



Diversity - celebrating difference

From the beginning, AEGEE has aimed to address several levels when engaging students in Europe through networking activities: bringing people from different backgrounds together, making them value their diversity, and integrating a variety of inputs in order to achieve something better than each of the individual groups could have achieved alone. Diversity, with a capital “D”, follows a similar approach in the area of corporate management, human resources, leadership and organisational culture. In more and more places, AEGEE ideals are becoming a reality in the corporate world and beyond - by means of diversity.

The concept, developed first in the US, from equal opportunities and affirmative action, today comprises four different paradigms: phenomenon diversity – consciously acknowledging differences and similarities. Attitude open-mindedness – actively valuing people who are different from us, their perspectives and expertise. Behaviour inclusion – integrating others and providing space for everyone to perform to his or her best. Finally, managing diversity – embedding differences, open-mindedness and inclusion in all the things we or an organisation does.

In the light of internationalisation, fierce competition, changing values, ageing and other significant trends, diversity has become one of the focus areas of management. Corporate Europe is pro-actively leveraging the potential of differences since the mid 1990’s. Companies are adopting policies, training their employees, organising events and launching communication campaigns, all to raise awareness of diversity. For many organisations, it is a challenge to overcome national thinking, stereotypes, prejudices, and reluctance to change. In brief: breaking up monocultures and broadening horizons.

The similarities to AEGEE are striking. AEGEE has always tackled stereotypes and prejudices. Through its innovative activities, the association has thoroughly developed the personalities and skills of its members, and those it reached out to externally. The impact of the AEGEE way won’t be understood by many until years later, when they are actually faced with situations they recognise. In these situations, they can tell the difference of who has experienced the pan-European culture of AEGEE, who has acquired inter-disciplinary and trans-national working skills, and who has not had that opportunity. They will also understand the necessity of inclusive policies, of unity in diversity, and of open values that are based on mutual respect, dignity and freedom.

AEGEE wanted to be a role model for European politics. It has become more than that. Implementing diversity illustrates how powerful many principles that were already applied by AEGEE can be in other areas. More learning, more transfer and more application should take place. It would benefit companies, organisations, and the world of politics. They are all aware of the need to improve. Here are two great opportunities to seize: AEGEE and Diversity. Michael Stuber

AUTHOR

Michael Stuber was president of AEGEE-Karlsruhe in 1988/9 and served on two European boards as vice president and secretary general until May 1990. This industrial engineer became self-employed in 1997. His company specialises in helping organisations to pursue a strategic approach to implementing Diversity in Europe.

