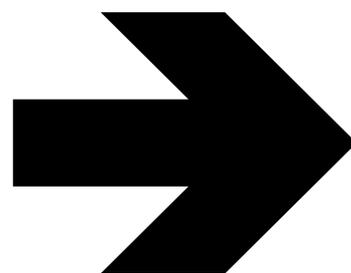


DE&I

REPORT 2021



CONTENTS

**INTRODUCTION:
CREATING LASTING CHANGE**

Page 04

DE&I BY THE NUMBERS

Page 06

AN INTERNAL VIEW

Page 08

**OUR APPROACH
TO INCLUSIVE WORK**

Page 10

**SPOTLIGHT ON: RACE,
LGBTQ+ & GENDER**

Page 12

FUTURE FOCUS

Page 18

**A VIEW FROM THE INDUSTRY
WITH ELIZABETH BANANUKA**

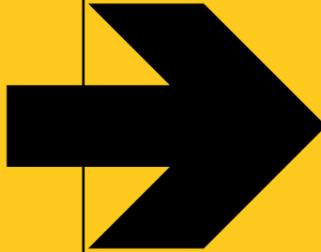
Page 20

**CURRENT GLOBAL
THINKING ON DE&I**

Page 24

INTRO

DUPLICATE

CREATING LASTING CHANGE 

ION

Diversity, equality and inclusion is central to the Harvard culture. It's our People First mission to create an environment where anyone, from any background, feels safe, inspired and able to thrive and reach their potential. Yes, this is about the diversity and equality of our workforce, but it is also about fostering and actively nurturing an inclusive culture built on empathy, shared values and behaviours.

Throughout Harvard's inaugural DE&I Report we have brought to life all the ways we have acted on this mission in the last 12 months – driving work and making progress that we're very proud of, against the backdrop of the desire and commitment to do so much more.

All of our work is underpinned by our five-pillared DE&I strategy, created in partnership with our Taking Action team – an advisory group comprised of some of our Black, Asian and ethnic minority employees to help enact positive change and hold the leadership team to account. In the last 12 months, this has included:

PEOPLE: RE-ENGINEERING CORE PEOPLE PROCESSES

- We've re-engineered the way we recruit, becoming one of the first marketing and PR agencies to partner with Hidden to reach more diverse talent pools and remove bias from the process.
- We've evolved our approach to learning and development, anchoring this in the rallying cry to Make Your Move, ensuring everybody has the same access and opportunity to thrive at Harvard.

WORK & CLIENTS: USING OUR WORK TO DELIVER ON OUR COMMITMENT

- We've launched an inclusive work guide that's being used across our whole business and with all our clients.
- And we have also developed a set of client commitments, asking our clients to share our commitment to DE&I.

STRUCTURE & POLICY: USING DATA TO GUIDE OUR JOURNEY

- We've published our gender and ethnic pay gap independently, as well as taking part in PR Week's Pay Gap Project, and we have refreshed all our DE&I policies
- We've also audited all our suppliers as a business, collecting and understanding all of their own DE&I statements and work.

KNOWLEDGE: COLLECTIVELY LEARNING AND ENABLING CONVERSATION

- We've created a global DE&I knowledge centre to encourage and enable everyone at Harvard and in our wider group of companies to learn.
- We rolled out a company-wide Race at Work programme in partnership with Louisa Joseph, founder of BAME to Boardroom, ensuring we continue to normalise conversations about race across the business.
- Communities like Grapevine, dedicated to supporting women progress in their careers, and ChimeQ, our LGBTQ+ focused-network, have hosted events throughout the year to engage and educate.

HARVARD'S VOICE: CHAMPIONING OUR DIVERSITY

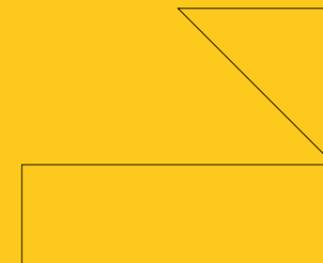
- And throughout the year we have celebrated the diversity of the whole team – coming together to learn about and celebrate moments like Black History Month, International Women's Day and Pride, to name just a few.

In February 2021, we were awarded the Blueprint Ally Status from BME PR Pros in recognition of not only the progress we had already made, but also our commitment to creating last change here at Harvard, as well as in the wider industry. There's still so much we will do, and you will read about what we plan to do next – but as you read on, I wanted to take the opportunity to thank every member of the Harvard team who has driven and participated in our DE&I work to date.

Successfully driving diversity and equality across a 90+ person business while maintaining an inclusive culture is a collective responsibility, driven from the top but activated everyday throughout the whole business in the way we behave and the energy we bring – and every member of the Harvard team embraces this journey and responsibility completely. Thank you everyone!



ELLIE THOMPSON
CEO, HARVARD



DE&I BY THE NUMBERS

by Pete Marcus

As you'll see in this report, we've worked incredibly hard over the past year to make Harvard a more diverse and inclusive agency. We believe passionately in providing a working environment where everyone can feel safe and enabled to thrive. And while we know we aren't perfect, we take pride in leading the industry in this effort.

The statistics here only tell part of the story – and comprise a starting point, not the end of the journey. But we wanted to include them in line with our wider commitment to openness and transparency about our ongoing DE&I work. We'll measure our progress against these numbers and continue to report them annually.



OUR TEAM

- 25% of our employees identify as from a Black, Asian and ethnic minority background
- Our leadership team is 50% female, 50% male
- Overall our agency is 60% female, 40% male



RESULTS FROM OUR PEOPLE SURVEY

Every quarter we poll our people to get a sense of their thoughts and feelings on a range of agency issues, including DE&I. These stats are from our latest survey in Q3 2021.



OUR RECRUITMENT IN 2021

- From 23 new recruits hired, 13 are white (57%) and 10 are from Black, Asian and ethnic minority background (43%) ...
- ... While 15 are female (65%) and 8 are male (35%)
- Our candidate pool for these roles was 50% white and 50% Black, Asian and ethnic minority
- ... And 67% of our candidates were female
- 18% of our interview panels were ethnically diverse and 100% were gender diverse.



OUR PAY GAP DATA

- Harvard's gender pay gap is 8.5%
- Our ethnic pay gap is 27%

94%

agree that Harvard is an environment where they feel safe and enabled to thrive

97%

are aware of Harvard's DE&I initiatives

96%

agree that Harvard has a positive culture regarding diversity and inclusion

90%

are comfortable being themselves at work

94%

agree that Harvard is making good progress on our DE&I initiatives

84%

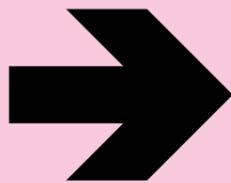
agree that Harvard creates work that is authentic and inclusive

80%

feel confident reporting inappropriate, marginalising or discriminatory incidents or issues to senior staff

AN INTERNAL VIEW

by Lorna Hughes



As we look back over the last 18 months at our work in creating a more diverse and inclusive workforce, some of our most transformational change has come internally. I wanted to highlight two things we've done which have genuinely helped to make our agency more inclusive now and into the future.

08/09

OVERHAULING RECRUITMENT

One of the first things we did back in early 2020 was look at our recruitment practices through a lens of DE&I. At that point, there wasn't yet a process which truly levelled the playing field for all and helped us attract more diverse talent. We identified Hidden as a partner to help us overhaul our approach.

Hidden is an app-based recruitment consultancy which puts the emphasis on DE&I – we are given anonymous candidate lists and approve people for interviews based purely on experience. We have implemented a policy to ensure diversity in the interviewing panel, we've been coached on holding inclusive interviews, and we have done some very practical but vital things like changing our job adverts to ensure they appeal to people from all backgrounds.

Since kicking off with Hidden, just over half of the people we have hired are from Black, Asian and ethnic minority backgrounds. Equally importantly, it's changed the way we think and made us all more aware of where unconscious bias could creep in, or where even the tasks we set for an interview could put, for example, someone with a neurodivergence at a disadvantage.

A NEW APPROACH TO LEARNING & DEVELOPMENT

Recruitment gets great people into the business; the next step is helping them thrive. We've always been a people-first business but our approach to L&D was not clearly defined and there were inconsistencies which, as we looked at ourselves through a DE&I lens, went from frustrating to unacceptable.

In mid-2020, we began the process of re-setting what L&D means at Harvard. We created a framework based on a simple principle – "A great career will be driven by you, guided by your line manager and supported by Harvard". This puts growth mindset and self-drive at its heart. We want to work with our people to decide their own career trajectory and help them thrive.

Within this, we have established new job descriptions and career path outlines which show non-traditional paths available. We've developed a new Personal Development Plan focused on helping people drive their own careers. We've formalised the process around mentoring with guides in place for mentees and mentors, and, for our Black, Asian and ethnic minority team members, the ability to be matched with people of colour who they can learn from and grow with. And we have introduced a line management training programme to ensure every manager here is equipped to do the best for our people every day.

But there is more we need to do. We are looking at our onboarding process, our Black, Asian and ethnic minority retention rate, and we will be especially focused on areas of DE&I where we have the most work to do, as our CEO Ellie discusses later in this report.

The last 18 months have been truly transformational for us internally but we won't stop there.

OUR APPROACH TO INCLUSIVE WORK

by Andrew Last



**NO MORE PALE,
MALE AND STALE**

As an agency, there's arguably no greater impact we can make in DE&I than ensuring the content we create and put out in-market is inclusive and reflects the audiences we are trying to engage. We should be challenging stereotypes and generalisations, not only breaking away from common misconceptions but creating new narratives that present these groups in a more genuine light.

Unconscious bias and internal pressures to deliver at speed already make this challenging. This is intensified in the world of B2B, where there are less opportunities for 'big ticket' DE&I campaigns you might expect from the likes of consumer health & beauty or fashion brands.

B2B is an altogether more conservative industry and is just starting on its own DE&I journey. It's a world where 'male, pale and stale' is still the order of the day – and they're often wearing suits and shaking hands in the most clichéd stock photography way imaginable.

We're fully committed to making a difference and have started by looking at three areas to enable change:

EDUCATION: THE INCLUSIVE WORK GUIDE

Through a cross-agency team representing all areas of Harvard, we produced a guide to help us create work that represents the full spectrum of society.

Whether it's guidance from Planning on how to create more diverse personas; tips from Editorial on avoiding gendered colloquial greetings (such as "hey guys") or gendered job titles (e.g. salesman and actress); Creative considerations when casting for a film shoot; or Account Management advising on how to run an inclusive brainstorm – this guide is all about bringing people together, rather than pushing them further apart.

PROCESS: CHANGING THE BRIEF

Our first step here was to literally 'change the brief'. We updated our creative briefing template so it now includes prompts and reminders to guide the brief writer on challenging stereotypes and thinking more inclusively.

Next up is a proactive initiative to help influence client work by taking a more inclusive and diverse approach to promoting better behaviours. This can manifest itself as presenting clients with bold creative ideas addressing DE&I inequalities, questioning the briefs we receive or by promoting relevant behaviours internally and externally. It's early days but we're excited by the opportunity here.

CLIENT PARTNERSHIP: CLIENT-AGENCY COMMITMENTS

Our work is only as good as the relationships we have with our clients. We therefore developed a Client Partnership Guide that defines a set of shared priorities and purpose. This contains eight commitments, covering everything from communication and time management to budgeting and resourcing, including a commitment dedicated to 'Inclusive Work'.

Here we commit to making sure that "diversity and inclusion considerations are at the forefront of our work, not an afterthought" and clients pledge to be prepared to "challenge our own biases and those within our organisation, to be open-minded to your suggestions and recommendations, whether that's use of language, design or choice of imagery or footage."

We have communicated this to all clients and initial feedback has been extremely encouraging.

With these foundations in place, we are excited about what's next.

SPOTLIGHT ON...

by Louie St Claire

➔ RACE



We talked to Ben Roberts, director and DE&I leader, to discuss our DE&I efforts, achieving the Blueprint status and The XEC (a scheme to create the next generation of Black, Asian, mixed race and ethnic minority PR leaders).

TELL US A LITTLE ABOUT DE&I AT HARVARD OVER THE LAST 18 MONTHS?

It's interesting, I was interviewing last week and I get asked that question in some form all the time now, it's lovely to be asked and is testament to how far we've come. Our approach to DE&I has come from the very top. I think we have really tried to understand both the internal and external dynamics at play and in the wake of George Floyd's murder, we really stood up – speaking to colleagues, clients, the industry and ex-employees. We did this with a level of openness that really set the tone and made having difficult conversations possible.

I guess when it would have been easy to focus elsewhere during a pandemic, we really prioritised it. Then basically the Blueprint came at a good time for us, giving us a structure when we were trying to get a grip on urgent requirements. It has enabled us to have a centrepiece for the programme and really embed everything into the foundations of the business.

AND HOW HAS THE PROGRAMME EVOLVED?

I think that we've done a good job of getting people to trust that we're trying to do the right thing and it has meant everyone is up for learning together. This has put us ahead of most companies.

DE&I now permeates everything, best described through our five pillars: recruitment and onboarding, learning and development, innovation, the Harvard voice and of course our policies. Ultimately people are very committed to it.

CONGRATULATIONS ON GETTING ON TO THE XEC. WHAT IS THAT ALL ABOUT?

The XEC has been set up by BME PR Pros, it's designed as a scheme to directly solve the issue of adding senior Black, Asian and ethnic minority leaders to the upper echelons of the comms industry. Which is fundamental to addressing the ethnic pay gap. Everyone on the course has the opportunity to learn from people that are like them across leadership functions, DE&I and communications – it's really exciting to be part of.

WHAT'S NEXT FOR HARVARD ON ITS JOURNEY?

Ethnicity, LGBTQ+ and gender are a huge focus, not just in our business, but the wider world and we'll continue our focus there. There is also an appetite for progress in other areas such as disability, age and neurodiversity and I think that we have the foundations now to maintain momentum and keep learning. We just want to excel and be a great business for DE&I.

→ LGBTQ+



One of our key focus areas in 2021 has been to change the conversation around LGBTQ+ and diversity. Jo Franklin-Wright, director at Harvard, describes where we've come from, where we're heading next and the ongoing urgent requirement and support needed for the trans community.

LET'S START BY TALKING A LITTLE ABOUT THIS YEAR AND SOME OF THE PROGRESS WE'VE MADE – HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE IT?

It's been positive, the Blueprint, ChimeQ (our group-level LGBTQ+ network) and the way we onboard have all contributed really well to a more inclusive conversation. I think that the word I'd use is that everything has been more intentional. We understand how to bring people into all of our programmes and the ways we would like people to connect. We're making it easier and more natural for people to get involved in affinity groups. This helps to normalise conversations, which has been a key commitment in our DE&I plan.

AND IN THAT NORMALISATION PROCESS, SO MUCH OF THIS IS WRAPPED UP IN LANGUAGE, WHICH IS SO IMPORTANT IN A PR AND MARKETING AGENCY THAT TRADES ON WORDS. HOW DO WE MAKE THAT CHANGE MORE PROFOUND?

Firstly, it's mindset thing. It's about accepting that change is good, we're meant to change, that's a good thing. If people are open to looking at the ways they communicate that's half the battle. In business language, phrases like 'Hi Guys' is easy to change. There is tonnes of entrenched language like this that mean it's easy for assumptions to occur when talking about someone's identity or their partner's. I recently got married and our registrar admitted to finding it challenging not to say "Mr & Mrs" at the end of the ceremony, so my wife and I asked them to just avoid gendered language entirely.

It's simple stuff but it is so important. Normalising inclusive behaviour starts with how we communicate with each other. That said, there is a so much work to do, imagine a world where everyone said humankind rather than mankind, to be inclusive of everyone in it. It doesn't sound hard, but these can be huge hurdles.

TALKING OF INCLUSIVITY, THE BALANCE BETWEEN BRANDS JUMPING ON LGBTQ+ CULTURAL THEMES SUCH AS PRIDE HAS BEEN AN ONGOING CONVERSATION AT HARVARD.

Yes, I'm amazed at how much brands still get this wrong. I sound like a broken record, but brands need to do the proper work to earn the right to be part of the community. For example with Pride, it's both a celebration and a

commemoration, it's a look back and a look forward for the community and a time to take stock of the work that still needs doing. So many brands just misfire totally by viewing it purely as a celebration and miss the point about the ongoing issues facing the community that they could help with their money, and resources but time and again decide not to. Performatively changing your logo to a Pride flag is somehow less political and easier to justify than donating to an LGBT-friendly domestic violence shelter, for instance.

WE'VE TALKED LOTS ABOUT THE TRANS COMMUNITY AND SUPPORT THIS YEAR, TELL US A LITTLE ABOUT THE THINKING HERE?

So many of the issues around sexuality are wrapped up in challenges around gender roles and expectations of what it means to "conform," and by extension the dialogue around transgender people has hit the mainstream in the most destructive and cynical way. The trans community is the most persecuted group amongst the LGBTQ+ community. It's a very small community relative to the population and most people in the UK won't know any transgender people, but whilst we're normalising conversations, I want to promote the idea that trans people have normal everyday lives like the rest of us. I want Harvard to be a place where anyone would be comfortable coming into our organisation. It's why pronouns and language is an important first step, but we both need to signal we're a safe place for everyone and back that up with education and support for all, to ensure everyone can thrive in our agency and industry.

FINALLY, ARE THERE ANY OTHER PIECES OF ADVICE OR THOUGHTS FOR COMPANIES NAVIGATING THIS?

I think that all businesses need to work out where their blind spots are and get help to address them. When we booked our honeymoon, my wife and I were all too well aware that in over 70 countries you can be arrested and even killed for being openly gay. We asked our travel company for LGBTQ+ friendly destinations and the response we got was "You don't need to worry about that, we're not in the dark ages anymore". It was just tone deaf, cynical and showed a total blind spot for an entire community. That kind of stuff needs to be fixed. Do the work!

→ GENDER



As the third and final spotlight on the urgent requirements in DE&I, Harvard CEO Ellie Thompson talked about her changing attitudes on gender and how they have evolved over time and, in turn, have informed Harvard's strategy...

SO TELL US ABOUT HOW THINGS HAVE CHANGED FOR YOU?

I certainly feel a bigger responsibility and my focus on gender and specifically women definitely takes up a bigger focus in my mind in my new position. I guess I have a more reflective understanding and more people point out my responsibility to lead in this area. Also, it's undeniable that the world has changed. Having spoken to virtually all the women in the business, I also know that it means a lot to them.

HOW DOES THIS TRANSLATE INTO ACTION AT HARVARD?

It's all about creating an environment where women are able to continue to thrive and get where they need to get to without needing to leave. As a personal example, when I joined Harvard, I was returning from maternity leave after the birth of my son. I didn't realise at the time, but I didn't want to have to go through the 'returning mother' thing and a whole bunch of assumptions that go with that... juggling responsibilities, holding down motherhood and a job... men never get asked those things. I want to make sure we have paths open to women at Harvard without the entrenched behaviours or assumptions, that's genuine inclusivity for me.

AND FOR WOMEN, THESE KINDS OF ENTRENCHED ATTITUDES PERMEATE ACROSS THE ENTIRE WORKFORCE, RIGHT?

Exactly, another example being that in our industry women struggle to make the shift from what could be described as 'doing roles' to 'thinking roles'. We too often get cast as great doers by those around us – more senior to us. At the same time men are much more comfortable sharing opinions and have a confidence in their ideas; as a result they accelerate into senior levels more quickly. So often with the women I've mentored, the biggest barrier is self-belief. If we can help with that, and the paths are available to them, that's a match made in heaven.

WHERE DO YOU THINK PROGRESS HAS BEEN MADE IN THE INDUSTRY?

There are probably more female leaders in PR than ever before and role models are certainly easier to come by. That means women coming through the industry can see the paths that others have taken and it should make the hurdles easier to overcome. But I say that with caution; there is still a serious gender pay gap problem and entrenched attitudes, in an industry that is dominated by women. I can't believe it's a conversation we still have to have in 2021.

To reiterate, supporting women at the critical points along their career paths is how agencies need to keep up the progress.

AND FINALLY, WHAT WOULD YOU SAY TO WOMEN EITHER MAKING THEIR WAY IN THE INDUSTRY OR CONSIDERING JOINING IT?

Speak up! It's easier said than done, but at Harvard, we have a culture that actively encourages that for everyone, whoever you are. Building self-belief has its foundations in trust and confidence. Trust that if you do speak up you'll be heard and confidence that your employer will take you seriously. That would be a good start for our industry because it's a brilliant place to work.

→ **SO OFTEN WITH THE WOMEN I'VE MENTORED, THE BIGGEST BARRIER IS SELF-BELIEF. IF WE CAN HELP WITH THAT, AND THE PATHS ARE AVAILABLE TO THEM, THAT'S A MATCH MADE IN HEAVEN.**



FUTURE FOCUS

by Ben Roberts

For all of the action that has taken place across Harvard, and the progress made to date, we know we are just at the start of our DE&I journey – and in so many ways it’s a journey without an endpoint.

While we will reach our goal of having a truly diverse workforce rooted in equality across all groups, the mission to create an environment where anyone from any background feels safe and enabled to thrive is a perpetual commitment – it’s a promise that requires nurturing and prioritising every day. This will underpin our action moving forwards.

In the next 12 months, we’ll maintain our focus on the urgent priorities around ethnic and gender diversity, taking the action required to meet our stated goals in our DE&I strategy, including reducing our pay gaps and increasing representation at the most senior levels within the agency.

We’ll be investing even further in our relationship with Hidden, but also looking to other partnerships to ensure we are reaching and inspiring more diverse talent. Alongside this, we will drive forward our action with the LGBTQ+ community, both internally at Harvard as well as in the wider industry, with a focus on creating a safe and inspiring environment for everyone to be their true self at work.

Knowledge and collective learning will remain core to so much of the action we take, as we continue to bring the whole agency on this journey. And after re-engineering recruitment and learning & development agency-wide in 2021, we’ll turn our attention to wide-scale initiatives that drive retention across all diverse groups and enable progression into leadership positions.

➔ KNOWLEDGE AND COLLECTIVE LEARNING WILL REMAIN CORE TO SO MUCH OF THE ACTION WE TAKE, AS WE CONTINUE TO BRING THE WHOLE AGENCY ON THIS JOURNEY.

Our commitment is to broaden our focus to understand and kick start the work we need to do around neurodiversity and disability. We will not divert or take away impetus from our work in ethnic and gender diversity or LGBTQ+ – but we want to do so much more.

To achieve this, we’re evolving our DE&I strategy for 2022 and the metrics that guide our activity within it; we will involve more people from across the Harvard team to drive knowledge and action through the agency as we grow to 100+ people; and as we did around ethnic diversity, we’ll take the time to look at ourselves and learn in order to truly understand the work that needs to be done and the action we need to take.

We have never shied away from tough conversations or the need to look at ourselves critically in order to progress positively. We believe that our willingness to do this is key to our ability to create an inclusive culture and keep momentum up. And that, above everything, is our promise when looking ahead – we will not lose focus or momentum.

A VIEW FROM THE INDUSTRY

WITH **ELIZABETH BANANUKA**

by Efe Otokiti

**“WANT TO FUTURE-PROOF YOUR
BUSINESS? EMBRACE DIVERSITY.”**

Efe Otokiti sits down with BME PR Pros founder, Elizabeth Bananuka, to discuss how diversity will determine the future of agencies, and why focusing on working practices is the heart of any successful DE&I initiative.



There are few people that have a better vantage point on the PR sector's progress in diversity, equality and inclusion (DE&I) than BME PR Pros founder, Elizabeth Bananuka.

With more than 20 years' experience, she's not only been an advocate for change within PR, but has also worked in an array of comms jobs herself. So she has intimate knowledge of the nature of the industry and how it can treat people of colour, women, and other marginalised groups.

A few weeks ago, I was fortunate enough to sit down with her and get her view on the sector and how she feels DE&I is progressing within it.

“In just the last week, I've spoken to six industry leaders, and about half of them mentioned recruitment being an issue,” says Elizabeth. “This moment we're in presents an opportunity to not only accelerate DE&I, but to address fundamental working practices in PR. That's why I've said before, agencies such as Harvard that have chosen to embrace diversity, are future-proofing their business.”

She points to the droves of comms professionals she knows that have left their jobs, sector, or the city because of the burnout they experienced over the past year, as proof of this.

“People have begun to ask themselves why they should work with that level of stress. Working all hours but not being paid overtime or getting time off in lieu, all while handling excessive workloads and tight deadlines. That's why I think the recruitment challenge agencies are facing isn't a wages issue – it's a working practices issue.

“More and more businesses are realising they need to be smarter and find ways to make sure that the brilliant young woman who just had a baby doesn’t leave because she can’t balance her family and agency lives. Or that the talented young black man they just hired doesn’t exit the sector because he felt alienated. That’s why I say you simply can’t nail recruitment without also nailing working culture.”

It’s no secret that it makes more commercial sense to retain staff than to hire new people – and in more ways than businesses like to talk about. Everyone knows it’s a lot easier to work with someone you have built rapport with than to start again with someone new. Nonetheless, poor retention has always been a big part of why many corporate pushes for diversity fail.

However, it escapes neither of us that the fact we can now have these sorts of conversations around corporate DE&I is in itself a sign of progress. Up until very recently, a certain disregard for diversity was the norm for many people of colour working in comms.

“It seems ironic, but until I started BME Pros – so up until about 2015 – I’d never met another black, or even Asian woman in PR. And that’s in London!” exclaims Elizabeth. A sad reality I and many other black men I know can relate to.

“When you’re in a challenging workplace and having a hard time, it becomes difficult to know whether it’s them or you. After years of being bullied from job to job, I just felt like I had bad luck.

➔ IT SEEMS IRONIC, BUT UNTIL I STARTED BME PROS – SO UP UNTIL ABOUT 2015 – I’D NEVER MET ANOTHER BLACK, OR EVEN ASIAN WOMAN IN PR. AND THAT’S IN LONDON!

“Then I started talking about this stuff and a deluge of emails from women saying they’d had similar experiences started pouring in. One woman I know is still in therapy dealing with PTSD from her time in an agency six and a half years ago. And just last year, one black woman emailed me after reading one of my Twitter rants to tell me everything I had said was just like her life – it was like we could’ve been the same person.”

While microaggressions and unconscious biases are exacerbated for marginalised groups, Elizabeth ultimately believes PR is a fundamentally flawed industry. She brings up heart-breaking stories from her time as a crisis comms consultant, and what it was like watching people’s lives disintegrate in front of her eyes.

“Because you’re the PR person, no one thinks there’s any duty of care around your mental health,” she says. “I’d watch people get sent to prison for crimes they didn’t commit, watch their family collapse around them, and you’re meant to see all this and just carry on as normal. It’s all part of the PR Kool Aid we all drink. We think it’s normal to leave an event or date at 11pm to reply to some emails.”

Elizabeth believes that no one really wants to partake in this always-on work culture – we’re all just trapped in a vicious cycle. “I’ve asked people if they’d even asked their clients if they want to receive emails at 9pm, or go for drinks, and they just look at each other and say, ‘we should probably do that’.”

➔ THE MOST EXCITING THING ABOUT DE&I IS THAT EVERY TIME I’VE WORKED WITH AN AGENCY THAT’S TRULY EMBRACED IT, NEARLY EVERYONE THERE SAYS THE SAME THING – THEY FEEL LIKE THEY CAN BE MORE OPEN AND AUTHENTIC AT WORK. I LOVE THAT.

Despite these hurdles, when I ask her about the future of DE&I in the industry, she’s still very optimistic. “The most exciting thing about DE&I is that every time I’ve worked with an agency that’s truly embraced it, nearly everyone there says the same thing – they feel like they can be more open and authentic at work. I love that. Most people like to do good and be good, and in what can often be a very cold, hard industry, DE&I has allowed people to be their better human selves.”

That’s why she says the Blueprint has never been about quantity but quality. Too often, business leaders want diversity but don’t want to confront the ugly truths at the heart of their business.

“People want me to come in and help them fix their diversity issues like it’s an external thing, yet no one ever wants to talk about racism or homophobia. But the reality is, if you’re in a position of power and find yourself in a room in London with 100 other people and it’s not 30-40% diverse, you have to ask yourself a difficult question: how are you complicit in this disproportionate misrepresentation? If you can’t do that, then nothing is going to work.

“We need leaders to start questioning their internally held prejudices, because the truth is many people just don’t want a black boss – it’s as simple as that. But if you hire a diverse employee and can’t see them one day being above you, then there’s no point hiring them in the first place.”

It’s a hard pill to swallow, especially at a time when it feels like the accusation of racism can appear to be more problematic than the act itself. So to conclude our chat, I ask Elizabeth how she manages to remain authentic and avoid becoming what she calls a ‘professional black person’.

“When I first started, I would get endless requests to speak at events and companies. I quickly realised that if you want authentic change, you need to learn what to say no to, because if you keep taking part in conversations with topics like, ‘is diversity important’ then you’re making yourself complicit in this madness,” she says.

“If you’re calling me to ask if diversity is important, I’m going to point you to 20 years of Google articles that have made that point many times over. But if you’re calling to ask me how you get a black female chief exec in the next few years – then that’s a conversation I’m excited to have.”

CURRENT GLOBAL THINKING ON DE&I

by Roxy Nucu

DIVERSITY, EQUALITY AND INCLUSION BY DESIGN

For too long DE&I (diversity, equality and inclusion) within companies was tackled by HR professionals, resulting in a creeping pace of progress for the movement.

And this is not surprising. Given the size of the challenge, DE&I is too complex to be tackled by one department and it's wrong to assume that it's just their responsibility. It needs to become a more active priority for business leaders and beyond by adopting a systemic approach. This means embedding DE&I in the planning, design and execution of the business strategy that guides the organisation's daily activities. One-off initiatives are not impactful enough to overcome individuals' biases and truly create lasting cultural change.

When a company has a clear organisation-wide DE&I strategy embedded in the business strategy, leaders can use it to guide the selection of partners that are aligned with its intentions, creating long-lasting systemic DE&I progress.

EMPATHETIC LEADERSHIP: THE BRIDGE TO PROGRESS

Systemic change requires time, resources and doesn't happen overnight. Empathy, on the other hand, can be displayed immediately and has the power to keep people engaged in the process. DE&I needs empathy, openness and humility, especially from leadership.

An empathetic leader is one who leads while understanding the contexts, experiences and needs of others, with an increased awareness of their thoughts and feelings. This, in turn, helps organisations adapt to diverse customers, markets, ideas and talent and become successful not just in their commercial ambitions but also in moving the needle on the wider DE&I conversation. Finally, cultivating the ability to connect and relate to others, particularly when led by senior management example, brings us closer to making progress in tackling systemic inequality and systemic bias.

ALLYSHIP PROGRAMMES – MAKE INCLUSION EVERYONE'S BUSINESS

To get a DE&I initiative off the ground, it needs to become everyone's business and allyship is a great method for it. HBR defines allyship as a strategic mechanism used by people to "become collaborators, accomplices, and co-conspirators who fight injustice and promote equity in the workplace". So, an allyship programme is essential to making an organisation more diverse, fair and inclusive.

By setting up an environment where DE&I is everyone's business, it creates a sense of continual growth and nurtures a culture of being comfortable with being uncomfortable. Making everyone aware of their own privilege helps improve knowledge of what others might be lacking and prepares everyone to challenge unjust behaviour and act when needed.

DATA AND THE EXPANDING DIMENSIONS OF DIVERSITY

Data disclosure can be a powerful tool to change organisational behaviour and practices. Collecting workforce diversity data helps employers analyse and monitor progress on diversity metrics. But categorising diversities is complex and it's important we get it right.

There is no "one size fits all" approach and diversity categories may not capture everyone's identity. Organisations need to account for privacy and cultural considerations, while keeping up to date with the latest developments in the discipline. Typically, the data collected by employers in the UK includes sex, age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity and disability. However, socioeconomic status, faith, caring responsibilities and further detail in relation to a disability (e.g. neurodivergence) are adding depth to the level of inclusivity organisations should be striving for and setting better, more inclusive standards.

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A FINAL WORD

by Louie St Claire

As you will have read throughout this report, we have made tremendous efforts over the last 12 months, across absolutely all areas of our business, to focus on real change and urgent requirements across our DE&I programme.

Race and ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation have been, and will remain, urgent requirements, not just in Harvard and the marketing and PR industry, but for society as a whole.

Our businesses are reflections of the societies we operate within and it's incumbent on us as leaders – usually white, most frequently men and almost always middle class – to be more than mere allies. We need to actively champion those that do not benefit from our privilege or are parts of society that experience at best disenfranchisement and at worst abuse, prejudice, anger and hatred.

At Harvard, this started with listening and education, moved on to meaningful discussion and finally action. The word that has underpinned our year when it comes to DE&I is, normalisation. Once you have created safe spaces for dialogue, where people can reflect but also are allowed to make mistakes, people can be more open about a whole host of challenges and then at least people can all move forward together.

I'm so proud to have got this far, but unlike most things in business, this a journey with no destination. I can't wait to see what comes next and I say that with real optimism and hope.

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