



# How to Build a Diverse & Inclusive Business

Creating an inclusive and diverse organisation is now a business imperative.  
Leaders tell **Criticaleye** about the practical steps they are taking to deliver on this





The death of George Floyd and subsequent unrest in the USA forced a global re-evaluation of attitudes towards diversity and inclusion. As we move into a new year and focus on navigating the challenging economic environment, leaders must ensure they don't allow the spotlight on D&I to fade.

"Undoubtedly, businesses face multiple challenges – and that will continue for some time. However, the narrative around the Black Lives Matter movement has progressed and every organisation must now ask themselves how they can make meaningful and lasting change," said **Amrit Jhita**, Senior Account Executive for Advisory at Criticaleye.

Speaking at Criticaleye's CEO Retreat in October, **Diana Barea**, Managing Director for Accenture Strategy UKI, and Lead for Talent & Organisation Practice at Accenture, urged organisations to get more done and quickly.

"We have these incredible movements that capture everyone's hopes for a better future and they then seem to seep away," **Diana** said. "Nobody's talking about them. How can we have had Black Lives Matter and anti-racism commitments over the summer and now there's nothing on the news?"

**Diana** said that organisations should take a hard look in the mirror; more is needed than conversations around ethnicity and creating safe spaces. "You need to look at your operating model, your organisation design, and the things you're motivating with your financial levers so that people then act and make choices in a certain way."

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**Nichole Viviani** joined software and integrated payments company TSG as Chief People Officer at the height of the George Floyd protests. She found an executive team wanting to make a statement but – like many organisations at the time – unsure about what it should say. The inaction was affecting the workforce, particularly those based in the US. "People were upset. They were walking past rallies and worried they were going to get arrested for protesting," **Nichole** recalled.

"We had a focus group and we listened. It was very difficult and very emotional, but it was what needed to happen. People had to have an opportunity to speak their minds and to be heard and understood."

Those discussions have led to longer-term action and a reinvigoration of the company's purpose, as **Nichole** explained.

"What we found with our listening sessions was that we weren't living our purpose as an organisation. Our aim is to create better outcomes for our clients,

our customers and our employees, but the more we listened the more we realised that wasn't happening. So, by bringing it back to purpose, and what that is, we made it possible to ask what would be the agenda that allows us to live that purpose for these groups of people. Then we could engage them in creating the initiatives to achieve that.

"I feel that we've come 100 miles already, just by gaining some of that trust back through taking some short, quick actions while we think about our future plans," she said.

Bold actions make a strong public statement about an organisation's commitment to change. **Diana** explained how Accenture asked its large global network of black and BAME employees what the business' next steps should be. "It's about giving people power and a platform, and you act by sharing yours with them.

"Shape the next step with the voice of the people who have been most under-represented and probably had the worst experience within an organisation. It's a step forward because it says we're actually going to listen to you," **Diana** said.

## The Leadership Challenge

Engaging the workforce is crucial to make progress on D&I, but how leaders behave is key. When Criticaleye Board Mentor **Yetunde Hofmann** left her last executive role in a FTSE 25 business, she was one of just five women in the top 100 in the company and in an even smaller minority as a black woman. She recognises the difficulties leaders face in making change but stresses the urgency for it. ➤



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"This goes far beyond the bottom line and the walls of the organisation. It's fundamental that leaders create an environment where everybody can be free to be themselves. Now that's a tough call, but a leader who wants to walk in that direction is a leader capable of making a difference," **Yetunde**, who is currently also an NED for CIPD, said.

For **David Meads**, CEO for UK&I at Cisco, fostering a diverse business should be a given. "It's a business imperative to mine the best ideas from the best talent in order to gain that competitive edge. Having a diverse organisation across the full spectrum should therefore also be a business imperative to facilitate that."

"First and foremost, it's a belief system. I fundamentally believe it's important we provide an inclusive future for all – and that's self-serving [in that it enables] businesses to succeed, as well as being the right thing to do for society because, in doing that, we will get access to talent that we wouldn't otherwise have had," he said.

However, the Black Lives Matter movement highlighted the differences of black employees' life experiences, leading to difficult conversations in the company, as **David** explained.

"As a business leader it's my problem to solve, not theirs. It's a delicate balance because I don't want to be coming up with answers from the perspective of a white, privileged male, nor do I want it to turn into

*“It takes a courageous CEO, willing to stick his or her head above the parapet, to make lasting change”*

their problem to solve it for me. So, we're finding our way through together, we continue to listen, but we also need to take action. We've also started similar conversations with our other Employee Resource Groups, and it's clear there's a lot still to do."

**Joanna Aunon**, Director at WiHTL (Women in Hospitality, Travel and Leisure), which works to increase women's and ethnic minorities' representation at all levels of leadership in the sector, noted that in hospitality there was a sense of progress around D&I being lost due to the pandemic. She highlighted gender in particular.

"A lot of the roles that have been made redundant or furloughed have affected a higher proportion of women, for example those in the frontline, Marketing or HR. When companies have had to restructure, whilst some have kept D&I at the core of their selection criteria, many have not taken this into consideration," she said.

Ultimately, much of the success around diversity and inclusion is down to whether an organisation has the right

culture and leadership to facilitate change. "This is crucial because once you've opened that box, you can't listen and understand, but then not act. There has to be a commitment to action," **Joanna** said. ■

This article is based on conversations at a number of Criticleye events, including the [Virtual CEO Retreat](#), held in association with [Accenture](#), [E.ON.UK](#) and [Brewin Dolphin](#), in October 2020.

For further reading on D&I, see Accenture's research [Who We Are is How We'll Grow](#).

Featuring Commentary From:



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