DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT:
A CHALLENGE FOR HIGHER EDUCATION AND RESEARCH INSTITUTIONS

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Italian Public Research Body created in 1994 to:

- promote and develop research in the fields of materials science and of physics of the matter
- train young scientists
- enhance technology transfer

Nowadays an institution within the National Research Council
BRAIN DRAIN AND BRAIN GAIN: ARE WE DISCUSSING THE REAL PROBLEM?

INFM FOREIGN PERSONNEL (EXTRA EU)
YEARS 2002-2004

1 RESEARCHER OUT OF 7 IS NOT ITALIAN
ITALIAN AND EUROPEAN INVESTMENTS IN RESEARCH: WHERE ’S THE « GAIN »?

- POORENESS OF RESOURCES REQUIRES OPTIMIZATION PLANS
- LOSS OF BEST HUMAN RESOURCES (BRAIN DRAIN)
- GLOBAL COMPETITIVENESS, WORLD WIDE LABOUR MARKET (BRAIN GAIN??)
LET’S TAKE OUR CHANCE WITH DIVERSITY

Higher education and scientific research are fields which naturally and normally experience what diversity is...

- Let’s stop talking about “brains”, let’s start thinking about “people”, their needs, their skills, their potential.
- Let’s develop pleasant and respectful workplaces.
- Let’s appreciate different cultures, religions and also individual aptitudes as the real assets of our organisations.
- Let’s promote real equal opportunity rights policies.
- Let’s enhance professional development for our disabled workers.
TAKING CARE OF DIFFERENT CONTEXTS...

- I am what I come from
- what I say is not all I mean
- body language
- importance of personal roots/family environment
- ...

“HIGH CONTEXT” CULTURES

Northern / Eastern Europe

Africa

East

Far East

US / UK

Mediterranean Area

Middle East

“LOW CONTEXT” CULTURES

- I am what I do
- what I say is what I mean
- less importance of body language
- detachment between professional and personal life
- ...

...OR THINKING ABOUT INDIVIDUALS AND WORKING OUT TAILORED SOLUTIONS FOR HRM?
INFM started developing a higher sensitiveness to diversity management issues in 1998, when a quite big recruiting procedure was needed to increase laboratories’ staff. Applications for the jobs posted were too few. What was happening???

- People with the right skills had given up sending applications because they thought they couldn’t win the competition (Women)

- Job descriptions were unfamiliar to lots of people (from other countries)

- For technical jobs physical requirements and abilities were not described (what about the disabled?)
SOME SIMPLE EXPEDIENTS TO ENHANCE DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT
- GENDER ISSUES -

1) a service of nursery and baby parking is provided during seminars and conferences

2) a permanent nursery was built in the main premises of the institute

3) a 5 month allowance was provided for women’s motherhood by the Institute’s regulation for fellowships

4) explicit calls for women in recruitment procedures

5) a 3 year plan of positive actions communicated to the scientific community
SOME SIMPLE EXPEDIENTS TO ENHANCE DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT
- MULTICULTURAL WORKING ENVIRONMENTS -

1) Experts in immigration rules and regulations were trained

2) Specific consulting services (Italian regulation for payment of taxes, etc.) for foreign personnel

3) All the Institute’s databases were provided with specific fields and sections for gender, nationality, family situation. A fully integrated HRM software was bought and developed

4) Specific travel policies were worked out accordingly to international standards (expatriation allowance)

5) Where/when possible some spaces were destined to prayer rooms; a list of markets and shops responding to religious requirements is provided to the new comers.
SOME SIMPLE EXPEDIENTS TO ENHANCE DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT
- DIFFERENTLY ABLE PEOPLE -

1) All disabled people recruited by the Institute are asked to experiment an internship period of about 4 weeks to train and learn the basics of ICT.

2) The institute takes part to regional initiatives for the professional development of the disabled and hosts people for free training periods.

3) All people who are going to join a team with disable people are obliged to follow a training course about integration of disable people at work. Lessons are given by specialists and they aim at changing the behaviour of people in working places, who tend to treat the disabled in a different / more protective way.
THE TOOLS FOR DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT

Diversity Management is not a business tool, but a new way to look at the business, considering people as a source of added value and not as a cost

Commitment of the organisation’s top management

Deep knowledge of the organisation’s characteristics

Critical areas’ analysis

Specific solutions and projects