

Diversity management

Business, Company



This report gives a general introduction to M&S's (Marks & Spencer) Diversity policy, dealing with different aspects in reality and ideally. With ample examples and illustrations comprising many specific points, I demonstrate my own argument on the outstanding features of M&S's Diversity policy along with its inefficiencies.

The main body is divided into four parts: the first part introduces the background of M&S, together with some examples analyzing how M&S could successfully be accepted by the British people in such a short time, including the return policy, only selling British-made goods policy, etc. And then, some common classifications of M&S's marketing concepts are discussed, including its mission statement, vision and values.

Thirdly, even though M&S's Diversity policy seems to be satisfying enough, from my point of view, there are kinds of inadequacies remaining in it. For example, uncovered ratio of males and females, the unequal percentage of the top managers' gender, etc. In the coming part, the conclusions and the resolutions of these inadequacies in M&S's Diversity policy are discussed, which are completely based on my own understanding.

“ The basic concept of Managing Diversity accepts that the workforce consists of a diverse population of people consisting of visible and non-visible differences including factors such as sex, age, background, race, disability, personality and work style and is founded on the premise that harnessing these differences will create a productive environment in which everyone feels valued, and where all talents are fully utilised and in which organisational goals are met.” (Kandola & Fullerton, 1998)

To fully exploit the potential of each employee and turn their unique working skills into business advantage, it is of great importance to manage diversity in workplace. By cultivating such diversity, it enhances team creativity, problem-solving, and innovation and consequently, is an elementary strategy for employers nowadays. To remain competitive, organisations would have to attract and recruit people from diverse groups of the population. Moreover, diversity enriches the workplace by enlarging employee perspectives, offering greater resources for problem resolution, and strengthening the teams.

Managing diversity is more than semantics. A much deeper significance lies in the social and economic effects of including hitherto marginalised people in work. (Maxwell, 2004) As a consequence, it is essential to study the fairness of the Diversity policy among a company.

M&S's background

In 1884, M&S was founded by a partnership between Michael Marks from Slonim, and Thomas Spencer from Yorkshire in Leeds , which is a major British multinational retailer headquartered in the City of Westminster, London, with 703 stores in the United Kingdom and 361 stores spread across more than 40 countries.(Store Finder, 2011) In the next coming few years, they open market stalls in many locations around the North West of England. It specialises in the selling of clothing and luxury food products. In the early 20th century, M&S made its reputation on a policy of only selling British-made goods which discontinued in 2002.

It built up long term relationships with British manufacturers, and sold food and clothes under the " St Michael" brand, which was introduced in 1928. The St Michael honours Michael Marks. It also accepted the return of unwanted items, giving a full cash refund if the receipt was shown, no matter how long ago the product was purchased, which was unusual for the time. (Chislett, 2009) It adopted a 90-day returns policy in 2005 and on 12 April 2009 the refund policy changed once again to 35 days. The company put its main focus on goods quality, including a 1957 stocking size measuring system. (Chislett, 2009) It had a reputation for offering fair value for money, for most of its history. By sticking to the slogan," The customer is always and completely right", M&S is successfully being the head retailer.

M&S's marketing concepts

The mission statement of M&S is divided into three parts; their vision aims at to set a standard against which others are measured, the mission is to make aspirational quality accessible to all and the value which is to attain quality, value, service, innovation and trust.

The company has two reportable geographic segments: UK and international. As I mentioned before, M&S's operation can be categorized under two divisions: clothing and food. The clothing division product includes men's wear, women's wear, children's wear, foot wear and home wear. The food division concentrates on providing fresh, healthy, and natural food. It chain of 205 franchised simple food stores runs in Heathrow Airport , railway stations, and motor service areas, so that its customers can shop between visits to the company's main stores. (Company Overview 2009)

M&S claims to create an in-store environment which represents the aspirations of the brands target consumer along with expanding the brands current target market. In order to capture a value from customers to create profit and customer equity, M&S always concentrating on developing and maintaining successful relationship with the target customers.

M&S launched an initiative on 15 January 2007, named “ Plan A”, to remarkably increase the environmental sustainability of the business within 5 years and expect to cost £200 million. (BBC News, 2007) M&S is looking forward to sending no waste to landfill, becoming carbon neutral, extending sustainable sourcing, helping improve the lives of people in their supply chain, and helping employees and customers live a healthier life-style.

M&S's Diversity policy

The definition of ‘ diversity’ reflected in the multiplicity of meanings in the literature is unclear. Generally, diversity contains all types of individual differences extend beyond race and gender, such as age, religion, ethnicity, disability status, sexual preference, geographic location, personality and others. Diversity refers to create an inclusive culture which takes advantage of the talents of all would-be members.(Herring, 2009)

Comparing a diverse workforce to a homogeneous one, the former is generally beneficial for business, such as corporate profits and earnings. However, greater diversity may also bring about lower quality because it can lead to positions being filled with unqualified workers (Rothman et, 2003).

In M&S, the company is committed to provide an active Equal Opportunities Policy from employees’ recruitment and selection, through training and

development, appraisal and promotion to retirement. They promise they promote a working environment free from discrimination, harassment, and victimisation where every worker will receive equal treatment regardless of age, ethnic or national origin, hours of work, race, gender, disability, colour, gender reassignment, sexual orientation, maternity, etc. All decisions refer to employment practices will be impersonal, avoiding from bias and based exclusively on individual performance and work criteria. M&S is committing itself to be an organisation using everyone's abilities and talents and striving for everyone feel valued.

At the same time, M&S always emphasis on raising staff awareness that support the Equal Opportunities aims by designing training programmes all through the time. In order to protect both individuals and the company, M&S complies with the law and communicates to the stakeholders all the kinds of responsibilities.

However, there are several problems existing in the recruiting process which go against the Equal Opportunities policy from my research. Firstly, M&S declares to the public that they are willing to obey the Equal Opportunities policy to recruit employees, but there are not any figures released by M&S showed the accurate number of the people they hire, the gender proportion, the scales of the disabled, the coloured people, and the foreign people, or the wage differentials between males and females. As a result, I can assume that the Human Resource Department would concern more about the company's benefit rather than the employees'. To be more precise, the company would be more likely to hire a male than a female in a physical work department. And this do be a bias.

Secondly, from the M&S's career website, there are four section managers provided, Kate for Section Manger, Paul for Menswear Section Manager, George for Food Section Manager, and Sven for Menswear Section Manager, among which, solely a quarter is female. From my own perspective, it is not fair for the female employees. Take Vivienne Westwood company for example, it was established by a successful businesswoman named Dame Vivienne Westwood, and now, it dominates in being responsible for bringing modern punk and new wave fashions into the mainstream, obtaining a great achievement. Namely, females can be capable of top manager positions as males do.

Thirdly, M&S recruits around 250 university graduates in the UK each year and it has a good relationship with graduate career advisors. (The times 100) From these numbers, we can tell that M&S gives an extraordinary priority to the graduates. Even though the company solves the problems of graduate employment, this policy may cause the reduction of the employment opportunities for the other members of the society. From the company's perspective, hiring the graduates is able to bring multiple fresh ideas into the company, due to the fact that the graduates are generally energetic and creative. However, the minority of the graduates have any working experience that can contribute to the work. Worse still is that, graduates from other European countries, such as the Germany, leave the university at the age of 27.(The times 100) Otherwise, it is unfair for the people without attending university.

Moreover, there is no relevant policy combating the discrimination or the harassment in the company. Different managers have different attitudes

towards the behaviors which may result in damaging impact on the 'problem' employees. Taking the 3rd Seminar case study for example, some of the staff member likes making fun of the foreign employees' accents, which is likely to result in a horrible influence on the foreigners. It can not be denied that it is unfair for the foreigners. As far as I am concerned, it is necessary for M&S to formulate an accurate policy to avoid from these kind of unfairness.

Conclusions and recommendations

Diversity management includes administering social environments and systems, along with organisational climate and procedures. (Bergen, etc, 2002) The purpose is to create a positive working environment for all employees. Studying on Diversity policy is contributing to tackle the social and economic issues. This report is explaining the goodness and drawbacks of M&S's Diversity policy by providing the information of M&S's history, along with its marketing strategy. M&S's Diversity policy clearly clarified what they are avoiding from, including age problems, ethnic or national origin, hours of work, race, gender, disability, colour, gender reassignment, sexual orientation, maternity, etc. However, the Diversity policy still can not be satisfying enough to to meet the developing market situation.

From my own perspective, here are some suggestions for M&S to accomplish the Diversity policy referring to the ineffectiveness I have mentioned before. To begin with, M&S is ought to uncover the the gender proportion in each department , the scales of the disabled, the coloured people, and the foreign people, along with the wage differentials between males and females. Even

through these figures are regarded as commercial secrets, the company can release the long-dated data, which seems not to be that confidential.

Once the company releases the information, people can tell from the figures whether M&S gives employees a fair working environment or not, and M&S is possibly to gain a increasing reputation. In all, not only the company can benefit from frankness, but the people who are interested in M&S. And then, make the top managers' gender ratio equal. From the Vivienne Westwood's successful experience, it can not be denied that females are not no match for males.

By equaling the ratio, female employees can be fully encouraged because they know they get the access to be the top managers and male employees are also totally inspired for they understand they have a powerful competitor. Thirdly, make the recruitment opportunities even between the graduates and other people. A job position should be provided to someone who really wants it and likes it, not just for the one whose education background fits it. The last but not the least, put the Diversity policy into practice, which should not just be an announcement, but a standard of behavior.