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**Diversity:  
Think Globally,  
Act Locally**

# Diversity: Think Globally, Act Locally

## How EMEA talent leaders are driving diversity across borders

Every week, it seems there is new research published demonstrating the commercial advantages of a diverse workforce and how hiring inclusivity can improve staff attraction and retention.

While most company leaders are well aware of the business case for improving Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI), there has been wide variation in progress among employers in EMEA.

One idea gaining traction is the development of a global DEI policy to clarify best practice regardless of location. However, there are big question marks over whether an over-arching strategy helps or hinders regional initiatives, and how it can be adapted to cater for cultural and legal differences. An initiative focussed on promoting more people from ethnic minorities in Johannesburg, for example, will obviously require a different approach than one in Berlin or London.

TALiNT Partners and global total workforce solutions firm AMS recently hosted a virtual roundtable of EMEA HR and Talent Leaders to explore how their companies are supporting diverse recruitment, chaired by Debra Sparshott, Employer Programme Director for TALiNT Partners, alongside Brett O'Connor, AMS Client Director and Head of Transformation, Jamie Pirie, AMS Client Solutions Director, and Stella Steigleder, Senior Manager Governance and Continuous Improvement at AMS. Guests included representatives of major organisations in healthcare, pharmaceuticals, education, aerospace, the automotive industry and financial services.

### Data versus Programmes

Making progress in diversity and inclusion requires a multi-dimensional mind-set, says AMS Client Director Brett O'Connor, who co-chairs the company's EMEA Diversity Inclusion Committee. There is the corporate dimension; the team and performance dimension; the political and economic dimension in an increasingly globalised economy; and, finally, the personal



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dimension of whether people actually feel comfortable being themselves within their workplace culture.

A company's strategy is typically driven by where their headquarters are based, which can be problematic if it does not allow for the complexity of regional differences.

O'Connor says there are two key tools for improving DEI:

- A data-driven strategy, typical in the US
- A programme-driven strategy, more typical in European countries with stricter laws on collecting and sharing candidate data

"In the US, data is king, but if you're headquartered in France, Poland or Germany, you have to approach diversity differently, and even within Europe there is a range of topics from immigration to LGBTQ rights where there is no settled consensus," O'Connor says.

The ideal approach balances data and programmes. "They have to be in harmony, because there will never be a perfect set of data globally," O'Connor adds. "Around the world, we have a saying when it comes to our design principles: the US market gives us scale, Asia gives us complexity, and here in EMEA we have options for scale and complexity."

### Developing a Global Strategy

While talent leaders agree that a global strategy is a great starting-point, it cannot be too rigid or uniform; instead, it should be a framework for best practice that can be adapted at a regional level to take into account local needs. For example, some companies provide guidelines for inclusive language in job postings, while others mandate diverse representation on candidate lists and interview panels.

Kathrin Choffat, who leads the global talent acquisition team at Zurich Insurance Group, points out that it would be impossible to insist on specific targets across operations in more



than 200 countries and territories. “We have introduced consistent guiding principles, so people have a common understanding, language and experience, no matter where they are interviewing, but our tracking and KPIs remain very localised,” she explains. “In interview panels, we have mandated for one ‘bar raiser’ interviewer, a person who comes in from a different function, background or region, to look at the candidates from a completely different angle and bring in diversity of thought.”

The global head of talent acquisition at a leading bank explained how, when interviewing for director level or higher, the investment bank requires at least one diverse member on the selection panel and two women on the short-list. “These are our diversity standards, but clearly they are not possible in every instance, and the degree to which we enforce them varies by function,” she says.

#### **Hurdles and Solutions**

Leadership buy-in – or lack of it – is the biggest hurdle facing talent leaders. Sometimes this is due to complacency, as company heads believe they already have an element of diversity and don’t need to make further effort; sometimes company chiefs are happy to embrace diversity down the ranks but continue to make senior hires in their own image; and, sometimes, it simply is not a resourcing priority. Data insights are the easiest way to build a convincing case, but in markets where the data is not readily available, talent leaders are forced to come up with alternative strategies.

Stella Steigleder, Senior Manager: Governance and Continuous Improvement at AMS, says encouraging employees to share their personal stories had proven highly effective in European countries. “Stories can really resonate with people, raising awareness to get to the point of acceptance and inclusion,” she says.

“If you don’t have the data, it’s all about the inclusive culture you create through your leadership team and employee groups. External guest speakers can be very powerful as well.”

Another common frustration is inability to retain diverse candidates. Companies in male-dominated sectors such as tech and engineering continue to find it difficult to hang onto female talent long enough for them to be promoted into senior positions.

Jamie Pirie, AMS Client Solutions Director, says this issue came up repeatedly when talking to talent leaders across Europe. “TA leaders get frustrated because they can meet their targets – they can get a diverse shortlist and bring in diverse candidates – but they are not on-boarded in the right way, they are not managed in the right way, so the problem isn’t solved,” he says. “If the culture of the business doesn’t suit a diverse workforce, then people will just leave.” Solutions suggested by participants included creating a formal sponsorship programme for female leadership talent and embedding DEI initiatives into day-to-day operations.

#### **Conclusion**

An increasing number of multi-national organisations are considering implementing global diversity strategies to drive cultural change, improve hiring and boost their EVP. Future-thinking companies are building strategies based around a broad framework and common goals, which can be adapted to local requirements, combining data insights and programmes. Leadership buy-in is vital in order to make fundamental changes to company culture that ensure organisations not only attract but also retain a diverse workforce.

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Brett O’Connor, Client Director and Head of Transformation, AMS

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