

D&I Advisory Council London – May 2021 Meeting

In our inaugural D&I Advisory Council in December 2020, our Council set the following four priorities for D&I in 2021:

- ◆ All organisations have got the Diversity message but getting Inclusion right is the priority
- ◆ We have to make progress on Black British in our businesses
- ◆ We have to ensure the D&I message is about investment not a threat
- ◆ Ultimately to make progress you need Targets with Teeth

Across each of our priorities, it has become clear that diverse and inclusive environments stem from leadership tone. It is in our nature to gravitate towards those that are similar to us, to sink into groups that feel familiar and comfortable, but this does not lend itself well to the diversity of thought that is required to solve the complex problems of today, and tomorrow.

Ultimately, it is down to leadership to nurture psychologically safe and inclusive environments so that their teams can accelerate.

In our second D&I Advisory Council, we continued our discussion on how businesses, and leaders, can deliver on the Priorities and the actions that we must focus on, specifically focusing on Creating Inclusion and Black British in our Businesses.

Priority One: Creating inclusion

Leaders that ‘walk the talk’

Tone from the top, consistent messaging and curiosity from our leaders is key to driving inclusion within businesses. Employees need to look up and believe their leaders are driving inclusion authentically. It can’t just be a campaign – you have to live and breathe it. D&I is often still seen as separate from the day job but true inclusion comes when it is embedded and this starts with leadership ‘living’ the agenda.

Finding your why

Leaders that focus on helping their employees find their ‘why’ are invaluable. Helping others understand the deeper level of impact they can have helps transcend background, race, gender, seniority etc. Organisationally this means helping people to understand how their contribution impacts the bottom line – if you can achieve this then the sense of common purpose leads naturally to an inclusive environment.

Beware Hierarchy

The more hierarchical the organisation, the greater the inclusion challenge. Tone from the top is important but it is very easy in top down organisations for there to be assumptions made about groups of people. The feedback loop and the willingness for people to speak up to correct false assumption may just not be as strong. Similarly to 'finding your why,' businesses that create environments where juniors feel they can genuinely add value to the culture and bottom line of a business, are more successful.

Jolting people out of their comfort zone into awareness

For many people in our organisations, they have rarely felt 'other' at work. It can be hard for them to understand how those that may have different 'lived experiences', experience the same workplace. However, asking people how they have felt when they went to a party or a wedding alone, and did not know anyone, is a great question to jolt them into empathy for other colleagues.

Another question that can be valuable is asking people to reflect on their 'five closest friends' – what we usually find is that our friendship group tends to reflect us; we all have a tendency to gravitate to people like us. If we want to create inclusion in our work places, we have to consciously seek out, and be curious, about people who aren't like us.

Time to drop the word 'Diversity'?

Inclusion starts when leaders realise that an individual is not 'one thing' nor to be put in a category. Too often 'diversity' is defining someone as 'other' – 'X is diverse' or 'Y is a diversity hire'. Using the phrase 'underrepresented groups' is much more helpful. Increasingly, the term 'equity' is becoming commonplace with many D&I functions re-labelling themselves with the word 'equity' to reflect the fair and level playing field they are trying to achieve. Will 2022 be the year when 'diversity' as a term, and a measure, has served its purpose?

Priority Two: Black British in our Businesses – listen, learn and look in new places

Look in new places

Our Advisory Council acknowledge that whilst we can address this conversation from a business perspective, it does not affect the intrinsic inequality systemic in our society. Businesses cannot expect to shift the dial overnight – this is a deep-rooted issue that will rely on multi-faceted and collective effort to address. Amongst other things, you have to look at the school system to rectify these issues.

As a result many businesses will argue that 'the pipeline is simply not there', but how often do businesses think 'outside of the box' and look in new places? Headhunters are in an important and influential position to push clients to be brave and look in new areas. There is not a lack of Black British talent but it may not be in high profile places, so we must push beyond the traditional confines of hiring and look in new places for this talent, for instance local authorities and the public sector more broadly.

Mentoring

Mentoring is a vital tool that leaders can use to support the pipeline of Black British talent coming through the private sector. Taking it one step further, to truly understand an individual's experience, leaders should also use reverse mentoring.

There has been a footprint established over the years for how the 'successful' individual should look and behave, but we need to rid ourselves of this expectation, or certainly gravitation, towards homogeneity – inclusive cultures and curious mentors will be key to this. The ability to listen and learn from the experiences, ideas and ambitions of your Black British workforce will be pivotal in making this shift.

Open Forums for Listening

The Advisory Council debated the notion of 'cancel culture' – closing down, even vilifying, an individual for saying the 'wrong thing'. Open debate where people are able to express opinions and hear opinions different to their own is extremely important. In this process people may say something inappropriate or even inflammatory. It is very important to listen for their intent rather than to immediately condemn.

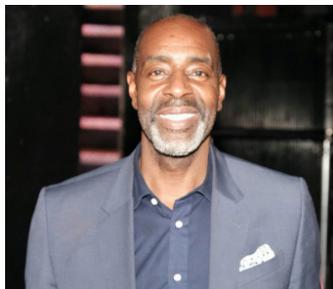
Ultimately, there is a balance to be struck here between guarding against views which are being asserted to preserve the status quo, versus creating the sense of a 'cancel culture'. The latter will ultimately lead to lower levels of engagement and curiosity on this critical topic, which is not productive to change.

Diversity isn't a bolt on; it's the beginning.

Learning, curiosity and diversity have always been central to Hedley May and with our first [Advisory Councils](#) now established in London and New York, we recognise the value and role that our Advisors can play in assisting our business.



[Liz Bingham](#), OBE, Former MP of People, EY and currently CEO of R3, Liz has received numerous awards and honours including ranked in the top 50 of World Pride Power List of influential LGBT people worldwide



[Tunde Banjoko](#), OBE, Chief Executive and Founder of social mobility charity Making The Leap which supports young people in advancing their careers and runs the UK Social Mobility Awards, focused on organisations social mobility initiatives.



[Asif Sadiq](#), MBE, Asif Senior Vice President, Head of Equity and Inclusion, International at WarnerMedia, Asif has received a number of accolades that include the highly commended Head of Diversity Award at the European Diversity Awards.

About us

[Hedley May](#) is a global executive search firm dedicated to finding exceptional talent to transform Boards and executive leadership teams. Shining a bright light, we help create a better future through our commitment to doing the right thing for our clients, candidates and the communities we serve.

Curious? Please contact our D&I practice to [learn more](#)

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