

GGI and Article Consulting Diversity Dinner

Discussion summary

October 1st 2019



The first of October 2019 marked the first day of Black History Month, and in order to commemorate the occasion, the Good Governance Institute (GGI) and Article Consulting Ltd brought together thought leaders to participate in a discussion dinner centred around diversity within the workforce and beyond.

Over the course of the dinner, the group engaged in open and honest conversation around diversity, drawing on their own personal and professional experiences to contribute to richness of the debate. Some of the key themes have been captured which summarise lines of enquiry around the question of diversity.

A paper on Diversity in the NHS was introduced¹ and some key concepts were highlighted around the importance of reframing the workforce diversity debate in terms of added value, referred to within the paper as the diversity dividend, as opposed to diversity for the sake of morality. This paper highlights the importance of describing the value of a diversified workforce in real terms, in order to inspire change in current practices.

Professor David Divine² presented his paper “the Pros and Cons of Feeling a Sense of Belonging” which highlighted some of the opportunities and challenges of diversity and inclusion, drawing on his experience within the Canadian context. In his paper, he raises the question ‘how do those individuals and communities caught up in the race categories imposed on them by more dominant others, seek to navigate through this cultural group web to claim some sense of belonging?’. He asserts that belonging is personal and is derived from one’s own experiences and that the role an individual plays within society stems from one’s own vision of what that means. In essence, as opposed to defining our sense of belonging through the views of others, the solution lies in our own effort to discover our own sense of belonging flowing from our vision of what that should be, and accordingly find allies in conversation and action who share the same vision. The concepts discussed by Professor Divine provided food for thought and framed the debate for group discussion. Supporting articles distributed and authored by Professor Divine during the event on bridging the cultural gap, cultural sensitivity in the workplace, and the state of diversity in today’s workforce are referenced at the end of this paper.

There were rich contributions amongst the wider group, and a number of key themes emerged related to identity, belonging and drawing on networks, which formed a large part of the discussion. The importance of education was noted as a key starting point to achieve meaningful change with regards to diversity in the workforce and beyond. With regards to workforce in particular, recruitment agencies were cited as needed to more proactively promote a diversified workforce, and board training was noted as being extremely important to ensure that ethnic minorities are represented in leadership and middle management positions. The group discussed the need to develop synergy between ethnic communities and create platforms designed to promote inclusion of ethnic minorities and advocate diversity. The impact of circumstances and how these shape opportunities led to a debate around choices, and subsequently, on how to overcome ascribed status. The imminent need to work closely with ‘undervalued’ individuals and facilitate a way for their voices to be heard in order to change their trajectory was raised during the discussion as having the potential to positively impact change.

The development of networks, and, networking was perceived as having the potential to support the progression of undervalued members of society, by giving them the support and confidence they need to project themselves in the most positive way going forward. Technology was cited as a way to achieve this end, and as an important tool for breaking down barriers. The concepts above give a flavour of the lines of enquiry that emerged throughout the course of the event. In conclusion, this discussion dinner provided a forum for thought leaders to speak candidly and debate openly around issues related to diversity, with the aim of stimulating innovative and progressive thinking on the subject. The intended outcome of such discussions is that attendees will leave inspired, and that the learning will encourage further debate and discussion within their respective networks on the subject, in order to keep the dialogue going.

1) Diversity: The New Prescription for the NHS, 2018

2) Professor David Divine has occupied some of the most senior positions in social work practice, administration, regulation, and education in the UK, in addition to occupying a similar level in social housing in the UK. Professor Divine has managed his own consultancy company in social work, housing and community health, and was the James Robinson Johnston Chair in Black Canadian Studies, at Dalhousie University, Nova Scotia, Canada, in addition to being a fully tenured Professor of Social Work at Dalhousie University. He is now Managing Director of Footprints Life Coaching. David’s strengths are in teaching, working with people who are often identified as marginalised, research, employee engagement, management and strategic vision

References

- 1) Corbett-Nolan, A., Fanshawe, S. Diversity (2018) 'The New Prescription for the NHS'. Accessed at: <https://www.good-governance.org.uk/services/diversity-the-new-prescription-for-the-nhs/>
- 2) Divine, D. (April 2019) 'The State of Diversity in Today's Workforce', My Halifax Experience. Accessed at: <https://myeastcoastexperience.com/halifax/the-state-of-diversity-in-todays-workforce/>
- 3) Divine, D. (September 2019) 'Cultural Sensitivity in the Work Place: Touching Strangers'. Accessed at: <https://myeastcoastexperience.com/halifax/cultural-sensitivity-in-the-work-place-touching-strangers/>
- 4) Divine, D. (September 2019) 'How do we Bridge the Cultural Gap? When all else Fails: Reach out to Connect in Spite of our Differences'. Accessed at: <https://myeastcoastexperience.com/halifax/how-do-we-bridge-the-cultural-gap-when-all-else-fails-reach-out-to-connect-in-spite-of-our-differences/>

