

# See the individual in the business – group diversity as an asset





## Foreword

What is important to consider when starting development work? How should an organisation function for the people within it to feel good and contribute towards organisational development?

This publication is intended to create interest in making use of and developing each government employee's ability and resources. It provides insights into how change happens in general and highlights the important parts in change processes. The publication also contains short sections on the evaluation result of the "Group diversity as an asset"<sup>A)</sup> project by the Development Council for the Government Sector. Those who want a more detailed examination of the evaluation result can read the publication entitled "Group diversity is an asset – a project evaluation"<sup>B)</sup>.

The result indicates that a relatively minor effort can make a major difference. It also suggests that it is important to be prepared. One hope is that this publication will contribute towards preparation and commitment by raising a number of questions, among other things. The reader alone has the "correct" answers to these questions.

The Development Council has also produced the publication "Differences – people in meetings and relationships"<sup>C)</sup>, a popular scientific overview of what happens when people meet, of the importance of being aware of ourselves and others, of how we can develop learning in our relationships and how uncertainty and conflicts have influence and can be handled in an organisation.

This publication can be seen as an introduction to how you can use group-dynamic, process-oriented development to fuel improved communication, empowerment and self-knowledge, and how this affects the working environment and competence development.

If you are interested in developing ways of working and competence within public administration, read this publication and those listed in the text above. This publication has been written by Karin Albrektson, the National Agency for Government Employers, the steering group's chairperson. The steering group also consists of Agneta Leijonhufvud and Josi Lundin, the National Agency for Government Employers; Anette Bister, The Public Employees' Negotiation Council; Marie-Thérèse Gyllhede, The Swedish Confederation of Professional Associations; and Helen Thornberg, the Union for Service and Communication Employees.

*Stockholm, June 2007*

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Chairperson. The steering group for the "Group diversity as an asset" project.

A) Swedish: "Olikhet som tillgång"

B) Swedish: "Olikhet är en tillgång – utvärdering av ett utvecklingsområde"

C) Swedish: "Olikheter – människor i möten och relationer"



# See the individual

**T**HE INDIVIDUAL IS AT THE CENTRE of modern working life, and this demands that every employee is regarded as a unique individual. Is it possible to see every employee and value everyone based on their unique ability? Doing so is not only a matter of fairness, but also of efficiency and quality. It is necessary to develop and make use of the competence that already exists and also to recruit the best. Everyone is aware of the factors that make this issue so urgent. Restructuring, large retirement waves and anticipated competition for manpower are some examples. Furthermore, in addition to being better educated, future government employees will place higher demands on independency, involvement and developing leadership.

Within the “Group diversity as an asset”<sup>A)</sup> project, the Development Council for the Government Sector has carried out development work based on openness and respect for differences, uniting people and therefore creating an attractive and competitive workplace. At seven state authorities, almost 600 people from existing work groups have tried three different methods to see if these could be used to increase awareness and focus on the importance of making use of differences in work groups. The three methods offered process-oriented, experiential learning.

This publication aims to share experience and knowledge from “Group diversity as an asset”<sup>A)</sup>. We hope this will inspire you towards a way of working with competence issues which is perhaps not so common at state authorities. This publication is particularly aimed at authorities’ managements, line managers, trade union representatives and staff within the area of personnel and organisational development. The publication contains result descriptions, experiences from the participating authorities and other conclusions from the evaluation. The publication also includes sections from research and development work within the area of competence and learning, leadership and adjoining areas.

## A POSITIVE OUTLOOK ON PEOPLE

Which starting points did the parties have when the “Group diversity as an asset”<sup>A)</sup> project began? The

first and most important was belief in each individual’s ability to change and people’s desire to be influenced and inspired by others. You could also call this having a positive outlook on people. The second was curiosity as to whether there are methods that open up contact between people and have a positive influence on both work groups and the entire organisation.

The aim was to support development work to better see and make use of employees’ competence and resources for the business’s development. The project aimed to create an attitude that respects differences and increases awareness of the uniqueness of each individual. The long-term ambition was for state workplaces to become more attractive and more competitive. The work was to focus on individuals, competence management and co-operation.

In simple terms, “Group diversity as an asset”<sup>A)</sup> began with the question: is there a way, or preferably a shortcut, to increase the ability to make use of every employee’s potential?

As a reader, you may think that this publication focuses far too much on the individual at work, what human relationships are concerned with, dialogue and communication. We are fully aware that there must be a balance between the business’s demands and the demands that the employee can make, and that economic factors could represent an obstacle to the desired development. What do you do if there is a need for change when funds decrease and demands increase? In the long term, not investing in development represents an obstruction. Within state authorities, it was not that long ago that there was talk of the individual’s employability. This is the responsibility of the individual, but one where open communication about development needs between employee and employer is central.

This publication does not recommend a quick fix to create an organisation with creative, open and self-developing people who can achieve continual improvements in the business. However, it shows that the work methods that have been tested can form an important part in a process towards this goal.

A) Swedish: “Olikhet som tillgång”

# Organisation, culture and structure affect everyone

Focusing solely on developing individuals is, of course, insufficient when trying to develop an organisation with increased pluralism that is striving towards gaining benefits from and developing competence. You cannot just concentrate on psychological issues. To achieve long-term development, there must also be a focus on organisational, structural and economic aspects.

It is common to say that something is “ingrained in the culture”. An authority’s culture and structure influences its ways of working and the environment. In addition, there is the practice and training of seeing oneself as an individual, with your own capabilities and the desire to have an influence within the work group. Organisations shape people. A culture that is administered by rules or one that is development-oriented obviously affects the result of group-dynamic development work of the sort that this publication focuses on.

As individuals, we find it hard to stand up to group pressure and authority. We are also dependent on work to provide for ourselves and to have a place in society that is socially meaningful. In response, we adapt. We adjust to the structure and the norms, both expressed and not expressed, that apply at our workplace. This makes shaping these structures a major responsibility – a responsibility that mainly lies with authorities’ leaderships but also with all employees.

Respecting differences and working towards mutual understanding does not mean unconditional acceptance. Neither does it mean that guidelines and indications are not needed when it comes to what is acceptable. The organisation’s culture and values must be discussed, as must the actions that originate in existing values. Respect for thinking differently may have to improve and the internal employer and staff policies may need to change.

What kind of culture and structure does your organisation have? Does it need to change? Does it support development and learning? What is the authority manager’s role like in relation to learning? Authorities cannot act and change by themselves – only individuals can do that. The only individual you can change is yourself. Everyone has a responsibility for the organisation they work in and this responsibility involves not allowing unsatisfactory conditions to prevail. As a manager, you have a greater possibility to change things.

It is easier to bring up discussions about structure and culture, similarities and differences if these are usually on the agenda at all levels within the authority.

Being aware of your own values and the prevailing culture at your workplace is an important prerequisite for change. Existing values constitute a form of rules for employment or membership in the organisation.

Discussing them and clearly expressing them in words and actions is important for the management team and managers, but every employee has a responsibility here. Clarity in terms of prevailing values and norms can allow scope for innovation, flexibility and creativity. But this does not mean that all differences should be tolerated.<sup>1)</sup>





## Try it yourself

There are many issues to discuss and decide on when it comes to competence management. Is the business on the verge of introducing a change with new work tasks and perhaps a new organisation? How does this affect the business and competence management? Do the employees have the right skills for their tasks? Are we paying attention to all the competence the employees have? Are we benefiting from competence that is not obvious – that is, competence that is not theoretical or conventional? Are we updating our competence with new discoveries and other methods? Is the collaboration and co-operation within work groups and between units successful? As a manager, what are you prepared to stake?

Even if there is nothing major that needs to change right now, there could be a reason for working preventatively and making a good situation better by focusing on developing employees and the organisation. What are resources like? Time is a common restriction.

Active involvement from managers and all employees is a prerequisite for experiential learning of work groups to have the best effect.

As a manager or employee, part of what you need to do depends on your answers to the questions above. Putting all this together determines the actions that will be taken in your development plans. The target could be that the organisation needs to develop its employees' ability to communicate and co-operate for their current work tasks, improve contact between themselves and others in the organisation, enable project work, or increase employees' ability to accept variety. It is very important that every organisation bases its plans on its particular needs and conditions, but the experiences of other authorities that have participated in the work should be of some use to other state authorities. The authorities that took part represented different areas of state administration and were chosen when they showed interest in participating.





# Get everyone involved

It is important that employees are informed and involved in the initial phase of development work, both through their staff organisations and as individuals.

To achieve a genuine change, all employees must:

- understand that change is needed;
- feel involved in the development work; and
- have the right skills to connect the changes to their daily work.

There is much to be gained from involving the employees early on.

- You make use of the skills and experience that exist in the authority.
- The motivation towards implementing the change increases.
- When more people work together, new ideas and angles of approach are born.
- Responsibility can be delegated and put in the “right” place.
- Once employees have had the chance to influence decisions, you reduce the level of displeasure and criticism at a later stage.

Are you prepared to value everyone’s argument objectively, regardless of the contributor’s status? Does your

authority encourage reflection and evaluation? As an employee, do you question suggestions and decisions or do you follow orders regardless? Co-operation and participation demand openness and dialogue from both managers and employees. Employees must show commitment and a desire and ability to share responsibility for the business. Managers must be able to take a step back without relinquishing their managerial responsibility, provide guidance, give support and encouragement and give stimulus to reflection and afterthought. At the same time, managers can also have the chance to learn, partly by employees coming through in other roles.

The development work that work groups at the authorities were involved in improved the ability to communicate and increased involvement. The managers who took part stated that they found sharing experiences with their employees to be very worthwhile.

Many believed that they got to see new sides of their employees and that those who had previously been more quiet and reserved had received a clearer profile. These are experiences that will benefit the business. The results are described in more detail further on in this publication.

# Consider consultancy support

Spending more time formulating and working towards targets means it will be easier to make demands clear if you need to engage consultants. The authority also gets good underlying information from which to later follow up and evaluate the work.

Let us say that you have mapped out what you are going to do and have decided that your own resources cannot provide enough support for the work that needs to be done. Alternatively, it may not be appropriate for internal consultants to take responsibility for this particular work – it may be regarded as being too sensitive.

In this case, it is time to bring in an external consultant. The demands that the Development Council places on methods and consultants are described on page 22. You may have tougher and/or other demands. The important thing is to clearly articulate and communicate the demands that the authority has and not to rush the purchase of a consultant. The Development Council’s work included a one-day consultant course to prepare, discuss with representatives of the authority and become familiar with the material, and so on. In retrospect, that time was regarded as being too short.

# Pleasing results – small measures can make a difference

What impact could a three-day, process-oriented, experiential learning course have?

The work was done over two days with overnight accommodation. A one-day follow-up session was held after one to two months. The daily business was evaluated as this was being done. The first step in the evaluation phase took the form of a questionnaire completed prior to the course. Immediately after the course, interviews were held with a selection of individuals from the work groups and managers. After six months, effects and results were followed up with a questionnaire and interviews. The questionnaire and interviews both focused on respect towards differences, making use of competence and differences, communication,

co-operation, participation, working environment and leadership. The result is objective in so far as the participants' own subjective viewpoints were asked for and the results were not measured objectively.

From the results of the course, it is pleasing to find that a relatively minor contribution can make a difference. Communication was found to have improved, participation increased and knowledge of each other's competence was strengthened. It was also proved that a number of factors that are described at the end of this publication had a big effect on the result. It is also likely that the evaluation had a positive effect on the result because the participants were able to reflect and formulate their opinions after the course.

## 1. Make use of competence

The evaluation shows that the work results become better qualitatively by making use of and developing employee competence. There is reason to believe that the more individuals in a work group get to know themselves and their colleagues, the easier they find it to work together and move forward – put simply, they are less afraid of embarrassment.

The work has led to effects in terms of highlighting the participants' competence, but the effects regarding making better use of this competence are small. One explanation could be that it is easier to become aware of your colleagues' competence than it is to become better at making use of it. Another explanation could be that six months is a relatively short time to change individual work tasks within a group.<sup>2)</sup>

Being able to perform your work tasks does not only imply that you have the professional ability to do so, but also that you are aware of the prevailing norms and value systems at your workplace, as well as the values, sometimes not expressed, that are linked to performing the work task. Being aware of the norms and values that guide the work are, however, a pre-condition considering modern practices such as management by objectives and results. The less the rules guide, the more the values do.

### TACIT KNOWLEDGE AND KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER

People have always been aware of, and accepted, individual learning. Studying at university and within tertiary education is an example of this. Group learning is different to individual learning because it contains collective learning that goes beyond individual learning. Because work groups are being emphasised more and more, it is increasingly important that group learning is implemented.<sup>3)</sup>

What does one know about knowledge development other than that it contains facts and theories? The obvious points:

- Development occurs in co-operation with people, is interactive and common.
- Knowledge is dependent on the situation in which we find ourselves. We are competent in one situation but not in another.
- We learn as much about the context, about the people and the pre-conditions, as we do about the facts we study.
- Our understanding, attitudes and feelings influence our learning. A positive environment expands and builds up our knowledge. An environment that is less good creates opposition and escape, and makes it hard to acquire knowledge. A confident, motivated



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- employee who feels respected by his manager and his colleagues learns and can cope with new work tasks easier than someone who is unhappy and feels bad.
- “Tacit knowledge” is decisive to innovation and new ways of thinking.<sup>4)</sup>

But what is tacit knowledge? Tacit knowledge is expressed through experiences, intuition and instinct, by the employee being challenged and forced into new and complicated situations so that they acquire a natural feeling for how a problem should be solved. One could also express this by saying that tacit knowledge is something we know before we know it – to have a feeling, to have intuition and ability when words are not enough. Some tacit knowledge occurs in an unstructured way, maybe even unconsciously, while we are working.

Other examples of tacit knowledge are when we recognise a solution without

having formulated a problem, when we can see the potential in an idea without being able to prove it. Tacit knowledge is stimulated when we focus our thoughts

A) Swedish: “Olikheter – människor i möten och relationer”

from pure facts to ideas, purposes and visions with our work. It is also proved that insight, trust and empathy are crucial for developing good tacit knowledge. Tacit knowledge is central to increasing our innovative ability, but it must be complemented with formal facts, structured theories, models and information.

Trust, flexibility, empathy and communication are key words in developing our tacit knowledge. The types of leadership that want to create learning organisations must also admit to, talk about and spread tacit knowledge. Society and working life place far too much focus on the knowledge of facts. You must also trust in intuition. Environments that stimulate different ways of thinking and development are a good breeding ground for this.<sup>4)</sup>

## HOW TO CREATE A LEARNING ENVIRONMENT – EXAMPLES OF TRICKS AND TIPS

There are a number of different procedures that can be used to stimulate and open your senses. Here are a few of them:

- Scenarios:** Imagine yourself in the future. It is 2010, for example, when we will have succeeded with the development plans. What did we do?
- Case examples, case discussions:** Present a real situation, ask interlocking questions, give recommendations.
- Horizontal perspectives:** Let everyone participate, the expert should not take responsibility.
- Peer review:** Invite a group of colleagues to contribute to a challenge. Present the situation, let them work undisturbed and provide ideas.
- Suspected competence:** Invite people with knowledge within totally different fields to take part in the development phase.
- Master/apprentice or mentor/protégé:** “Shadow” or interview specialists.
- Continuous reflections:** For example, take weekly notes on what you have learned and discuss them in the work group.
- Coaching/guidance:** Engage professional people outside the workplace – good for trustworthy learning – dare to try.
- Random lunch date:** Draw lots within the authority so that people who do not work together get a chance to discuss matters over lunch.
- Appreciative inquiry:** Focus on the positive side – why is it going so well?

This list has been assembled according to a lecture by Birgitta Södergren, organisation researcher at IPF and Uppsala University, February 2007, Development Council.

The “appreciative inquiry” method is described in more detail in “Differences – people in meetings and relations”<sup>A)</sup>, Gill Widell, Development Council 2006.

## 2. Respect and benefit from differences

A desirable result at individual level was that the respect for individual differences would increase and that differences in people's backgrounds would be made use of at group and organisational level.

The work led to effects that persisted after six months in terms of showing respect for individual differences and more respectful treatment in the work groups. This means that the work led to a change in behaviour and not just in changed opinions.<sup>2)</sup>

Fewer people experienced the participants in the work groups becoming better at benefiting from each other's differences, which is much harder to achieve than appreciating and seeing differences as an asset. In the interviews, it was stated that many of the authorities have structures and routines that make it more difficult to benefit from differences. One authority was said to be old and have a stale culture, which results in differences not being made use of. In another authority, it was claimed that a rules-based approach is seen as an obstacle. A lack of structures and guidelines can also make it difficult to make use of differences in the form of various suggestions and ideas.

In the interviews, many also said that in future

recruitments, they will consider aspects such as “differences” and “diversity as an asset”. The latter was one of the long-term goals of the project. Effects of this type were not evaluated due to time restrictions.<sup>2)</sup>

### **DIFFERENCE – AN ASSET?**

What is difference? There is no obvious definition of difference. Many believe that difference and diversity are the same thing and, in this case, often mean ethnic diversity. Others consider the term difference to go further than diversity. When we defined the term difference within the project, we chose a broad definition: *By difference, we mean every difference that exists between people, such as gender, age, ethnicity, religion, sexual inclination, functional disability, education, background and experience – in other words, everything that has shaped, and is shaping, us into the person we are and will become.*

It is important that every authority discusses and defines what the authority means by difference and diversity. Apart from reaching a definition, which is the ultimate goal, the discussion is important in itself. Many stones will need to be turned and many windows opened. In this case, the journey is more important than



the goal. When making an inventory of and planning competence requirements, there is reason to ask where in the authority difference and diversity are of most importance to the business. It may be the case that similarity could also sometimes be an asset.

Working towards an inclusive workplace and counteracting exclusion means ensuring long-term competence management. This demands that we, both as individuals and within our organisation, review our outlooks and values, reflect and be prepared to change ingrained patterns. This in turn affects the authority's work organisation and employer and staff policies from recruitment, staff development and wage setting to reduction and redundancy issues.

If the work relating to competence management is only based upon categories such as those groups that have protection against discrimination, there is a risk of ending up in a "categorisation trap", in other words, that individuals are reduced to being representatives of a group and are expected to live up to what others expect of them.

A recruitment process could explain how:

- The work must begin with an inventory of the com-

petence required. Are you looking for a copy of the person about to retire or of their manager?

- The next stage is to consider which channels to use to reach the right competence and how the advertising should be designed.
- It is also important to have a clear opinion on how to view application negotiations.
- How is the selection process that will lead to interviews done and how does our own background influence who we decide to interview and the person who eventually gets the job?

State authorities have a particular responsibility to develop or increase diversity, in other words, increasing the number of employees with discriminatory protection. The work of fulfilling discriminatory legislative demands is made easier by the organisation also actively working to include everyone in its organisation. Ethnicity, gender and sexual preference are not competences in themselves – competence is possessed by people and not categories. It is therefore necessary to work to counteract exclusion while at the same time working for inclusion when recruiting and developing the competence that the authority requires.<sup>1)</sup>

### 3. Open up communication

One of the goals of the development work was to improve individual communication ability. The evaluation shows that the work had the greatest effect within this area. After six months, half of the participants considered that their ability to give and take positive and negative feedback had improved. More than one-third agree, either completely or partly, when it comes to having more of an opportunity to speak and listen to other people's viewpoints in common discussions in the work group. Many consider that the effects of this improved communication still remain after six months. For example, many highlighted in the interview say that they now communicate better with their customers. A relatively small contribution could improve the ability to communicate and increase openness in work groups.<sup>2)</sup>

#### **CATEGORISING AND STEREOTYPING**

People develop by communicating with other people in relationships both in and outside the workplace. We

make comparisons and categorisations when we look for solidarity, which forms the basis of human relations. Categorising could be described as a necessary method for dealing with ability, experiences and information. As people, we need to generalise to be able to take in experiences; otherwise, we would not be able to cope with the complexity of reality. We try to make things easier for ourselves.

A generalisation process means that we place the other person into a category, a type, which we have already established in our way of thinking. We then assign her other characteristics – in other words, the ones that we have assigned to everyone according to our previous experiences or assumptions. The latter is called stereotyping. Using categorising is part of our desire for consistency and causality. We want clarity in our way of thinking and strive for orderliness in our cognitive structure and thought processes. In other words, we counteract chaos in our thoughts and feelings.

Categorising therefore means that you, more or less

unconsciously, place people into categories and types, as well as man/woman, old/young, black/white, and so on.

Stereotyping means “an exaggerated belief associated with one category”. By both categorising and stereotyping, we obstruct the openness that could help us to see unexpected sides to another person’s personality. However, unlike more “neutral” categories, stereotypes largely contribute towards strengthening and justifying our ingrained opinions of others. Our experiences of the other person are filtered by the stereotypical opinion we have placed her in and other signals do not reach us.<sup>5)</sup>

#### **WHEN THE RULES OF THE GAME VARY**

Knowing the rules of the game is a pre-condition to

being able to participate in different activities. This applies to a unit meeting at work just as much as it does to a game of Monopoly. Our roles in our working life are built on categorisations according to some sort of reasoning, which is built into the authority’s structure. In some contexts, we may be able to step outside of our roles and be more like “ourselves”, be as open as we want and can be depending on the situation. It is far from certain that everyone behaves in the same way in a work organisation. We behave differently to ourselves than to others. We have our roles and do what we believe is expected of us. While our feelings and relationships are determined by the conditions under which we live, we influence the conditions through our actions. Through our actions, we create our own reality at the



## FEEDBACK

1. Observe and describe an important current event.
2. Search for and try to describe the feelings I have about what I observe.
3. Identify why I feel what I feel.
4. Talk about what needs to be done in this context for me to feel better.

same time as “genuine” reality is going on. Together, “genuine” reality and our version of reality help to form our conditions both at work and privately.<sup>5)</sup>

The rules of the game vary depending on the context, time, space and culture. The development work in which the pilot authority participated was partly based on giving opportunities for straightforward and clear communication, dialogue and increasing active listening. The participants also practiced giving and taking constructive feedback and the opportunity to reflect and try new behaviour.

There is not usually the opportunity to get to know each other well in temporary project groups and irregular networks. To do a good job together, it is necessary to quickly abandon role playing and for everyone to enter into the project with their different competences. This requires a degree of habit, courage and humility.

This does not mean displaying all of one’s personality through total openness, but rather that one uses one’s professionalism.

One way of improving your communication ability is to consciously practice feedback, which, in short, is based on:

1. Observing and describing an important current event.
2. Searching for and trying to describe the feelings I have about what I observe.
3. Identifying why I feel what I feel.
4. Talking about what needs to be done in this context for me to feel better.

Giving feedback requires practice. The starting point is yourself and your own feelings without placing demands on others. It becomes part of contact-creating communication.<sup>5)</sup>



## 4. Participate and co-operate

The aim of the project was for group-level development to contribute towards positive co-operation and increased understanding of the interplay between the group and the individual. The aim was also for the work environment to become more open and accepting after a time. Many believed that the work environment and the co-operation had been positively affected by “Group diversity as an asset”<sup>A)</sup>. In the interviews, employees said that they had got to know each other better thanks to the work, which has not only influenced communication and respect for differences, but also co-operation and the work environment.<sup>2)</sup>

Participation does not require the participant to have decision rights. But there must be a clear connection between the process in which the employees are participating and the decision process for the issues that are dealt with by, or generated through, this process. If employees are given the chance to participate in an issue, but their viewpoints do not appear to influence the decision, this does not automatically mean that the viewpoints have not been taken into account. However, participation means that one is involved in the process up to a decision, not just in the decision. Getting the opportunity to air one’s views and interpretations during the process increases understanding of the issue and leads to greater knowledge.<sup>6)</sup>

Collaboration and co-operation are important prerequisites for a good working environment. Focusing on developing employees in the “Group diversity as an asset”<sup>A)</sup> way could be an opportunity to create an ability and desire to commit to the operation’s development.

## 5. Involve more people

In the questionnaire given out six months after the work had finished, more than 40 per cent believed that their working environment had developed for the better. They thought that the working environment had become more open and that the harmony had improved. The employees announced that they dared to be more open and honest and that more people in the group were included. Some believed that commitment to the group’s task and to working in the group had increased dramatically, which had a positive effect on the work

You do not go deeper into learning and creativity every once in a while, it is a continuous process. Every now and then, we need to come into contact with what is inside us – there is more to gain from there than we imagine.

### Co-operation for development

This may be the right time to recall that the parties within the government sector signed an agreement entitled “Co-operation for development”<sup>7)</sup> a decade ago. Its purpose includes supporting the work of becoming more efficient by encouraging the development of workplaces which are, in part, characterised by:

- the work being set up so that it makes use of employees’ ability and experience;
- the employees having the opportunity for personal development and continuous learning;
- the employees being able to contribute towards developing the business through influencing their own work situation; and
- the work being organised in a way that it creates good communication between people and an open and developing climate.

In accordance with the agreement, this implies that there is a leadership in place that works with delegating, co-operating and motivating as well as developing employees.

With the co-operational agreement as their platform, many authorities have signed local agreements to encourage participation and co-operation. Process-oriented, group-dynamic development work can be a tool to develop the agreement’s intentions.

environment. The participants got to know their work colleagues better and became closer to them, a development that persisted six months later. Some thought that “Group diversity as an asset”<sup>A)</sup> was one of the factors that contributed towards an improved working environment. Some had got a new boss and a less stressful work situation.

There were some who believed that the working environment had not changed at all. A few even thought it had become worse. The latter is probably a result of old

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problems being brought to the surface, which could be the beginning of something new and positive.<sup>2)</sup>

When each and everyone's competence is emphasised, differences are respected and made use of, communication improves and participation and co-operation gets better. The working environment is also regarded as being more positive.

Göran Ekvall, professor in psychology, summarises what characterises a creative working environment in the following 10 points:

#### **1. Challenge and commitment**

The employees are personally committed and agree with the organisation's goals. The work seems meaningful and stimulating, and everyone feels as though they are making a contribution. It may be stressful, but the stress feels positive. The opposite is non-committed employees who have not found their place and are longing to be away from work.

#### **2. Freedom and independence**

The employees can make contact freely both in and outside the organisation to discuss problems. Initiative is encouraged and the work can be handled on an individual basis. In a rigid organisation, nobody goes outside frameworks in order to avoid criticism.

#### **3. Support for ideas and encouragement**

New thoughts and ideas are listened to and encouraged. They are received positively and tested. The opposite is an organisation where new ideas are met with suspicion.

#### **4. Trust and confidence**

The environment is good for new ideas and opinions. Thinking freely and big is risk free. Fear is not the guiding force here; when it is, people prefer to keep quiet rather than sharing ideas and thoughts.

## 6. Support for leadership

One hope was that "Group diversity as an asset"<sup>A)</sup> could also help management. Managers realised that they got the opportunity to see employees' "other sides". They revealed that they saw employees' needs more clearly and that they became clearer themselves. The work gave managers insight into the importance of being clear in communication.

They got the chance to approach employees they did not usually talk to, and an insight into the fact that they support some more than others in their managerial role. Newly appointed managers said that they integrated into the group and the business quicker and more easily than they had expected. Some managers believed that the employees gained greater understanding and acceptance of their "shortcomings" as leaders. They also believed that the employees seemed to find it easier to make contact.

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#### **5. Liveliness and dynamism**

In this environment there is always something new happening. It is worrying to some but exciting to most. The opposite is for everything to take its course without any surprises.

#### **6. Playfulness and humour**

The atmosphere is unrestrained and relaxed with a lot of laughing and joking. New ideas and thoughts are tried here. The opposite is a workplace where the atmosphere is heavy, stale and where there is no place for laughter.

#### **7. Dialogue and debate**

Thoughts and ideas are met with lively discussion. Everyone can contribute under the same conditions with experiences and opinions in a continuous conversation. In the opposite case, decisions are questioned and if a discussion arises, only established viewpoints are allowed.

#### **8. Conflicts and emotional tensions**

The level of conflict is low in a good working environment. Problems are solved without creating individual opposition. The opposite is a place with a high level of conflict. In this case, opposition arises that is more to do with conflicts between individuals than between ideas. These are ignored instead of being solved and this affects the atmosphere, which is characterised by gossip and slander.

#### **9. Risk-taking and readiness to act**

There is a willingness to try out any opportunity that arises. Even if all the pre-conditions are not good, action is taken quickly. An unsure organisation does not reason in this way. It does not take risks without performing a thorough investigation.

#### **10. Time for ideas and reflection**

A good climate provides the time both for reflection and to discuss new ideas, even if there is little time. In the opposite case, time pressure dictates what can and cannot be done and there is no room to discuss new ideas.

One or two thought that they had received help in their leadership because the employees had become more aware of their own responsibility for relations and communication in the group.<sup>2)</sup>

### **GROUP DIVERSITY**

When it comes to leadership in an inclusive organisation, there is evidence of the demands on management being particularly clear. Otherwise, a good manager also needs to be a good manager in a "difference organisation". Here are a couple of examples of such studies:

For many years, the Stockholm County Administrative Board has been working on increasing the level of diversity in its organisation with the help of the Development Council. From initially having limited the definition of diversity to mean "ethnic diversity", it then worked with a broader definition "diversity/

difference”. In a follow-up phase during which a large number of managers and employees were interviewed, the following points came out with regards to leadership:

- The importance of discussing the values that are to apply
- Giving these clear expression in actions
- Being a leader for diversity highlights the manager’s ability to lead
- Increase the consensus between what is said and what is done
- Stimulate leadership development
- Leadership development that emphasises self-knowledge and personal development is needed.<sup>8)</sup>

At the request of the Swedish Board of Integration, Mercuri Urval studied leadership in eight successful multicultural companies. The purpose of the work was to look for prominent patterns in leadership and possible effects.

The hypothesis was that leadership is a decisive factor in the results and relations within a workplace. If the hypothesis was confirmed, experiences from the study could be used to better identify, choose and develop leaders for “diversity organisations”. The companies primarily supplied services within the services and industry sector. One to three managers and a number of employees were interviewed at each company. The managers were also tested according to Mercuri Urval’s tests.

In the results of the in-depth assessments, the managers’ image of their own leadership was in accordance with the employees’ viewpoints. There are common

characteristics, even though the results are obviously influenced by personal differences. Four aspects stand out regardless of the business and how many employees the manager is in charge of:

- *The manager should be clear*
- *The manager should be fair*
- *The manager should be present and interested in the staff*
- *The manager should have an open attitude and not be afraid of the unknown.*

In their reflections on the result, the investigators announced that being successful in terms of diversity and creating added value based upon thinking differently, combined with thinking in equal terms, does not come easily. Hard work is required. Deliberately putting together staff groups based on difference and equality is more demanding, especially during the build-up phase. You have to come through your own pre-conceived views, re-evaluate, be prepared to meet people in a new way and increase your acceptance and tolerance. But once this has been done, it opens the possibility for breadth and depth in the combined competence that can never be achieved in the “cloning model”.

The report concludes that it is “unavoidable to be confronted with your own preconceptions if you are serious about leading, living and working in accordance with thinking differently”.

Another quote is: “The fear of the unknown sits deeply in many of us. Could it be the case that we can only put up with as much difference as our own assurance allows us to? The managers and employees we met had come a long way and were characterised by broad-mindedness and openness.”<sup>9)</sup>





## 7. Create a new role for the employee

In previous sections, we have described that “Group diversity as an asset” A) can contribute towards developing leadership and the manager’s role. It is also clear that the efforts contribute towards a changed employee role. By developing social ability, awareness and clarity of their own values, the ability to work independently and take the initiative gives individuals a greater opportunity to influence their working life.

Today, the relationship between the employee and manager is based more on dialogue and co-operation. This is under the prerequisite that plenty of scope is given for independent initiative and an increased opportunity to take responsibility. The manager should lead a dialogue with the employee before any decision, which means that decisions are developed through communication. The leader who is still a manager has formal responsibility for decisions. The new roles will

A) Swedish: “Olikhet som tillgång”

become more equal than before. A leader who knows himself and his employees is confident enough to judge limits and boundaries for increased responsibility. A manager who acts with uncertainty makes his employees uncertain.

Broader work content, with increased responsibility and variable conditions, raises the demands on the employee. But if the employee is part of a functioning work group, in which attention is paid to each person’s abilities, the pressure subsides. Better communication, increasing insight and improving the work environment increases the chances to not only “do one’s job” but also to spend time, energy and commitment on planning, developing and following up the common work. In a well-functioning group, each individual can receive support and more space.<sup>6)</sup>

# The most influential factors for change

Which factors for change have been the most important? Below is a description of the elements that have had a particular influence on development work at authorities.

They are not surprising or unique. They are familiar from other forms of change work and could constitute something to remember for changes in general.

## **LEADERSHIP COMMITMENT**

Change work should preferably be done on the management's behalf, but if the staff unit or someone else has taken the initiative, it is the management's task to give support, inform and ask for the results. It is important to understand that development work takes time; firmly establishing, informing and taking part yourself are basic prerequisites for a good result.

The management should give clear signals and take responsibility for development and competence management – increased co-operation and development of work groups to make use of differences could otherwise risk being viewed as less important. All development work is based on managers being motivated and seeing the opportunities in the proposed changes.

## **ESTABLISHING IT INTERNALLY**

Firmly establishing the change work and giving employees the opportunity to actively participate in it at an early stage affects commitment and the results. It is important to inform, motivate, converse with and cooperate with staff.

## **STAFF ORGANISATION COMMITMENT**

At all authorities except one, the staff organisations were involved when “Group diversity as an asset”<sup>A)</sup>

began. As for the rest, the level of commitment differed. One conclusion is that trade union organisations should be involved in development issues at an early stage. They have an important role when it comes to informing, establishing and – not least – spreading knowledge of the result. It could therefore be suitable for staff organisations to be included in steering or project groups for development work.

## **EVERYONE SHOULD BE INVOLVED**

In experience-based, process-oriented development, it is important that everyone in a work group, including managers, is involved. The work will then have a greater effect on the daily work. Trying to study in another way does not work because the individual experience here and now in the group is central to the development. You cannot force anyone to be involved, of course, but it is clear that those who do not participate will leave a gap, which affects those who do take part and therefore also the result.

## **BELIEF IN CONTINUING EFFECTS**

The more strategic the development issues are and the more they are integrated into the business, the better the conditions for a good result.

As previously stated, every effort aimed at developing individuals or groups should be planned thoroughly and form part of a continual process to develop both the business and the employees. Activities should be included in the development plan or plan of operations set up by the authority. The concern that the efforts will come to nothing – which was expressed in “Group diversity as an asset”<sup>A)</sup> – can then be alleviated.<sup>2)</sup>

» The more strategic the development issues are and the more they are integrated into the business, the better the conditions for a good result. «

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» A leader who  
knows himself and  
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confident enough to  
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borders for increased  
responsibility. «

# It works

How has the group members' opinion of others' and their own competence been affected after three days of process-oriented, group-dynamic development in existing work groups? Here are some conclusions:

Openness towards differences has changed for the better. Communication has improved, as has involvement and co-operation. The work climate has also improved. Furthermore, many managers feel that they have gained support in their managerial roles by participating in the development work together with their employees.

Many experienced such a change that we can recommend using similar methods. However, you need to be aware that development work must usually be combined with other measures, and there should at least be preparation for this. It is also important to observe

whether the organisation supports learning and development, whether the management development work is adequate enough, and to review staff and employer policy processes. All change work must be adapted to each authority's situation and business. Some factors are general and necessary to achieving a good result:

- Management commitment
- Integration into the authority's internal processes
- Employee participation
- Management and employee development
- Long-term work and follow ups.

Finally, it does not matter if you take a break in the development work. What you have learned will stay with you, in both your consciousness and unconsciousness mind, and can quickly be recalled.



# The targets set by the Development Council

The Development Council's work was performed with consultancy support to test whether process-aimed methods focused on changing attitudes is a successful way of improving communication and making use of competence, among other things.

One demand on the methods was that they should make it easier for authorities to identify and highlight any obstacles or norms in the organisation that counteract the ability to make greater use of the differences between individuals.

The methods were designed to help reduce any such obstacles and to provide experience-based learning that could be applied to existing work groups and give managers support in their work of leading independent and competent employees.

The "Group diversity as an asset"<sup>A)</sup> project focused on developing individuals and work groups.

The Development Council brought in three consultants to work on three different experience-based, process-oriented methods/ways of working. Almost 600 employees at seven authorities were asked to try the methods to see if they could be used as a tool in their work. The development work lasted for three days. The methods, which were purchased with the help of the National Agency for Services to Universities and University Colleges (VHS), are Psykosyntes (Psychosynthesis), Öppna Fönster (Open Windows) and TEAM.

Following several discussions, the parties in the Development Council decided to test whether there were methods that fulfilled the targets stated below. The targets may appear to be extensive and highly ambitious. The work that your organisation chooses to do does not need to be as thorough to achieve results.

## TARGETS FOR THE WORK

The Development Council's targets for the development work:

- Development on an individual level contributes towards increased respect for individual differences (through, among other things, better self-knowledge and ability to communicate).
- Development on a group level contributes towards

positive co-operation and increased understanding for teamwork between the group and the individual.

- Differences in background are utilised and regarded as an asset at group and organisational level.
- After a while, the work environment is described as being more open and accepting.
- Work results improve as a result of the individual's competence being better exploited and developed.

As a consequence of a change in attitudes, approach and behaviour, it is expected in the longer term that:

- the way of recruiting will be developed so that differences are actively in demand;
- various sorts of harassment are prevented and avoided through increased openness and respect for differences;
- decisions in complex issues are better supported as a result of utilising the combined competence;
- employer and staff policy processes become more open; and
- all customers/citizens are treated better and with more respect.

## PURCHASING CONSULTANCY SUPPORT

The criteria that the methods were to fulfil were:

### *On an individual level*

- Provide better self-knowledge about the individual's values, attitudes and behaviour that helps/obstructs increased tolerance towards individual differences
- Provide practice in straightforward and clear communication/dialogue
- Provide practice in active listening
- Provide practice in giving and receiving constructive feedback
- Provide opportunities for reflexion and test new behaviour
- Provide better ability to utilise differences.

### *On a group level*

- Provide better understanding for the individual's influence on the group
- Provide more insight into the group's development
- Provide more insight into and understanding of each

A) Swedish: "Olikhet som tillgång"



individual's differences and better insight into the positive effects that can be achieved through making use of skills and abilities

- Improve the group's ability to take in differences.

*On an organisational level*

- Provide greater insight into the necessity of seeing and making use of individuals' differences in the organisation
- Contribute to a more open and better work environment.

### **PLACE DEMANDS ON CONSULTANTS**

Consultants should have:

- training or education in behavioural or organisational theory or several years of documented experience within these areas;
- experience of leadership development;
- extensive knowledge and experience of working with individual and group development in existing groups;
- an ability to adapt the work according to the group's needs;
- experience of assignments for Swedish state authorities; and
- good references from assignments undertaken using the method.

Formal competence and experience had to be backed up by written documentation and a reference list of assignments undertaken using the method. Furthermore, it was a necessity that the company supplying the consultants had a collective agreement. Other formal demands were a corporate tax clearance certificate, tax obligation fulfilment, and so on.

The procurement process was highly demanding and drawn out, largely because none of those involved had experience of such a major procurement within this area.

One positive experience is that no authority has questioned the choice of methods and, therefore, consultants. Another positive experience is that the majority of the methods that were introduced through the tender-

ing procedure would probably have brought about the same results. On the negative side, it was not possible to sign call-off agreements so that other authorities could use the methods without having to purchase them themselves. This is because the Development Council is not a state authority.

All development takes a lot of effort; nobody develops without reconsideration and initial opposition. It is important that the consultant can handle the situations that could arise and has vast experience of similar work.

### **PLAN THE EVALUATION BEFORE THE WORK**

Three methods with "associated" consultants were to be tried against the demands that had been set. At least six authorities were to test one method each on some work groups. An evaluation consultant had already been contracted at this time to follow the process and evaluate results and effects within the work groups at the authorities.

### **ESTABLISHING AND INFORMING**

The participating authorities began their involvement by describing their development needs and the result that the work was expected to achieve at the authority. After that, they were accepted as pilot authorities and an agreement was signed between the authority and the Development Council, and another between the consultant and the Development Council.

This way of working proved to contain several weaknesses, even though there was not actually any other choice because the Development Council had taken the initiative for the project. Was there genuinely a need for this work or was it a way for the authority to gain extra resources? Even though the need existed, the question of establishment within the organisation arose. Did the work have the management's support?

In retrospect, the work could have been established on a broader scale at some authorities. The level of management commitment also had a great bearing, both positive and negative, on the result.

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## Group diversity as an asset – starting a change process. How, when and what was the result?

What should you consider when you want to start a change process aimed at making use of people's diversity? How can communication and the work environment be improved? What role does the manager have?

This publication is intended to inspire development work at government workplaces. It provides practical tips on improving learning at work and important things to remember when you intend to start development work. It contains insights into practical change work that has been initiated by the Development Council and the project's two other publications "Differences – people in meetings and relationships" <sup>A)</sup> and "Group diversity – a project evaluation" <sup>B)</sup>.

A) Swedish: "Olikheter – människor i möten och relationer"

B) Swedish: "Olikhet är en tillgång – utvärdering av ett utvecklingsområde"



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