

## Culture and choosing the right executive talent

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**We are in a 'melting pot' of cultures within the Middle East, quite literally hundreds of nationalities, live work and play amongst each other creating a buzzing, colourful mélange of faith, food and formalities.** Whilst this is undoubtedly a positive thing, it requires a 'give and take' attitude in the workplace – a 'workplace culture' that needs to be socially cohesive whilst sensitively managing the needs of the personal and the professional towards the common goal of the organisation.

So how do we manage culture in the workplace? How do we ensure that potential candidates can make the right fit for both themselves and their new potential employees?

In 2010, as executive search experts, we wouldn't be doing our job properly if we weren't carefully considering the ease into which an employee may fit into their new role. In a region where the majority of workers are expatriate, and literally from across the globe – how do we define culture and how do we help both the individual and the organisation through the multicultural recruitment processes?

From a human resource perspective, cultural awareness training and intercultural competency are crucial for the success of global organisations and their most important resource – their people. International recruitment, overseas assignments and relocations and company-wide training programmes all require an understanding of how culture impacts on the management and development of human resources.

Never has it been more important to get your employee relations, training and management right. From the vital recruitment process and ongoing, when companies are looking more closely at the Profit and Loss sheet, retention of staff is key. Constantly re-recruiting isn't an option for many businesses in the present economic situation, so getting it right first time is vital.

Diversity in the workplace is like diversity in everyday life – it helps us to understand, learn and benefit from the thoughts and ideas of others we would otherwise and unnecessarily be cautious of. It can be argued that those who go through life with an unwillingness to embrace and understand diversity are often the same people who become ignorant of the benefits that diversity can bring and less interesting as individuals themselves because of it.

Understanding who we are as individuals, has a lot to do with where we grew up and the people we interacted with and learnt from during a particular time. When people talk

about multicultural societies they often imagine a coming together of a mixture of races and religions with different living and behavioral patterns. This can certainly qualify as being multicultural but it doesn't have to be that obvious. Anything different to your own beliefs and way of living can be classed as a variant to your own culture. Having the basic knowledge and understanding that we are all different in some aspects and being able to respect each other's differences is a major start to living and working in a friendly and productive diversified society.

Most of us know that diversity means inclusion of people of different backgrounds and cultures into all sectors of the workplace. Is this something that all companies can realistically strive to achieve? If so, why? Is it conscience? Profits? Government or societal pressure?

At Vision Executive Search, first of all, we educate our clients, the employers on the benefits of a more culturally diverse workplace. In the UAE in particular, although expatriates are the majority, some organisations still employ specific nationalities, mainly for 'ease' as this ensures a cohesive workplace as the employees all share the same heritage and cultural values.

Many companies will not pursue diversification until they perceive direct bottom-line benefits. Why "rock the boat"? The fact is there exist a number of good business reasons to champion diversity in the workplace. Employee retention can be much higher for companies that have greater diversity. People like to feel comfortable in their work environment. No one likes to be "the only one". A diversified workforce allows people to socialize and relax with co-workers which leads to higher job satisfaction and less employee turnover.

With today's shrinking labour pool, companies will have to put aside old definitions of "fit" and employ people of different colors and cultures. But recruiting minorities and women isn't enough; organisations that want their fair share of talented people will have to compete to hire, retain and motivate minorities, women and others different from the mainstream.

We advise companies to ensure internal corporate support to help advance employees' career goals and give timely and specific feedback about performance and to build a workplace community that supports open dialogue to discuss perceived discrimination that could impede minority advancement.

While many companies are recognising that a diversified workforce can provide a greater pool from which to choose new employees, they are not yet familiar with how to locate these minority employees. Although the standard answer is to look in the same places you look for other employees, with a diversified workforce they will often find you. This happens as a result of contact with employees of your company or your clients.

As we move toward the elimination of discriminatory practices in the workplace, emphasis on a diversified workforce increases. The savvy company will stay ahead of the curve and lead the way, thereby reaping the benefits of a progressive policy.

When it comes to helping individuals into new roles within the UAE – if they are coming from outside the company we will spend time with the person to educate them on the ‘rules’ of working in the Middle East. Many are obvious and many are unspoken, so we will always endeavor to help a new employee through the potential social minefield that working here can be if one is not used to working in such a diverse, environment.

The obvious training is in the recognition that the UAE is a Muslim nation, and many activities that are acceptable elsewhere or amongst different cultures, simply aren’t here. Even the fact that the ‘weekend’ covers different days can be confusing, and, as Dubai in particular is one of the less strict Emirates, it is still important to understand the legalities of the land.

When it comes to the actual workplace, vision Executive search help the employee understand that it is important to acknowledge everyone with the same sense of acceptability. This pays huge dividends in how others will feel noticed, respected and feel like they are being appreciated and understood. We help them to understand that equal and proper use of ‘Tools for the Job’ will ensure fairness and prosperity. The ability to do the job successfully comes first.

A person’s overall ability to do their job successfully and follow procedures accordingly should be an over-riding factor in what deems an individual a valued part of any working organization, regardless of origin, and an understanding that diversity within any group helps each member of that group feed off of each other’s thoughts and ideas, which means being able to listen to and appreciate other peoples viewpoints on any given subject is what can help individuals better understand and appreciate the meaning and complexity of those subjects.

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