

Get comfortable with being uncomfortable

Wednesday 27 April 2022 | 1.00 - 2.00 pm BST

Discomfort can come from not knowing the right language or a fear of doing the wrong thing. The Inclusion & Diversity space is fast evolving, with new terminology and best practice coming into play all the time. Many people are well-intentioned, but hold back from participating fully in I&D initiatives and behaviours because on an individual level they are afraid of offending the people they are trying to make feel included. Discomfort can also come from not knowing when to challenge the language of others - how and when to do this, whilst maintaining a safe space, can be a minefield for people to navigate. Even if the issues around language and fear are overcome, the next challenge is what to do after identifying and vocalising the problem.

During this session, our panel addressed some of the key questions which can lead to discomfort when thinking about I&D issues on both an organisational and an individual level:

How do we make change in an organisation?

- We should not set an expectation that everyone is an evangelist for I&D issues from day one, as not everyone will have the skills or desire to do this effectively. There is a scale of contributions (with some red lines of course as being passive is not the same as being neutral!). Allies are on a journey, and helping them to feel confident and giving them the resources they need to self-educate on I&D issues will help them further progress.
- Global organisations need a global perspective on I&D, being sensitive to the issues on the ground in the markets where they operate, rather than imposing a one-size-fits-all approach which is not truly inclusive of the multitude of cultures which exist in a global organisation.
- A good behaviour which our panel identified was organisations and individuals either owning up where they feel they are not getting things right in the I&D space, or being open to feedback from others without getting defensive. For example, managers and leaders asking for help in how to recruit and retain diverse teams, or accepting they were not sufficiently knowledgeable about anti-racism to authentically respond to the BLM movement.
- We also thought about the metaphor of "Elephants and Ants"*. Within organisations there are elephants – strategy, employee resource or affinity groups; they do the big things and the heavy lifting. Individuals are ants – they can make small incremental changes in their own behaviour and mindset which add up to major, disruptive change when many individuals are pulling in the same direction.
- Organisations must also behave transparently and openly with regard to the I&D initiatives they are pursuing – these initiatives must be explained in terms of their purpose and value-add. An understanding of these initiatives cannot be taken for granted.

How do we encourage a journey into allyship?

- It is essential to consciously create a safe space for people to tell their stories in an organisation – this can be a powerful driver of change as it brings I&D issues from worthy but abstract topics into something tangible, which leaders and employees respond to.
- This should be complemented by recognising that lots of small acts done regularly by individuals can make a huge difference on I&D issues – "ants" can make a difference!
- And finally, be clear about what is expected of allies.

"Do your little bit of good where you are; its those little bits of good put together that overwhelm the world"

Desmond Tutu

#WeAreNotNeutral

Chaired by:



Hannah Swift
Senior Associate
Baker McKenzie

Our Panel:



Nilema Bhakta-Jones
Group General Counsel and
member of the Executive Team
Kantar



Matthew Dening
Partner
Baker McKenzie



Joanne Payne
Chief People Officer
Clear Channel International

* "Elephants and Ants" was provided by Mind Gym as part the approach to launching *Fairness in Clear Channel*