

## IMPROVING BUSINESS PERFORMANCE THROUGH BETTER DIVERSITY STRATEGIES

***The Swedish DISI Development Partnership has demonstrated how business performance can be improved by involving management and staff at all levels in a structured dialogue about diversity and countering discrimination.***

*“In Sweden, we have migrants from around the world”* explains Cecilia Ramberg, head of the Equal Disi project, which promotes diversity in Swedish automobile firms. This project focuses on ethnic and gender discrimination, which is recurring in the automobile industry, and it tries to facilitate access to positions with responsibilities for migrants.

Volvo Car Corporation and Enterprise partnered with the IVF Industrial Research and Development Corporation. Volvo asked its suppliers to participate financially in the diversity programme. *“We opened discussions with each one of these firms regarding their specific situation.”* Contacts within the firms included individuals, directors, trade unions and co-workers.

The Plastal group was the most active in the project. *“Plastal hires more than 60% people from ethnic minorities. Promoting diversity is part of the firm’s basic goals. Diversity and fighting discrimination are often themes at managerial meetings. The management is committed to a serious dialogue on these subjects with all employees.”*

A “skills map” was developed to highlight long-ignored talents. *“One of the major focal points of the diversity approach consisted of redefining the notion of ‘skill’. Often, firms do not identify the real competences migrants have because of their approximate Swedish. The argument is that they don’t have enough skills, when in fact there are other ideas in mind that people don’t dare voice. During our interviews, we insisted a lot on what ‘a skill’ means in these firms... and we also pinpointed missing skills that another culture or language could provide.”*

Plastal served as an example because we were able to bring to light problems of discrimination that had not been perceived previously because nobody talked about them. Immigrant workers were not satisfied because they felt they were not being treated in the same way as others. *“By discussing these problems, managers realized that there were economic benefits to be had, because if the employees worked better, the company would have better results.”*

Following the anti-discrimination programme, the firm reorganized its production process in order to have team supervisors from various ethnic groups. *“After this reorganization, people who had been silent began to talk, and this year the firm’s productivity increased, as did the firm’s profits.”*

For Cecilia Ramberg, the key point is the joint work that must be done with the various players in society. *“You have to treat discrimination in a larger context. We worked with seven firms, but we then had the municipality and the university join our meetings, which were held twice a year. You have to treat diversity as a preoccupation for the entire society.”*

[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 the short description of the DISI approach in [Mobilising a Diverse Workforce](#).

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Transnational Partnership: [DOOROPENER](#)  
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