

A CEO shows us how promoting diversity is not an exact science

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Ian Rand took part in the breakfast discussion *Women and the Workplace: Separating Myths from Reality* on 4 November, at Bloomberg's London headquarters, with **Allyson Zimmermann**, Executive Director of Catalyst Europe; **Tim Loake**, Director of Dell EMC Services; **Peter Duff**, Head of Diversity and Inclusion at BP; and **Shani Orgad**, Associate Professor in LSE's Department of Media and Communications. The panel was moderated by Bloomberg TV's news anchor **Anna Edwards**. The event was a joint initiative between Bloomberg, LSE Business Review and Catalyst.

I spent the first 10 years of my career in one of the very best, but also perhaps least diverse, organisations around.

The British Army taught me a huge amount about leadership, but those lessons did not include how to handle the conversation with a woman coming back from maternity, or offer advice to a colleague looking for support in coming out at work.

So when I left the Army in 2000, and started working for a US Investment Bank, and then for Barclays, Leading Diversity was something I learned to do, one lesson, and sometimes one mistake, at a time. A couple of those lessons are worth sharing.

Firstly – accept up front that Leading Diversity is hard, you have some learning to do! The sad reality is that many managers look like me – white, straight, middle-aged men – and even the best of us don't have the knowledge, or circle of friends outside the office, that makes us literate in all the cultures, language, and societal norms that exist within the teams we lead. So – you have to learn them; and here organisations can really help. For example, many firms have an LGBT network, but the SPECTRUM network at Barclays focuses not just on supporting each other, but also on educating everyone. Want to understand the language used in the LGBT community? Well you'll find a dictionary on the intranet, next to the pages on loan pricing, and IT support.

But sometimes you'll need more specific advice. Most people focus on building a network that helps them with their next career step, and with 'what' they do, but what about having a network that helps you improve 'how' you do it? Build a network that will help you gain a new perspective on issues, and then use them. The more different they are to you (age, sex, race, sexuality) the better. Men – ask a female colleague with insight into how you operate to give you feedback – weekly, not annually. I will forever be grateful to the incredibly insightful, and maybe sometimes courageous, women I have worked with who were willing to sit me down after a meeting and point out how I could say or do things differently.

And on the subject of saying things better – learn that the small stuff matters. Recently at Barclays we have been talking a lot about the [Linchpin research](#) undertaken by Elisabeth Kelan at Cranfield. This work shines a fantastic spotlight on the unintended consequences of 'micro behaviours' exhibited by even very well intentioned mid-managers. For example, take the statement "We are really focused on supporting working parents, for example John shares the school-run with his wife, and so he comes in late on Mondays and Wednesdays, and we all make that work". Sounds great! But now replace 'late' with 'later' and see how much better it becomes. Just one letter transforms the cultural message.

This example leads to a specific area which I have learnt can transform the engagement and simple happiness of colleagues – the broad adoption of flexible working.

I think many leaders are on a journey with flexible working. We understand the overall idea, and we might currently see it working in our technology teams, but there is still a general reticence to embrace it broadly.

However, adopting flexible working across our organisations can help solve one of the biggest challenges facing many organisations striving to become truly diverse.

The challenge I'm referring to is the lack of female representation in senior leadership positions – especially in financial services. But the link between this issue and flexible working is not as simple as 'give women coming back from maternity more flexibility'; that's happening in many places, but it's not having the impact that was perhaps expected. Why not?

In most businesses there are 'golden pathways' through the organisation, or key roles that are necessary steps to taking senior leadership positions. The challenge is that these roles tend to be high profile and client facing, and traditionally necessitate long hours, evening events and travel; areas which will cause huge challenges for those seeking to work more flexibly.

So great statistics about more women taking advantage of flexible working in your organisation will not help your senior leadership gender balance if none of their roles are on the 'golden pathways'.

This is a tough one to fix, and the culture in these roles runs very deep. But it is something we are focusing on in my team at Barclays. How do we make job-sharing a client-facing role work? How can we shift the balance of our client events to during the day? How do we persuade colleagues that this will really work, and ask them to try?

So that's the great thing about Leading Diversity for me; there are always more lessons to learn.



Notes:

- *The post gives the views of its author, not the position of LSE Business Review or the London School of Economics.*
- *Before commenting, please read our [Comment Policy](#).*

Ian Rand was appointed in March 2016 as CEO of Business Banking, Barclays UK. He is responsible for the business that provides banking services to nearly 1m UK SMEs. Ian joined Barclays in 2008. Prior to that he was a COO at JPMorgan in London and New York for 8 years, working in Sales, Trading and Research. Before moving to banking, Ian served in the British Army for 10 years working in Northern Ireland, Norway, Bosnia and Kosovo.



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