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Shaking Up D&I In Talent Acquisition

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On 28th April TALiNT Partners hosted an online conference on "Shaking up D&I in Talent Acquisition" as part of our TALiNT Advantage programme. Why do we want to shake it up? To date, despite all the rhetoric and good intentions, strategies developed more than 10 years ago are still being repackaged and passed off as innovative, regardless of their limited impact in driving real results.

The global pandemic has affected the D&I landscape too, so perhaps it is time to take a fresh look at how employers are driving change and inclusivity in 2021?

The impact of the pandemic on gender equality.
As we begin to assess the wider impact of the covid-19, an unhappy bi-product has emerged indicating that career inequality between women and men has widened. Alison Macguire, Head of Recruitment, Emerging Talent and D&I for Eversheds Sutherland shared her findings with our audience of senior HR and talent acquisition leaders, on how women's jobs have been disproportionally affected by the pandemic. According to McKinsey's 2020 "Women in the Workplace" report, womens' jobs are "1.8 times more vulnerable to the current crisis than mens' jobs". The report also highlights that, whilst making up 39% of the workforce, women make up 54% of overall job losses during the pandemic.

Alisons' findings showed that women have been affected in two direct ways, creating a pincer effect on their career development. She referred to "society's reliance on women during the pandemic", with cultural and social norms leading to the bulk of home schooling and care for elderly or vulnerable relatives falling to women. With the prioritisation of family care, many women have neither had the bandwidth or energy to do "more" in their role, whether that is putting their hand up for additional responsibilities, taking on projects or working

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extended hours. The impact has also been seen in women stepping back from promotional opportunities, additional training, and job applications.

Simultaneously, many sectors most directly impacted by the pandemic in terms of redundancies and extended periods of furlough, employ a high percentage of women. Alison quoted the ILO's "Covid-19 and the World of Work" report, which found that 41% of employed women were in sectors at "high risk of severe COVID-19 in terms of job losses and decline in work hours e.g. hospitality, retail, travel".

There is a sense that women have fallen behind in their career development. To redress the balance employers will need to examine how individual employees have been impacted, and to provide access to opportunities which will encourage women to step forward, with confidence that they will have the support they need. Alison challenged organisations to honestly consider their own promotion criteria in terms of which behaviours are recognised and rewarded, and how these might deter, or rule out their talented women from applying or being considered.

The power of detail in ED&I transformation
Considering job applications on a case-by-case basis requires time and good visibility of the data. Andy Randall, CEO of eArcu demonstrated the danger of using generalisations when it comes to driving change in ED&I. Averages can skew the reality of regional and cultural differences, for example considering the diversity of new hire and employee populations against regional demographics is meaningless without understanding how they relate to the location; hiring across ethnic minority groups in London is very different to the same hiring in, say, Norwich. Qualitative detail is critical, not only to accurate assessment of progress, but

also to understand how inclusivity is impacted at every stage of the recruitment process. Employers must move away from using clunky on-line forms (often a lift and drop from their paper survey) to persuade candidates and employees to share their D&I information; this does not convey the importance of embracing all backgrounds, as central to the organisation's culture.

Putting D&I data front and centre is a differentiator for both new talent and existing employees. In eArcu's recent job-seeker survey, 70% of respondents saw commitment to diversity as important. That means not only taking steps to improve ED&I across an organisation but also proving impact and shouting about it in brand messaging.

Andy highlighted how the "dimensions of diversity" have changed over the past decade. ED&I targets in the UK are largely still based on the 2011 census. New categories in the 2021 census, such as gender identity, sexual orientation, etc. can be expected to bring new areas of focus for employers in 2022 and beyond.

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One organisation shouting publicly about their achievements in D&I is the BBC. Nina Goswami, Creative Diversity Lead announced the 2021 results of the 50:50 challenge, where 70% of BBC teams managed to achieve gender balance in the month

of March. The BBC initiative started in their London newsroom and is now driving cultural change by increasing diverse representation not only across the organisation, but also their partner relationships.

The whole programme is underpinned by data, with focus on measuring and setting targets for what is within control, and influencing what is not. Nina pointed out that the BBC's content-makers cannot not always control the reporters or presenters used, but by tracking it they are able to give feedback and influence future planning, without compromising on quality.

The principle behind 50:50 is based on the BBC being more representative of their consumers: for their audiences to see themselves reflected in the people on-screen. In fact, the project can have impact off-screen, with production and back-office teams also taking part. This is a high-profile example of something employers around the globe are struggling with; creating an organisation which is reflective of its customer base.

The BBC has invested in the 50:50 Project, both in terms of resources and budget. It indicates the necessity of both executive sponsorship and employee passion in driving real and lasting change from the top to the bottom of an organisation.

Not to steal the BBC's thunder, but Nina reported how 41 partners of the 100-strong global network that spans 26 countries published their data for the first time publicly. Half of the partner organisations reached at least 50% women representation, compared to a third when they first started monitoring.

Meanwhile back at the BBC, an audience survey conducted by YouGov suggests the shift in use of women in programming was being noticed by 62% of the BBC's audience. In addition, 58% of women aged 16 to 34 said they visit BBC websites and

online services more often because of greater female representation. A great illustration of what can happen with dedicated focus.

Does flexibility create better access for all?
The rise of flexible working, as an outcome of the pandemic is well and widely documented. There are mixed reviews on how this has impacted the mutual relationship between employer and employee, as Paul Deemer, Head of D&I for NHS Employers terms it, there has been a "shift in the psychological contract" and with it the balance of power. Flexible working is no longer a differentiator for employers, it is a candidate expectation.

For the NHS this trend raises health and safety challenges in relation to their employees; how can they assess risk for those working from home? With the introduction of shielding, there is a new visibility of employee health. Along with employees living with underlying health conditions, those with hidden disabilities (e.g. diabetes, colitis, etc) have been highlighted as a cause for employer concern. NHS Employers conducted a survey of these employees to better understand their experience in lockdown. 75% of the 5000 respondents had some form of disability. Whilst there were instances of feeling isolated, particularly amongst those with mental health issues, many with disabilities were positive about the experience, having found a new balance in managing their condition whilst also working effectively from home.

Paul suggests that this creates a case for a re-calibration of working practices expanding the parameters of what constitutes reasonable adjustment. He believes this could be broadened to include adjustments for other protected characteristics such as age, ethnicity, gender, etc.

With employee welfare as a clear priority post pandemic, this could create greater access to talent which might otherwise have been limited by the workplace or their personal constraints.

If previous projects have failed to move the bar – what next?
Employers have grown frustrated that the challenges in achieving a truly inclusive and diverse organisation have not been solved. What is going wrong?

Unconscious bias training may or may not raise understanding and awareness, blind screening provides a more skills-based filter, paying attention to the language and messaging reduces self-deselection.

Structured interviews can be extremely impactful in increasing unbiased hiring decisions. According to Catalina Schveninger, Chief People Officer at FutureLearn, if the science tells us anything it is that organisations cannot move the dial by doing just one thing in isolation.

As with the BBC, FutureLearn have looked at their consumers to shape their ED&I aspirations, seeking to mirror the diversity of their learner base. They have sought to understand and build upon the diverse talent within their own organisation, without fear of being challenged by new perspectives whether cultural or generational. Through enabling people to bring their initiatives to life they are seeing success in both gender and ethnic minority employee representation.

The second critical ingredient, Catalina stresses, is a clarity of purpose in relation to ED&I. The integration of ED&I within an organisation's overall commercial strategy, rather than seeing it as a side project, drives a fundamental change of approach. Inclusivity goals and targets are intrinsically linked to operation and commercial success, policymaking, performance targets and reward.

Catalina recommends being guided by the data and science; "try everything and measure the results – it is not a sprint; it is a marathon" she concludes.

Guidant Global have also taken this mid-term, persistent approach and seen positive results.

Karina Townley, Guidant's Managing Director for EMEA, shared how the organisation challenged themselves to seek excellence in their own ED&I to improve the quality of their client operations and be better able to support clients with their own change strategies.

Support from the top has been fundamental in the success of driving lasting change. Karina describes their ED&I programmes as "Employee-led" and "Passion-filled", with five Ambassador groups providing challenge, input and ideas across each area of diversity. As a technology-enabled programme, employees have a platform to share their stories and raise awareness through peer-to-peer communication.

During the pandemic, Guidant were able to broaden the scope of their ED&I tools to support employee welfare during periods of furlough and remote working, offering unfiltered communication and connection to their teams. They could closely monitor staff wellbeing and happiness, assessing any risks or challenges throughout the whole period.

What are the takeaways for employers?
There were some consistent themes throughout the event. The importance of boardroom sponsorship and employee buy-in are well known, but perhaps there are lessons learned in the pandemic, which offer a new perspective?

If long-established barriers to change can be overturned in days to maintain operations, when necessary for organisational survival, then we can challenge barriers to creativity and new practices which create a better and more inclusive workplace for every person.

The second lesson is that it is all in the detail; generalised statistics create a false picture and mask both challenges and successes.

Understanding how ED&I is supported at every stage of the process takes effort but brings transparency. One intervention in isolation cannot transform an organisation's culture.

Finally, let the leadership set the purpose, then give ownership to employees to make the culture their own, representative of who they are and the communities they live in. An empowered workforce is one which takes pride in its own organisation, and that ultimately, could be the one difference that makes all the difference.

The TALiNT Partners Benchmark tool is designed to support an end-to-end review of your talent acquisition, helping you to understand how best to respond to the altered recruitment landscape as it looks in 2021.

Register today: benchmark.talint.co.uk

TALiNT BENCHMARK PROGRAMME

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