

---

# 12

# The Role of Diversity in Talent Management

*Matthew Yap*

## Learning objectives

After reading this chapter you should be able to:

- Understand diversity management and talent management in the tourism and hospitality contexts.
- Comprehend and discuss the value of recruiting diverse workers in the global tourism and hospitality workplaces.
- Critically appraise the role of diversity in talent management.
- Evaluate the essential components of the diversity management in global tourism and hospitality talent management paradigm

## Introduction

Sociological advancements and multi-culturalism in contemporary societies, and the demographic changes of the general population have led to greater visibility of diverse individuals (Ineson *et al.*, 2013). For instance, the enlargement of European Union (EU) leading to the migrant mobility within EU member states (Yap *et al.*, 2015a) and migration of population from rural villages to modern cities to seek job opportunities in developing countries (Yap *et al.*, 2015b; Yap and Ineson, 2016). In general, individuals' diverse backgrounds can be visible and invisible. Visible characteristics include physical appearances, age, skin colour, gender, physical disability; whilst invisible characteristics comprise of sexual orientation, transgender, age, culture, education level, religion, immigration status, social class, political association, marital status, parental status, mental disability, personality, work style, departmental affiliations, ex-offenders statuses and asymptomatic illnesses (Cooke and Saini, 2010; Yap and Ineson, 2012; Yap *et al.*, 2015a). For instance, Yap and Ineson (2009; 2012) conducted a multi-year study in the Asian hospitality industry and found the HIV (human immuno-deficiency virus) infection to be an asymptomatic illness because patients display no symptom during early stages of

infection. They concluded that HIV infection is an invisible diverse characteristic. However, some demographic profiles like age and gender can be ambiguous due to natural phenomena and/or surgical and cosmetic procedures.

The global tourism and hospitality industries are expanding quickly, especially in Asia, with China's (Yap *et al.*, 2015b) and Vietnam's (Yap and Ineson, 2016) continued industrial and economic transformation and social modernisation. For instance, the United Nations World Tourism Organisation forecasts China to be the world's leading tourism destination by 2020 (Lew *et al.*, 2008). These expansions have generated increasing numbers of domestic and international diverse customers (Yap and Ineson, 2016). The global tourism and hospitality industries are labour intensive and need to provide quality service to customers round the clock seven days a week or 365 days a year but they are experiencing qualified labour shortages due to excessive labour turnover and exhaustive occupational stressors (Lövhöiden *et al.*, 2011; Yap, 2011). Hence, it is of no surprised that more diverse workers, through mobility and migration, have joined these industries to fuel their continuous expansions (Yap *et al.*, 2015a). However, discrimination, prejudices, stigmatisation, marginalisation, unfair treatment and stereotyping of diverse workers and customers have surfaced frequently (Andriessen *et al.*, 2012; Ineson *et al.*, 2013; Yap and Ineson, 2009; Yap and Ineson, 2016; Yap *et al.*, 2015a). As such, both potential and existing global tourism and hospitality managers are challenged to manage and treat diverse customers and workers fairly through diversity management (Yap *et al.*, 2015b; Yap *et al.*, 2016). In the following sections, first, the value of diversity in the tourism and hospitality workplaces will be appraised; next, concepts of diversity management and talent management will be elucidated; then, the role of diversity management in global tourism and hospitality talent management will be discussed.

## **The value of diversity in the tourism and hospitality workplaces**

The nature of the global tourism and hospitality industries is dynamically involving cross-cultural interactions of stakeholders from different backgrounds. Hence, the presence of diverse workers in the tourism and hospitality workplaces can yield many advantages but some disadvantages as summarised in Table 12.1.

With reference to Table 12.1, tourism and hospitality companies can gain competitive advantages when their diverse workers attract diverse customers to patronise their establishments (Wrench, 2007); because diverse workers can understand the behaviour of those customers from similar cultures, religions and sexual orientations. For example, gay and lesbian tourists prefer to do businesses with specialist gay tour operators as they understand the discretion and safety that their clients seek (Pritchard *et al.*, 2000). Even so, diverse customers feel more comfortable and are more compelled to purchase when they are communicating

with and informed by employees who speak similar languages (Holmqvist and Grönroos, 2012). Hence, Agrusa, Kim and Wang (2011) suggest that Hawaiian tourism and hospitality companies should have Chinese speaking employees, and menus and signs written in Chinese characters to attract Chinese tourists.

**Table 12.1:** Advantages and disadvantages of recruiting diverse workers

Advantages	Disadvantages
Attract diverse customers and workers (Wrench, 2007).	May invite backlash from non-diverse workers and community (Hanappi-Egger, 2012).
Facilitate global expansion (Wrench, 2007).	Cross-cultural and behavioural misunderstanding (Kirton and Greene, 2010).
Satisfy equality legislation (Kirton and Greene, 2010)	
Generate new ideas (Madera, 2013).	
Harness the uniqueness of diverse individuals (Kandola and Fullerton, 2001).	
Create a positive public image (Hon and Brunner, 2000).	

However, Li, Absher, Graefe and Hsu (2008) caution readers of the difficulty of profiling cultural and cross-cultural values in service delivery, as they are frequently indirect and complicated to determine during interactions; hence leading to tourism and hospitality service personnel misunderstanding their customers' cross-cultures and behaviours (Kirton and Greene, 2010). Further, tourism and hospitality organisations having a pool of diverse employees can attract other diverse employees from similar nationalities and ethnic groups to work in those organisations. These organisations with global outlook can fully utilise their diverse workers as part of an international business strategy to facilitate global expansion (Wrench, 2007). Employing diverse employees purely to satisfy national equality legislation, like the Affirmative Action in America, is not the best way to value the uniqueness of diverse workers, but it certainly can help companies to avoid expensive discrimination lawsuits (Kirton and Greene, 2010) and to project positive public images (Hon and Brunner, 2000). In truth, tourism and hospitality organisations with excessively diverse workers may invite backlash from non-diverse employees because they may feel isolated, threatened and left out (Hanappi-Egger, 2012). For instance, heterosexuals working in an homosexuals dominated environment may feel threatened due to their ego defensive behaviour (Lubensky, Holland, Wiethoff and Crosby, 2004).

Hence, the abilities of managers to harness the uniqueness of individual employees to work towards achieving the goals of their organisations are ultimately invaluable (Kandola and Fullerton, 2001). We should not forget that diverse employees with unique work styles can generate creative ideas to aid their companies' competitiveness (Madera, 2013). Previous discussions have justified the value of diversity in the tourism and hospitality workplaces. However, the