



Lord Herman Ouseley, PRIAE's Chair Comment on Diversity Published in the Management, 2006

Discussions about race relations too easily get sidetracked by talk of veils, symbols, and even quotas. Recently, the government's Ethnic Minority Employment Taskforce demanded greater transparency in its partners regarding their diversity employment. But a push for quotas is a sign of desperation. The corporate world has failed abysmally to reflect diversity among its workforce in meaningful ways. We seem to have reached a stalemate in promoting talented employees from black and minority ethnic (BME) backgrounds in modern Britain.

Paradoxically, an inability to promote talent from *any* background means devices such as quotas have to be introduced to ensure that ethnicity is an accountable part of any diversity policy. But this too easily becomes tokenism. Organisations need to incorporate equality, diversity and inclusion as integral to their ethos.

Globalisation and population movement means greater competitiveness. Our society is irreversibly ethnically diverse and our consumer bases more fragmented. The 2001 census found 50 per cent of people of mixed race origin were aged 16 and under. Those young people are starting to trickle into the workplace and the figure can only increase. They are consumers as well as potential employees. A joined-up approach can only be achieved through a compound workforce of diverse employees with different identities.

Teams which have a mix of ages, backgrounds and cultures provide more than merely stock, 'type' solutions. They bring passion, commitment, creativity and originality to the table. With inspired leadership they have higher morale, and can integrate and assimilate with greater ease. They learn with and from each other, broadening their own outlooks and horizons in the process.

The situation now is that emergent BME talent developed by progressive employers tends to get poached. We need more employers to follow suit with investment to nurture and develop BME and other talent. While recruitment and development is important, the attention to retention is essential. Talent distinguishes itself by its excellence not colour or culture, but it can be denied opportunities to flourish and prove its real worth.

We are currently running a project called CEMESME to gauge the Contribution of Ethnic Minorities in SMEs. The first of its kind in Europe, it has polled 20,000 UK firms over the

summer on their levels of diversity, their openness to ethnicity and the contribution employees of all backgrounds make to business success.

Companies are often reluctant to engage with diversity, fearing it will drive up resourcing costs and cause conflict between employees. They refuse to consider that benefits far outweigh costs. Any employer wanting to invest in diversity should consider the following:

- Recognise BME talent, but work equally hard to nurture, develop and retain it
- Provide opportunities for BME talent to produce the results it is capable of
- Ensure diversity informs every part of the business, from the floor to the boardroom
- Promote BME employees at every level of the organisation based on merit and not on appearance

British business disregards equality, diversity and inclusion at its peril: 'more of the same' as a recruitment criterion belongs in the dark ages. It needs diversity to perform, diversity to compete and diversity to survive and succeed. We do not need quotas. We need to recognise that talent is usually there within organizations or seeking to get there. If only we can look beyond images, even symbols, to ourselves.

(Source: Management 2006)