

Diversity

The status of diversity and discrimination is country and time-dependent. When I immigrated to Canada 30 years ago, the professional standards related to discrimination by gender, religion, color, sexual preferences, etc were somewhat relaxed. I have seen the progressive change of these standards from the state of “some tolerance” to a state of “zero tolerance”. My current institution is very vigilant regarding issues of equality, discrimination and harassment in the workplace and is continuously educating the staff on what is acceptable and on what is not. There are serious consequences for offenders and there are professionals who listen to, and handle complaints. Bottom line: There is no more a grey zone for discriminatory or abusive behavior in the workplace and workers are encouraged to report offenders, who may get punished severely for inappropriate actions (even if such actions are intended as “jokes”).

My interaction with international colleagues has confirmed repeatedly that professional standards related to diversity, discrimination and harassment are very different in other countries. I have witnessed clear cases of sexual harassment in the workplace (verbal, touching, joking, etc) which seem to pass “unnoticed” by the victims. Clearly, the lack of strong directives on what is permitted and what is not permitted in the workplace encourages abusers to continue their customary behavior and discourages the abused from reporting them.

In my estimation, eventually, in most countries, institutions will adopt the principles of zero tolerance, educate all employees on what constitutes discrimination and abuse and will open specialized offices which will deal with education, counselling and punishment of offenders. When these policies are in place, I predict that all forms of discrimination and abuse in the workplace will be highly diminished.