

MANAGING A DIVERSE TEAM

DID YOU KNOW?

Following are examples from the research that demonstrate the potential benefits associated with diverse teams and that address the potential challenges of managing them.

Potential benefits of a diverse team

- In terms of identity, training and experience, a diverse team has been found to exhibit greater cognitive diversity.¹ Indeed, perspectives, heuristics, interpretations and predictive models, which are useful for problem solving and prediction, have been shown to be influenced by individual identity, so that each person has a unique toolkit to draw from;²
- Diversity reportedly lowers the risks associated with the psycho-sociological phenomenon of groupthink;^{1,3}
- A positive association is believed to exist between decision-making diversity and performance.⁴ For example, a study appears to have uncovered a link between the diversity of executives and financial performance;⁴
- Gender diversity in work teams has been reported to foster innovation, diversify perspectives and contribute to developing better social relationships as well as a more open climate of work and debate;^{1,5}
- Teams with diverse identities have been found to have a variety of concerns and to take an interest in multiple issues.¹ For example, in journalistic publications or more specifically in opinion pieces, certain topics appear to be less present when women do not publish;⁶
- Diversity has been reported to stimulate skill development in a student population.^{1,7,8}

Potential challenges of managing a diverse team

- In a multicultural society such as Quebec, the world of work is made up of individuals with different beliefs, ways of thinking, and behaviours. While these cultural differences represent many benefits, they may also produce misunderstandings in some situations between individuals from different cultures.^{1,9} To dispel these misunderstandings, dialogue often remains the best way forward;^{CWSE}

- People belonging to minority groups may experience personal difficulties such as exclusion, isolation, discrimination and harassment;^{10,11,12}
- Microaggressions (“subtle, mundane exchanges that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to individuals based on group membership”) have been found to be experienced regularly by women, members of the LGBTQ2+ community, visible minorities, persons with disabilities and members of underrepresented groups¹³ (see the [Microaggression White Paper](#) for more information);
- A diverse team can comprise multiple forms of diversity (e.g., ethnocultural diversity, gender diversity and professional and generational diversity) which may generate tension and conflict;¹⁴
- Interdisciplinarity within a team is believed to foster creativity and problem solving. The potential of such a team may, however, be compromised and generate opposition if it is not properly channelled;¹⁴
- When people on the same team do not share the same basic preferences or core goals, problems may develop between them.^{1,2}

Other challenges include onboarding and integrating team members, supervision and advancement, finances and scheduling, the physical work and study environment, and policies and measures. These challenges are addressed in the [pamphlet on challenges encountered by designated and marginalized groups](#).

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following examples of equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) practices that can be put in place for managing diverse teams are provided for inspiration.

Training and awareness

- Educate yourself, as a manager or team leader, about EDI issues;^{-CWSE}
- Learn about EDI and its challenges and raise awareness among team members¹⁵ (see the [documentation available online](#));
- Adopt the tools to become an ally and give your team members the resources they need in order to learn how to become allies as well;^{-CWSE}
- Where appropriate, draw a link between diversity and team performance so that team members understand the benefits of diversity and are aware of the potential losses if diversity is neglected;¹⁴
- Become aware of one’s own biases and prejudices about the groups represented in a diverse team¹⁴ (see the [Unconscious Bias White Paper](#) for more information);

- Take advantage of the role of manager to lead by example in order to reduce the barriers that people from diverse backgrounds face in diverse work teams.¹⁵

Reflection on challenges and solutions

- Make sure to know one's team well with respect to the forms of diversity it contains in order to be able to better understand issues and act appropriately;¹⁴
- Identify challenges with team members through interviews or questionnaires with a view to taking targeted action¹⁵ (see the [online guide to identifying EDI challenges for more information](#));
- Request the team's participation in the problem-solving process in order to help implement strategies.¹⁴
- Adopt a zero-tolerance policy toward acts such as violence and harassment;¹⁶
- Use constructive feedback (discuss objectively by using facts and demonstrating the intention to improve things rather than issue judgment);¹⁵
- Adopt a meeting format that includes elements which show consideration toward members of visible minorities¹⁷ and members of designated or marginalized groups (e.g., use inclusive language, schedule meetings at convenient times for parents);^{CWSE}

Inclusive management

- Review management practices according to the forms of diversity present in the team with a view to adopting new practices that will take into account the challenges of diversity (e.g., review the processes for integrating new people into the work team);¹⁴
- Make sure that team members understand new management practices by introducing them to any such practices;^{14,15}
- Stay current on practices' evolution by instituting an occasional review and follow-up on practices (e.g., surveys, debriefs or interviews);¹⁴
- Encourage continuous improvement in team functioning by adopting a vigilant and attentive attitude;¹⁴
- Make sure that team members share the same vision of the tasks to be accomplished, and the same core goals;²
- Appreciate what each person brings to the team;¹⁵
- Openly welcome different ways of working;¹⁸
- Make adaptive measures (e.g., flexible schedule, clear instructions) available to all staff members rather than assigning them on the basis of disability. This may promote the retention of persons with invisible disabilities (e.g., neurodiverse individuals) and may have benefits for all employees.¹⁹

RESOURCES

Diversity in science and engineering: Unconscious bias.

<https://wwest.mech.ubc.ca/diversity/>

Documentation on the potential benefits and challenges of diversity in higher education and research.

<https://cfsg.espaceweb.usherbrooke.ca/edi-in-higher-education-and-research/>

Guide to identifying EDI challenges in a team and pamphlets on EDI in research.

<https://cfsg.espaceweb.usherbrooke.ca/resources-for-implementing-edi-in-research/>

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- ^{CWSE} Chair for Women in Science and Engineering in Quebec



ABOUT THE NSERC CHAIR FOR WOMEN IN SCIENCE AND ENGINEERING IN QUEBEC

The mission of the Chair for Women in Science and Engineering (CWSE) in Quebec is to increase the representation of women and maintain their participation in the field of science and engineering (SE). The Chair's first action area is to work with girls and the people close to them to present and demystify the opportunities that SE has to offer. The Chair also works with students and professionals to better equip them to overcome the obstacles that continue to affect their careers. Moreover, the Chair works with several communities to rally efforts around the equity, diversity and inclusion in higher education and research. The Chair's second action area is to conduct research to understand and raise awareness of this issue. In this way, it helps propose potential solutions to the various authorities involved, with a view to driving change.



ABOUT UNIVERSITÉ DE SHERBROOKE

In its 2018–2022 strategic plan, Université de Sherbrooke committed to becoming an exemplary environment with respect to equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI). This commitment has resulted in the adoption of a related action plan, which is under the direct responsibility of the rector. Implementation of this plan is supported by the Executive Committee, the EDI Strategic Committee and all its working committees, and by several influential members of our community. The university is proud to be able to count on the leadership of the Chair for Women in Science and Engineering, which is contributing to this objective by developing a series of EDI-related training and tools, thereby strengthening our academic community.

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