



Networks

Summary

Establishing an equality and diversity network within a society acknowledges the challenges minorities face in the workplace, provides a space in which to discuss any issues they may face and a forum from which to promote change. They engender a more inclusive environment and can be particularly supportive for groups who are significantly underrepresented in their particular workplace.

The resources demanded of the network vary depending on its composition. As we are taking a network to be a member-driven community, maintenance should come primarily from those engaging with it. Contributions from the organisation itself will be higher during setup and events, but otherwise networks are typically a low resource, high impact action. Most groups are focussing on women at present, although other diversity groups are gaining prevalence. From the web research it was more common to have specific communities for each protected characteristic, although communication between specific networks is obviously beneficial to the overall diversity of the organisation.

Networks for diversity characteristics may also be referred to as “affinity groups”.

Examples

Member Bodies

British Computer Society, Women’s Forum

The BCS runs a successful women’s forum, established in 2001 to support women working in computing and IT. Overseen by a committee of volunteers, the group runs a women-only mailing list, CV advice clinic, mentors list, networking, and various other events. The majority of the group’s contact occurs online, although face-to-face meet ups take place on at least an annual basis.

<http://www.bcs.org/category/8630>

Institute of Materials, Minerals and Mining, Women in Materials Group

The Women in Materials group was established to support female members and address the underrepresentation of women in IOM3 membership. They aim to increase this by providing networking, mentoring and outreach opportunities, and have put events so far on these topics.

<http://www.iom3.org/news/women-materials-inaugural-event-success>

Institute of Physics, Women in Physics group

The group is designed to support female members and encourage more women into physics. Their activities include an annual meeting, the Very Early Career Woman Physicist prize and engaging in issues such as career breaks, education, and women in academia. The group is overseen by a committee consciously made up of members from diverse career backgrounds (industry, research, education, etc.) to reflect the composition of societal membership.

<http://www.iop.org/activity/groups/subject/wip/index.html>

Nuclear Institute, Young Generation Network

The network was established to increase communication between generations, to facilitate career progression, and to encourage young scientists to remain in the domain of nuclear science. The network holds regular sponsored events introducing different elements of nuclear science, and holds an annual dinner and seminar. It also maintains links with other European nuclear societies to encourage cross-country exchange

<http://www.nuclearinst.com/YGN>

Royal Society of Chemistry, Women and Younger Members Networks

The Royal Society maintains two networks that have application to diversity work: one focussed on women, and the other on young members. The women's network seeks to support and provide networking opportunities, including regional networking events, as well as increasing women's entry and re-entry into chemical careers. The young member's network follows the same approach in terms of events, with the community itself subdivided into regional areas. The main aim of this network is to increase the personal/professional development of the younger members. Both are run by volunteers and have close contact with the main activities of the RSC and external organisations such as WISE.

<http://www.rsc.org/Membership/Networking/WomenMembersNetwork/>

<http://www.rsc.org/Membership/Networking/YoungerMembersNetwork/index.asp>

Non-member bodies

Ashurst LLP

Ashurst LLP is well-known for its commitment to equality and diversity. They have staff networks for LGBT employees (Spectrum) and women in the company. The Women's network runs mentoring programmes and skills coaching, and evaluates company practices to increase women entering and progressing through the firm.

https://www.ashurst.com/about-ashurst.aspx?id_Content=10038

Office for National Statistics

Spectrum is the ONS' group for LGBT* staff, acting as both an advisor on how policy and practices can influence LGBT* people and as a support network for those who need it. The group has organised several events, both on its own and in collaboration with other LGBT* groups, and has been named Best Welsh Employee Network Group 2013.

<http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/about-ons/who-ons-are/diversity/spectrum/index.html>

External Resources

Chartered Institute of Housing

The housing sector has covered significant ground in terms of diversity, and the CIH has produced a report on the positive influence of networking groups on business, as well as the individual. It includes a top 10 tips for a successful community group, and the points Stonewall look for when analysing diversity initiatives. Examples are included from within the housing sector, which may not have direct relevance but can certainly be translated across to STEM organisations.

http://www.cih.org/publication-free/display/vpathDCR/templatedata/cih/publication-free/data/How_to_use_diversity_network_groups_to_improve_services

Health and Safety Executive

The HSE have developed guidelines, “How to Organise and Run Focus Groups”, for work-related stress that are generic enough to be taken into diversity work. It outlines the purpose of focus groups, how they should be run, and how to action any recommendations.

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards/pdfs/focusgroups.pdf>

Liverpool John Moores University

The university has put together a guide for establishing a staff network group, with a particular focus on HEI institutions. It includes how to run the network, how to promote it and what sorts of outcomes can be expected. There are case studies spanning a range of organisations, from county councils to other universities, and particular emphasis on the importance of having an advocate at the top.

http://www.ljmu.ac.uk/CSD/CSD_Docs/Staff_Networks_A4_GUIDE.pdf

Opportunities for Collaboration

There are some good opportunities for collaboration here, both in developing new diversity network groups and collaborating across existing ones. Those with well-established affinity groups could be called upon for best practice information on setting them up and ensuring that they are run smoothly. There may even be cause for those responsible for the diversity groups to disseminate why they are so beneficial to the organisation, so as to encourage members perhaps more unsure about establishing them to begin.

Another possibility is creating diversity networks across member bodies in related fields. This way responsibility for the group can be spread across multiple organisations, widening the reach and also relieving smaller bodies from some of the administrative burden of such groups. It could also mean the funding available is greater than a single-bodied group, enabling the network to put on events or create initiatives with more impact, disseminating the message of inclusivity further.

Finally, network groups could collaborate on the events or initiatives themselves, whilst remaining solely in the domain of their organisation. For example, women’s networks from similar sectors could work together to create a “returning to work” day of lectures and skills workshops to increase the number of women returning to the sector after a career break. These events could also be open to men to ensure inclusivity rather than exclusivity¹, and to encourage amity between underrepresented and majority groups.

This document was originally written January 2014. All links were live in February 2015.

¹ Inclusivity vs. Exclusivity is well discussed in the Liverpool JMU resource, with reasonable arguments for each. It is ultimately up to the members to decide which approach, or combination of approaches, their network will take.