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‘Race into Action’

Lessons from b:RAP’s Organisational Change Programme

b:RAP briefing No. 10

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Introducing b:RAP briefings

This is the tenth in a continuing series of b:RAP briefings. Their purpose is to examine key issues in public policy from a clear and practical race equality perspective.

While some briefings cover topics that have a very clear and evident relationship to race equality others have taken less obvious issues and examined them afresh, teasing out the race equality dimension.

b:RAP briefings identify the key issues involved, highlight current trends in thinking and policy-making and recommend practical action and solutions.

Previous b:RAP briefings include

1. Community Consultation
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6. From 'Anti-Racism' to 'Diversity': Revisiting the Race Equality Agenda
7. Community Cohesion & Asylum
8. Islamophobia: Echoes of the Past?
9. The Social Construction of Race
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Earlier b:RAP briefings are all available for download on the b:RAP website at <http://www.brap.org.uk/> (follow the link for Publications).

Foreword

This briefing paper is about b:RAP's *Race into Action* organisational change programme. *Race into Action* is about driving equality out of the margins and into the mainstream of organisations – where change can be lasting and sustainable.

In the four or five years that we have been delivering the *Race into Action* programme with partners we have learnt a number of critical lessons. We have:

- Seen at first hand some of the main obstacles to real and lasting cultural change within organisations
- Recognised the need to distinguish between diversity and equality
- Developed a systematic understanding of why approaches based primarily on *diversity* do not necessarily deliver *equality*
- Identified a number of *unintended consequences* of existing 'equality and diversity' practice
- And developed a much clearer understanding of the opportunities and benefits Race into Action can offer organisations

We would like to take this opportunity to share these lessons with you and hope you will find this briefing paper both personally and organisationally useful.

Joy Warmington
Chief Executive, b:RAP
April 2006

1.0 INTRODUCTION: 'RACE INTO ACTION' – THE b:RAP PHILOSOPHY OF ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE

Over the past four years b:RAP has developed an organisational change programme called *Race into Action*. This is a strongly collaborative programme of *action learning* and *cultural change*¹ that we have used with partners to help fundamentally change the equalities practice of their organisations.

In 2000, the 1976 Race Relations Act was amended in response to recommendations contained in the Macpherson Report, following the racist murder of black teenager Stephen Lawrence. Those recommendations emphasised the need to tackle profound and largely unquestioned *institutional racism*, which it was felt had been highlighted by failings in the police and criminal justice system during the Lawrence investigation.

We began to look very critically at organisational development processes following the Macpherson Report and concluded that some new models and practices were required if organisational development programmes were to actually stand any chance of fostering real, sustainable *cultural* change within organisations and institutions.

Race into Action was conceived, then, with two key purposes in mind:

- First, it should be a programme of supported and guided organisational development and change that would enable participants to recognise and address the *traditional culture and practices* embedded in their organisation's ethos, policies, systems and processes and help them understand how these contribute to persisting '*racial*' discrimination and to wider institutional or structural discrimination
- Second, it should help participants develop the necessary critical and analytical *skills, knowledge and aptitudes* required to identify more progressive and more effective equalities practice and understand the limitations and weaknesses of their organisation's previous efforts

The Race into Action model is important for a number of reasons:

- a) It locates *people* as the critical *change agents* within organisations.
- b) It seeks to translate race equalities practice into *transferable skills* and aptitudes that can be taught and periodically reviewed and strengthened.
- c) It seeks to embed sustainable, cultural change in organisations at all levels and amongst all staff, thus ensuring that equalities practice is

¹ We use the term 'cultural change' to refer not just to changing the 'culture' of an organisation but to challenging the discriminatory or exclusionary learnt 'cultural norms' – "the way we have always done things" – practised by some groups and organisations.

seen as a *mainstream* function of the organisation and not just the concern of 'personnel experts' or specialist departments.

- d) It seeks to strengthen the competence and confidence of staff to advocate on behalf of sound equalities practice and where necessary question and critique poor practice.
- e) It introduces the notion of *equality-proofing* organisations' core business functions and activities.
- f) And critically, the model recognises that in the absence of external support the vast majority of organisations have neither the time nor resources to extend such a programme of development to all staff.

Race into Action, then, was conceived as a 'whole system' development programme. By this we mean that race equality is the lens through which a much broader view of equalities practice and organisational development is taken.

Our starting point with Race into Action is helping organisations to achieve a critical understanding of existing equality and diversity approaches and we do this by posing a number of questions:

- Does the organisation and its key staff understand that recognising and celebrating diversity – which is often at the heart of so-called diversity programmes – is not the same thing as *identifying and addressing patterns of inequality and discrimination*, and that diversity alone does not offer a clear sense of purpose?
- Does the organisation have a clear view of what it is trying to achieve through its equality and diversity activities or programmes?
- What are the intended outcomes and how and why have these been chosen?
- Is there a clear match between the approaches used and the intended outcomes?

Our overall aim with Race into Action, then, is to work with organisations in developing transferable approaches, competencies and skills that can help empower staff at all levels to see equality in a much more holistic fashion, giving them the confidence and competence to critically examine different approaches to equality, to pick 'the right tool for the job', to identify and understand intended and unintended consequences and to seek *clarity of outcomes*.

We advocate that equality should be planned and managed *like any other aspect of organisational change*. Simply declaring that the aim is to build a

more diverse organisation does not generally speaking offer sufficient clarity of purpose, nor does it offer clear guidelines for what the outcomes should be. It is a limited approach that may change the demographic profile of an organisation, but will rarely produce embedded, sustainable *cultural change* in favour of equality. Indeed, such an approach may not even produce *fairness*.

We knew that Race into Action would be a steep learning curve and this has proven to be the case – both for b:RAP and for its partners who have volunteered to participate in the programme. But the lessons we have learnt during this process have been invaluable and have enabled us to:

- **See at first hand some of the main obstacles to real and lasting cultural change within organisations** (pp. 7-9)
- **Distinguish between equality and diversity and develop a systematic understanding of why approaches based primarily on *diversity* do not necessarily deliver *equality*** (pp. 10-14)
- **Identify and understand some of the *unintended consequences* of existing ‘equality and diversity’ practice** (pp. 15-17)
- **And develop a much clearer understanding of the opportunities and benefits Race into Action can offer organisations** (pp. 18-20)

Using the four broad headings above, we would like to use the remainder of this paper to share some of these critical lessons with you.

2.0 SOME OBSTACLES TO REAL & LASTING CHANGE

The Race into Action programme is **not** intended to tell people what to think, but rather to help individuals recognise the importance of critical and analytical skills so that they themselves can identify, foresee and respond to discrimination and disadvantage wherever it might occur in their working environment. Through supported action learning we aim to help individuals build their background knowledge of equality and thus begin to gain the competence and confidence to recognise and challenge racism.

At the heart of *Race into Action*, then, is the notion of *personal development* within an organisational context.

We might begin, for example, by taking a familiar and routine concept or process and asking participants to re-examine this as a means of 'breaking the ice'. Creating a buzz of attention and involvement at the outset is critical to getting the programme off to a good start. One example that has worked well in the past is the use of ethnicity monitoring data. We asked participants to consider:

- The slippery nature of ethnic monitoring categories and their inconsistency
- Why and how such data is collected and its value
- And whether they can point to ways in which collection and analysis of such data actually informs policy and delivery in the organisation

Asking people to examine, probe and 'deconstruct' familiar processes can be an extraordinarily effective way of getting people to rethink not just their organisation's assumptions about 'race'² and equality but their own too.

2.1 Common Obstacles

But when there are 'blockages' in getting the Race into Action programme to work, we often find that these have common causes. Here are some such examples:

(i) Critical thinking requires a 'thinking and learning culture'

We usually find that a small proportion of participants are challenged by the process of critical, action learning and are reluctant to examine their own or their organisation's attitudes. There can be a variety of reasons for this.

² It may help to understand that when we enclose race in inverted commas – as do many equality practitioners – it is to indicate that it is a contested term. Science has shown us that 'races', in the sense of biologically or genetically distinct ethnic groups, do not exist and that we are all made of the same human 'stuff': race is a social, political and historical construct. In the rest of this paper, assuming that this caveat is taken as read, we shall omit the inverted commas.

Some staff are inherently uncomfortable with 'open ended' learning methods and feel much happier with more prescriptive 'tool kits' and 'instruction manuals'. Because they lack confidence in their own judgement on equality and especially race issues they want to be told what to do and how to do it. Similarly, some staff do not feel sufficiently well informed to examine service delivery or business functions that lie outside their immediate areas of responsibility.

This often reflects an organisational failure to create a '**thinking and learning culture**' regarding equality, one which provides 'space' for people to think about and openly discuss equality without fear of blame or stigma. The absence of appropriate procedures and mechanisms which would enable staff of all grades to engage with and think and talk frankly about race and equality issues *on a routine basis* emerges repeatedly as a key obstacle.

We also frequently find widely divergent levels of ability and competence in equality issues, even within single staff tiers, and staff members, at all levels, often indicate to us that they do not feel either as informed or as confident as they need to be about equality issues in general, but race equality in particular.

(ii) Pressure, pressure, pressure – 'compliance' rather than critical thinking

Organisational time pressures, targets and other constraints also play a key role in closing down opportunities for a more considered approach to race equality. Lack of time, lack of managerial support, pressure of targets and poor communication have all been cited to us as contributory factors in impeding real equality progress. This often indicates that there is no wider organisational culture of *critical thinking* about the principles and practice of race equality and this is often because the pressures of legislative or policy 'compliance' take precedence.

(iii) Compulsion doesn't produce 'engagement'

One issue we frequently grapple with is that of *compulsory participation* in Race into Action programmes. Generally speaking, we resist the notion that participation should be mandatory; the elective nature of involvement has always seemed to us an important factor and on balance we find it creates greater engagement amongst those who do attend and a more positive and enquiring atmosphere in which to conduct what can after all be challenging discussions.

But not all staff who attend our programmes necessarily agree with this view and we are frequently told, "the staff who really need to be here are missing". The answer, we believe, lies not in making Race into Action a compulsory programme but in ensuring that organisations better embed race equality in their job descriptions, induction and performance review procedures. Such linkages should mean that staff expect and welcome equalities training as an

integral aspect of their role, continuous professional development and assessment processes.

(iv) Limited resources

Every organisation will at some point grapple with the issue of insufficient resources, with too little time to do this, not enough money to do that. This will be familiar in virtually every workplace and in every context imaginable.

In most instances, organisations will plan accordingly, identifying action plans that will deliver their organisational objectives within the budget available. There will be a 'fit' between the action and the intended outcomes.

But equality is rarely treated like this. There is hardly ever the same degree of planning, the same focus on outcomes, the same 'fit' between action and intended outcome.

Every organisation has to live within its means, this much is obvious, but this should also suggest the need for much more careful *targeting* of resources. So, for example, if all your organisation can afford is one day's equalities training, acknowledge that this is the case *but revise your objectives accordingly* and ensure there is a 'fit' between action and outcome. Rather than assuming that one day's equalities training will meet all the needs of the organisation, decide in advance the most pressing issue or training need that should be addressed; decide which staff can most benefit from the training and make that training 'work hardest' throughout the organisation; identify where and how the training can create the strongest impact and have most lasting effect.

3.0 WHY APPROACHES BASED PRIMARILY ON DIVERSITY DON'T NECESSARILY DELIVER EQUALITY

As well as throwing into sharp relief some of the key obstacles to equality that organisations struggle with, the *Race into Action* programme will also sometimes reveal more deep-seated underlying problems.

One of those we encounter again and again, in many different contexts, we have called the 'diversity versus equality' problem.

The 'diversity agenda' has in recent years come to dominate the way many organisations and institutions think about and respond to the pressure for change and greater equality. But diversity is at best only a partial answer and in itself has produced only marginal gains for equality. One of the key reasons for this is the tendency amongst many organisations to view diversity as synonymous with equality: achieving the former, they believe, produces the latter. But we know this isn't the case. Some high profile corporations, long thought to be at the forefront of equalities practice, such as Coca Cola, have also learnt this lesson the hard way (see p.16 for a brief outline of this example). Let us explore the concept of diversity a little further.

First, diversity is a noun that describes the fact or quality of being diverse – as in the 'difference', 'range', or variety of a group of things or people. But in recent years the word has taken on, in our view mistakenly, a specific equality dimension; it is as if diversity per se (a 'balanced' or 'representative' workforce, for example) naturally has equality in tow. We believe the evidence is against this view and we regard diversity and equality as two different things – precisely because our experience has shown that it is entirely plausible to achieve the former without achieving (or in some cases without even contributing to) the latter. Our experience of working with major organisations and institutions has also revealed some more subtle differences between approaches based primarily on diversity and those based squarely on equality. These require some explanation.

For example, we have found that where organisations focus on ***diversity*** as their key objective, the measures they adopt will tend to emphasise reactive, shorter-term 'solutions', which not only fall short of creating real or lasting *cultural change* within the organisation, but may also inadvertently perpetuate stereotypical, tokenistic or out-dated 'essentialist'³ attitudes regarding race. Diversity 'models' also tend to emphasise **identity**⁴ and **personal experience** (and the **authenticity** of that experience) over skills, knowledge and aptitude. 'Identity' (or worse, identity politics) becomes the quick fix.

³ 'Essentialism' is used in a wide variety of contexts, but in terms of race equality it is used to describe the view that for any person it is at least theoretically possible to define a set of 'essential' characteristics, possession of which identifies that person as belonging to a specific racial or ethnic group.

⁴ In equality terms, 'identity' has come to mean those aspects that people emphasise in defining their own *cultural identity* – for example, ethnicity, religion, faith, culture and gender.

On the other hand, where *equality* is the key determinant, one tends to see measures that are focused on achieving lasting *mainstream* change within the organisation – change which is sustainable in the long-term and which creates a fairer organisation *for all*, rather than simply a demographic shift in the ‘diversity’ or profile of the organisation.

The table below contrasts these two different approaches.

Table 1: Differences between diversity-based and equality-based approaches to organisational change

“Diversity” Short-term and reactive	“Equality” Longer-term, proactive
Tends to focus on:	Tends to focus on:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Issues of representation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying areas where inequality is manifestly evident and change is required
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Benefits presumed to derive from role models and/or ‘mentors’ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changing the <i>culture</i> of the organisation – rather than just its <i>profile</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive action approaches 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Fairness and justice”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targeted provision to address specific disadvantage presumed to derive from <i>ethnicity</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognising, understanding and addressing <i>institutional racism</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved consultation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Solutions that reach – and change – the <i>mainstream</i> of the organisation

As diversity-based approaches have become so widespread, it may be useful to examine their characteristics in more detail.

Representation

Diversity-based approaches often focus on trying to ‘fix’ what are perceived to be deficits in *representation* in specific areas or functions of the organisation. While there are of course strong arguments for ensuring that a workforce reflects the diversity of the wider populace (or of particular communities within which an organisation or business unit operates) this in itself will not deliver *equality*; indeed, it may not even deliver fairness.

Inequality and discrimination cannot be addressed by simply changing the demographic profile of the workforce, important as this may be. Indeed, *only* changing the profile of the workforce may sometimes have the unintended consequence of exacerbating inequality. Many organisations, for example,

report a *rise* in the number of grievance procedures and other staffing problems they experience following dramatic increases in the diversity of their workforce. This can indicate a number of problems:

- That pre-existing and unacknowledged problems of racism and discrimination have been exacerbated by 'diversifying' the workforce
- That there are unidentified (or unmet) training needs in terms of people-management at various levels of the organisation, and that these are contributing to the organisation's difficulties in 'managing' diversity
- That there is a perception or assumption amongst existing staff that new recruits have been chosen for their cultural or ethnic background rather than their skills and aptitudes. Such assumptions, especially if unchallenged, can be profoundly damaging

Representation, of course, can also be an issue in other more specific contexts, such as in the make-up of a recruitment panel. Recent research by The Runnymede Trust has shown that it is often in these kinds of areas that there is the widest divergence 'between real employee experience and company policy on equality and diversity', with some BME staff reporting that they feel as if they have been adopted as 'specialists' on race relations primarily because of their skin colour.⁵ Our own experience also indicates that staff from BME backgrounds are often placed on recruitment or other panels in the expectation that their 'diversity' will bring some special knowledge to the panel; and yet frequently they remain untrained and largely unsupported and have no specific HR or recruitment and selection expertise. **Our main contention, then, is that actions of this kind, while motivated by good intentions do not necessarily produce either 'good' or fairer outcomes. They may look fair, but they're not.**

Role models and mentors

The notion that people from BME backgrounds require the assistance of role models or mentors as behavioural exemplars has become an extraordinarily widespread one. It is common in the workplace, but can equally be seen in widely differing contexts in community work, the voluntary sector and education. Again, while the intentions may be good there is much about the thinking that underpins the role model or mentor concept that is problematical.

Too often, mentoring is based on a 'deficit model' which identifies the 'problem' as a lack, an inadequacy, in the person being mentored. This is perhaps especially true of mentoring which seeks to increase 'self-esteem'. While mentoring may have a part to play in particular instances, it can only ever be a partial answer. If adopted in isolation such approaches can ignore the impact of **institutional discrimination** – the inequality and discrimination

⁵ *The Space Between: From Rhetoric to Reality on Race Equality in the Workplace*, Sandra Sanglin-Grant, Runnymede Trust Report [April 2005].

that has become structurally embedded in society and its institutions. Even significantly improved self-esteem is of only limited use against institutional racism.

Positive action

The Race Relations Act does **not** allow positive discrimination or affirmative action and an employer, for example, cannot seek to change the balance (the diversity) of a workforce simply by selecting candidates mainly because they are from a particular racial group. This would be regarded as unlawful discrimination on racial grounds.

There are some specific circumstances in which discriminating on racial grounds is not considered unlawful, however. Employers and others *can* take positive action to prevent discrimination or to overcome past discrimination – for example, in instances where those from a particular ethnic group are or have been under-represented in the preceding twelve-month period – or where being of a particular ethnic group is a ‘genuine occupational requirement’ (GOR) for the job in question. Employers must be able to demonstrate, however, that it is ‘proportionate’ to apply the GOR in the particular case.⁶

While such provisions would seem unequivocally good, recent research by the Runnymede Trust and others suggests that the outcomes of such positive action approaches can be ambiguous.

For example, the evidence suggests that some employees recruited in this fashion ‘stall’ in the lower reaches of the organisation: staff from minority ethnic communities do not progress to upper management positions in anything like the proportion that their white counterparts do. And where staff from minority ethnic communities do achieve management positions many report having to work doubly hard to gain the respect and authority they require in order to manage. They feel they have been promoted to fail.

And of course – as some court cases have shown – it is possible to achieve greater diversity in the workplace without doing anything to challenge or remove the racism, racist stereotypes and negative assumptions about the capabilities of minority employees (and not just *ethnic* minorities) that pervade some organisations. While there is clearly a place for positive action, then, it can also be seen that it will not necessarily promote positive *mainstream* change throughout the organisation. As we have said of some of the other measures we have looked at here, there needs to be a clear match between the course of action pursued and the *intended outcomes*.

⁶ See Commission for Racial Equality website: http://www.cre.gov.uk/legal/rra_positive.html

Targeted provision

A routine response to inequalities in public service provision and/or access over the last decade has been the provision of additional, targeted services for specific ethnic groups.

But like positive action this is not free of pitfalls. At the very least it can be open to misinterpretation and, to the uninformed, can look discriminatory – a provision that one can only be qualified for by ethnicity. But there are other more fundamental problems with targeted provision, especially in service delivery terms, in that it is frequently seen as ‘special’ and ‘add-on’ rather than a statutory mainstream entitlement. Its funding will often be ‘project-based’ rather than mainstream and therefore time-limited. Such provision may prove unsustainable: it may be lost as soon as appropriate project funding ceases and is often first to be reduced or terminated when money is tight.

Again, while there can be a role for targeted provision, it can also result in a two-tier service, inadvertently driving change into the margins rather than the mainstream and reinforcing the notion that equality is a ‘special case’, fundable only as long as additional resources are available to pay for it.

Consultation

Improved consultation often lies at the heart of diversity-based approaches. But for us this raises several questions. The assumption is almost always that minority ethnic communities (or individuals) require more effective consultation techniques if they are to be ‘reached’. What makes them so ‘hard to reach’? What is it, exactly, that we don’t know about minorities; what is it we don’t understand about them?

Again, while well-intentioned, it is also possible to see in consultation something of an avoidance strategy: we can’t improve things for minority ethnic communities until we can communicate more effectively with ‘them’; and we can’t communicate more effectively with ‘them’ until we have identified better consultation techniques.

Such thinking always casts those from minority community backgrounds in the role of the ‘other’ – mysterious individuals who, because of their ‘culture’ or their ethnic background, will by definition require something different to ‘us’.

Increasingly, the accelerating rate of demographic change (and Birmingham is a prime example of this) requires us to re-evaluate such concepts as *majority* and *minority* communities and even *host community*. Birmingham’s ‘host community’ is at least four times more ethnically diverse than the UK average. Almost 30% of Birmingham citizens are from minority communities – and in ten years time these communities will not be statistical minorities. Surely this calls for some rethinking? In terms of consultation, for example, the priority will be not how we consult with ‘minority communities’ but how we *talk to each other*.

4.0 EQUALITY & DIVERSITY – UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES

So far we have seen that Race into Action will sometimes reveal underlying organisational problems that existing efforts are not addressing. We have also seen that a widespread confusion between diversity- and equality-based approaches in organisations is a persistent problem.

But strategies based solely or primarily on increasing the numbers of BME staff employed in an organisation (i.e. increasing an organisation's diversity) can, if pursued in isolation or not communicated and explained effectively, also have *unintended* consequences. What follows is not exhaustive but will offer a flavour of what these consequences can be. For example:

- White majority and minority ethnic employees may feel that some groups receive preferential treatment in recruitment or have an unfair advantage. This can lead to *increased* levels of discrimination and hostility between staff.
- Cohesion and team spirit can suffer and as a consequence organisational performance be eroded.
- At management grades, any inference that a manager has been recruited primarily because of their 'identity' or ethnicity – i.e. to meet targets rather than for their skills and abilities – can profoundly undermine that person's authority and hence their capacity to manage. If the former is true, then this too often serves to perpetuate a stereotype that BME managers are 'incapable' or lack the necessary competencies – with wider implications too for the person recruited, their line manager and in some cases the rest of the immediate staff team. For example, if the new recruit is struggling to fulfil the role, a line manager may also be reluctant to address this consequent poor performance – precisely because of the sensitive circumstances – thus requiring other staff to fill the gap. Far from being contained, the problem spreads.
- Some employers have also noted an increase in industrial tribunal proceedings as tensions between staff are exacerbated and isolated or unsupported staff seek legal solutions to their situations. Stress and workplace harassment and 'bullying' are also often seen to increase in such circumstances.

Sometimes, diversity policies devised with the best of intentions, then, can produce unintended consequences. One of the most widely circulated – and perhaps most high profile – cases of unintended consequences has been that of the Coca-Cola corporation. Over-page we give a brief account of the Coca-Cola case study.

Case Study

Coca-Cola US: when diversity isn't enough

How could a multinational employer, regarded by many as an exemplar of equal opportunities, find itself facing a class action suit by 1,500 African-American employees?

In April 1999 four Coca-Cola employees brought a lawsuit against the company for racial discrimination. Their lawyers applied for the suit to be given 'class' status thus extending the action to cover 1,500 other African-American employees across the US. It was alleged that Coca-Cola's senior managers had known about company-wide discrimination against African-American employees since at least 1995 and that internal memos on file indicated that black employees felt themselves to be "ignored, overlooked or unacknowledged".

Despite company instructions that senior managers' performance and compensation be tied to their achievement of diversity targets and that more ethnic minority staff should be promoted to "executive assistant" - widely acknowledged within the corporation to be the springboard for more senior jobs - these problems didn't go away. In 1997, Coca-Cola's vice-president in charge of corporate external affairs, herself a black American, went on record as being hampered in her work by "invisibility driven by chauvinism, power and, sometimes, pure and absolute disrespect".

A 1997 audit by the US Dept of Labor found Coca-Cola's managers unclear about the aims of the company's affirmative action programmes and also revealed that the company's diversity goals were still not embedded in its performance review processes. The company had also failed to re-examine its recruitment and promotion procedures.

Although Coca-Cola remedied these shortcomings - ultimately the lawsuit was dropped - the case sent shock waves through the personnel and equalities community not just in the US but around the globe. Subsequent coverage of the case drew forth some interesting analyses. First, it was evident that the company's *diversity* programmes had delivered only that - *diversity* rather than *equality*. Second, despite all its affirmative action and diversity targets, commentators concluded that there was still a critical gap. **The company still didn't feel a fair place to work.**

* *

While Coca-Cola is a massive multinational employer, there are still some lessons here for smaller businesses – indeed, for organisations of all kinds.

The key lesson is that, ultimately, employees will judge an organisation's commitment to equality not by its policies and procedures **but by whether the organisation feels a fair place to work**. And if an organisation, despite its equality and diversity policies, still doesn't feel a fair place to work, then it probably isn't. Coca-Cola apparently recognised the telltale signs but chose to do little about them. The case assumed an extraordinary public profile as a consequence and set the corporation's equality reputation back years.

5.0 RACE INTO ACTION – THE BENEFITS

5.1 In Brief – How it Works & What We Do

By bringing together staff from all levels and departments within your organisation, we aim to engage in a long-term personal development programme designed to assist your staff become more confident and competent in race equality. The programme revolves around two main options, which work particularly well when combined: an ‘equality advocates group’ and ‘leadership coaching’.

The ‘equality advocates group’ approach

Through collaboration between the b:RAP team and the equality advocates group we aim, over a period of time, to build the capacity of staff to:

- Access and analyse internal data that identifies the equality gaps in your organisation and the potential areas of discrimination.
- Develop, implement, critically review and understand race equality policy and practice.
- Discuss issues of equality, both formally and informally, with other staff within the organisation.

Leadership coaching

Using b:RAP’s one-to-one coaching and mentoring sessions with chief executives, directors, senior managers and/or board members, a relationship of trust and confidentiality is established. This provides opportunities for your senior staff and officers to:

- Explore and update their understanding of and approach to race equality
- Analyse their leadership and communication styles
- Identify personal, professional and role-specific equality objectives
- Utilise their coach/mentor as a sounding board and source of guidance and advice on equality issues

Race into Action, then, focuses on:

- **Competence** – an emphasis on equality as something that can be learnt, reviewed and improved upon. It is commonplace to regard, for example, customer service as a *set of teachable skills and competencies*, but this approach is far less likely to be applied to equality competency. Our experience indicates that race equality

competencies *are* transferable skills that can be taught, refreshed, strengthened and if necessary periodically reviewed. The equality competencies approach is different because it emphasises *building individuals' confidence* to think critically about, and reflect on, race equality issues. This is vital if organisations are to deepen their understanding of equality issues – and yet even now we find that in the vast majority of organisations the idea that they can and should build their intellectual capital regarding race equality is given nowhere near the same priority as *compliance*.

- **‘Mainstreaming’** – We also believe that taking the transferable skills and competencies approach also makes it much more likely that equality will be driven into the mainstream of an organisation. This means that equality will be seen as a *universal* rather than a BME staff responsibility, as an important addition to management skills, and also as having a fundamental relationship to service, quality and customer care. This, in our view, better characterises the principles or spirit of ‘mainstreaming’.
- **Identifying and challenging *institutional racism*** – But it is also vital that we do not forget that it is institutional racism, specifically the findings of the Macpherson inquiry following the murder of Stephen Lawrence on the 22nd April 1993, which have been instrumental in fuelling demands for organisational change.⁷ Despite the passage into law of the Race Relations Amendment Act (2000) we believe that combating institutional racism remains a priority – and this requires an unequivocal emphasis on *fairness and social justice*, which the more abstract language of diversity simply does not offer.

5.2 The Benefits

By utilising equality-based approaches that emphasise proactive, longer-term *cultural change* within organisations – and which are perceived as an integral part of your organisational change plans – Race into Action can help your organisation:

- Capture and articulate its vision of equality
- Define its equality values and convey these throughout the organisation
- Define the purpose and intended outcomes of its equality programme
- And spell out the levels of its commitment to and investment in equality

Through a planned programme of learning, development, support and guidance, Race into Action can help your organisation adopt an approach to

⁷ The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry: Report of an Inquiry by Sir William Macpherson Of Cluny, HMSO [February 1999]. See: <http://www.archive.official-documents.co.uk/document/cm42/4262/4262.htm>

race equality that goes beyond recognising and ‘celebrating’ diversity, and focuses instead on **identifying and addressing patterns of discrimination, unfairness and inequality wherever they may occur in the organisation and its operations.**

By helping to drive equality out of the margins and into the mainstream, we can help your organisation develop a *culture of equality* in which change can be lasting and sustainable.

We should close by letting two of our recent Race into Action participants speak for themselves:

“I believe that the Race into Action approach works because it gives space for considering human situations, not just tasks, tools, or management issues. The space isn’t empty, however, with plenty of input and time to develop between sessions, to go through the process or cycles, to experience the highs or lows, and to gain understanding along the way. This approach was facilitated properly – wisely and thoroughly – and always with the best interests of the group at heart, which is not always easy when dealing with such difficult issues on a daily basis.”

–Group participant: 2005

“It’s always difficult when you reach my level to admit what you don’t know – the assumption is that you should know it all. I know I don’t and have valued the opportunity to talk honestly about my own and my organisation’s equality challenges and how to begin the change. It felt safe, but also stimulating and challenging. Recognising that equality wasn’t as difficult to do as I thought – because much of it is simply good *quality* practice – has really motivated and encouraged me to make some very simple but effective changes.”

– Leadership participant: 2006

If you would like to discuss our Race into Action model in greater depth, or find out more about our other staff training and development options, one of our Learning and Professional Development Team would be pleased to talk to you. Please contact:

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