



Diversity Works
for London

Reuters case study - Using mentoring to develop workforce diversity



Organisational background

Reuters is a global information and financial services company and a trusted brand operating in 94 countries around the world. It provides tailored information and services for the financial services, media and corporate markets. It employs approximately 17,000 staff and over 370,000 professionals use Reuters' information and products. Reuters' diverse employee base comprises hundreds of nationalities, cultures and backgrounds, reflecting the different markets that it operates in and also contributing to the innovative ways that it serves its wide range of customers.

How Reuters started on the diversity journey

An important part of Reuters' success is its earned status as a highly trusted brand with a reputation for independence, integrity and freedom from bias. From a business perspective it is important that its employment and diversity practices represent this to its clients and its workforce. Some of the early diversity steps came about because the Diversity Council in the Americas were considering how best to make an impact, particularly on senior management. The Council recognised that the company did not have a 'training' culture and that people tended to learn through practical initiatives that were experiential.

A key business and diversity issue is to increase the numbers of women and racial/ethnic minorities recruited to and working for the organisation. The reason for focusing on these areas is that Reuters is already culturally diverse because of the extent of its operations across the globe and so has a rich mix of backgrounds. However the organisation has recognised there is still a 'leaky pipeline' in a number of critical areas, and executive teams do not yet include a sustainable level of women and/or ethnic minorities. Research suggests that representation by gender and race or indeed any strand needs to achieve 30% in the organisational structures to improve the situation.

One of the first diversity activities was Reverse Mentoring, which started in 2003 in the Americas. The initiative started small with the purpose of targeting senior managers to help them understand how underrepresented groups felt in the organisation, for example how it would feel for an Afro-American woman to walk into a meeting attended predominately by white male managers. This initiative was expanded and developed over time. A diversity specialist was recruited to join Reuters in the Americas in 2005 to give impetus to what was already happening.

Further initiatives followed around the world, often developing organically and driven by local priorities. As a global organisation with three geographical hubs – Europe, Middle East & Africa, The Americas and Asia – diversity issues and understanding vary depending on the cultural and legal context.

However, a recent ambition communicated by the CEO has been to introduce a global diversity programme, with standardised approaches in those areas in which it is sensible to have a consistent approach.

Accountability for diversity will lie with line managers, and progress with the senior leadership. The Group Leadership Team (GLT), comprised of the organisation's most senior managers globally, will monitor progress biannually using a diversity balance scorecard. The organisation's Global Diversity Advisory Council (a group that oversaw Reuters' diversity activity) has been disbanded and will be replaced by councils at regional and business unit level to monitor and shape change.

The key changes and activities that are being used to drive diversity forwards are:

- a recently developed 18 month diversity strategy, endorsed by the GLT, and written with input from a number of groups around Reuters including: staff networks ('Affinity Groups'), external advisors, internal diversity specialists such as former Reverse Mentors and people from the human resources team
- a dedicated budget for diversity activities and some central resources
- the embedding of diversity through using the business area line managers to influence team behaviours around diversity and inclusion

The group are currently putting together a balanced scorecard for diversity and will, amongst other metrics, measure the following:

- percentage of different groups (e.g. gender) at different levels
- percentages in talent pool
- diversity analysis of the leadership team's succession plans

Another source of monitoring is the annual employee survey which demonstrates that there has been an improvement in employees' perception about how diversity is managed within the organisation.

Reuters have learnt a number of lessons along the diversity journey. These include:

- the need for local participation. Going forward, Affinity Groups will have a key role to play in supporting all diversity activities and helping drive progress
- in order for global initiatives to be successful, there is a need to start off small in a manageable way
- focusing on initiatives that fit the culture. Reverse Mentoring worked at Reuters because it suited the way people learn in the organisation
- the importance of thinking about how to obtain emotional engagement, which leads to passion and energy to do more rather than focusing on intellectual engagement

- developing early senior leadership commitment to help embed practices into the organisation. The GLT now talks about diversity and it is a routine part of human resources programmes and policies
- having initiatives that are both top down and bottom up ensures that diversity is embedded into the culture

It is too early to quantify the results of all these initiatives but there is buy-in to the notion of building up a diverse workforce as a way to grow new streams of revenue and thereby create commercial advantage for the organisation. However there are some positive signals, for example, a couple of women appointed into very senior roles.

Why Reuters undertook this initiative

Reverse Mentoring is a process in which, through a rigorous selection process, high-performing staff from under-represented groups ('mentors') are matched with senior managers ('mentees') to help the more senior person gain knowledge and insights that will enable them to incorporate diversity into their daily business. The objective of this programme was to enhance the understanding of diversity issues within the business units; to increase leadership, to aid conflict management, to improve the coaching skills of mentoring pairs; and to encourage frank discussion.

An underpinning concept is that, via this process, senior managers will gain knowledge and insights, enabling them to connect with diversity and inclusion issues. A very positive by-product of the process (but not a core goal in itself) is the development and exposure that mentors will gain from their involvement.

Over 70 senior managers have participated in this programme since its launch in 2003.

Implementation steps

The steps that need to be taken to run a Reverse Mentoring programme include:

Stage 1: The process for recruitment of mentors

Different approaches were taken depending on where the programme was based. In the Americas anyone can apply to be a mentor, although the selection criteria are fairly rigorous. For the GLT (the senior leadership team), the Human Resources team was asked for nominations. For the most recent new programme with the senior team in Reuters' Global Sales and Service group, it was recognised that there were advantages and disadvantages to both approaches, so there was a mix of opening up the opportunity to anyone who met the criteria – they had to be a high performer and work at a certain level of management – and nominations were also requested.

There is a lengthy application form which is paper-based, in part to ensure there is a certain level of commitment from those that apply. Applications are reviewed and then individuals are interviewed. In the most recent programme in the Americas, everyone was interviewed, but this is not always the case. It should be noted that for programmes with a global scope, the internal diversity specialist was supported by external consultants through this process. Reuters decided that the mentee and the mentor should not be part

of the same organisational reporting structure. There is a check done for 'red flags' such as individuals who have a personal agenda as a reason for becoming a mentor. The matching process is also done centrally at this stage. For more details on application process and interview rating see attached documents.

Stage 2: The orientation process

After the selection process has been completed there is an orientation workshop for mentors facilitated by external consultants. The duration is between half a day and a day and a half depending on the amount of theoretical preparation required. The senior managers are briefed individually for 30 to 45 minutes on the programme and its expectations.

Stage 3: The mentoring programme

Mentors are expected to take the leadership role and there is an expectation that the pair will meet once a month. The duration of the programme in Americas was initially six months and this was extended to between nine and twelve months to enable pairings to meet between six to nine times.

The monitoring of the programme is via a number of mechanisms including 'Reflection sheets' which have to be completed after each session (to cover what went well, what could have gone better and what they plan to do next time), informal lunches and other progress meetings to review how things are going, share experiences, best practices and challenges.

The diversity specialist also supplies mentors with fact sheets covering current events and diversity initiatives as a prompt for ideas for discussion topics at sessions.

There is a mid-point meeting for both mentors and mentees and there is a wrap up session to identify what worked well, what did not work and what action points should be taken forward.

Stage 4: Changes going forward

As a result of the programme for the GLT, the CEO has placed greater emphasis on all mentees committing to doing something differently going forward and his direct reports will be required to check in with him on a quarterly basis.

Outcome

Reverse Monitoring had a big impact on both the mentors and mentees. For mentees it was a powerful development experience; mentors reported being able to take a new and different perspective on existing issues. For example, one male leader was being mentored by a female, Afro-American mentor at the time of Hurricane Katrina. They reviewed the news reports on the hurricane together and she was able to draw his attention to the bias in them, for example how the media focused on black looters rather than their white counterparts.

Very senior managers have participated in the programme, and Reuters believe the initiative succeeded and grew partly because it had sponsors at a very senior level. Leadership discussed the positive impact of reverse mentoring at an executive dinner and the CEO was so impressed by what he heard that he decided that both he and his direct reports should participate in the programme. This has led to reverse mentoring becoming global.

Commentary

This case study demonstrates how much can be achieved in a relatively short period of time with minimal financial investment, an innovative approach and a good understanding of the firm's culture. By approaching the subject on an emotional level rather than a conceptual one the activities were successful in creating culture change in the majority group in a way that engaged rather than alienated them. On the basis of the small scale initiative, senior managers were persuaded about the value of the programme, which resulted in additional funding for wider activities.

Reverse mentoring is proving to be a powerful method of enabling a greater understanding and empathy for issues which may have a profound impact on the professional and personal lives of some staff and yet may be completely outside the experience of others. Individuals report benefits for both parties; the more senior person being provided with a 'safe' way of exploring the experiences of someone from another background and the more junior person being exposed to the successful ways of working at the most senior levels of an organisation. At local levels the programmes are inexpensive and relatively simple to operate and may offer a quick way to start bridging the gaps between certain groups of the workforce and senior management.