

Saxton Bampfylde

Inclusion and Allyship Our opportunity



Introduction

The following reflections emerged from a webinar discussion held in October 2020 between Althea Efunshile CBE, Chair of Metropolitan Thames Valley Housing and Non-Executive Director of Channel 4, and Pamela Leonce, Diversity Advisor at Saxton Bampfylde.

Althea and Pamela spoke with honesty and openness about the challenges they had faced in organisations and in society. While the conversation was focussed on the experiences of black people in Britain, we recognise that these will be different in some ways from those of people from other racially diverse backgrounds. We hope that the observations and insights that arose from that may be of broader interest and applicability also.

We are privileged to share these perspectives with you as a summary from the webinar discussion. Whilst we may all be more aware of the themes, we also acknowledge that there is work for us to do, personally and collectively to create a more equitable environment for colleagues from racially diverse backgrounds, present and future.

We hope that you find these perspectives helpful and will look forward to working together to achieve more equitable, representative organisations.

What is an Ally?

Allyship is:

- Supporting black colleagues and amplifying their experiences.
- Sharing their experiences with those who have the capacity to create systemic change.
- Speaking up, especially if you have the audience that will listen to you.
- Calling out inappropriate behaviour. It's particularly important that this is done in the workplace, within teams, groups, departments, boardrooms etc., where black people are under-represented.

Allyship is not:

- A charitable act.
- Proving to the world what a good person you are.
- Being quiet because you don't have all the answers and/or because it feels uncomfortable.

What makes a good Ally?

- Recognising where privilege has played a part in your organisation and doing your bit, however small, to fight against it.
- Building relationships with black people to learn and for white people to share and challenge their thinking about race.



Continuing the conversation

Though many organisations have publicly expressed their appetite to dismantle systemic racism, they are still unpacking what changes that will require them to make, culturally and operationally.

To make substantive progress, it is important we ground our understanding in the practical realities of working life that might exist for black colleagues. Our vision is that by learning and sharing together and elevating voices, we can help to create a working culture where black colleagues are able to contribute to their fullest ability and where organisations can benefit from their insights and expertise.

The year that was

2020 was notably challenging and traumatic, especially so for black colleagues. The killing of George Floyd in May, though only one of many acts of violence of its kind, catalysed a new energy and focus to ensure that the roots of racist violence were addressed at every level in society. Compounded by the disproportionate effects of the pandemic on the black population, a new light has been shone on institutional racism and structural inequalities.

Racism has been highlighted anew as a collective problem to acknowledge, with a renewed imperative for white people to address it.

Opening up the dialogue

In the aftermath of George Floyd's killing, new opportunities arose in some organisations for black employees to share their experiences of racism and for others in the organisation to hear these perspectives first-hand in open and honest discussion. For some this was the first time they had spoken out and was a cathartic moment. As a result, many organisations have begun to listen more closely, to better understand these experiences and to address barriers to participation in every part of society.

Dismantling racism will be an ongoing process and one that requires listening and facilitation of open dialogue to continue. "Safe" forums for discussion cannot be declared overnight; they require a continual commitment to inclusion and openness by organisations' leadership to ensure that these perspectives can be meaningfully shared.



Cultivating new awareness

Inequitable outcomes for black people across education, criminal justice, health and housing, and most particularly in the workplace, mean that there is a great deal of work to do, but with significant possibility for our organisations to make real change.

We must acknowledge that we live in an institutionally racist society in order to begin to address it, continually cultivating a new awareness of the different experiences employees from all backgrounds have of our organisations.

This means continuing to challenge our own assumptions and unconscious biases - at times, uncomfortable work, but which has been demonstrated to make positive contributions to organisational outcomes, and which raises us all up.

Appointing a new senior colleague can be a useful exercise for “organisational self-examination” which makes us consider afresh how we are perceived externally, and particularly here, what the structural and cultural barriers might be to attracting and successfully onboarding someone from an under-represented background.

Coming to terms

One of the key facets of an inclusive culture is confidence in using appropriate terminology around issues of power, privilege and inclusion. The majority of people who joined our webinar in October said that they were not comfortable with the language to use when speaking about issues of race or racism, or that there was more to do to enable them to do so confidently.

Although as we learn, we may not always get it right, it is imperative that we work towards being comfortable with the language around race, naming and understanding who we are and how we relate as community and as communities, moving forward with honesty.

When considering making new appointments, it is important for us to consider how potential new hires will see the organisation, in the appointment brief, on its social media or website and in discussions with current and former employees. We have committed to challenging all our clients on how they represent themselves, asking themselves why a colleague from an under-represented background would choose to join an organisation, aiming to articulate this clearly throughout the recruitment process.

When “your best” is what’s stopping you

We all want to appoint the best person for the job. But what are the criteria we’re using to tell us who is best? We’re familiar with the way that unconscious bias drives us towards the familiar, and in particularly complex and challenging operating environments there is a tendency to move away from perceived risk, to continue doing what we have always done – or hiring those we have always hired.

But we need to continue to challenge ourselves to create environments where we can get the best from the widest range of people and to broaden our definition of what success looks like, opening up our own perspectives, in order to drive positive change.

Institutional body language

Inclusivity means addressing both the headline policies of the organisation as well as the more nuanced and subtle markers of culture that do – or don’t – allow for diversity. Considered reflection by those who have upheld the status quo will mean active questioning of the organisation’s “institutional body language”, considering more nuanced practical barriers to inclusion.

Nothing about us without us

The challenges of 2020 have shown that it is possible for us – personally and for our organisations – to persist in ongoing discomfort as we address the most pressing issues of our time. Boards need to have the courage to continue to look frankly at themselves and to do the work required to create more equitable organisations.

More diverse boards are comfortable with discomfort, with no stiltedness on conversations about race. This openness can only stand a board in good stead to turn its attentions to other critical issues which may be facing them. It's self-evident that colleagues from different backgrounds will understand the nuances of strategies differently. Moving towards a working environment which is integrated and not compartmentalised, where we regularly address broader employee perspectives both formally and informally, will benefit us all. A diverse board is best-equipped to face a rapidly changing environment with ambition, resilience and foresight.



Doing the work

Working together to address racism benefits all of us and is a process of continual self-examination and awareness. Some practical steps towards this are outlined below:



Be prepared to devote time to learning and asking the questions. Your education is your responsibility.



Speak out if you see inequality or injustice - don't leave it to black colleagues to call out racism.



Don't allow fear of "getting it wrong" prevent you from trying to make positive change – learn and share lessons.



To be lasting and impactful, change is required at an organisational level: in systems, processes, and behaviours.



Highlight and celebrate achievements by black colleagues.



Regularly measure your organisation's progress on diversity to be sure that you are making lasting positive change.



Saxton Bampfylde

At Saxton Bampfylde we strive for real change and equality for all. We share a fundamental commitment to diversity and believe that diversity, equity and inclusion, is key to building extraordinary teams.

STEP Programme

Support, Transition, Elevate, Promote

We have been privileged to work with so many organisations who actively seek to diversify their leadership teams and provide development opportunities for their upcoming talent. As leadership advisors, we have a pivotal role to play in the development of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic leaders, and particularly those at a point of transition to executive leadership or board level.

Building on the success of our REACH mentoring programme for high-potential civil servants with a disability, we are proud to launch STEP, a holistic coaching, development and career development programme for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic leaders. The programme aims to support those operating (or recently operating) in a leadership position and who will likely be considering significant career progression at executive or non-executive level.

STEP builds on the strengths and talents that individuals already have. It is designed to really understand existing strengths and areas of development, both psychologically and in practice.

Find out more at www.saxbam.com/step-programme

The logo features the word "STEP" in a bold, green, sans-serif font. To the right of the text is a thick orange L-shaped line that forms a partial frame. Below the word "STEP", there is a thick orange horizontal line that extends from the left edge of the frame.