

Businesses are displaying an ever greater commitment to workplace diversity, but does the ICT channel understand the real value of a diverse workforce?

Bridging the gap:

Spanning the Diversity Divide



Insights that could give you an edge



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Introduction

The goals of this research are to assess the current state of diversity in ICT channel businesses and establish key demographics, identify where diversity programmes are most and least successful, develop a thesis for progression and encourage leadership in executing strategies that diversify and cohere the workplace.

The research data is derived from extensive telephone interviews with over 160 channel organisations, the vast majority of which are comms resellers and MSPs of all sizes. What emerges from the report is a kaleidoscope of insights that strengthen our understanding of dimensions of diversity – how they are related, why they are important to business success and why certain diversity strategies aren't delivering. The study also spotlights what more needs to be done to bridge strategic gaps and optimise existing diversity programmes and cultures.

The survey results indicate a complex relationship between certain elements of diversity, presenting challenges that must be overcome to make progress. The obstacles mainly derive from a lack of leadership, vision, focus and no situational awareness of where businesses think they are on their diversity journey, despite setting out with clear intentions. This paper offers guidelines for business leaders who need to rethink their approach to diversity; and provides food for thought for boardroom executives with no diversity agenda.

Research yields compelling insights

The report also offers insights into the role of technology-driven diversity as an opportunity to nurture inclusion across diverse teams, thereby overcoming occupational segregation and promoting workgroup performance and cohesion. Furthermore, the study yields compelling results that show how diversity is emerging as a determining factor within the dynamics of business partnerships, and adds real business value to channel firms, most apparent when seeking to exit. There is no argument about the multiple benefits of developing an effective approach to workplace diversity. But this study shows that more needs to be done. ■

key points

For the purposes of this survey the participating organisations are categorised based on revenue size: Up to £5 million, £5-20 million and £20 million-plus. And the results and implications of this Bridging the Gap report were comprehensively discussed during a round table debate which sought to establish ways to create a more diverse comms channel (see page 10).



Making diversity work

It is accepted as fact that workplace diversity can improve the bottom line, boost leadership, help attract and retain skills, foster loyalty, improve team performance, knowledge sharing, productivity, creativity and innovation – and more – so to what extent is diversity embedded into channel businesses?

The case for diversity and inclusion is only partially understood in the channel, with just over 25 per cent of survey respondents having implemented a diversity programme. They feature mostly among the sub-£5 million revenue segment, suggesting that growing companies, led by a younger generation, consider diversity as fundamental to future success. With the rising population of start-ups it is likely that the number of diversity programmes among sub-£5 million revenue companies will increase. Nearly one third of respondents in the £20 million-plus category have a diversity programme, ahead of the £5-£20 million segment.

In what will be a recurring theme in this report, £20 million-plus businesses are more likely to look hard at their diversity as they seek further expansion. This theory is supported by our research figures that point to diversity being a priority for nearly 27 per cent of £20 million-plus firms.

Gauging strategic priorities

The survey sought to grade the importance of diversity in channel businesses by measuring its status as a strategic priority. Overall, more than 70 per cent of the respondents rate diversity as a priority for their business, but nearly 30 per cent don't, even though they have established a diversity programme. It is unlikely that this 30 per cent merely pay lip service to their diversity agenda – more probable that it is not seen as fundamentally strategic and reflects a lack of ambition in this area, a deduction supported by research figures that show over 70 per cent of channel businesses with a diversity strategy do not publicly communicate their diversity ambitions. Diversity is rated a priority most in the £20 million-plus segment at nearly 27 per cent, followed by sub-



£5 million businesses. Less than 20 per cent in the £5-20 million category rate diversity as a priority.

Three key dimensions of diversity

In terms of their current diversity status three dimensions dominate. Over 80 per cent of the channel businesses surveyed rate themselves as ethnically diverse, 81.5 per cent say they are gender diverse, and 79 per cent have diversity in age groups. These encouraging statistics suggest that some channel businesses are more diverse

than they think, with actual diversity standing at circa 80 per cent in the key metrics of gender, ethnicity and age, despite 70 per cent rating diversity as a strategic priority, pointing to a 10 per cent diversity dividend.

Where's the leadership?

Almost 93 per cent of channel firms surveyed have a multi-tasking diversity leader with responsibilities shared across a number of functions. Just seven per cent have a dedicated leader – five per cent of them in the £20

70 per cent of respondents with a diversity strategy say it's a priority, yet 49 per cent do not provide career development opportunities for diverse staff, and 39 per cent do not have a policy to recruit diverse candidates.

million-plus revenue segment. Multi-tasking leaders appear most in the sub-£5 million revenue category at circa 30 per cent, followed by 27 per cent in £20 million-plus businesses with the £5-20 million segment trailing.

Overall, more than 68 per cent of these leaders have the full spectrum of diversity on their agenda. Nearly 27 per cent of full-scopers reside in the £20 million-plus revenue segment, the highest portion. A more selective approach to diversity is adopted by 32 per cent of all leaders (both dedicated and multitasking), which suggests a targeted strategy, probably aimed at the three prominent groups already highlighted by this survey – ethnicity, gender and age.

Why communication matters

Over 75 per cent of businesses surveyed communicate their diversity goals across their business – 24 per cent do not. Those in the sub-£5 million and £20 million-plus segments communicate most. Least communicative are £5-20 million firms, meaning that workers in this segment are more unlikely to be informed about their employer's diversity ambitions and goals, which suggests a diversity starved culture.

68 per cent of respondents consider diversity to add value to their business. Yet only 22 per cent expect to increase investment in supporting diversity, and 78 per cent intend to maintain existing levels of investment.

key points

Among the channel businesses taking part in this survey 20 per cent have no women in leadership positions, and just three per cent have more females than males in management roles. Under 15 per cent of women in over 43 per cent of ICT channel firms hold leadership positions.

key observation

Of the companies surveyed nearly 44 per cent gather and analyse employee data and demographics to assess what is working and what is not, and to measure the progress of their diversity leaders. But 56 per cent don't apply any kind of analysis to their diversity programme nor its output. Without quantifiable results it is near impossible to know whether a scheme is working or otherwise, and where it can be evolved and improved.

The comms sector's best kept secret

While more than 75 per cent of channel businesses communicate their diversity goals across their business, over 70 per cent keep them a secret from the outside world and do not publicly communicate their diversity ambitions. This is hardly a proactive approach to attracting diverse candidates, especially as more than 70 per cent of the companies surveyed rate diversity as a priority for their business. The least likely to publicly communicate their commitment to diversity are sub-£5 million revenue firms, many of which keep their diversity agenda within four walls. In the £20 million-plus bracket 22 per cent don't publicly communicate their diversity ambitions; with £5-20 million channel firms the least likely to blow their own trumpet. More positively, 29 per cent of channel businesses surveyed do publicly communicate their diversity ambitions.

Crunching the numbers

Of the channel companies surveyed nearly 44 per cent gather and analyse employee data and demographics to assess what is working and what is not, and to measure the progress of their diversity leaders. But 56 per cent don't apply any kind of analysis to their diversity programme nor its output. Without quantifiable results it is near impossible to know whether a scheme is working or otherwise, and where it can be evolved and improved. Given that almost 93 per cent of channel businesses surveyed have a multi-tasking diversity leader and just seven per cent a dedicated head, it is no surprise that more attention is not applied to analysing diversity programmes.

Matching results to stated intent

Although over 70 per cent of respondents rate diversity as a priority for their business, 56 per cent have no clue about the output of their diversity programmes. This lack of attention to detail and dearth of insight reveals a big gap between stated intent and practical commitment to managing and optimising the strategy/culture. This could be indicative of businesses paying lip service to a high profile social and industrial cause, but the research proffers a more likely reason.

The main responsibility and accountability for diversity within channel organisations sits at board level (over 68 per cent) and mid-management (24.5 per cent). It is probable that time-pressured boardroom executives simply lack the scope to give diversity the attention it needs, nor the time to be hands-on with middle managers tasked with driving diversity, let alone having the resources to train diversity leaders. Bridging this gap could simply be a matter of raising awareness of the issue and bringing diversity front of mind.

Get on track with diversity training

Just 44 per cent of all channel businesses surveyed provide diversity training, mainly in the £20 million-plus segment



The goals of current diversity schemes ranked by importance are: To improve the bottom line (76 per cent); to attract skills (10.5 per cent); to boost team performance, knowledge sharing, productivity, creativity and innovation (10.5 per cent); and to diversify leadership (3 per cent).

How well a company performs is directly linked to the proportion of females occupying senior management roles (McKinsey), yet our survey reveals that diversifying leadership is the lowest priority in current diversity programmes. Respondents value the output of greater skills and productivity gains through diverse teams above a more diverse leadership profile.

where 22 per cent of these firms focus on educating staff about the dimensions of diversity. Of the businesses that do not pursue formal procedures for training staff on diversity matters, just 2.4 per cent plan to do so in the foreseeable future. These figures suggest a clear split between more diversity aware businesses and those that are less educated, and therefore less prepared to benefit from the many boons associated with a diverse workforce. It's a trend which could also impact the real value of a business, which we will explore later in this report.

HR: Resolving the people dilemma

Over 58 per cent of respondents have a policy to recruit diverse candidates. The most active are £20 million-plus organisations of which nearly 27 per cent have a formalised approach to recruiting diverse employees. Conversely, 39 per cent of respondents do not currently have such a policy, and only 2.4 per cent of these plan to introduce one.

What also emerges from the channel research is that 39 per cent of respondents do not deploy 'techniques' to encourage diversity in their recruitment process (for example, name-blind recruitment, which takes some bias out of the recruitment process). Among the 58.5 per cent of respondents that inculcate diversity and inclusion considerations into their recruitment strategy, 36.5 per cent deploy techniques, 22 per cent don't, and 41.5 per cent did not know how to answer the question – suggesting that recruitment techniques are an unknown quantity to them, and that the 'policy' exists in writing only.

These figures indicate a strong intent and commitment to recruit diverse candidates, but a lack of practical knowhow and experience which will ultimately stop them from achieving their diversity objectives and

prolong lingering biases, thereby contributing to inequality rather than diversifying to the max.

It comes as no surprise to learn that employment techniques are deployed most in the £20 million-plus revenue segment, where almost 27 per cent have a policy to recruit diverse candidates and 17 per cent of them leverage specific techniques for the purpose. This segment is likely to become more diverse faster, followed by sub-£5 million businesses where over 12 per cent deploy techniques to encourage diversity in their recruitment process.

Partnering for a more diverse channel

When selecting channel service providers/vendors to partner with almost 27 per cent of all respondents consider their diversity status – 68 per cent currently do not, of which 46 per cent say they intend to consider the diversity of potential partners in the future. Clearly, service providers/vendors need to up their diversity credentials. The most diversity conscious businesses are those in the 20 million-plus segment of which over 12 per cent already consider the diversity of potential partners – a number that is certain to rise.

Diversity boosts exit values

That channel firms project the value they place on diversity (if not always acted on within their own business) onto external organisations they might work with (service providers/vendors) is also reflected in the fact that 63 per cent, when looking to exit, would consider a potential buyer's diversity as a factor in the sale. For buyers, elevating their diversity strategy/culture could be key to hitting acquisition targets – and those acquisitive businesses in the £20 million plus revenue segment will be most attractive to the potential 63 per cent of diversity alert vendors.

Furthermore, 68 per cent of respondents consider diversity to add value to their business. Yet their recognition of real business value derived from a diverse workforce is not reflected in the attention given to diversity on their own turf, nor financial commitments. Only 22 per cent of respondents expect to increase investment in supporting diversity, and 78 per cent intend to maintain existing levels of investment.

Harnessing tech-driven diversity

Greater levels of diversity and differences in teams may stop people working together effectively. Fostering cultural

key observation

Double standards? Channel leaders want to see more diversity in their partners, but this requirement may not be reflected in their own business.

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homogeny from teams made up of diverse people may pose a challenge, which the survey goes some way in resolving by highlighting the role of collaboration technology as an enabler of diversity and cultural inclusion in teams.

The survey asked respondents whether they recognise collaboration technology (such as Unified Communications and enterprise social media) as a unifying force that enables diverse teams to work as one effective entity, and with other working groups to share knowledge and ideas. The endorsement of this thesis was emphatic, with 80 per cent of respondents agreeing that collaboration technology is an optimiser of diverse teams. Companies in the £20 million-plus segment accounted for 29 per cent of tech-driven diversity proponents, with the sub-£5 million segment also registering 29 per cent, and nearly 20 per cent in £5-20 million businesses.

Collaboration cultivates inclusion

Of the 80 per cent who agree that collaboration technology is a unifying force and optimiser of diverse teams, 68 per cent have deployed technology within their own business to optimise diversity, mostly in the £20 million-plus segment (26.8 per cent) and the sub-£5 million category. Overall, among those that have not yet deployed diversity-friendly technology, 2.4 per cent plan to. The survey results suggest that technology implementations that promote a culture of diversity will quickly pay off in terms of RoI, given the added business value that comes hand-in-hand with diversity.

Therefore the role of ICT providers to help customers develop a diversity strategy from a technology support perspective is significant, and accepted as fact by 61 per cent of respondents (17 per cent think there 'might be' a role, while 22 per cent say there is no role). Notably, 41.5 per cent of respondents are already ambassadors for tech-enabled diversity in their customer base. The £20 million-plus channel firms have the highest faith in technology's ability to optimise teams, with 19.5 per cent of this segment believing there is a role for ICT providers.

New wave of diversity set to emerge

Among those businesses without a diversity programme, 84 per cent do fully recognise the benefits of a more diverse and inclusive workforce, and 29 per cent say diversity will become a priority area for their business, yet only 17.4 per cent of organisations with no diversity programme plan to introduce one, with most commitment in the sub-£5 million segment – 19 per cent overall 'might' focus more on diversity.

Among all of the diversity novices, just 12 per cent say they would benefit from expert guidance to help put them on the road to becoming a more diverse organisation, while 87.5 per cent would not seek outside help. More positively, with nearly 30 per cent expressing a commitment to making diversity a



priority, combined with the potential of almost 20 per cent 'might dos', this points to a possible conversion of 50 per cent of those without a programme over the long-term, which is great news for the channel.

Bridging the Diversity Gap round table debate – page 10

Points to consider

- Do you truly prioritise diversity?
- Does your diversity strategy work?
- Do you provide diversity training?
- Who owns your diversity programme?
- How well do you understand diversity?
- Do you know the value of gender diversity?
- Do you have a policy to hire diverse staff?
- Are you investing enough in diversity?
- Do you understand the link between technology, team diversity and cohesion?
- Do your initiatives maximise business value?



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Round table debate: Diversity and inclusion key to channel development

As round table delegates got to grips with the findings of Comms Dealer's Bridging the Divide diversity and inclusion channel survey (produced in association with BT Wholesale), they zigzagged from the root causes of gender imbalance, to embracing neurodiversity, to addressing unconscious bias, to breaking entrenched moulds. But all of this points to an industry in need of soul-searching and corrective action.

Some industry people think the channel's greatest challenge is the impending switch to an all-digital Britain. They are wrong. The industry's greatest challenge is to keep pace and compete with the spread of diversity and inclusion across UK plc. According to Entanet CEO Elsa Chen the comms sector will never flourish if diversity and inclusion is not treated as an immediate priority. "I've become aware during the past six months how other industries have moved forward faster, such as Google and other digital organisations," she stated. "We must recognise the urgency of diversity and inclusion and see it as important to the survival of our sector."

The relentlessness of the comms industry's diversity-lite heritage has ultimately sapped the channel of a fluid supply of talent. The industry's failings over diversity and inclusion are presented in the main as those of leadership – but that is not to say that the desire to become more diverse and inclusive is not evident. "I have been asked by a number of owner operators what they need to do to change their business," commented BT Wholesale Managing Director Alex Tempest. "My finger is not on a magic button just because I'm female, but there was a total willingness to want to have that conversation and embrace it."

The issue of diversity and inclusion in the comms sector has suddenly got more serious, and tokenism and posturing, which offer no advantage, will be quickly found out. It requires full attention and commitment, and to do otherwise is to impose a sanction on your own business, according to Sky Business Communications Marketing Manager Rohita Kopf, who noted that these matters should be at the discretion of many people, not just individual leaders.

"Diversity and inclusion is built into Sky's culture and is therefore part of the recruitment and onboarding process, and part of every team and quarterly meeting," she said. "You need to build a diversity culture top-



down. It should be business as usual, not an initiative or a programme, but part of everyday life. And you need more than one diversity ambassador. We have males and females at all levels leading the diversity message."

The industry in general needs to flesh out broadbrush plans to deliver diversity, and Daisy Corporate Services CEO Stefni Oliver proposes that from the outset diversification should also extend to the wider community at large. "If you don't

We must recognise the urgency of diversity and inclusion and see it as important to the survival of our sector

have a pool of potential recruits you can't choose diversity, so we work with an organisation called Stemettes as well as local social outreach companies," she explained. "Our

office is in a culturally diverse area but these cultures are insular, so we help people to integrate and get jobs. For example, we offer roles where English as a first language is not important. This gets people through the door. We also go out to local schools and colleges to encourage people, otherwise you're never going to get them."

Challenging unconscious bias

Progress does not mean passing through any Damascene conversion to diversity awareness. But there may be deep seated prejudices to realise and neutralise, because nothing illustrates the partiality in all of us like unconscious bias, so we must reach deep into our psyche to find answers to personal questions and adapt accordingly. "I have a challenge between changing policy versus creating the right culture and behaviour," commented Tempest. "Consider unconscious bias and ask whether that can

be addressed by changing a policy. I don't think it can. This is something that people have to take on personally, especially when trying to create a more diverse culture.

"When I first heard the term 'unconscious bias' I had to clarify its true definition, then I challenged myself on what I thought my bias was – it's unconscious so you don't necessarily know – and asked the questions that enabled me to challenge stereotypes. We offer training in this area alongside other initiatives that address culture and behaviour. If you do it in isolation you won't make much of a difference. If you do it as part of a holistic dynamic programme it changes everything."

We revisit the issue of unconscious bias and personal awareness of it later in this report, and also reflect that change can come from only one quarter, leadership, which may be in dire need of a reality check. According

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to Chen, it's time for a realist's vision of why diversity goes beyond gender. "As an industry we have accepted that there is one model of success which is male dominated," she said. "This makes minorities and people from diverse backgrounds uncomfortable. It's about breaking the mould. Businesses with more women experience greater success because they bring different opinions and a culture that understands how diversity will lead to success. We need women to speak up instead of holding back opinions because they are different from the boss."

Addressing the gender imbalance

For years, the comms industry has been starved of cultural diversity and inclusion. The resulting imbalance of males versus females in top level leadership positions is matched by the scale of the challenge in creating greater gender parity through a change in mindset. "I started in the industry in a junior position and shied away from the established behaviour and success model," commented Chen. "I did not see myself as naturally fitting this template and presumed that I would not be successful. When I became more mature and confident in myself I understood that being different can be a good thing. There are many people in the industry that lack confidence and don't see what an alternative success model could look like."

Yet to be seen as embracing diversity does not always imply the capacity to drive it in an environment where personal experience may be limited, noted BT Wholesale Sales Director for Fixed Sales Michala Hart. "The comms industry can be 'samey'," she said. "People operate in the channel for long periods of time and move from one £20 million organisation to another, for example, but businesses of all sizes are very different. People almost get trapped into their size and scale and lack an opportunity to broaden their horizons."

The recruitment policies of GCHQ are a telltale sign of what can happen in the comms sector if blinkered outlooks are broadened to also embrace neurodiversity and atypical patterns of thought or behaviour. The National Autistic Society suggests that fewer than two in ten autistic people are in full-time paid work. Astro Communications founder and CTO Steve Smith believes these statistics point to a serious waste of autistic talent.

"I've worked with some amazing people on the spectrum, but their personality and the way they live their lives doesn't fit with neurotypical people," he stated. "I know an amazing technologist but he had issues around personal hygiene. The company accommodated these issues for a while until he hacked the managers' accounts – not maliciously, but to show he had the technical capability. He was sacked. The company should have spent more time finding out what made him tick and accommodate his way of living."

Embrace and acknowledge unconscious bias and recruit what you need, not what you think you want

I'm mentoring people with complex issues like this. It's a real challenge and talented people don't get a look in on interviews or careers. Yet the National Cybersecurity Centre and GCHQ recruit people on the autistic spectrum."

This is just one indication that shows how the comms industry is not a modern construct and in varying degrees stands opposed to diversity and inclusion by virtue of its heritage. Nonetheless, business leaders should recognise that they are in large part responsible for turning the comms sector into a magnetic attractor of young female talent. "In years six and seven at school girls are equal



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We need to get into schools and instil in young people what technology does for society and what it can do for them

that cannot always be made simple even by the strongest impulse of duty to society and industry. "I also work with ex-offenders, transitioning people from a place they didn't want to be in," added Smith. "They may not have received enough attention at school – people with ADHD, bipolar disorder, Asperger's, those on the autistic spectrum, to name a few, all miss out on their education and fall out of the other side. They may end up on the wrong side of the law and it can happen to anyone. We need to invest more in those early years and be ambassadors for our industry."

Embracing risk factors

Addressing the diversity imbalance also involves approaches that may be loaded with value assumptions and an element of risk in seeking greater equality, pointed out Virtual1 Head of People and Culture Kate Brunning. "It's partly about encouraging leaders to take a risk outside of recruiting people with channel experience," she stated. "There are lots of other people that are experienced in different ways. It is about starting small and being consistent in everything you do. Think about your values and make sure they are culturally diverse – especially when you are recruiting on values and behaviours."

Such initiatives serve to boost comms sector diversity but do not on their own lead to higher populations of females in boardrooms. "There is a reason why women are in the middle management piece," commented Tempest. "We are able to get there, but there is a barrier in our minds that hinders the realisation of what females can actually do and achieve. You don't have to follow the rules you abide by at school, and you can break into something if you want to. You also have to give yourself permission."

In advancing the spirit of self-liberation the channel's focus on diversity should be cultural, not policy, and not confined to a single group, explained co-founder of Engage Your People (and former Director of Culture at Chess) Kate Wood. "Chess's diversity culture started from not trying to empower women but empowering everybody, recruiting on attitude and energy, and recruiting the right people for the right job which enables them to thrive and be themselves," she stated. "My skills, energy and resilience have been great for the business. You don't need to be technical to work in technology; and you need to see those senior women and think 'I can do that'."

It is hard to imagine a better route to greater gender diversity than to increase the number of female role models and make it easier for women to work in the comms sector,

to, or surpassing boys in technology, but come year 12 the majority of girls are looking for careers in areas like accounting, medicine or law," stated Smith.

Not surprisingly, the comms industry remains a stranger to these girls and according to Hart this is one of the sector's most pressing issues, on which it is found lacking. "Girls choose to go into science or medicine because they think it makes a difference," she explained. "They don't know that technology makes more of a difference. My whole career has been about what technology does for businesses and how do monetise it. The question is, how do we make school girls realise that our industry is shaping the world. Science and medicine is important, but the technology industry takes the practical application of these to another level. There is no passion, enthusiasm or funding to underpin what school girls can do for our industry."

Pedagogic opportunities

Indeed, the drive for greater diversity offers a series of pedagogic opportunities to bridge the gender gap. "We need to get into schools and instil in young people what technology does for society and what it can do for them," stated BT Wholesale Client Director, Channel Partner, Noreen Hallbery. "For kids in deprived parts of London, for example, it shows them a way out of a situation where they are judged culturally and unfairly."

The cardinal reason for the industry's diversity debate is that in some shape or form minority groups may be disenfranchised and out of the loop. This is a complex matter

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which will go some way in making up the shortfall due to maternity and the early career decisions of girls when they leave education. On school leavers, BT Wholesale Commercial Director Daria Sokolova said: "It's very important to give women an opportunity to switch career later in life. I have seen girls pursue a certain job but realise later that they are interested in technology. Part of the overall industry debate should be to create an environment that accepts people who want to change career and pursue something different."

This vision of greater flexibility in approaches to recruitment must accept that since the dawn of time women ultimately keep the world populated. "A fact of biology is that females have children, but forcing women to choose between progressing their career or bringing up children is not fair," observed KCOM Marketing Manager Sarah Bailey. "Women are talented and experienced and businesses should work around the needs of the industry and society. There are very few part-time job share roles at management level or above. This is a fundamental issue for all businesses."

Flexibility is key

One classic example of individual discretion leading to change is Jola's all-encompassing recruitment policy. "When I'm recruiting I ask for the same pot of money but spend it in a different way to get the best person for the job," said Jola Marketing Director Cherie Howlett. "Many of the women who choose their children over a career are brilliant, trained people. Why not bring them back on flexible hours? We have the technology and can work from home flexibly. There should be no barriers for anybody and we have a naturally developed diverse team. Therefore challenge what you've always done and ask whether there is a better way."

The comms sector is reasonably mature but for diverse groups it's not always open for business. This is a predicament that will be resolved only by a change of tact at company and individual level, and tackling unconscious bias is a key element of reaching a 'better way', believes Hart, who provided an insight into her own change experience. She noted that BT has a graduate programme, an apprentice programme and a large population of people who are 35 to 40 years into their career. Her team spans this workforce profile, and when recruiting for jobs the considerations of tenure, length of service, organisation fatigue and 'freshness' were assumed as key criteria, which in hindsight placed the older candidates at a clear disadvantage.

"One candidate had been with BT for 38 years and I was biased when I walked into the interview," commented Hart. "I had in mind that I wanted someone younger and external, but he was the best I've interviewed and did the most preparation. I hired him and he has been phenomenal. In stark contrast, the attitudes of some digitally competent apprentices are dreadful. So embrace and acknowledge unconscious bias and recruit what you need, not what you think you want."



The desire to engineer both a diverse and inclusive workplace is a step towards common sense, and diversity could become your secret weapon, but bridging the gap remains a challenge for many. "I genuinely believe that we are an industry of game changers because of the technology we provide," stated Tempest. "The entrepreneurs in our sector didn't become entrepreneurs because they were afraid, they made their businesses successful because they were prepared to take risks. They just don't know, in certain circumstances, how to change their dynamic."

Bites from the table

Unconscious bias is in the fabric of how you grew up, your experience, who you engage with and how you operate. Being conscious of all this changes the landscape.
Michala Hart, Sales Director, Fixed Sales, BT Wholesale

Businesses that want to develop cultural diversity should ask whether they are doing it because they think they have to or because they are passionate about diversity.
Stefni Oliver, CEO, Daisy Corporate Services

Recruit on competencies. It doesn't matter if candidates have three heads, are male or female, or part of the lesbian gay community for example. It makes no difference.
Sue Kempton, Managing Director, Windsor Telecom

We must do more in terms of mentoring across the industry. Everyone has a story to tell and we all have different experiences. Maybe the channel community can help each other.
Karen Heaven, Head of Marketing, BT Wholesale

BT hosts school trips to Adastral Park, bringing to life what technology can do. If they spark one child's imagination that's a success.
Noreen Hallbery, Client Director, Channel Partner, BT Wholesale



Supporting channel diversity

We firmly believe that **workplace diversity** can foster loyalty, boost leadership and help attract and retain new skills. We're very committed to supporting diversity in all its forms, and helping our channel partners to embrace the opportunities this brings to improve the bottom line.

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