

The County Administrative Board of Stockholm

Diversity as an Asset

General description of the organisation

In Sweden, each county has an Administrative Board. The County Administrative Board is a government authority, which ensures that the decisions taken by the government and Parliament are put into effect with maximum impact throughout the county. It is an important link between people and municipalities on the one hand, and the government and central authorities on the other. Covering an extremely wide range of social issues, the board is also the most multifaceted of authorities. Hence the need for all types of experts: lawyers, biologists, architects, agronomists, foresters, engineers, educationalists, archaeologists, sociometrists, vets, sociologists and economists to mention a few.

The main content of the case

The intensified work with diversity started in 2000 and has been organized in its present form since 2002. Methods and work procedures are continuously developed. The County Administrative Board of Stockholm (referred to hereafter as CAB) has been focusing on more tangible work with attitude change than is common within the field. Increased information, knowledge and direct interaction between people are considered the best ways to eliminate or decrease prejudice and to understand how our differences can constitute an asset. The project consists of a number of activities, which have been performed at continuous times or in parallel intervals.

The work with trainee programs has constituted a big part of the tangible activities within the project. A number of unemployed academics with other background than Swedish have in three separate periods been offered a traineeship within different departments in the organisation.

Apart from the trainee programs, a broad range of educational opportunities dealing with diversity and discrimination have also been arranged for personnel at all levels within the organisation. The education has mainly been directed to managers and employees working within the project (such as Diversity Ambassadors, see below) but also to other employees.

In order to decrease the risk of discrimination in the recruitment process and to make the employees involved more aware and open for alternative competences, all the steps of the recruitment process have been reviewed through a diversity perspective. Recruitment guidelines for every part of the process have been drawn up. The CAB has also been committed in finding alternative methods to attract candidates from underrepresented groups to apply for vacant jobs within the organisation. This has mainly been achieved by using alternative channels to broaden the marketing of the advertisements and direct them to specific groups. Furthermore, a method for "acceptance to interview by quotas" has been developed. The method involves a rule within the organisation that for each vacant position at least one person with non-Swedish background

should be selected for an interview, providing that the basic qualification requirements are met. The latest development of the recruitment procedure involves an evaluation form that the recruiting manager has to fill out after every completed recruitment. The form contains questions about whether the diversity factor has been taken under account during the different steps of the process.

During 2005 and the beginning of 2006 the CAB was participating in a program called “Differences as an Asset”. Seven working teams, including the managerial body, participated in a three-day education and group development activity where the groups were to learn more about openness, communication, feedback and the functioning of groups. The outermost purpose with the program was to develop the competence in diversity for both working teams and individuals – and in extension effect attitudes towards diversity in the whole organization.

At three different occasions, a self-evaluation of the work with diversity has been carried out according to the FEED-model (Framework for Excellence in Equality and Diversity). The evaluation is a useful tool in securing the quality of the work and a way to make sure that continuous progress is made.

The reasons behind the case

Swedish society consists of a variety of individuals who are different from one another when it comes to ethnic and cultural background, age, gender, sexual disposition, functional disabilities, personality etc. As a democratic government authority, the goal is for the CAB to have employees that reflect the assembly of the people it serves. It is also important for the benefit of the organization to appreciate and make use of the strengths and advantages that a diverse workforce brings. The CAB started working with diversity by writing plans and documents, but soon found an inherent risk and possibility that diversity oriented activities would come to a standstill once the administrative planning and process of drafting documents and plans have been completed. Plans and documents were not considered enough to implement the thoughts and ideas in the regular work of the organisation and to achieve change. The CAB therefore made a commitment to work more hands on with activities such as recruitment from underrepresented groups, trainee programs and a broad range of educational activities dealing with diversity and discrimination in order to improve knowledge in the area and to change attitudes.

The project was initiated by the HR-department together with integration specialists from the department of regional development.

The actors behind the case

In the beginning stage of the diversity project, support and ideas on how to start and run the project was received from other organizations. The Development Council for the Government Sector (Utvecklingsrådet) was one of the main contributors with both ideas and monetary support. The Council also offered resources for carrying out interviews for a written report on the project after the first two years.

An early and important aim in the planning of the project was to achieve as widespread commitment for the subject as possible within the organization. In an initial phase, the

managerial body constituted the directing board of the project, but the responsibility was soon handed over to a diversity working team, the so-called Diversity Board. The Diversity Board consists of representatives from a variety of positions and organizational levels. The Board members should be exchanged after one or two years to give place for other employees, but it should always consist of at least one person from the managerial body, representatives from the two unions, one integration officer/specialist and one person from the HR-department. Among other things, the Board is responsible for the meetings and activities of the Diversity ambassadors (see below), for the yearly FEED-evaluation and educational activities for the organization as a whole. The managerial body is still involved in different ways and gives great support to the project.

In addition to the Diversity Board a diversity network was created. The network consisted of approximately 20 active representatives from nearly all of the departments and working units within the organization. In the beginning of the project, the network members were all tutors within the trainee program, but after the completion of the two first trainee periods the tasks of the network has gradually changed and the members have more of a diversity ambassador role. The ambassador role involves being a catalyst and a consultant in diversity related issues in the workplace. The Diversity Ambassadors meet once a month and inform each other about current activities in the different departments and discuss interesting topics and ideas on how to improve acceptance for diversity and avoid discrimination in the workplace. Various kinds of educational opportunities within the field of diversity and discrimination have been arranged for the Ambassadors, with the purpose of giving this group the knowledge, support, legitimacy and status required to conduct discussions on the theme of diversity within their respective department. For instance, courses in the MOD-method have been held at two occasions. MOD is a Swedish abbreviation for Diversity and Dialogue and is a method that aims at making preconceived notions and prejudices visible and learn how these could be worked on.

A certain turn over of members within the network is encouraged, since it ensures a continuous spread of the commitment to the work with diversity amongst a larger number of employees.

The process leading to success

The process was planned by the managerial body, the HR-department and integration specialists within the CAB. After the initial phase, the work has mainly been carried out by the HR-department together with the Diversity Board.

During the first two years of the project monetary support was received from The Development Council for the Government Sector. The following years the CAB have exclusively used its own resources. A certain budget is also put aside for diversity related activities every year.

The goals and methods of the project have been continuously developed as it has advanced. During the first years of the project, the main goal was to eliminate discrimination in the work place. The work with diversity was also solely concentrated on ethnic background and no other factors or minorities. After the initial phase, an attempt was made to broaden the perspective and include other kinds of differences amongst people in the concept of diversity. Instead of emphasizing the elimination of discrimination as the main reason for the project, the CAB also pushed it one step further by stressing the necessity of diversity for the gain and benefit of the

organization as the main motive. Diversity is indispensable for achieving growth, effectiveness and an attractive workplace. The goals and perspective hence became more positive and easier for everyone to relate to.

The most quantitative goal for the project is for the CAB to have employees that reflect the assembly of the people it serves. This means that approximately 25 % of the employees should have non-Swedish background, as is the ratio of the citizens of the county.

During the first year of the project the work was almost exclusively focused on the first and most extensive trainee program together with a variety of educational opportunities for all levels of the organization. After that, the education and trainee programs have continued, but in smaller scale. The work has instead been made broader and efforts have been spread out in a number of other activities. For instance the recruitment guidelines have been developed in three different stages. The most recent activity is the extensive program “Differences as an Asset”, which has involved about 100 employees and resulted in a renewal and more ignition for the project and the subject of diversity.

Evaluations of the project have been carried out both by the CAB and by The Development Council for the Government Sector at several occasions and with a variety of tools.

Results indicating success

The results of the work with diversity have been measured in a number of different ways. The CAB conducted interviews with over 300 employees before the start of the project. The results of the interviews provided a starting point for measuring improvements. At the end of the initial two years, the Development Council for the Government Sector put together a report on the project based on interviews with the managers of the organization. The FEED-method has also been used for evaluation of the work at three different occasions and there are recurring questions about diversity in the yearly personnel survey.

At the time of the writing, the last part of the evaluation of the program “Differences as an Asset” is still in progress. This evaluation consists of surveys both before and after the activity and interviews with approximately 25 of the participants.

Although changes in attitude are difficult to measure, it is evident that the work with diversity has led to increased commitment to questions regarding differences and discrimination at all levels of the organization. Most of the employees have realized the importance of creating a work place distinguished by democratic values, and how essential it is that we all accept, encourage, appreciate and make use of each other’s differences.

The project has led to improved awareness when it comes to recruitments. During the last two years we have witnessed an increase in the number of job applications from academics with backgrounds other than Swedish – a group that the CAB formerly had problems attracting.

A census of the number of employees with a non-Swedish background is scheduled to be performed once a year. In November 2005, 12 % of the employees had a non-Swedish background. Even though the goal of 25 % has not been reached, the number has continuously

increased and is above average for government authorities in Sweden. In the beginning of 2006 the CAB had a recruitment peak when over 30 people were to be recruited. 31 % of those recruited had backgrounds other than Swedish. This speaks for a further increase in the number of employees with non-Swedish background in the 2006 census, which is due at the end of the year.

The trainee programs have resulted in both valuable insights for the CAB as well as an introduction to a Swedish workplace proving valuable experience to the trainees. Approximately 15 of the trainees were offered jobs relevant for their educational background within the CAB or at other organizations with the help of references from the CAB directly after completed traineeship.

The main obstacles of the case

Since the start of the project many learning experiences have taken place and many conclusions have been drawn regarding what could have been done differently. For instance, a miscalculation was made in the first trainee program when the selection of trainees was made hurriedly and without sufficient consideration of who had the most relevant and adequate background for the position. Consequently, some of the trainees were not prepared for the Swedish work market and would have benefited more from other efforts such as courses in the Swedish language or psychological treatment for traumatic war experiences. In recent trainee programs the qualification requirements of trainees have been higher and more specific. In order to change attitudes towards people with different backgrounds, it is of utmost importance to not lower the requirements and demands on these people, as a person who performs poorly will be used by sceptics as evidence for showing that diversity is bad for the organization.

There have also been some difficulties with the Ambassador network. Given the sometimes long intervals between meetings and, at times, high member turn over, the network faced a hard time maintaining cohesion. Uncertainty about the role and assignments of the Ambassadors also led to lack of motivation for the task. To correct these problems, a document with an activity plan and a clarification of the role of the Ambassadors was established. The Ambassador network was also selected to participate as a group within the program "Differences as an Asset". Because of the program, the Ambassadors were given a better opportunity to know each other and received increased knowledge in group dynamics and diversity. The recent efforts have led to a decrease in member turnover and an increase in motivation and communication within the group.

Main sources of inspiration behind the case

Before beginning the project in early 2000, the HR-department and other employees involved in the project studied a variety of different approaches, examples and methods for working with diversity. This was accomplished by studying literature and research within the field, but also by attending courses and seminars. The Development Council for the Government Sector was involved in the project during the first period and contributed with advice, ideas and relevant examples.

After approximately one year, the diversity working team (Diversity Board) conducted a field-based study in England to investigate and assess organizations that work successfully with

diversity on location. The primary aim of the visit was to gain inspiration and be advised in order to better develop the CAB's work with diversity. The group visited six organizations: British Telecom, London Borough of Camden, Regional Coordination Unit, Tees Valley Training and Enterprise Council, Commission for Racial Equality and Hong Kong Shanghai Bank.

The most important lesson learned

This diversity project has been ongoing for several years and a great deal of resources have been invested into the project. One lesson learned during this project is the importance of managerial support. Without management standing behind the project, the work will have difficulties gaining the acceptance and recognition needed to move forward. One other factor that has contributed to keeping the work alive for such a long time is the annual budget, which has been set aside for diversity related activities. Even though not very big, this dedicated budget is a way of recognizing the area as an important part of organizational activities. Another condition for success is to achieve widespread commitment from as many individuals within all levels of the organization as possible. The more widespread the support for the project, the greater impact it will have on the organization as a whole. To ensure ongoing commitment to the project it is also imperative to have several individuals particularly dedicated to the continuing success of the project in order to keep others enthusiasm alive and push the project forward.

At the beginning of the project a few minor setbacks combined with the sensation of long-term goal accomplishment being very far off, had a discouraging effect on the working team. This led to the realization of the importance in setting limited and more easily achieved goals in addition to the long-term goals. Achieving the short-term goals infuses a feeling of success in an early stage of the project and contributes to continuous commitment and motivation for the project.

The most important lesson learned, however, might be the necessity of not trying to take haste in the work. The initial working team experienced a degree of frustration due to unreasonable expectations of tangible change to quickly occur. Achieving changes in attitude does never happen overnight and it is of utmost importance that the work is conducted with patience and that the necessary amount of time is taken in accomplishing these goals.