



Why we should stop talking about Diversity & Inclusion initiatives

With so many initiatives in place - are we 'done' with diversity?

D&I initiatives have their part to play, but research shows that initiatives alone don't work. Diversity is not a box to be ticked; true inclusivity requires a radical change of culture. Embedding the change is crucial.

We know the life sciences sector desperately needs diversity across the board. The industry is facing a demographic time bomb: many of the current generation of leaders will be retiring in the coming years, and previous homogenous selection has led to a wide age and experience gap with the next generation.

Whilst I appreciate that diversity isn't limited to gender, it is a marker that companies can use to assess a diverse workforce. Increasing diversity - of thought, of background, of industry - in life science leadership teams introduces different perspectives and encourages innovation and debate.

But how can we increase diversity in a way that goes beyond superficial schemes and ensures lasting, impactful change?

I recently attended a women's networking industry event in the city and was interested to hear one of the speakers declare that she had "never experienced gender bias". The company she worked for has so many 'initiatives' that she didn't feel held back in her progression. Yet, later in her talk she commented that

some expectations associated with leadership positions, such as evening engagements with older male colleagues, made her reflect on whether she was actually keen to take the next steps in her career.

It struck me that the initiatives can be in place, but the messages can be difficult to disseminate. Diversity and bias can be so multifaceted that they're not always understood, the mind-set is not always changed.

"The only way to truly develop the pipeline of executive women is to radically change the culture to be more inclusive. You can have as many diversity initiatives as you like and recruit lots of diverse candidates, but without a truly inclusive culture, none of it sticks." Brenda Trenowden Global Chair, 30% Club ([Hampton-Alexander review](#)).

We all have a responsibility to ensure that we have not just implemented an initiative but that the message is disseminated throughout the organisation. [Creating a genuinely diverse environment requires continuous work and commitment from staff at every level.](#)

A recent [Accenture survey](#) concluded that "...diversity and inclusion need to run through the core of the organization and inform everything that it does. So, for example, rather than the talent acquisition team creating their own diversity initiatives, they should be [embedding the overarching organizational strategy and leverage it as a way to attract talent](#)"

I play my part in the interims and search space, where The RSA Group presents comparative shortlists for each search. As a consultative partner, we listen to our clients, but also constructively challenge every client brief. Whilst we are trying to find someone who fits the bill, we are also looking for cultural and ethical fit in each search, exploring all options and often finding adaptive solutions to talent needs. We regularly advise our clients what we've seen work, what doesn't work.

When attracting executives to move to a new firm or take on a new project, it's not just about the science, the profit, or how good the new drug is. Candidates want to know about fit and how the workplace environment will support their advancement. Organisations that appeal to diverse values will, ultimately, gain a competitive advantage in the talent market. The depth of the organisation's commitment to diversity will be a key performance indicator.

CONCLUSION

We need to stop talking about D&I initiatives and start being more passionate about instigating intrinsic change. Embedding these values to ensure that D&I become part of the firm's strategy to be measured and not just a convenient buzzword. It is a journey which is constantly changing, but we know that the different perspectives and vigorous debate that come with true diversity and inclusivity will ultimately drive a more successful, sustainable industry.



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