

MAJORITY CHAMPIONS OF INCLUSION



Highlights from a workshop held on 27th October 2016

hosted by Mott MacDonald and supported by the Major Projects Association, Business in the Community and WISE

For organisations to recruit, support and retain a diverse workforce there has to be an inclusive environment for all employees, said Richard Chapman-Harris, Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Manager for Mott MacDonald. Making EDI efforts more mainstream could create a step change within businesses, but to achieve this goal organisations must engage those in the majority demographic for that company or industry.

In the engineering and major projects space, where companies typically employ anywhere between 70% and 90% white males this demographic in particular must become more integrated in EDI efforts for them to succeed. In 'unlocking the diversity space', as Chapman-Harris described it, companies can empower this majority demographic to become inclusion champions, which could lead to a step change across the industry.

'Research shows that white males are less engaged in EDI efforts, but the difficulty is if we don't engage 80% of our workforce we are not going to impact cultural change.'

Richard Chapman-Harris, EDI Manager, Mott MacDonald

In this interactive workshop delegates explored ways in which their organisations were seeking to engage their majority champions of inclusion, in order to ensure that their businesses have a sustainable and diverse talent pipeline that creates opportunities for all. To achieve this greater engagement it was suggested that communication of EDI needs to change, as current strategies are not creating inclusion quickly enough. For the engineering industry, which is facing a skills crisis, this is particularly critical as graduates and young professionals have many career options in sectors such as law and banking, where EDI efforts are more mature.

BUILDING ENGAGEMENT

Delegates worked together in small groups to scope out issues, answering five key questions:

- How do you measure EDI? What impacts can you see/not see?
- How engaged are senior white men in EDI efforts?
- What disadvantage is experienced by majority groups?
- What examples do we have of initiatives that worked?
- What 'outside the box' ideas do we have going forward?

Discussions revealed a mixed picture in how EDI was measured and implemented within organisations – from companies with hard targets and full engagement at CEO level to those with no strategy around EDI, and an unwillingness among senior teams to acknowledge that this was a challenge facing their organisation.

The impacts of this ranged from firms that were clearly making major progress on inclusivity to those where people described coming to work in a mask and hiding their accents or personalities in a bid to fit into the company's existing cultures.

This was not only seen to be an issue affecting people from minority groups. Young male professionals described their reluctance to take shared parental leave or flexible working for fear of being seen as less committed than their peers. Yet this culture, where perceived ambition is tied to longer working hours and flexibility is seen as a weakness, is having negative effects on men in business.

'Be a hospitable host. There is no point recruiting from minority groups if the organisation then fails to keep them because their cultures and processes are not inclusive.'

Priya Mitchell, Diversity Advisor, Business in the Community

Research from Mott MacDonald's employee engagement survey 2015 shows that 12% more men than women do not feel they have a successful work-life balance.

Participants felt strongly that if flexible working was more acceptable throughout organisations, EDI efforts would be massively improved. Senior leadership and majority groups participating in this is important, said delegates.

'Over the last two years it has become much more acceptable for men in our organisation to share maternity leave, and we have had a number of cases where men are applying for more part-time work. Leaders of the organisation have embraced flexible working a lot more and that has made it much more acceptable.'

Natasha Hanson, Head of HR Strategy and Delivery, Nuclear Decommissioning Authority

Discussions about how engaged senior white men were in EDI efforts were insightful, with one participant noting that in her experience the senior white men in the company were either fully engaged or totally disengaged. There was no halfway point. It was felt that this was because individuals in this majority group had no experience or awareness of the issues faced by minority groups. Once their eyes were opened to these issues (and the benefits of addressing them) these men became majority champions of inclusion. Reverse mentoring, where managers are paired with colleagues from different backgrounds in order to experience working life from new perspectives, was highlighted several times as a successful way to achieve this.

LANGUAGE BARRIERS

Emphasising the benefits to all of having an inclusive workplace was also suggested as another way to engage more senior white men in EDI efforts. The struggle to achieve a sustainable work-life balance also creates issues around stress for men in senior roles, and encouraging discussions around this could create positive change for all. Achieving this might be more effective if stereotypical language is replaced with terms that make it more comfortable for men to participate in discussions, for example using terms such as 'practising mindfulness' rather than 'dealing with stress'. At the same time it was considered important that majority groups are given the opportunity to explore EDI issues in what Chapman-Harris described as a 'safe space', so that views and EDI efforts can be discussed without judgement.

Many of the initiatives proposed and already in practice were cultural, but some argued that a harder, target-driven approach was more effective when it came to engaging senior white men.

'I want our business to set key performance indicators for our senior people on diversity and inclusion. When we started measuring what we were doing and evidencing this in our bids, it started to have a commercial impact and this made everyone's ears prick up. It might not be the fault of senior people that they have not been exposed to EDI, but when it affects the profit and loss and has a commercial impact they learn pretty quickly.'

Gary Zetter, Director of Technical Facilities Management, MITIE

INITIATIVES FOR CREATING MAJORITY CHAMPIONS OF INCLUSION

- Raise awareness among majority groups using tools such as reverse mentoring.
- Emphasise the benefits to all of more inclusive workplaces.
- Address the use of stereotypical language that may alienate the majority.
- Build in performance indicators on EDI for senior staff.
- Move away from the perception that flexible working means a lack of ambition by making senior leaders champion this, and have visible company role models who work flexibly.
- Make promotion criteria transparent for more equal opportunities.

Chapman-Harris was quick to point out that when it comes to EDI there is not a one-size-fits all approach and companies must find what works best for their organisations. But to be successful everyone in the organisation must be engaged, and for many firms this means a step change in their approach to EDI.

In terms of moving forward Mott MacDonald urged organisations to take a more collaborative approach, noting that one of the issues is that many EDI managers are from minority groups and so they must work to bring majority champions of inclusion to future events.

This strategy is already being employed at Mott MacDonald, with senior business leaders Jonathan Douglas-Green, Andy Mountain and Dan Excel participating in this workshop.

POINTS FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

- Does your firm have any majority champions of inclusion? How are they leading change in the organisation?
- Would reverse mentoring or more participation in collaborative events help to create more inclusivity leaders in your business?
- Are hard targets necessary to encourage engagement of majority groups in EDI?

Hosts:

Richard Chapman-Harris, Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Manager, Mott MacDonald
Sophie Lea, Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Advisor, Mott MacDonald

Participating Organisations:

Arup
Balfour Beatty
Bouygues UK
Business in the Community
Capital One
Carillion
Connect Plus M25
Environment Agency

Fujitsu
Highways England
Hitachi
Institution of Civil Engineers
Major Projects Association
MITIE
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