



CASE STUDY:
**THE GREAT BRITISH
DIVERSITY EXPERIMENT**

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BACKGROUND

The Great British Diversity Experiment was created in 2015 by five communications professionals aiming to provide practical and relevant actions to drive change in the creative industries.

It answers three key questions:

- ♦ We all know diversity is better for business but why does it specifically drive advantage for the communications industry?
- ♦ Why has it not been adopted universally, what are the hidden challenges we need to understand and overcome?
- ♦ What does the industry need to do to ensure they can take advantage of the benefits of diversity?

The Experiment was the first study on the impact of diverse leadership in the communications sector and it was designed, managed, run, experience, supported and delivered by the industry, for the industry.





DIVERSITY LEADS TO PEOPLE BEING THEIR AUTHENTIC SELF AT WORK AND THUS CONTRIBUTE MORE CREATIVELY AND BE MUCH HAPPIER IN THEIR JOB



DIVERSITY IS THE NEW DARWINISM

THE EXPERIMENT

In January 2016 140 truly diverse people were recruited to the experiment. They were divided into 20 teams and briefed on a world changing challenge by Tesco—to solve food wastage in the home. The teams then worked on this brief for a month and during this time were ethnographically studied to enable an understanding of what is different, difficult and advantageous when diversity is in action. Not surprisingly, the methodology was highly creative using mobile-phone documentarians, open video forums, before and after surveys.

THE BENEFITS OF DIVERSITY WITHIN THE EXPERIMENT

The Experiment's leaders wanted to take the known benefits as demonstrated in cross-sectoral research such as McKinsey (2015) and the Lord Davies Reports, and show why and how diversity delivers better creative solutions. The following benefits were confirmed:

- ◆ **Diversity leads to people being their authentic self at work and thus contribute more creatively and be much happier in their job.** What is detrimental to being yourself (and thus creativity) is having to play to type, and too often, the creative industry is forcing people to do this. There are still many people who believe they tick the diversity box or a token representation of their background when they are appointed as - when you feel like you're the only black, LGBT or disabled

person in a room, you end up feeling you represent that group, rather than being able to just be yourself. These experiences of tokenism and type-fitting were in total contrast to the experience of the heterogeneous groups of the experiment.

- ◆ **It dramatically increases the possibility of new connections between experiences, perspectives, and insights that lead to distinctive, powerful and new creative ideas.**

The experiment shone a spotlight on the alchemy resulting from fresh collisions of personal experiences, reference points and cultural knowledge. In short, there are more raw materials to work with. Diversity is not just better for early stage ideas either. Raw ideas are shaped and improved more effectively: as a diverse team challenges ideas more, pushing them in new directions and different ways. By putting the same people in the room together, you get creative solutions that can be predicted, and ones your clients (stakeholders, members, partners) will probably anticipate.

- ◆ **Diversity means ideas develop via meritocracy, and not quick buy-in from the dominant cultural voice. It forces us to be truthful about creative merit.** Consensus often happens quickly in teams where everyone has a similar background and experience. In a diverse team, however, there are more opinions and when you have a range of different starting points, the things that might seem obvious to one can seem completely alien to another. Whilst it



might take longer to decide which idea is the best, when you have diverse opinions, ideas win because they are genuinely good and not just because they appeal to one type of person. Participants commented on the skills they developed through the Experiment including active listening, empathy and diplomacy— core skills for an effective board member.

THE CHALLENGES OF DIVERSITY WITNESSED IN THE EXPERIMENT

Whilst the benefits of diversity may trump the challengers, the challenges are very real:

- ◆ **Consensus is elusive – without dominant culture, group progression can be a difficult thing to negotiate.** Certain shared cultural codes that groups may rely upon to find quick consensus are not as apparent when teams are more diverse, making consensus harder to find. Decision-making therefore requires more energy and focus.
- ◆ **Tokenism does not work – people close up and the power of diversity is lost.** If people feel tokenistic gestures, they end up playing to a type or closing up and the power of having them there is gone. Getting

a few faces is not enough, you also need to de-politicise diversity, people are there to do the job they love. It is worthy of note that 84% of Experiment participants believed that cultural change is most needed to make the industry more diverse.

- ◆ **The leadership challenge – certain styles and management can really inhibit the positive impact of diversity.** Leadership is vital and the right kind of leadership is imperative. Harnessing the power of diversity demands a certain kind of creative leader, and the revered iconoclastic, alpha-male, creative genius is often the didactic leader who will stop a diverse group's creativity. The best leaders in the Experiment practised "clear enablement": empowering teams and giving them space, but stepping in with the right prompts or questions at the right time. A new breed of leader is needed, one who is able to guide people very different from themselves and to create an environment where others can thrive.



PARTICIPANTS COMMENTED ON THE SKILLS THEY DEVELOPED THROUGH THE EXPERIMENT INCLUDING ACTIVE LISTENING, EMPATHY AND DIPLOMACY.

5 THINGS THE INDUSTRY SHOULD DO

01.

CHANGE THE CREATIVE PROCESS

Don't fixate on speed and ease, embrace messiness and focus on merit.

02.

RETRAIN LEADERS

If they cannot provide clear enablement, they will not get the benefit of diversity.

03.

IMPLEMENT THE ROONEY RULE

Bringing in diverse talent is not a CSR thing, it is critical to business success. Go further than you are now and demand every new role has a diverse short list – the Rooney Rule. Look harder, further and accept that often a round peg in a square hole is a good thing. And then implement the Rooney Rule for those people who are actually doing the interviewing too.

04.

BUILD AN OPEN NETWORK AND ACCESS NEW TRIBES

If you hire new people you will have access into new communities and networks which will mean the Rooney Rule won't even be needed.

05.

MAKE YOUR ATTITUDES AS ACCESSIBLE AS YOUR BUILDINGS

More than 10 million people in the UK identify as having limitations in their daily activities for physical and mental health reasons, yet very few people in the industry are from this community.



BRINGING IN DIVERSE TALENT IS NOT A CSR THING, IT IS CRITICAL TO BUSINESS SUCCESS

The obvious knee-jerk reaction to the diversity challenge is to quickly hire some young diverse people but doing this will not solve the challenge. Tokenism closes people up and kills the power of diversity. Instead consider how you can improve the diversity of your business in a strategic and meaningful way.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR SPORT?

Sports organisations have to innovate more than at any other time—creativity in strategy, sports development and performance are key not only to survive but also to thrive. The Great British Diversity Experiment, which focused on the creative industries, demonstrated that more diverse teams brought measurable benefits in terms of ideas, creativity and output. This is probably more akin to the sport sector's goals than a financial institution and reinforces the anecdotal evidence from sports bodies that speak of enhanced innovation, new ideas and breadth of insight as a result of proactive recruitment of diverse board members.



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