

Promoting an inclusive workplace culture: The roles and responsibilities of workers' and management representatives:



What is an inclusive workplace culture?

An inclusive workplace makes every employee feel valued while also acknowledging that differences among employees contribute to a positive organization and organizational culture and business outcomes.

Culture can be broadly described as the shared social behaviours, attitudes, values and beliefs found in a group of people or a society, typically developed over time through dialogue, interaction and understanding. It can be an effective tool to bring people together based on common understandings and defines the accepted and expected ways to behave in a given situation. Cultural orientation to new employees and adaptation of the organizational culture to new realities require engagement from all individuals – including workers and management.



With such a significant part of the population in Qatar originating from different countries, cultures and ethnicities, it is important to find channels through which employees' cultural diversity can be preserved and expressed, while also acknowledging that employees can benefit from understanding and adapting to Qatari culture, customs and habits. Additionally, establishing a positive culture within the workplace can promote cohesion and cooperation across all nationalities / ethnicities, and contribute to positive working relationships and smooth business operations.



Why address inclusive workplace cultures in joint committees?

Discussions about culture can sometimes involve difficult conversations and topics. Joint committees provide a platform to plan and implement cultural or educational events, to share and learn about local culture, build workers' social capital, and understand what constitutes a positive workplace environment.

National/community culture: is the company responding to employees' interests in learning about local and national culture and history, their ideas for how this may be possible, and the best ways to do this? Are there opportunities for the company to engage in Corporate Social Responsibility activities to promote employees' involvement in community activities?

Organizational culture: are there organizational or leadership policies, structures and processes that workers find difficult to adapt to, and how can they be revised to improve workplace culture?

Individual culture: are workers able to express their own cultural beliefs or customs, either in the workplace, or their accommodation, and what are suggestions for improvements?



Qatari Law No. (14) of 2004: The joint committee shall undertake the study and discussion of all the matters related to the Work in the Establishment, in particular, the development of the general culture of the Workers (Article 126).

Roles and responsibilities of workers' and management representatives



It is important to ensure equality of opportunity for all workers in their access to cultural development opportunities that meet the needs of both the individual and the organization. To ensure that cultural concerns and opportunities are effectively addressed by the joint committee, it is important to consider the composition of the committee and its members. This might involve:



Considering the level of knowledge and expertise necessary to engage productively on matters of cultural orientation and understanding. For example, external experts could be consulted to help develop cultural orientation programmes or strategies that are inclusive and values-driven.



Ensuring that job type, nationality and gender representation on the committee reflects the broader job type, nationality and gender composition of the workplace and providing a space for different ethnic, national or cultural groups to speak safely and candidly about their own experience.



Fostering a collaborative environment where leadership and management encourages open dialogue and teamwork across national and ethnic boundaries, promoting positive meeting and gatherings.

Planning a discussion on workplace inclusion in joint committees



Efforts in this area are likely to be developed on a longer-term basis. It therefore may not be necessary to include cultural questions as a standing agenda item for every meeting. Being a broader topic with several important aspects, it may be possible to establish a sub-committee that focuses on improving specific aspects of cultural understanding or to promote and organize particular cultural exchanges or experiences.

For the joint committee meetings where cultural development is included, it is important to establish a well thought through agenda and devote enough time to address key issues in a systematic way, including for example:

- Having a specific agenda with defined bullets, which is shared in advance, including any reading material or other information necessary for the meeting to be productive.
- Following up on decisions previously made, as well as any outstanding items from earlier meetings.
- Considering any new, updated or revised policies, procedures or opportunities, and analyse worker uptake of the current services and offerings.
- Regularly reporting on the status of the implementation of initiatives and opportunities for cultural development.



A cultural development and orientation action plan would help steer the work of both the overall organization and the committee itself as it relates to workplace and local cultural learning. In workplaces with high staff turnover, both among workers and managers, establishing this kind of action plan and longer-term agreement could prove an invaluable resource to ensure consistency and sustainability over time, ensuring that institutional knowledge and lessons in relation to cultural development and orientation is maintained and passed on after individuals leave. Items for such an action plan may include:

- Establishing or proposing cultural orientation, inclusion, diversity and equality policies, initiatives and procedures.
- Developing cultural exchanges and experiences, including social events.
- Scheduling follow-ups and monitoring of activities at regular intervals.
- Evaluating the uptake and effectiveness of opportunities and offerings.
- Setting goals and targets for provision of cultural orientation opportunities at the workplace, which may include cultural orientation centres (on larger worksites / workplaces).



In order to ensure that meeting time is used efficiently, a process and timeline should be agreed to ensure that relevant information is shared with committee members prior to meetings. It is also important that all representatives are provided enough time to read and understand the material.