



Changing gears:

how organizations can accelerate Equity,
Inclusion and Diversity for LGBTQ+ people and
People of Color.



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Executive summary

While the COVID-19 pandemic has continued to lay bare the stark societal and health inequities across continents, a new generation of global solidarity movements have come to the fore. These movements were seeded in response to a rise in far-right politics, racism and homophobia and have leveraged the power of technology to collaborate and campaign transnationally. The purpose of this whitepaper is to explore how corporations can accelerate their Equity, Inclusion and Diversity (EI&D) efforts through increased collaborations with such NGOs and grassroots activists, and why this matters for their sustainability, brand, and inclusiveness. It brings together the insights from discussions in which a novel mix of panelists – business leaders and activists – discussed EI&D for two particularly underrepresented groups: people of the LGBTQ+ community and People of Color (PoC).

In recent years, the Black Lives Matter and #MeToo movements have renewed worldwide calls for social justice and change. Against such a political and societal backdrop, organizations are under close public examination and business leaders are increasingly being called upon to accelerate their EI&D strategies. There is progressive pressure from a broad range of stakeholders, from employees to shareholders, customers to suppliers, for businesses, to not only to fortify and refresh EI&D commitments in-house, but also for businesses to leverage their multinational platforms in active support of marginalized communities in the territories where they operate. This whitepaper provides key insights into how such strategies can be implemented.

To identify new methods by which organizations can accelerate both their internal and external EI&D strategies, IMD brought together business leaders and grassroots activists. Their discussions, held over two half days, highlighted that, in addition to formulating robust, time-bound, and measurable strategies to address EI&D in-house, businesses must also identify external sources of support, dialogue and partnership to accelerate EI&D.

Activists are often at the frontline of change, taking risks to expose key areas that require immediate attention. Grassroots activist groups partner with governments, private foundations and well-established NGOs to accelerate equity and inclusion for LGBTQ+ people and PoC where it is most needed. Businesses can reach out to grassroots activist organizations to procure their acumen, insight, and support. While activists' relationships to risk and on-the-ground information can help an organization stay attuned to the changing needs of their internal LGBTQ+ and PoC employee groups, such collaborations can also inform and enhance the impact of an organization's wider work in communities, societies and nations.

Organizations can no longer afford to lose talent and potentially expose their brands because of lack of impactful EI&D policies and commitment. Hence, corporations such as Barilla, ABB and Amazon, Swiss Re, and the European Broadcasting Union shared how they have leveraged the commitment of top management to initiate major cultural shifts within their organizations. In addition to such internal strategies, the insights from the Eurocentralasian Lesbian* Community (EL*C) and the Belgian Network for Black Lives (BNBL) highlighted how engagement in external partnerships with grassroots activists can drive EI&D for the LGBTQ+ and PoC communities within business organizations.

While no single entity can solve the complex challenges in isolation, the discussions at IMD showed that in our technology-mediated, increasingly intertwined world, collaborative approaches can enable powerful insights and, therefore, persuasive movements for change. Organizations can ensure that meaningful dialogues are initiated, reflections are shared, and change is instituted across broad stakeholder groups by building coalitions with academia, NGOs and grassroots activist organizations to address homophobia and racism.

Creating an inclusive environment that supports both the professional and personal life of every employee is, therefore, only the first step of sustainable EI&D strategies. A second step: to engage in active commitments to wider social transformation, enables organizations to play powerful roles in driving meaningful change for individuals and societies while remaining relevant to both their employees and customers in turbulent times.

IMD develops business leaders that transform organizations and contribute to society. Our faculty offers real-world learning backed by academic research. It accompanies business leaders through industry disruption and innovation, critical self-reflection, and organizational transformations on the path to doing well by doing good. We invite you to join with us as we challenge what is and inspire what could be.



Equity, Inclusion and Diversity:

Key facts and definitions

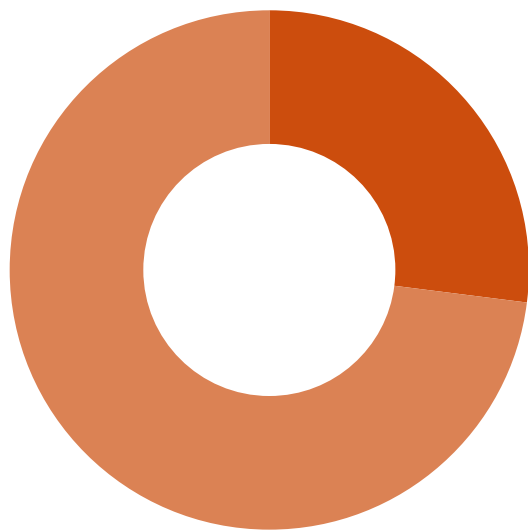
Equity, Inclusion & Diversity (EI&D) work together to build a vibrant, and empowering organizational culture.

Martin Luther King, Jr. reminded us that “the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.” As individuals, societies and nations continue to push for increased social and political justice across the globe, business too must play its role. Indeed, organizations are increasingly being held accountable by employees, shareholders, customers and clients over their commitments to strengthen human rights both internally and externally.

In this regard LGBTQ+ and PoC communities – groups that are underrepresented and overlooked in organizational terms – deserve more attention. Data tells us that having to ‘mask’ oneself daily to colleagues for fear of negative career repercussions takes its toll on mental and physical health. An LGBTQ+ staff member feeling unable to ask for parental leave or a PoC member of staff fearing that their dress code or religious beliefs will be ridiculed or met with hostility leads to an organizational atmosphere of fear and tacit bullying. As such, every organization should collaborate and co-create strategies to actively minimize such workplace tensions for all its employees.

The moral case must, therefore, be central to any EI&D strategy. However, organizations that have committed to a robust EI&D strategy reap the rewards in terms of profitability. Over the past decade research has repeatedly proven that teams that are diversely populated enjoy a stronger performance over those that don't¹.

In its 2020 report *Diversity wins: How Inclusion Matters*, management consulting firm McKinsey identified a growing polarization between those companies that scored high on their EI&D strategies and those that did not – or indeed had become complacent after a first effort in this domain. Having followed the EI&D progress of a cohort of companies over a five-year period, researchers were able to identify a “performance penalty” paid by firms who fell within the lowest quartile of the data set for PoC and gender diversity.



27%

As a result of initial plans being a victim of organizational inertia, these companies were 27% more likely to underperform on profitability than the others in the study.

¹ Nishii, L. H. 2013. The Benefits of Climate for Inclusion for Gender-Diverse Groups. *Academy of Management Journal*, 56(6): 1754–1774.

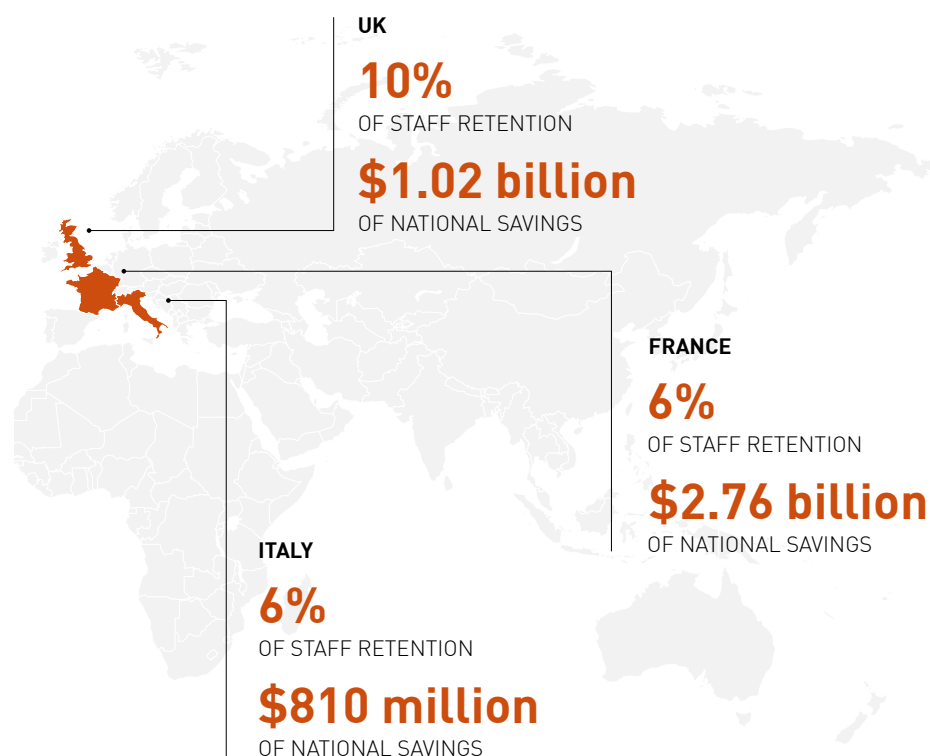
Shore, L. M., Cleveland, J. N., & Sanchez, D. 2018. Inclusive workplaces: A review and model. *Human Resource Management Review*, 28(2): 176–189.

Businesses also stand to gain from a robust EI&D strategy in terms of talent attraction and retention. In the *LGBT Diversity: Show Me The Business Case*² report, Outnow Consulting carried out surveys in Australia, Brazil, Canada, France, Germany, India, Italy, Mexico, the UK and the US. These revealed that 16.6% fewer LGBTQ+ people plan to leave jobs in which they are enabled to be out in the workplace.

Applying national parameters to recruitment costs to calculate the savings that could be generated if LGBTQ+ workers felt at ease to be out at work, the study provides impressive numbers: In France, for example, where the staff retention dividend is 22%, the total national savings would be of \$2.76 billion. In Italy, where the staff retention dividend is 6%, potential savings of \$810 million could be made. In the UK, where the staff retention dividend is 10% the potential savings are estimated as \$1.02 billion.

The moral and the business case for EI&D is strong enough to inspire a strategy shift but how can EI&D be implemented in positive and impactful ways that creates lasting organizational change?

EI&D policies work together to address specific organizational ambitions. A focus on Diversity without attention given to inclusion cannot achieve the necessary shift in organizational culture that seeks improved team performance, stronger analytical and problems solving skills, enhanced talent attraction and retention, as well as sparking market creativity. Each element must be considered individually within any specific policy to ensure it is represented across the entire EI&D strategy. A robust EI&D strategy is one that aims to harmonize the three strands at every level throughout the business.



² Out Now Global LGBT2020 Study.



Equity

Recognizes that people that come from diverse backgrounds will necessarily have diverse starting positions, needs and capabilities. They may therefore face different barriers within teams and organizations. Policies that promote equity take this into account. Paternal leave, for example, is an equity-oriented policy when it considers that a broad range of employees – irrespective of gender, family status or sexual orientation – can benefit from it.

Equity includes creating fit-for-purpose processes that level the playing field, acknowledging that some initiatives (e.g., hiring, promoting, assessing) may inadvertently favor some social groups and inhibit others, and taking appropriate steps to address these.



Inclusion

Inclusion can be defined as an organizational culture or climate in which everyone feels physically and psychologically safe, feels being part of a team or organization and feels valued for her/his unique contribution. Policies that promote inclusion, therefore, target the organizational culture to allow everyone to participate and be appreciated.



Diversity

Diversity can be defined as the representation of individuals with diverse backgrounds within teams and organizations. Diversity can be both visible and invisible. Representation can be based on gender, gender identity and sexual orientation (LGBTQ+), ethnicity, nationality, age, dis/abilities and/or religious beliefs. Hence, policies that aim to enhance the diversity of an organization will address key HR systems and processes, such as recruitment, promotion, talent reviews and more.

Driving the EI&D agenda for LGBTQ+ communities



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Leila Lohman

*Co-Executive Director at
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Community (EL*C)*

Accelerating EI&D for the LGBTQ+ communities within organizations requires addressing policy, engagement and culture change.

Our four panelists were representatives from global businesses and the LGBTQ+ activist community, each committed to 'walking the talk' on EI&D. In a discussion led by Misiek Piskorski, IMD Professor of Digital Strategy, Analytics and Innovation and the Dean of IMD Southeast Asia and Oceania, the leaders shared ideas and best-practice approaches on how to support and engage LGBTQ+ communities and their allies within their organizations; how to balance policy across territories with very different cultural mores, and the importance of partnerships with external campaigning groups.

Barilla, ABB and Amazon have all made significant strides in EI&D having initiated the process from three contrasting starting points. As the world's biggest pasta manufacturer, the Barilla Group had identified the topic as a strategic

business priority in 2012 with the arrival of CEO Claudio Colzani. Following a media controversy and facing a backlash from its LGBTQ+ customers the company opted to take a structured approach to EI&D starting in 2013.



We were either going to deal with the situation as a PR issue or we were going to embark on a cultural transformation and try to understand whether we had a blind spot on this topic and what else may we be missing. I'm very happy that we decided to pursue the most challenging route.

Talita Ramos Erickson

Chief D&I Officer (Global) at the Barilla Group

On the other hand, ABB a Swedish-Swiss multinational corporation that operates mainly in robotics, heavy electrical equipment, and automation technology areas was facing a talent issue. In 2020, Luca Condosta, Group Finance Process Owner Record to Report, realized that to affect positive change, he had to take ownership of a key part of the EI&D strategy, as it had remained focused on gender representation to the detriment of other groups.



The fact [that] we were not addressing the LGBTQ+ issue was causing a lack of attraction for certain talent from that segment. People were leaving the organization, having come from IT industry, and were [explaining their decision to do so] very clearly, [by saying] ‘I don’t feel accepted.

Luca Condosta

D&I LGBTQ+ Global Project lead at ABB

Meanwhile, Amazon has taken a mission-based approach to its EI&D strategy, yoking it to its customer-centric vision. As Daniel Cancela, DEI Program Manager at Amazon Luxembourg, explained: “To be able to be the most customer-centric company in the world, we need to ensure we are bringing in new people with diverse backgrounds, ideas, points of views. How can we be customer-centric if we are not taking into account the diversity that we can find in the communities we operate in?”

Grassroots activist Leila Lohman Co-Executive Director at Eurocentralasian Lesbian* Community (EL*C) stressed the importance of connecting the corporate view with the lived experience of LGBTQ+ communities.

“It is important for businesses to think in terms of diversity not only within organizations, but also how it speaks to actors on the ground,” she said.

Lohman gave the example of EL*C members approaching tech giant Google in 2019-2020 to question search algorithms that brought up pornographic material in response to queries with the word ‘lesbian’ in the search field. The engagement led to Google France changing the algorithms and, as such, offers an example of how activist groups can affect broad positive change through their agility and through direct collaboration with corporations.

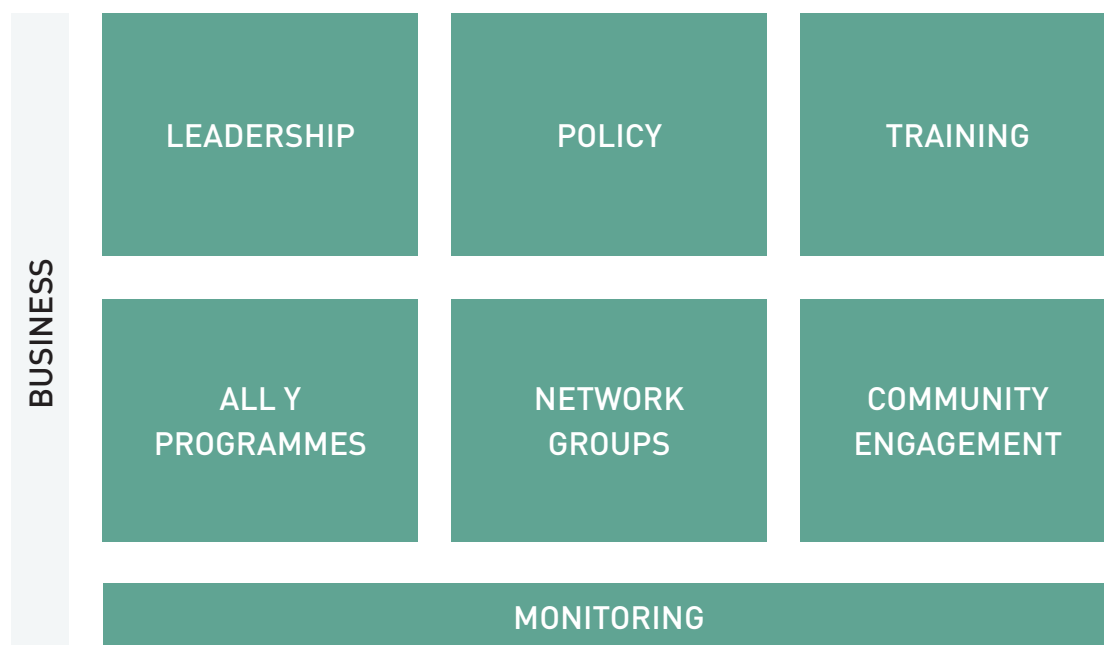
START BY DOING YOUR HOMEWORK

Regarding first steps, the panel emphasized that a fit-for-purpose EI&D strategy required a multidimensional approach that incorporated organizational governance, mechanisms to encourage and support collective ownership of EI&D throughout the business, and partnerships, both internal and external to the organization.

Condosta outlined ABB's LGBTQ+ strategy which launched last year. The strategy was built on seven building blocks comprising leadership, policy, training, ally programs, network groups and community engagement. Each of these, he said, were subject to continuous KPIs to measure impact and direct next steps.

"The first thing that we decided to do was to go to the executive committee for a commitment sign off. The idea was to [signal] understanding of what LGBTQ+ is, why we have [to address it in business terms], and what do we want to do about it. We also signed off the United Nations Code of Conduct, and then immediately went into partnership with Stonewall [a UK-based LGBTQ+ charity] to start understanding what we could do and develop a detailed action plan," explained Condosta.

Since then, ABB has worked on several fronts to upgrade and refresh its ethics, policies in line with the UN Code of Conduct for Business. For example, it has refreshed policy to include a gender-neutral parental leave, created ERGs across territories and engaged with local NGOs towards greater collaboration.



Swedish-Swiss multinational ABB implemented its LGBTQ+ EI&D strategy in seven key areas, each subject to regular monitoring and measurement.



Condosta said the engagement of senior executives was vital to the success of their ABB's efforts and Ramos Erickson agreed that developing a comprehensive understanding of where the business stood on EI&D from the top down was crucial.

At Barilla, she said, considerable support was rolled out to help senior executives understand where their individual unconscious biases lay. This then led to individual and group training to bring about more cross-cultural agility across senior functions.



If you have a homogeneous team, where everybody looks the same, behaves the same, and there's pressure to conform, then statistically speaking, you probably don't have the best possible team and you have a problem with recruiting and developing people.

Talita Ramos Erickson

Chief D&I Officer (Global) at the Barilla Group

Similarly, ABB is committed to training every manager in unconscious bias by end of 2021. And to staff that raised doubts as to the need for such measures, Condosta referred back to the business case.

"If you have just one person reporting to you, [unconscious bias awareness] must be part of your skill set as a leader because this is part of the critical leadership competencies for the company to survive in the future. Take the Global Business Service sector where the 'war of talents' is also based on how inclusive you really are. So, if you're not, you do miss a business opportunity," he said.

Ramos Erickson stressed the need for keeping your eye on the ball on the work-life experience of diverse groups within the organization. This, she said, could be achieved with regular anonymized surveys undertaken at 18-month intervals and would give instant metrics on how the EI&D strategy was working and where to place the focus next.

Condosta outlined how all ABB's initiatives were also underpinned with strong monitoring tools to ensure that the feedback on strategy continued to inform its direction.

ERGS: CONTINUOUS CONVERSATION IS CRUCIAL

Meaningful culture change hinges on dialogue and when it comes to EI&D, this is vital for two reasons. First, it enables diverse groups within organizations to share experiences and engage in conversation with management. Secondly, it enables ongoing feedback on EI&D within the company, which is crucial for sustainable progress in EI&D. As McKinsey reported, too many organizations start with strong EI&D impetus and then lose traction or consider their efforts a success and become complacent. Either way, the strategy becomes stagnant, and, with it, the business benefits lose their fuel.

To accelerate conversations, all three companies have embraced employee resource groups (ERG). These forums enable minority groups within the organization to raise awareness on LGBTQ+ (or other minority group) issues and promote opportunities for engagement both internally and externally through mentorship and social gatherings. ERGs provide a structure from which to engage management on relevant topics that can feed into the mechanisms of policy, training and practices.

At ABB, dedicated employee engagement initiatives helped to identify the need for greater awareness building among certain staff groups. Reactions to a film clip in which senior management discussed the company's commitment to its LGBTQ+ employees divided staff.



This was quite controversial on the intranet because some people were fully supportive, and some people didn't understand the reason for this. And this was an eye opener for the whole company. Because a lot of top managers were saying 'yeah, we are completely tolerant and open,' but the reality was a little bit different.

Luca Condosta

D&I LGBTQ+ Global Project lead at ABB



Participants engaged in wide-ranging conversations on EI&D strategy relevant to LGBTQ+ and PoC communities and the word cloud (above) captured their responses to discussions held over two half days.

The divisive employee response to the film clip led to reflection and then training and awareness building programs being planned to specifically engage blue-collar groups within the organization. For Condosta, it is crucial that outcomes are the driving force of any meaningful employee engagement.



I didn't want to have the LGBTQ+ employee resource group just focusing on having coffee together. I wanted to really make an impact in the company," he said. "There were people from Latin America, who were talking about [being subjected to] conversion therapy [and] how painful [that] was for them. So it really brings awareness – in a shocking way – because when you are in a [more inclusive] environment, you sometimes forget about the reality of the oppression.

Luca Condosta

D&I LGBTQ+ Global Project lead at ABB

Like Barilla and ABB, Amazon's ERGs are employee-led initiatives to drive certain issues in a specific region. Once set up, Amazon's ERGs are connected with an executive sponsor who helps it expand globally and looks for key issues that can be shared across regions.

"I've been leading Glamazon, which is the LGBTQ+ affinity group for the last four years in Luxembourg. This year, I was appointed to lead at the EMEA level and for this I am presiding on the India board. Our role is to ask, 'how can we coordinate chapters?' 'What are the main themes that we want to pose for the whole continent?' And 'how do we compare to other continents?'" said Daniel Cancela, DEI Program Manager at Amazon Luxembourg.

The issue of cultural or legislative differences between regions requires both sensitivity and action, said Ramos Erickson. Barilla's ERGs have met with great success and have helped the organization obtain a perfect score on LGBTQ+ EI&D every year since 2014 from the US-based Human Rights Campaign.



We don't give a pass to our leadership. Every market where we have a significant business, they have to work on LGBTQ+ inclusion, even if it's not something as overt as we can do in the US or in Italy. In Russia, and Turkey it is a little more difficult, but we still do something, we still work on it.

Talita Ramos Erickson

Chief D&I Officer (Global) at the Barilla Group



LEVERAGE PARTNERSHIPS WITH CREDIBLE COMMUNITY GROUPS

All four panelists expressed the importance of external partnerships. Barilla began its EI&D journey by implementing a diversity and inclusion board and partnering with three external advisors including a former group vice president of global diversity and inclusion of a global organization, a former professional racing driver and paracyclist and an LGBTQ+ civil rights activist. By submitting its work on LGBTQ+ EI&D to the Human Rights Campaign annually, the company also ensures it meets changing standards of excellence in its ongoing strategy.

ABB partnered with Stonewall UK, an LGBTQ+ rights charity. Its business resources and research have informed the organization's strategy and training programs. For Amazon, its ERGs help to build traction with local community organizations to drive broader social change while remaining sensitive to specific local needs.

Lohman said engaging with grassroots activist organizations was a powerful way for organizations to not only signal commitment but to also profit from the agility and risk-taking that activist groups bring to the table. Referring back to the engagement with

Google that led to its search algorithms being rewritten, Lohman commented:

"That is a great example where an issue was brought up from [a grassroots level] to the company and together they successfully managed to change the situation for the better."

She referred to the aggression and violence faced by marginalized groups from every walk of life, including her own colleagues, to highlight just how fragile the environment remains for the LGBTQ+ community.

Condosta agreed that building external partnerships was a vital next step for organizations. "When the maturity of the organization grows, I see a journey [towards] activism for human rights in line with sustainability best practices – nobody can neglect them," he said.

By partnering with key institutions and businesses, important cultural change is instigated across societies and nations and for marginalized groups, who are subjected to oppression and violence, such overarching networks of change are crucial.



It's certainly important not to forget why we are having this discussion. [Recently] five board members were physically and digitally and verbally attacked in France, Albania, Kazakhstan and Ukraine. This is why we have to build great collaborations with human rights, political institutions, such as the EU Council of Europe, and the UN. I think there's a lot that we can do together, as activists and businesses to bring the whole machine forward at those different levels.

Leila Lohman

Co-Executive Director at Eurocentralasian Lesbian Community (EL*C)*

Sparking and broadening cultural change across societies and nations is vital and business can and should play a key role here by partnering with change makers and activists, she said.

Key focus points

- ✓ Ensure your EI&D strategy is robust by challenging it. Be transparent with staff and independent advisors to ensure it is fit for purpose and in line with current trends. Apply independently assessed metrics to gauge success.
- ✓ Empower LGBTQ+ communities within the organization by enabling ERGs across your business territories. Be aware that these will differ according to local culture and legislation. Every region should have a working ERG to foster support, dialogue and change within the organization and wider society.
- ✓ Commit to regular, anonymized employee surveys that seek to reveal the lived experience of diverse communities within the organization. Often, the data gathered elucidates issues that can be addressed and offers leadership teams a very different understanding of the inclusivity of their organization to those who are experiencing bias, discrimination and inequity.
- ✓ Explore how to leverage the acumen, insight and support of grassroots activists as they can offer a distinct set of research and experience of target groups. Their relationship to risk and information can help an organization stay attuned to the changing needs of their LGBTQ+ employee groups and the impact of their work on wider communities.

European organizations must scale up efforts for EI&D for PoC



Natalia Alvarez

Vice President, Client Programs Consultant at Swiss Re Institute



Francesca Scott

Diversity Equity & Inclusion Lead, European Broadcasting Union



Joëlle Sambi Nzeba

Writer, filmmaker and activist for Belgian Network for Black Lives (BNBL)



Jean-Pierre Comte

President Region Americas at Barilla Group

Moving the dial on EI&D for PoC requires not just a robust strategy but also a tough examination of the existing systems and structures that govern our organizations, the panelists highlighted.

In a wide-ranging discussion led by Josefine van Zanten, IMD Chief Equity, Inclusion, & Diversity officer, the panel agreed that without a forensic scrutiny, the unconscious biases and stereotypes that we have all been socialized with will continue to hamper the way the best-laid corporate plans to accelerate EI&D are rolled out and received.

“We must be ready to question the corporate culture and the mechanisms that unwittingly support discrimination. It always comes down to three levels; the individual level, the group level and the systemic level,” explained

Joëlle Sambi Nzeba, writer, filmmaker and activist for Belgian Network for Black Lives (BNBL).

Individuals must examine whether they unwittingly exercise discrimination over their colleagues, said Sambi Nzeba. Members of majority groups should, therefore, ask themselves, if, for example, in meetings their remarks dominate over those of their PoC colleagues or if they are received in a more accepting manner. Informal groups could be questioned in terms of their homogeneity. The groups are formed almost unconsciously and can highlight the tacit biases at play. Finally, she maintained, the systems and structures within the organization could be examined.



As individuals we are part of a system. It doesn't mean that we wake up in the morning and say, 'today, I'm going to be racist', but we integrate something because of the way we've been raised, because of the system, because of the structure that we don't question.

Joëlle Sambi Nzeba

Writer, filmmaker and activist for Belgian Network for Black Lives (BNBL)



Jean-Pierre Comte, president, region Americas at Barilla Group stressed the need for bringing in support to facilitate such discussions to ensure that a cohesive cultural shift could be initiated and sustained.

"These are sometimes very uncomfortable conversations and you don't know how to handle [them]. So you need support, you need help, you need people who will help you to drive these conversations in the workplace," he said.

The panelists emphasized the quality of the conversations that needed to take place across an organizational setting. Too often, they agreed, the negative experiences of PoC are denied or dismissed. This led to an inevitable breakdown of trust between colleagues. The key, said Francesca Scott, Diversity Equity & Inclusion Lead, European Broadcasting Union, was the facilitation of empathic listening skills.



It is about having deep reflections in our organizations that help us really understand what other people might be going through, and not to deny their lived experiences, which are not necessarily our own.

Francesca Scott

Diversity Equity & Inclusion Lead, European Broadcasting Union

EUROPE'S CHALLENGE IS TO ENGAGE

There is a misapprehension that in comparison to the US, European nations do not have a race problem. However, numerous studies suggest otherwise. In his article *Europe Needs to Talk About Race Too* Remi Adekoya refers to the *Being Black in the EU* report (2018), the second European Union minorities and discrimination survey that shows how racial harassment, discrimination, profiling and violence present a daily threat in all areas of life among the EU's 27 member states. Moreover, it highlighted that the labor market does not present a level playing field, in other words equity, for PoC – an important fact that businesses must acknowledge and address where possible. So how could organizations engage in meaningful strategies on EI&D for PoC?

Delegates and panellists shared views on a short film created to highlight the different treatment of PoC from their white counterparts. In it, actors appeared to be stealing a bicycle in a public place in order to observe the responses of passing strangers.

While the white actors are generally assumed to be having problems with a bike lock and are offered help, the PoC actor is treated with immediate suspicion. Reflecting the views shared in the discussion, van Zanten said:

“Our brains react within a nanosecond to what we see. And immediately our biases kick in. And so what we saw in the video were biases and stereotypes and how they are applied to people: white people do not get confronted and when they do it starts with a dialogue. With the PoC, there was no dialogue. It was confrontation right away. It was anger right away. It was aggression right away. There was not even an opportunity to have a conversation. We don't even notice it happening.”

To build more self-awareness individually and within organizations was a crucial skill, said Comte. Cross-cultural agility is shown to make collaborations more successful, organizational culture more cohesive and an EI&D strategy more credible.



To address the topic, organizations must show willingness to listen and to change. Their PoC employees, customers and colleagues are people who live in neighborhoods, in cities that are impacted by such social justice problems. It's a matter of being willing to sit and meet with these issues and support them.

Joëlle Sambi Nzeba

Writer, filmmaker and activist for Belgian Network for Black Lives (BNBL)

“The best advice I received when I started to engage more activity on EI&D was to challenge your own network. And [I realized] oh my g-d, yes, all my friends and family are all white, Western European or North American, and they all think the same, etc. So be the man in the middle of women, be the straight [person] in the middle of the LGBTQ+ community, be the white [person] among Asian-American or African-American people, and you will learn a lot. It will develop this flexibility, this mental agility to deal with what diversity really is and be able to see the world with different lenses than the one you're involved in and [have been] raised on,” said Comte.



CREATING EQUITABLE PROGRESSION PIPELINES

Building diverse teams is crucial to ensuring that an organization walks the talk on EI&D. However, the issue has been mired in a too frequent controversy to the recurring perception of lower bars being set for PoC within organizations (and other underrepresented groups).

“Society is changing, it’s evolving, there is agitation for more equality. And that is coming, whether we like it or not. How can we ensure our teams reflect talent and diversity? What can we put in place, as organizations, to feed our talent pipeline?” said Scott.

While it was important to build new structures for recruitment, progression, mentorship and talent development within organizations, delegates agreed that to be truly empowering, systems that supported equity were vital.

Natalia Alvarez, Vice President, Client Programmes Consultant at Swiss Re Institute warned against reaching for easy solutions, such as tokenism. These, she said, could easily backfire. Appointing PoC to prominent roles for PR purposes, failed the appointee and the business, she said. The PoC would be forced to adjust themselves to the prevailing culture and that without a systemic response, the business would be open to critique.

For organizational cohesion, diverse teams needed to be built around authentic talent management policies and programs. While in the past quotas (e.g., as required in



We need to make sure that we are taking care of our own house before we make that commitment. Since George Floyd’s killing, we saw a lot of US corporations coming up with those messages, but then, when you looked inside the corporations [there was very little diversity].

Natalia Alvarez

*Vice President, Client Programs Consultant
at Swiss Re Institute*

North America) were deployed to increase representation, they failed to address root causes such as the corporate culture and inclusivity

“The key word here is legitimacy. For you as a manager, bringing the bar down is not the right choice. You need to move the people up, which is different. And so you need to create in your organization an ecosystem, which will bring all the people to have access to the same opportunities, in terms of mentoring, training, etc.,” said Comte.

BUILDING NETWORKS OF CHANGE

Partnerships hold the potential for bringing about radical change within organizations, said delegates. While businesses increasingly recognize their responsibilities to stakeholder communities populated by their employees, suppliers and customers, the potential for building powerful networks is yet to be tapped. Alvarez reminded delegates that the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) stress this.

"I like SDG 17³ because it's about partnering. And it's not just about corporations; it's about partnering with all parties who have a say in society. And staying on the SDGs, I was adamant that we included sustainable development goal number 10⁴, which is to reduce inequalities. So put that into your frameworks as you start building," she said.

Grassroots activists have self-developed toolkits that drive dialogue, goal setting and campaign strategies. They also have strong community and governmental links that can trigger further dialogue and practice sharing. In terms of sparking organizational culture change, their assistance cannot be underestimated. For those business leaders uncertain about relevance of partnering on issues of EI&D for PoC, Comte stressed the importance of commitments to broad social change.

"What matters is that we move. So that's what partnerships offer, because you don't know what you don't know. And if you do partner – could be with Black Lives Matter or other NGOs or public authorities – it is not something that will address you, as a

corporation in isolation. It will make a bigger change. You need to build bridges with the outside world to make it happen," said Comte.

Amplifying the voices and investing in the talents of PoC within organizations builds its internal capabilities and strengthens its systems of trust. By linking with broader players and activists in the same field, that process can be built on strong partnerships and resonate across the business.

"To actually accelerate equity, inclusion and diversity is to develop a concrete policy of empathy, which means listening to our workers[...] Question the system and use grassroots groups and the tools that we use to in order to change the culture of the corporation," said Sambi Nzeba.



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Joëlle Sambi Nzeba

Writer, filmmaker and activist for Belgian Network for Black Lives (BNBL)

³ UN SDG 17: Partnerships for goals aims to strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development.

⁴ UN SDG 10: Reduced inequalities aims to reduce inequality within and among countries.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ✓ Empathy and humility are powerful tools when deployed with purpose. Uncomfortable conversations are unavoidable in this area for meaningful cultural shifts to occur within organizations. Professional facilitation ensures that they occur without being derailed by reactivity.
- ✓ Building networks of change can assist an organization's own efforts in EI&D and also affect positive change in wider society. Experienced grassroots groups offer tools and programs to assist and facilitate meaningful change.
- ✓ To increase equity, diversity, and inclusion across all functions and hierarchies, talent development programs and progression pipelines must benefit targets and quotas and eliminate tokenism. Ensuring PoC and other underrepresented groups have equitable access to training, mentorship and development programs give an EI&D strategy legitimacy.
- ✓ Ensuring that PoC communities within organizations are supported with ERGs and regular employee surveys are carried out is essential to sustainable EI&D strategies and in making the invisible experience of PoC visible to the organization.

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