

EO Files (May 2021)

Hong Kong must do more to build on the strength of its diversity

By Mr Ricky CHU Man-kin, EOC Chairperson

The slogan “Nihil de nobis, sine nobis (Nothing about us without us)” has been used by the disability movement and other rights activists to highlight the importance of representation.

Paying attention to representation is not just a matter of political correctness any more, it is an imperative if you want to avoid costly and sometimes embarrassing mistakes. Moreover, diversity of thought has been shown to improve productivity, creativity and business outcomes.

Government policies are an area where decisions can have political, diplomatic, social and economic impact. Hearing all points of view, especially those representing the most affected stakeholders, should be seen as an important first step. Improving representation in policymaking can ensure that the views of those affected are adequately reflected.

Non-Chinese people make up almost 8 per cent of Hong Kong’s population. Foreign domestic workers comprise half the non-Chinese population. For a long time, minority groups have been content to stay on the sidelines and avoid the spotlight for fear of attracting attention to themselves. However, as their numbers grow and, more importantly, as the proportion of young, locally born and educated members of these communities increases, they want to be included in matters that concern their city. The changing profile of this community means its members are a valuable, though perhaps underutilised, resource. Qualified, confident and vocal, many from the non-Chinese population can make valuable contributions to the city in various capacities, including governance.

The Zubin Foundation, a think tank and charity, puts together a Diversity List of capable individuals from the non-Chinese population in Hong Kong each year. These are recommendations of people who could serve on government advisory bodies to boost the representation of racial minorities in policymaking. While there is no doubt that members of Hong Kong’s ethnic minority communities can

offer valuable input on matters concerning their own communities, it would be unwise to restrict them to that role alone. We need to appreciate that these individuals and the communities they represent are capable of and eager to contribute to society at large, no matter the race. They are Hongkongers and wish to help and serve all of Hong Kong. We often make the mistake of boxing them into a category that taps into only a fraction of their potential.

Representation is not just for government and public bodies. Diversity and inclusion are increasingly seen as essential for employee well-being and business bottom lines, becoming a crucial element in organisational tool kits. Businesses around the world are consciously setting targets and implementing inclusive policies and practices. This is not mere window-dressing or an effort to appease minority communities; there are proven positive benefits to be had from hearing diverse voices and thoughts.

Representation in public media and communication is another critical area that affects inclusion by working on the unconscious and subconscious mind. I have often stressed the need to give more visibility to the under-represented. A conscious effort is needed to show people there is a diverse workforce contributing to Hong Kong and its members come in various ethnicities, ages, abilities and social standing. Government and businesses equally have to ensure their advertisements, public announcements and broadcasts are inclusive and reflect the diversity that makes up society. While the needle has moved slightly on gender representation, there is still some distance to be covered with respect to race. Any visitor walking through an MTR station in Hong Kong looking at the multiple advertising panels would not be faulted for thinking that we live in a homogeneous, monocultural society with no diversity, quite contrary to the “Asia’s world city” tag that we would rather be associated with.

The World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development was on May 21. The United Nations notes that “bridging the gap between cultures is urgent and necessary for peace, stability and development” and that this day “provides us with an opportunity to deepen our understanding of the values of cultural diversity”.

Hong Kong is uniquely placed in the region because of its long history of being an international hub. We have to realise the strength that this diversity, which we

are lucky to have, offers us. And we need to do a better job of acknowledging, including and rewarding this diversity.

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