



A Guide to
Equality and
Diversity
in the Third Sector

olmec

***Definitions
of equality and
diversity***



DEFINITIONS OF EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

This chapter on definition of equality and diversity has been taken from the publication by Olmec *A Guide to Equality and Diversity in the Third Sector (2008)*. The update has been commissioned by the National Equality Partnership. A full copy of the Guide can be downloaded from Olmec's website: <http://www.olmec-ec.org.uk/documents/website%5CPublications%2FGuide%20to%20Equality%20and%20Diversity%20in%20the%20Third%20Sector.pdf>

Definitions

Society is complex and made up of people from different socio-economic backgrounds, countries, ethnic groups, different sexual orientations, ages, gender, disabilities, religions and belief systems. “Equality” and “diversity” are two terms that are often used in management and within organisations. But it is important to think about what we mean by the terms and how they can help to improve an organisation and society in general.

In essence, diversity is about people, and equality is about the equality of outcomes experienced by individuals and groups in diverse communities. Equality of outcomes is a requirement of equality law.

The scope of equality and diversity varies according to the nature of an organisation’s work and the needs of its service users. An organisation will need to set out what equality and diversity means for itself. This will normally be crystallised in a statement that demonstrates its commitment to equality and diversity. In formulating such a statement, a useful starting point is to:

- have a clear grasp of the diversity within and between individuals and communities; and
- decide how the organisation can respond to, reflect, embed, promote and measure equality of outcomes for this diversity.

Organisations often assume that their equal opportunities statement and policy sufficiently covers their equality and diversity requirements. Olmec’s research (Lloyd & Ahmed, 2008) found that for the majority of organisations, an equal opportunities policy covers recruitment and service provision. It is usually focused on the seven equality strands of age, gender, disability, sexual orientation, religion and belief, gender reassignment and race. Historically, equal opportunities policies have arisen from the need to tackle workplace discrimination and over time have expanded to cover service provision. The underlying basis of such policies is to eliminate any form of discrimination so that there is a fairness and equity in the way that people are treated.

An organisation wishing to deliver good equality practice would also embed the following:

- have commitment to diversity at the most senior levels of an organisation;
- demonstrate that diversity is embedded throughout the organisation and is explicit in the organisation’s mission statement, aims, strategic objectives, values, policies and the way it communicates about itself;
- recognise that everyone is different in a variety of visible and non-visible ways;
- have a culture and practices that recognises, respects and value these differences;

Diverse means different. We are all different and therefore, diversity is about us all.

National Centre for
Diversity

- have policies and practices in place which allow the diverse needs of service users to be met within a framework of respect, flexibility and dignity;
- recognise the capacity and capability of people who work in the organisation and provide an environment which facilitates learning and development so that people can reach their potential;
- recognise and encourage talent and ensure it is appropriately used to meet the ambitions of the organisation;
- ensure people who are part of the organisation feel that their views, input and suggestions are valued, considered and taken into account appropriately;
- recruit and retain staff and volunteers from the diversity that is most appropriate to the nature of its work;
- ensure that all staff and volunteers have a good level of understanding and awareness of diversity and are clear on their role in the delivery, monitoring and reporting on diversity; and
- regularly reflect on the outcomes of your work and commit to good practice.

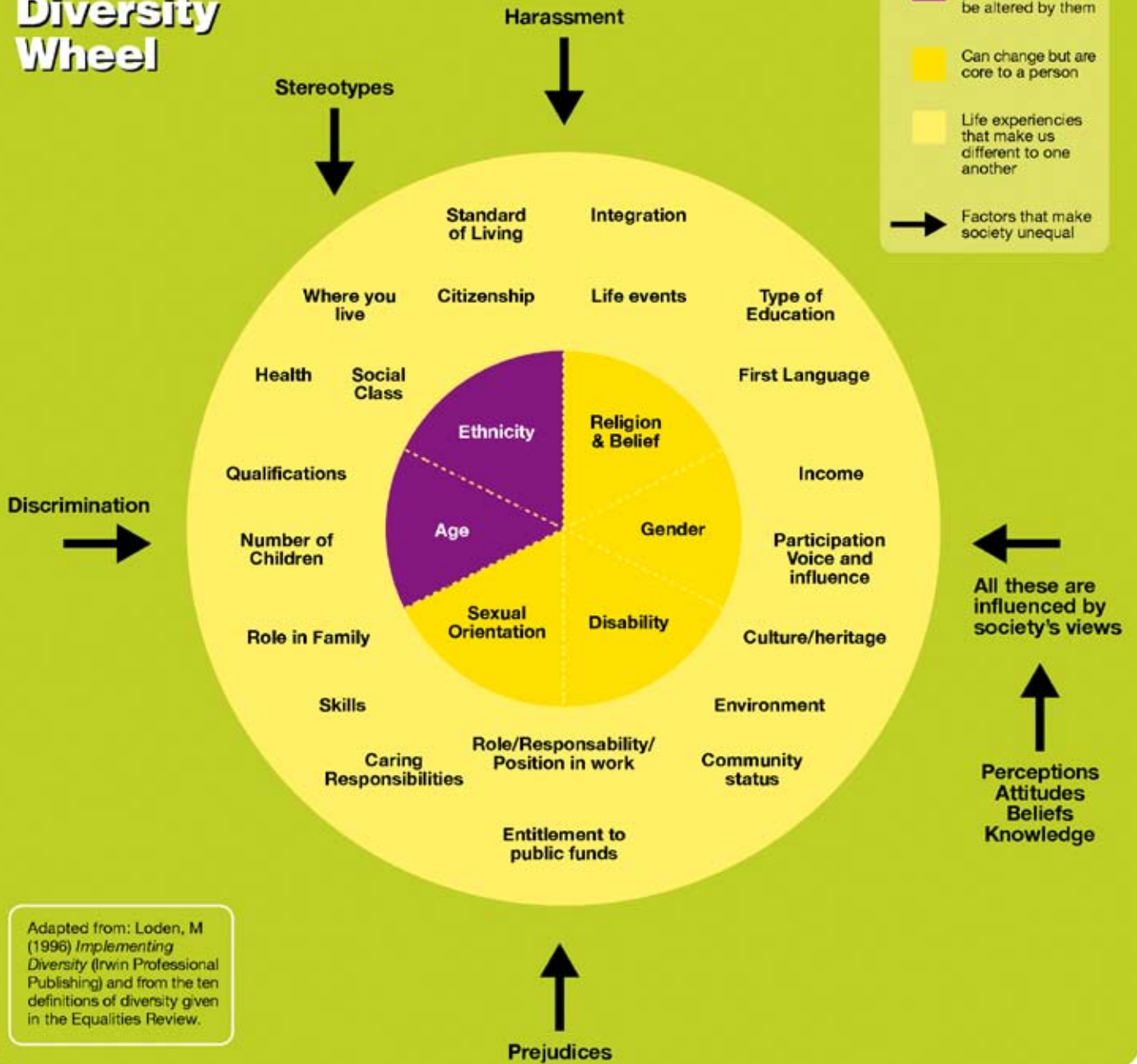
A useful starting point is to look at the *Diversity Wheel* below. The centre of the wheel illustrates what could be described as the primary dimensions of diversity or the six strands. Someone's ethnic origin, sexual orientation, age, sex religion or belief and disability are core to them. Some can change over time. For example, everyone gets older but someone may be treated differently at different stages in their life because of their age. You may be born into a family with a particular religious belief but you may decide to convert to another religion or simply choose not to follow that religion anymore. Other aspects cannot be changed. For example, we cannot change our ethnic origin.

The second circle illustrates life experiences or the secondary dimensions that make each and every one of us different. Any one person is a combination of these dimensions and these differences make our society rich. Organisations that celebrate this diversity and deliver equality get the full potential of each member of staff they employ and deliver fair services to everyone who is entitled to receive them. We have not necessarily included all the dimensions to diversity. You can tailor the wheel to suit the needs of your organisation.

Together for Peace replaced their diversity statement with a core values statement as follows:

Together for Peace is committed to embracing the rich variety of peoples and cultures in Leeds. We seek to embody sensitive, respectful and inclusive ways of working and relating with all; and on that basis, we aim to encourage a culture of openness and dialogue in which we are all able to be enriched, grow with one another, learn from one another's work and life practices, and constructively and creatively work with difference.

The Diversity Wheel



The Equalities Review¹ gives the following ten areas of diversity:

- **Longevity**, including avoiding premature mortality;
- **Physical security**, including freedom from violence and physical and sexual abuse;
- **Health**, including both well-being and access to high quality healthcare;
- **Education**, including both being able to be creative, to acquire skills and qualifications and having access to training and life-long learning;
- **Standard of living**, including being able to live with independence and security; and covering nutrition, clothing, housing, warmth, utilities, social services and transport;
- **Productive and valued activities**, such as access to employment, a positive experience in the workplace, work/life balance, and being able to care for others;
- **Individual, family and social life**, including self-development, having independence and equality in relationships and marriage;
- **Participation, influence and voice**, including participation in decision-making and democratic life;
- **Identity, expression and self-respect**, including freedom of belief and religion;
- **Legal security**, including equality and non-discrimination before the law and equal treatment within the criminal justice system.

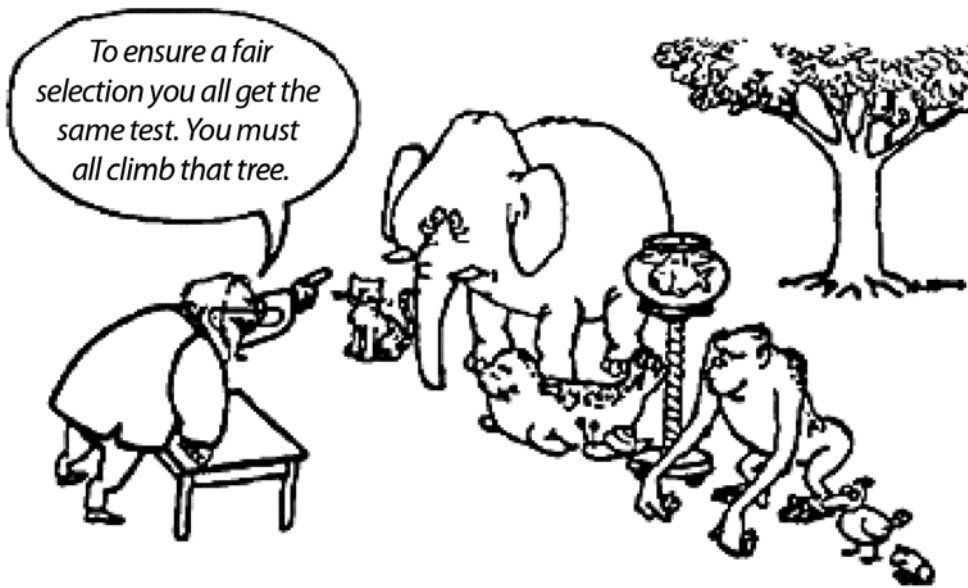
Further Reading

Burchardt, T & Vizrard, P (2007) **Definition of Equality and Framework for Measurement: Final Recommendations of the Equalities Review Steering Group** (Communities: Norwich)

The Centre for the Analysis of Social Exclusion produced recommendations on the definition of equalities that was used for the Equalities Review's definition of equality. To come up with the final definition it looked into international human rights instruments.

<http://archive.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/equalitiesreview/upload/assets/www.theequalitiesreview.org.uk/paper1equality.pdf>

1. The Equalities Review Team (2007) **Fairness and Freedom: the Final Report of the Equalities Review** and (Cabinet Office: London). <http://archive.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/equalitiesreview/>



Source: NDP Gender and Equality Unit, Department of Justice Equality and Law Reform Ireland.²

It is important to identify the different dimension to diversity because it helps us gain a better understanding of the reasons why certain groups are persistently discriminated against. Looking at social and economic inequality may also explain why some people are successful even where they ostensibly “belong” to a group which has traditionally been discriminated against.

The different dimensions of diversity can also make us think about what would make a society more equal. This would be one which looks beyond people’s life experiences and physical appearances and treats people with the dignity and respect that they deserve simply for being human.

The *Equalities Review* attempted to bring together different definitions to define an equal society as follows:

An equal society protects and promotes equal, real freedom and substantive opportunities to live in the ways people value and would chose, so that everyone can flourish.

An equal society recognises people’s different needs, situations and goals and removes the barriers that limit what people can do and can be³.

2. http://www.ndpgenderequality.ie/publications/publications_05.html

3. Fairness and Freedom: the Final Report of the Equalities Review Team, p.6

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www.improvingsupport.org.uk/equalityanddiversity

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