

diversity in Switzerland

where are we now?

By Ellie Filler, Brigitte Liebig, Marion Fengler-Veith, Kübra Varan

synopsis

There are a number of challenges facing the Swiss market as it faces issues of sustainability, globalization and the war for talent. For some diversity is simply political correctness smuggled into the work place by another name, for others it is a crucial aspect of delivering strategy in increasingly complex, fragmented and global markets.

This was a first national survey on diversity and diversity management of the Top 500 organizations in Switzerland. Recognising that it is important to bring a business perspective to academic rigour it was co-authored by Ellie Filler, Heidrick & Struggles, and Prof. Dr. Brigitte Liebig, University of Applied Science Northwestern Switzerland (UAS). Drawing on the opinions and insights of the senior CEOs and Chief Human Resources Officers, the aim of the study was to capture the current reality and the perceptions of diversity as a business driver in 2005 in Switzerland.

In management and organizational sciences 'diversity' is used a term describing a variety of social and cultural differences between people. For the purpose of this study in Switzerland we focused primarily on differences based on gender (female/male) and nationality (being Swiss or non-Swiss national).

the current status quo

The status quo shows implicit contradictions and polarities in Switzerland today. It reflects a nation in flux. On one side keen to recognise and adopt best practice in diversity, almost 10% of companies polled in 2004 make the inclusion of diversity candidates an explicit requirement for promotion short lists.

- 50% of participants think that diversity is undervalued as a business driver in Switzerland
- 72% of participants attribute the apathy to 'traditional cultural values' in Switzerland

Yet despite this there is also apathy: 73% of CEOs and HR Directors think the make up of the organization reflects their customer base.

the diversity employer

Companies that demonstrate the most commitment to diversity currently in Switzerland are typically

- very small organizations with fewer than 250 employees
- or very large companies with more than 10'000 employees but headquartered outside the country.
- Financial services & high tech organizations - both industries have undergone the biggest M&A and consolidation, in addition to rapid growth.
- Organizations that are prepared to make risk based decisions.

diversity in Switzerland: what next?

recommendations

- For a diversity initiative to be effective it is not enough to appoint a diversity manager - it must be owned at the highest level within the organization, both with the CEO and the Board, or it will fail.
- You don't know you have a problem unless you can measure it: 68% of Swiss companies are not measuring their diversity. Repeatedly we found that unless diversity was tracked within organizations it went largely ignored.
- Awareness is vital to the success of diversity within an organization. 80% of companies in Switzerland do not educate their managers on how to deal with diversity. This means people instinctively default to habitual behaviour.

project team

Ellie Filler is a Principal with Heidrick & Struggles based in Zurich and focused on the Life Sciences industry as well as Human Resources and Communications functions. Prior to executive search, Ellie spent over 12 years with some of Australia's largest corporate institutions in financial services, telecommunications and IT in a Human Resources function. Her expertise lays in general human resources management and learning and development. Ellie was involved in a variety of projects focusing on bringing diversity practices into organizations.

Dr. Brigitte Liebig is Professor of Social and Organizational Psychology at the Department of Applied Psychology, University of Applied Science, Northwestern Switzerland (UAS NWCH). She studied psychology and sociology in Frankfurt/M., Berlin and Zurich, and holds a Ph.D. in Social Sciences from Zurich University. Since 1993, she had directed various research projects on a national and international level, and teaches at Universities in Switzerland and abroad. In her current research she focuses on corporate social responsibility, gender and organization, as well as intercultural cooperation and knowledge management within and between organizations.

Dr. Marion Fengler-Veith is an Assignment Manager with Heidrick & Struggles. She joined the firm in 2000 and focuses on international executive search assignments and executive assessments in the consumer goods, chemical and healthcare industries. Marion holds a Masters degree in chemistry from Würzburg University and a Ph.D. in organic chemistry from Stuttgart University. Prior to joining Heidrick & Struggles, she worked for several years as a chemist in Research & Development within academia and industry in Germany, the UK and Switzerland.

Kübra Varan, former Senior Assignment Manager with Heidrick & Struggles is today with a global bank. With a master's degree in engineering (dipl. Ing. ETH), she started at the ABB R&D Center in Baden. She then spent ten years in Switzerland and Turkey in different roles with international consulting organizations in the area of pension funds and executive search.

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