

Diversity, and how to de

People who work in the voluntary sector like to think it's a pretty inclusive place. While their friends in the private sector earn all the money and those in the public sector have job security, they at least know they are part of a sector that is open, diverse and, all in all, a good place to work. If people from minority backgrounds cannot rise to the top in the voluntary sector, where can they do so?

But try counting the number of charity leaders you know of who are not white, or who are disabled, or who are gay or lesbian. Chances are you haven't used all the fingers on one hand. Look at your own chief executive and chairman. It is very likely that they are white heterosexual men in their fifties with no disabilities.

As Julia Oliver, a partner at charity recruitment firm GatenbySanderson, says: "At senior management levels within voluntary organisations, black and minority ethnic groups, women and disabled people are woefully under-represented." She adds that this is no different from other sectors, but the wheels of change are turning more slowly within the voluntary sector, which she says needs to work harder in this area.

Not only does this sit uncomfortably with the sector's view of itself as inclusive and diverse, it is also thought to be damaging the sector's performance. A wider level of diversity among leaders would lead to greater innovation and empathy with beneficiaries, and it would allow the sector to draw from a wider pool of leadership talent.

However, it is notoriously difficult for any organisation to foster greater diversity among its leaders. There are very few quick fixes, and many of the actions it is necessary to take can be highly controversial. Progress is likely to be slow and difficult, but progress is in the air. Here are six steps you can take to help your organisation develop a more diverse range of leaders.

1 Be prepared to face opposition

Not everyone believes an organisation should aim to have greater diversity among its leaders. Many people believe that leaders should be chosen purely on merit and that their ethnicity, gender, disability, sexual orientation, age and so on should be entirely irrelevant. If you believe differently and you want to build a more diverse leadership, you must be prepared to face opposition.

Cyril Husbands has recently joined HR consultancy Berkshire Consulting from Victim Support. He says: "Voluntary organisations must live up to the values they promote, but not everyone sees it this way. It's especially difficult when funders disagree with the work you're doing on diversity, and in



some cases you need to accept that you'll lose funding because of this. In my experience, however, once they've seen the results of a more diverse leadership, most funders are quick to return to the fold."

2 Audit your selection process

Employment Opportunities is a national charity that helps organisations in all sectors recruit staff at all levels from a more diverse range of backgrounds. Chief executive Karin Pappenheim says that a key step for all organisations is to audit the selection process to ensure it is entirely non-discriminatory.

"It is important to look thoroughly at every aspect of your selection process, because so much discrimination is inadvertent. For example, online application forms can discriminate against people with dyslexia," she says. "Some conditions affect

an individual's ability to communicate, so you need to make it clear to all applicants that you will make reasonable adjustments. Just making the changes isn't enough; you also need to communicate to applicants that you're doing it."

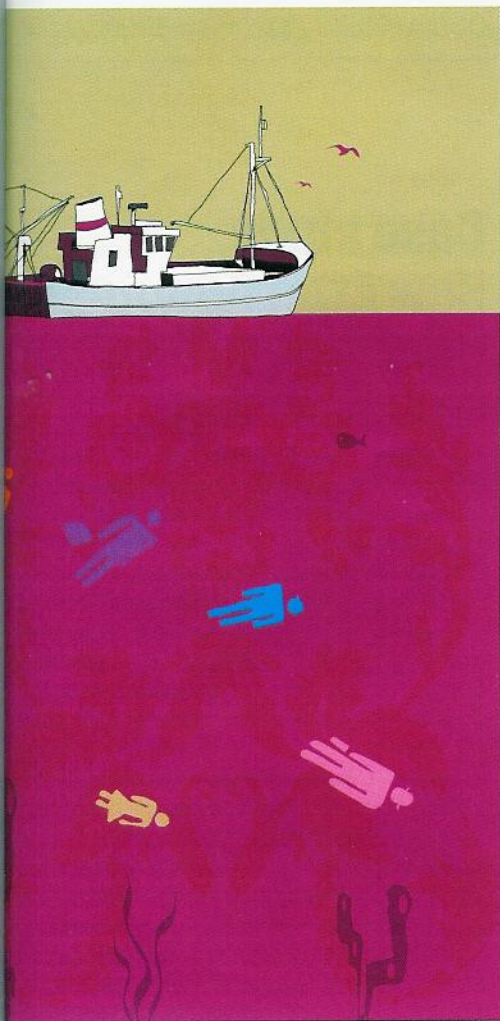
3 Widen your recruitment net

The potential leaders of your organisation might not all read *The Sunday Times's* appointments section, or whatever mainstream media you use to advertise your top positions. So it makes sense to advertise in media that are consumed by the minority groups you are trying to reach.

You should also go to the right careers fairs and link into networks that will help you reach the right people. Peter Armitage, director of Hays Executive, a recruitment consultancy, says: "It's not enough to put an ad in the black and minority ethnic press. You need to get involved with groups such as

Develop it

When you're seeking new senior staff, getting the right mix of applicants is easier said than done. Alex Blyth offers six steps to expanding your reach



PETER MAC

Case study 1 Christian Aid's call to India

Daleep Mukarji was originally a medical doctor in India and had never worked in the UK. So he was surprised in 1997 to receive a call from Christian Aid's head office in London asking if he would apply for the post of director of the charity. "The board took a big risk hiring someone from my background," he says, "but it was also a bold statement about the diversity and internationalism of the organisation."

Nine years on, he is still in the position, and he offers this advice to other charities that are keen to increase the diversity of their leaders: "Make a genuine commitment to it and start with the board. Provide diversity training to everyone in the organisation and encourage a culture of respect. There is still much more that Christian Aid has to do in this area. We need to do more to encourage people with disabilities to join our organisation, especially at a leadership level. We're working on our access facilities and the board monitors it continuously."

Case study 2 How Scope saw the potential in disabled recruits

In the past three years, Scope has dramatically increased the number of its employees – including its leaders – who have disabilities. In 2003, about 4 per cent of its 3,500 employees had disabilities, so the organisation decided to take positive action.

Chris Sherwood, access and diversity manager, says: "We actively targeted disabled people, telling them we welcomed applications, advertising in publications such as *Disability Now* and working with local disability groups to encourage people at all levels to apply for jobs here.

"We also worked to raise the profile of the issue within the organisation. Seventy per cent of disabled people have impairments that aren't immediately obvious, so they'll often keep them hidden at the workplace. Through training and networking groups, we encouraged our staff to be open about their disabilities, and many of them did come out."

The charity took advantage of a loophole in the law that allows positive discrimination in favour of people with disabilities. Now 20 per cent of the organisation's employees and a third of its senior management are people who have disabilities.

"We're now practising what we preach," says Sherwood. "I can't think of any other organisation where one in five of its employees is disabled. Not only has this empowered our workforce, it also means we're more reflective of those in our user base and better able to respond to their needs."

5 Know where positive discrimination is possible

For many people, discrimination is discrimination, whether it is positive or negative. However, if you are serious about creating a more diverse leadership in a short space of time, you may well have to discriminate positively. Jim Lister, a specialist in employment law at solicitors Pannone LLP, outlines the dangers involved in doing this.

"The purpose of the discrimination legislation is to ensure equality, not to award a particular minority an unfair advantage," he says. "For example, an employer cannot appoint a candidate from an ethnic minority ahead of a better qualified white candidate simply to improve its diversity figures. To do so would unlawfully discriminate against the white candidate."

Nevertheless, there are a few key exceptions to this rule.

First, Lister confirms that some limited forms of positive action on the grounds of sex, race, religion or sexual orientation are acceptable, such as offering under-represented minority groups access to facilities for training or encouraging them to apply to do particular work.

"Second, because of a loophole in the legislation, it is not unlawful to discriminate positively in favour of a disabled person; they may be appointed or promoted over a non-disabled candidate," Lister adds. "In fact, because of the obligation to make reasonable adjustments for disabled employees, in some cases the employer may be legally required to discriminate positively in their favour."

6 Focus on the benefits

Finally, you should emphasise the benefits of diverse leadership to all of your stakeholders. It is easy for diversity to become an organisational goal to which everyone subscribes, but few are sure why they do so. Christine Lloyd, executive director for people and organisational development at Cancer Research UK, stresses this point.

"Diversity shouldn't become simply a mantra," she says. "It's vital to keep on reinforcing why it is so important."

Lloyd outlines those benefits. "Embracing diversity allows us to access a much wider pool of talent, and generates innovation and creativity," she says. "Most critically, though, diversity is fundamental to our work. Cancer doesn't discriminate, so our beneficiaries are as diverse as society. If we're to do our work properly, we need to reflect that diversity at all levels of our organisation."

our Inclusion Network, a group of 750 people from a wide range of backgrounds."

4 Get help from other charities

When the British Red Cross decided, just over two years ago, that it needed to increase the number of its leaders with disabilities, it went to Scope for help. Fiona Adamson, living diversity project manager at the British Red Cross, says: "Scope's leadership recruitment programme is helping us find the leaders of the future by arranging placements of up to a year for high-flying graduates.

"We've had three so far and have learned a lot about what it means to have disabled people in the organisation and what we need to do to encourage greater representation," she adds. "Scope's assistance has been invaluable. Not only has it helped select the right individuals, but it has trained them and us to ensure the placements are successful."