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## What counts most is management approach



It is idealistic to think that diversity in whichever form -gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation - necessarily contributes to innovation and better performance in the workplace. However, it would also be incorrect to assume diversity doesn't help. Recent empirical evidence tends to suggest that diversity per se may not have a direct impact on performance, team development, or morale. But what does count is how diversity is perceived, lived and managed.

When well managed, it can definitely stimulate ideas and contribute to new perspectives. It can also boost performance and team development by broadening horizons and avoiding homogenous thinking which, in turn, can enhance motivation. However, if poorly managed, diversity issues can easily become a source of tension and conflict. To reap the benefits, people must be encouraged to remain open-minded and tolerant of differences, ambiguities and contrasting opinions.

If this happens, diversity can indeed stimulate new ideas in several ways. Firstly, the different starting points can prompt new perspectives and "out of the box" thinking. Secondly, reaching an agreement among people with varying priorities and outlooks often requires creative solutions. When this becomes part of work practice, individuals become generally more capable and readier to explore alternatives. And thirdly, the process of reconciling differences gives people a higher level of tolerance when faced with new situations and potential frustrations.

In the IESE MBA programme, diversity is taught and lived. Students come from more than 50 countries and various professional backgrounds, so they are automatically confronted with different views and values regarding the learning process and aspects of everyday life. Working together with classmates from very different cultural, ethnic and professional backgrounds helps to develop a greater level of openness and sensitivity to others. In the case-study discussions, in groups or in class, our students learn to respect and accept different perspectives and to understand how they come about.