will seek at all times to develop talent or potential.

There is a particular diversity mentality that speaks of the benefits of 'diversity' to the organisation and the individual. 'Diversity' also applies to customers, suppliers and the wider community.

Misinterpretations Associated with Diversity

Use of the word 'diversity' may, however:

- create confusion because it is hard to differentiate it from business as usual: for example, most management and staff development departments exist to maximise the potential of all employees
- be so all-encompassing it becomes meaningless
- become a smoke-screen for doing nothing
- be used to disguise what is essentially an equal opportunities programme dressed up as diversity

Our featured statement from KPMG (opposite) emphasises the benefits to the business of 'diversity' as well as the non-traditional aspects of difference, such as mindsets and skills. It is striking too that the emphasis is on creating a particular culture as well as making a link to the values of the organisation.

Example of a Diversity statement - KPMG

Diversity is a key strategic business issue for the firm. There are both social and business reasons for promoting it. We need to attract the best people and recognise the different experiences, mindsets, and skills that people from different backgrounds bring to the firm. This is crucial to our success.

Our diversity strategy is one of the ways we can achieve this. We want to "create a work culture that capitalises on all the differences of our people and client base – both current and future – in order to be the best KPMG we can be".

Our long-term diversity strategy is designed to deliver sustainable, business-focused change which impacts on how we access and retain people and their talents, how we behave, and how we gain access to new and changing markets and clients.

Our values programme recognises that in order to get the best from our people we need a culture that supports and encourages them to contribute. In this way the changes we want to happen will be embedded in our culture.

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6. Equality and Diversity as Adversaries or Allies?

Divided by the Same Language

Organisations involved in the change process around creating more 'equality of opportunity' and 'diversity' can sometimes experience difficulties of this sort:

- the words 'equal opportunities' and 'diversity' themselves, if too frequently identified with certain groups – for example, 'equal opportunities' in some organisational cultures is identified with women, while 'diversity' is identified with race, or vice versa – may become limited in meaning and effectiveness
- the languages of 'equal opportunities' and 'diversity' may get confused and then used interchangeably
- **people aren't sure who is to be included 'today', and who isn't**
- not everyone fully understands what is being communicated
- **where factions develop, the reception of what is being communicated by one department is affected by that department's reputation**
- blanket communication is not tailored to the individual 'listening' of those receiving the information – for example, the need to communicate the message differently, say, to senior managers or people on the 'shop floor' is not taken account of
- the whole subject is sometimes confused with political correctness

Measuring Outcomes

It is worth looking here at how employees might interpret equality and diversity.

The Cabinet Office example that follows is a telling example of how employees understand the two terms. In the first case, they felt that equal opportunities was associated with external recruitment. On the other hand, while some felt valued for their individual differences or 'diversity', many did not feel **valued** for their individual contributions to the organisation.

This shows us the demarcation in people's minds between

Example of a measurement of employee understanding of equality and diversity

A Cabinet Office report available on its website² shows that:

When asked: Is your organisation an equal opportunities employer?

- 71% of respondents agree
- while only 12% disagree
- (and 17% are neutral)

'Comments suggested that people saw "equal opportunities employer" as a badge that was applied to external recruitment. Some comments also suggested that attention to diversity/equality was driven purely by legal reasons.'

On the other hand, when asked to comment on the statement: I believe that the Civil service value diversity.

- only 39% agreed
- while 21% disagreed
- (and 40% were neutral)

'An interpretation of these statistics in the report is that while some staff felt the organisation respected individual differences, significantly fewer agreed that employees were valued for what they could offer to the organisation. Some staff felt that managers might need help/support if they were to learn to manage diversity effectively.'

'equal opportunities' and 'diversity': the former associated with a more procedural approach; the latter conjuring up an ideal way of being treated and appreciated in terms of individuality, uniqueness and contribution.

United by the Same Language

Our approach, at Runnymede, is to endorse the value of both 'equal opportunities' and 'diversity'. They have a combined value in complementing each other; while at the same time they make particular and distinctively individual contributions to creating a fairer and more inclusive society.

As the walls come down between different ethnicities, religions, cultures, genders and so on, there is an increasing convergence between equality and diversity that needs to be respected and honoured.

Our research suggests that great scope exists for navigating a course to encompass the two, to create a more solid and valuable internal change strategy. Ultimately, we are aiming for and advocating the following outcomes:

1. The purpose of the 'Equal Opportunities' approach should be to ensure that groups which continue to be disadvantaged have access to opportunities for full participation in society, with legal sanctions directed against those who violate this principle.

2. The 'diversity' strand is a way of valuing individual differences of all kinds and creating a culture that accepts and harnesses those differences to the benefit of individual organisations and society at large.

Organisations that are successful in implementing a combined equal opportunities and diversity strategy will have created a good balance between the head and the heart: the business case and the moral argument.

² 'Diversity Survey: Summary of Results' December 2000 www.diversity-whatworks.gov.uk



The Cabinet Office's Definition of Diversity

What is diversity?

It's easiest to explain diversity by talking about how it impacts in a team. A diverse team is a team in which:

- every member of staff, whatever they look like and however they operate, maximises their potential and value to the team
- everyone is valued as an individual and not as a member of a group
- everyone is themselves and seeks to be successful as themselves rather than conforming to a mould

Diverse teams transform constantly what they do and how they do it to meet business objectives to get the most out of every member's talents. Diverse teams are made by every one in the team, not by personnel or HR staff. They come out of an environment in which no-one else feels bigger or better or more important than anyone else, because every member believes that what is most important is the team and the business.

What diversity is not

Diversity is not about reducing standards; it's not a distraction from the business; it's not about language or political correctness. It's not about removing our prejudices – only about recognising that they exist and questioning them before we act.

Diversity and you

You can expect to be respected and valued for who you are and what you contribute to your team, regardless of your age, race, gender, working-pattern, religion or disability – in fact, regardless of anything to do with what you look like, what your background is, how you operate: all that is important is that the contribution you make is valued by your colleagues, peers and managers at all levels.

You can expect that your department has in place policies which outlaw harassment and bullying; that it looks at the way all the HR processes affect you and groups of staff like you; and that it consults you and listens to your voice.

And you can expect to be invited to play your part because to work in a Civil Service which truly values diversity means we all have to be on board. We all have to make the change and change the culture now because equality and diversity for all must be the norm. Your colleagues will want you to respect and value them for what they contribute, as you expect them to respect and value you.

There are levers in place to measure your progress. Think about how you can offer your view and make things better. Contribute to surveys, discussion forums, networks, etc., so that we get the complete picture of where we are at.

Unless the ethos of the organisation changes, we are climbing a never-ending hill. What you bring to your team is unique – we can all offer something and make a difference.

Managers who value diversity

You need to lead by example, encourage and enhance your team by exploring and using all their talents. Whatever those talents are and whoever has them, try to use them to improve and extend the way we do our work and meet our objectives. Everyone must be included and brought on if we are to be a truly successful organisation. Nothing matters – working pattern, educational background, or appearance, disabled, able bodies, women, men, black, white – only the contribution we make.

If managers fail to develop the culture of change, trust and value, they will continue to struggle with workload, priorities and outputs and continue to lose out on the real untapped talent we have. If managers succeed, the Service will be a truly 21st-Century Employer.

'Diversity Survey: Summary of Results' December 2000
www.diversity-whatworks.gov.uk

7. Positive Communication on Equality and Diversity

Some argue that moving from being an 'equal opportunities' organisation to being one that is more 'diversity' focused is a sign of a maturing organisation. From what we can see of current outcomes, there is little basis to this argument. Indeed we would go so far as to say that it reinforces the view that you can be one without being the other.

We would argue the need to work simultaneously with both 'equal opportunities' and 'diversity' strategies, right from the outset.

Aim to build strong ownership through adopting a policy of positive communication on 'equal opportunities' and 'diversity'. The principles that follow will help you develop appropriate communication in these areas.

Q1. With whom are you trying to communicate?

Most organisations will agree that there needs to be a common set of values that everyone in the organisation is aware of. Beyond that, however, it is important to think about the different **audiences** you have to communicate with. Most often, blanket policy statements are developed by HR. They include a lot of HR-type jargon – expressions which then get disseminated, used and reused throughout the organisation.

If one of the basic tenets of equality and diversity is valuing difference, then **you need to think about the different people who will receive your communication.** Are they shopfloor workers, middle or senior managers, young graduates, older workers? Each has a different 'listening' and needs to hear words appropriate to them and their particular needs, at the same time as reinforcing their acceptance of all types of difference.

Examples of the impact of communication:

The new young graduate who was recruited to the organization was tempted to join because the company talked about 'flexibility' and 'creativity', and opportunities to develop her talents. She is thinking about having a family later on and hopes she won't have to give up her career to do so. From her short experience of being with them so far, she can see that they mean what they say.

The 45-year-old worker is told that he is valued for the unique skills and experience that he brings to the organisation. His career development shows a clear and exciting career path that will allow him to learn new skills, while mentoring and teaching more junior staff. He feels that the company truly values his contribution.

Q2. What is the context for this communication?

Related to Q1 above is the question of **context**, which has an important part to play in how equality and diversity are

communicated. The context is determined by things like size of organisation, location, composition, type of service provision (e.g. whether you are a public, private or voluntary sector organisation), hierarchical or loose organisations. Even the fact that we are operating in 21st-century Britain rather than the 19th provides a context.

The equality and diversity issues will be different depending on the context, so the communications strategy will also need to differ. What remain the same are the principles and values underlying equality and diversity, regardless of context. Each example below, from within its different context, requires a different response.

Examples of context

A company wants to recruit more women. Its senior management team consists mostly of middle-class men. The company, located in the city of London, requires most people to commute in, and there is a commonly accepted expectation that people work long hours. The company is very traditionally managed with a strong and rather rigid hierarchy. The culture is that 'that's the way things are done around here'.

An international company has its HQ in the UK, but has opened offices in Central America. Most of the managers are British or North American, managing local staff, none of whom is represented among the senior management team. None of the expatriate managers speaks the local language, so the locals are required to communicate in English. Most of the customers are Central American and Spanish speaking.

Q3. What is the purpose of your communication? Are you aiming for: fundamental change, to achieve a shift in attitudes or behaviours; or simply to get people to understand the policies?

Communications should be supported by **action**. Often equality and diversity policies are seeking to shift attitudes, to bring about a different set of behaviours in employees. Is there a process in place for making your intentions clear? If not, it can be one reason why organisations that say they are 'equal opportunities' employers fall foul of the law or have poor retention rates among 'minority' groups: people may not actually know what the new behaviours should look, sound or feel like, nor how to go about producing them.

This is where training in 'equal opportunities' and 'diversity' can have its own important place, so long as it is part of an overall change strategy and not standalone. Organisations often mistakenly believe that the work of influencing and changing their culture has been done because everyone has been sent on a training course. What they need to put in place alongside it is a communications strategy, to support and reinforce the follow-up to the training – a strategy whose purpose is to integrate 'equal opportunities' and 'diversity' into every strand of organisational life. And not just with reference to written word: change will be encouraged just as much by what managers say as by what is communicated via intranet messages or memos.

Examples of reinforcing the equality and diversity messages

A group of workers have been on a training course on equal opportunities and diversity. The group is due to be joined by a new recruit who is black – they are all white. Their manager brings up the subject at the next team meeting, talking openly about the background of the new member of staff who is joining them and how much that person's skills and diverse perspectives will contribute to the team. She asks them to actively welcome the new recruit and appoints one person to mentor the new staff member throughout the induction period. She asks each member of the team to take time out to introduce themselves when the new recruit arrives.

A woman has just been promoted. The word is that she got the job because she's a woman. She will manage some of her former colleagues, most of whom are men. At the next team meeting their overall manager affirms the new manager's skills and the contribution that she has to make to the department. He also talks about the difference between positive action and positive discrimination, and invites people to join in the discussion.

Q4. What level of communication are you aiming at: the level of values, beliefs, skills, behaviours or culture?

There are times when you need to communicate at different levels in terms of making sure that the message is pitched correctly for your audience. The different levels include:

- **values** statements (using words like **fair, inclusive**)
- strong **beliefs** from the top of the organisation about what kind of company the leadership want it to be, demonstrated not only in what they say but what they do
- **capabilities/capacity** to make the changes that are needed
- clarity about the types of **behaviours** that are needed, that are acceptable, and that are not
- a clear view of the kind of **diversity culture** that accepts and values difference, will not tolerate prejudice of any kind, and seeks to end discrimination particularly against disadvantaged groups

Examples of communicating at the right level

There is a strong belief (stereotype) in one company that what Asians do is own corner shops or take up professions such as medicine or the law. The workforce is shocked when the CEO tells them the value of the Asian market for their products, and that their competitors have made a great start in attracting Asian customers. The CEO asks them to start marketing in Asian languages and to make sales calls on Asian business people. He actively starts a campaign to recruit Asian employees.

In another company morale is very low among disabled staff, with poor retention among ethnic minorities and women. The CEO's address to the sales conference contains a very strong message on how much he values diversity and inclusion. The sales force are taken aback at how emphatic he is about changing the culture of the organisation to become more inclusive. They also sit up and take notice when he announces that he intends to make every line manager accountable for their actions on diversity, which will have a direct impact on their bonuses.



One of the mistakes we can all make is to try to communicate at, say, the values level, when what is really needed is to be addressing, capabilities or behaviours, for example. Beliefs too can be very powerful in shaping how an organisation operates, so there might be strong beliefs that need to be addressed and changed before the behaviours can become more inclusive.

Q5. Who is doing the communicating: the CEO, a Trades Union official, a line manager, a member of HR, a member of the equality and diversity steering group? And who owns the messages on equality and diversity?

There is an infallible rule in organisations that if you want change to come about, you need to **enlist support** from those at the top of the organisation. There is great truth in that, but there can also be a temptation to assume that because the CEO or one of his or her team has spoken, then everyone else will automatically sing the same tune.

But, the further a communication travels from the top, the more diffuse it becomes and the more it loses its relevance. It is certainly very important that the CEO should endorse a particular policy or guideline, but it is also important that others further down the hierarchy are vested with the authority to disseminate the messages more widely, and to take ownership of them.

Examples of widespread ownership of messages:

Line managers in one company regularly take soundings from their staff about issues to do with equality and diversity. Then they meet with other line managers from across the various departments to discuss equality and diversity. They feed the results of their meetings back to staff at their individual team meetings.

Employees in another company take pride in having the best equality and diversity record in their industry. They are able to cite examples of diverse people holding senior jobs in the organisation. They tell their friends and their customers. They feel proud to work for their company, because it feels fair and inclusive to work there, no matter what your background.

8. Conclusions

As the cultural and ethnic mix in the UK increases, against the backdrop of a world stage that is also becoming more complex, never has there been greater need for a balance between focusing on the individual while guarding against disadvantage for particular groups.

We need both the big picture and the ability to home in on the individual and the particular.

This has always been the case, but the issues seem more pressing in this 21st century as we contemplate hostilities breaking out all around us on global and local levels. Never before have we all felt so implicated and yet so helpless.

Part of the change coming about is a steady increase in the scope and coverage of the legislation on 'equal opportunities': for example, the recent amendment to the Race Relations Act giving public bodies a statutory duty to promote racial equality, and the raft of anti-discrimination legislation coming from Europe covering new areas such as sexual orientation, age, and religion and belief.

As the legislative framework becomes more complex the possibility arises of all of the Commissions being brought together under one umbrella to administer compliance with the legislation in whatever form. Whether or not this comes about, the effectiveness of the Commissions could only be enhanced if they were to:

1. emphasise the importance of implementing both 'equal opportunities' and 'diversity' in parallel;
 2. develop clear definitions of the terms they would use to do this; and
 3. operate on the basis of this model themselves.
- Such a move would assist the development of an increasingly common and shared understanding of 'equal opportunities' and 'diversity' and lead to positive outcomes.

A compelling reason for focusing on the individual, as well as groups, at this time is to unlock the creativity – within the unique talents that each of us possesses – to contribute, to help solve the pressing social, economic and environmental issues that affect the collective.

Ultimately, what most of us want is a peaceful and harmonious society: not merely talking about 'equal opportunities' or 'diversity', but actively living these concepts in our daily lives.

Appendix 1: Valuable resources and their web addresses

Organisation	Area	Contact Details
Cabinet Office	Equality and Diversity	www.cabinet-office.gov.uk (see www.diversity-whatworks.gov.uk)
Commission for Racial Equality	Race	www.cre.gov.uk
Disability Rights Commission	Disability	www.drc-gb.org
Employers' Forum on Age	Age	www.efa.org.uk
Employers' Forum on Disability	Disability	www.efd.org.uk
Equal Opportunities Commission	Gender	www.eoc.org.uk
Opportunity Now	Gender	www.opportunitynow.org.uk
Race for Opportunity	Race	www.raceforopportunity.org.uk

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ABOUT RUNNYMEDE

As a prominent, independent think-tank on ethnicity and cultural diversity, the Runnymede Trust has a long track record in leading edge research, working in close collaboration with eminent thinkers and policy makers in the private, public and voluntary sectors. Founded in 1968 as a Charitable Educational Trust, our mandate is to promote a successful multi-ethnic Britain – a Britain where citizens and communities feel valued, enjoy equal opportunities to develop their talents, lead fulfilling lives and accept collective responsibility, all in the spirit of civic friendship, shared identity and a common sense of belonging.

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