



EMPLOYMENT
BY DEBORAH LAW

Conflict and diversity – good for business if managed well

According to Statistics NZ, 25 per cent of New Zealanders are foreign-born and the population comprises more than 200 ethnicities, with 160 languages spoken. Auckland is noted as one of the most culturally diverse cities in the world, and the trend towards greater diversity is accelerating.

But what is diversity? What is culture? And what does that mean for today's businesses?

It is a myth that cultural diversity is best understood through lifestyle, food, language and other visible means; in fact culture, diversity and inclusion are best understood through values, expectations, goals and styles of communication.

For many employers and employees, finding a common "language" that respects, embraces and values our differences is not simple or straightforward. How often have you heard something like, "We just don't seem to be able to communicate", or "I can't get her to see my perspective on this", or "He/she just doesn't understand me."?

Frequently, one consequence of this type of interaction is conflict, which in turn impacts relationships, teams and productivity. Some of us have a

tendency to seek conflict and others avoid it at all costs. Neither approach is entirely successful - with both being stressful. Yet, in any workplace, conflict, like diversity, is normal and necessary, and communication is the bridge towards greater understanding and wider appreciation.

Of course, conflict doesn't always have to be negative or difficult: many of the highest performing teams around the globe have positive strategies for handling conflict, realising it as an opportunity to work through the tension and move forward. What's needed, though, are the skills and environment to make it safe for all to contribute, and to ensure the diverse perspectives are heard and valued.

According to an article in Harvard Business Review some high-performing teams encourage an openness to productive conflict, prioritise responsibility over blame, and even quantify the impact of the conflict, in order to create alignment around the gravity of the issue.

Communication tool

One tool that EMA uses frequently in our workshops to help members with workplace communication and find a common language is TetraMap®, a simple, easy-to-understand

behavioural model and communication tool - developed here in Aotearoa NZ. A facilitated event using TetraMap makes learning fun, enjoyable and memorable.

EMA has integrated it into both public and in-house programmes and has made it our communication model of choice. TetraMap poses the question, Why Are You Like That?, and provides a process for a facilitated learning event on how our differences add value to the whole. The approach reflects the words of American businessman, author and educator, the late Steven Covey: "Strength lies in differences, not similarities".

This simple, natural approach has been proven to resonate with people and organisations from all over the world, including Asia, Europe and the US.

For many EMA member organisations, the biggest benefits from learning the TetraMap model are the simple-to-understand, easy-to-remember common language, and the adaptability of the programme to be contextualised simply and easily to their particular business challenges. For participants, the beauty is how quickly their learning is applied, without complex jargon, enabling them to apply the skills both at work and at home.

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