

INCLUSION NEWS

The Newsletter of the Equalities and Diversity Team of Central and North West London NHS Foundation Trust, bringing you examples of good practice, information and updates on developments within Equalities, Diversity and Human Rights.

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Book Review

The Value of Difference: Eliminating bias in organisations, by Binna Kandola

The author provides an in-depth exploration and analysis of the basis and behaviours that produce bias in the workplace. He argues that diversity as a whole has hit a glass ceiling and that laws, policies and increased awareness haven't produced the changes in the way organisations work or the lives of those affected by those organisations. He suggests that is fundamentally because we are all biased, and that unless we accept this and then find ways to understand how we can reduce our bias, progress will always be limited.

In the opening chapter the author contrasts the meaning of 'diversity' and 'inclusion', in many ways diversity often meaning what the organisation looks like and who is employed by the organisation, whilst inclusion is more about how an organisation behaves, it's culture, how it involves people and how those people feel being part of the organisation. As a service provider, we might extend this to consider service users, the diversity of those who access our services and the sense of inclusion and involvement that those service users have in their experience of services.

Chapter 2 is devoted to understanding why we are biased with a particular focus on prejudice, stereotyping and the psychology of the 'in-group' and the 'out-group'. He outlines processes through which we come to identify with a particular group and the value judgements that can follow, and how this sets the tone within an organisation. He then moves on to address the theme of 'Old Boy's network' and other ways in which organisations can be biased.

He makes the point that in a diverse society there should be no need to have to make a business case for diversity, and yet it remains an area where this approach is harboured.

He cites research that has shown how diversity in many different forms enhances an organisation. He then devotes a further chapter to addressing 'inclusive leadership', describing a set of competencies that he argues you should expect to see where people are consciously working for diversity: developing people, valuing individuals, championing diversity, a strategic diversity focus. These competencies are then broken down into a set of attributes for each competency.

Throughout the book there are many references to research and the author's own experience of working with organisations and undertaking training. References are extensive, providing valuable pathways for the interested reader to follow and to explore more fully the evidence-base for the arguments presented.

Importantly, the book is not simply an analysis of weaknesses and failings, it provides constructive advice and tools to be applied to offset and/or eliminate bias. The author ends by re-emphasising the fact that 'organisations are populated by and created by people', and whilst 'leaders ... have a critical role in establishing the culture... everyone plays their part in creating the culture and this needs to be recognised'. He points out that 'to capitalise on diversity ... we need to take responsibility not only for our actions but for accepting that bias exists. It's part of all of us...'. He highlights a three stage process. Once we can accept that we are biased in diverse ways, and can then begin to understand our own biases, then we can put into place the final action of a three stage process: do something about it.

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