

MAKING ETHNIC DIVERSITY A BUSINESS ADVANTAGE

In the UK, the Cemesme project has allowed enterprises to promote the contribution of young PhD holders from ethnic minority backgrounds.

"England is home to many immigrants from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, black Africa, the Caribbean and, more recently, Eastern countries," says Ahsan Malik from PRIAE.

Based in Leeds, a major city with a large financial market, the PRIAE Institute (Policy Research Institute on Ageing and Ethnicity) has developed the **Cemesme** project (**C**ontribution of **E**thnic **M**inority **E**mloyees to **S**mall and **M**edium Sized **E**nterprises) to showcase the contribution of educated ethnic minority employees to small and medium-sized businesses.

"With the support of Equal, we wanted to prove a theory that we devised a few years ago: "Businesses boasting ethnically rich workforces will perform better on the market". Since 2002, the Cemesme team has contacted 200 small and medium-sized businesses throughout Leeds in order to encourage them to employ post-doctorates, aged between 30 and 40, from ethnic minority groups. To convince the firms they employ not social but business reasoning.

"When we approached businesses, we didn't raise the possibility of an anti-discrimination or pro-diversity agenda. We communicate using business language: it's about emphasising the advantages and financial gains that can be achieved through our suggested approach. Our team centre their pitch on what highly-qualified immigrant employees can bring to the business, so for example if a business were to conduct a study of international markets, this would be a better way to approach the country of origin of the future employee."

In particular the project is aimed at high-tech, engineering and imports/exports enterprises who aspire to become global players. This has enabled Cemesme to place around 20 doctorates from several ethnic minorities. *"We endeavour to educate SMEs on diversity by first answering their number one question: How can Cemesme help us to increase our earnings?"* The advantages are mutual: the doctorates are able to complete their research while SMEs learn how to grow internationally.

Businesses view doctorates as independent consultants who can provide them with the means to conquer new markets. It is only at this stage that the notion of diversity is broached. *"We leave the SMEs to consider the benefits derived from diversity. Then, if they are willing, SME managers can attend university training seminars on diversity as a commercial advantage."*

Promoting diversity by making use of the requirements of a global marketplace is the key to Cemesme's success. According to Ahsan Malik, *"it's about seeing globalisation as an opportunity. We play the globalisation card in order to change they way in which SME managers view ethnic minorities. If we can convince them of the real benefits derived from diversity in a highly competitive environment, our method could be successfully adapted for use in other European cities. In businesses that view diversity in a positive light there is very little discrimination. Faced with the benefits of diversity, a company is more likely to value its immigrant employees than exploit them."*

[Extract from the [Portraits of Experience](#) that were provided as resource material for the EQUAL conference on [Acting against Ethnic Discrimination in Employment](#), in November 2007.]

See also [Presentation_Cesmesme](#).

Contact

Mr Ahsan Malik

Email: ahsan.malik@priae.org

<http://www.priae.org/projects/cemesme.htm>

Link to [EQUAL database description](#)

[Transnational Partnership](#)