EVERYBODY WELCOME?

Charities must admit they have a diversity problem and take practical steps to solve it, says Priya Kantaria.

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PROBLEMS AROUND diversity are more and more in the public eye, with gender stereotyping in advertising and universities researching their involvement in slavery all part of tensions today. But now that the existence of prejudice and injustice is accepted by individuals and institutions, the next step is how to address and resolve them. So, for example, universities may pay reparations to African countries and put funds and efforts into encouraging more racially diverse students to study with them.

Within the charity sector, one element of the debate concerns maintaining a diverse workforce, whether that be in terms of ethnicity, sex, disability, social class or even thought. The call is for charities to encourage more minorities that are currently under-represented. For example, just 9 per cent of voluntary sector employees are from black, Asian or minority ethnic (BAME) backgrounds, according to NCVO's *UK Civil Society Almanac 2018*. This is lower than in the public and private sectors (both at 11 per cent) and across the UK as a whole (14 per cent).

There are particular nuances to the sector's diversity problem. The fundraising profession, for example, is known to have a higher proportion of women lower down the ranks than in senior roles, and charity boards are infamous for being dominated by older, white men. There may be reasons for these norms, but the call is to break them and foster teams that reflect the diversity of society.

BEATING BIAS – OR NOT

Bias, unconscious or conscious, can be the underlying reason for teams lacking diversity. The term "unconscious bias" describes an alternative to deliberate, unashamed prejudice. It affects how people are recruited and how they progress within an organisation.

Management consultant David Bryan, who has advised the likes of Comic Relief and Arts Council England, says he sees the problem as primarily that lots of voluntary organisations are trying to recruit in their own image. "It's a longstanding challenge but they're still doing that even though it's widely understood that there's a bias in how we recruit – that we like to find people who look like us, talk like us and quack like us," he says.

The challenge of diversity, says Bryan, is well established for the voluntary sector. As much as the sector is committed to a range of important social issues, which some think means it should be held to even higher ethical standards, Bryan believes charities still haven't spent enough time trying to break the patterns of behaviour that lead them to be unrepresentative of society.

"Often, we don't even begin to explore how someone from a different background who brings a difference to the table might actually have
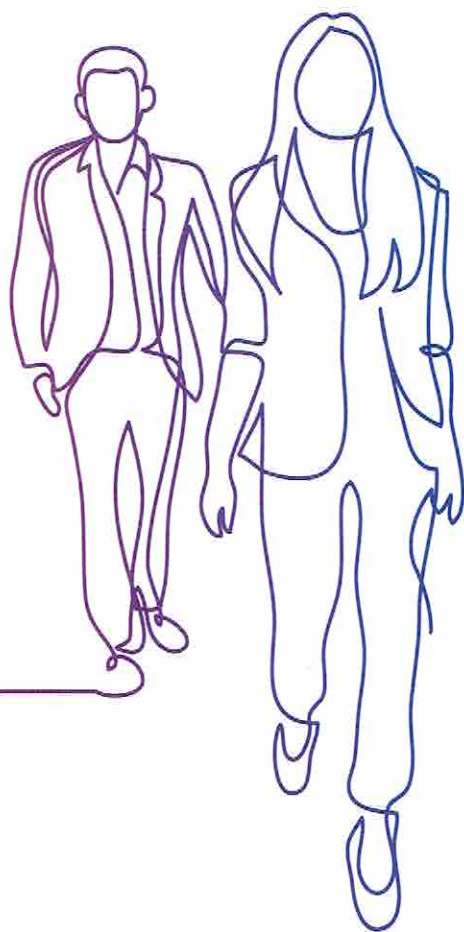
things in common [with us]. The assumption is 'they are different and maybe too different to work with; if I don't have a familiarity with working with difference, maybe they'll bring challenges into the office that I don't know how to contend with'."

The reaction to bias is often to recruit diversely and deliberately so. For example, blind recruitment involves removing personal information from applications, while adopting the so-called Rooney rule guarantees that BAME candidates (or potentially others with protected characteristics) are given the opportunity to interview for roles.

But another action is training to become aware of your biases, with the end goal of overcoming them and instilling a more inclusive culture. Ultimately, this change is designed to ensure organisations actively welcome diversity into their workforces and beyond. This is stronger and more human than Tony Blair's mild ideas of tolerance

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and possibly aggressive notion of integration.

"It's got to be that we say to individuals, 'don't come and be like the way we want you to be, come and be whoever you are and add to the richness of our environment'," says Bryan. "And we haven't been doing that for decades."

However, some have called the value of unconscious bias training into question. Teresa Boughey, diversity and inclusion expert and founder and CEO of Jungle HR, says it can sometimes cause more harm than good.

"It's superficial. People come away with more questions than they have answers. I think it can heighten people's biases and leave people thinking, well 'I do do those [bad] things', without any real context around why

they do them and what they need to do to prevent them."

FIVE POINTS FOR STARTERS
In general, she says, there are so many organisations that have a desire to do something but do not know what, and what they do is very piecemeal, rather than sustainable or holistic – they are just engaging in one-off initiatives.

Part of the inspiration for Boughey's book on achieving diversity and inclusion, *Closing the Gap*, was recognition of the need to not get caught up in a never-ending conversation about difference. Rather than trying to solve sexism or racism or any type of prejudice, she instead sets out five alternative steps to achieving diversity.

Step one is about taking stock and transparency, which means organisations asking themselves what

they have and what is working, and looking at the people data. Boughey points out that while it is good practice for organisations to be aware of what they are paying individuals, the issue is bigger than just pay. It includes how organisations are rewarding and engaging their workforce.

This first step involves understanding your people, including the demographics and recruitment practices, "and ensuring that with anything that is identified, the organisation owns that truth. It's not about identifying uncomfortable figures and just hiding them – it's about working out what the root causes are."

Step two is about raising awareness. "Raising awareness is about ensuring that every employee understands the importance of diversity, the benefits of it and why we need to have it, so that the existing and new workforce get that inclusion means them. It's not just for a minority group – it means that they themselves may have to do something different. And, as a consequence, they may have to change a mindset and a belief."

individuals who do not believe there's a problem from a gender perspective. Understanding the difficulties that people face is part of raising awareness.

Step three is for inspiring and involving the workforce by recognising talents and having ambassadors. Encouraging individuals to recognise their own brilliance – "because sometimes we're quite quick to shy away from things and play them down" – is part of an inclusive environment.

"It's about looking around you and seeing if we are celebrating the same things, or do we need to start reaching out?"

BUSINESS BUILDING

Step four is building for the future and includes business continuity. Many organisations forget talent and forget their people, says Boughey. They do not build that into their business continuity in the way they might invest in building maintenance or keeping up IT systems.

So, she says, organisations must ask: "How you ensure you do have a good supply of talent coming through and that it's diverse as well? You're looking

people know what is expected of them from a procedural and a behavioural point of view.

FASHIONABLE TERMS

There will always be tension between those who see diversity and inclusion as just a buzz term, a fad that will die out, and those who see it as true progress.

The inequality between men and women and the racial prejudice used to justify slavery might seem far off in the past, but sexism, race tensions and now unconscious bias are part of the language as we try to explore the effects of earlier injustices, which were once unacknowledged.

In the same way, terms like "privilege", "ally" and "woke" have a specific meaning and use as we progress toward a more fair society, although they might pass over some individuals as fashionable social media vocabulary.

Bryan believes the notion of privilege is important, although he says we are in danger of turning these terms into fashionable notions that come and go as opposed to having depth. That depth comes with an appreciation of what those terms add to the conversation and to our actions.

For example, privilege is not an active belief or action like racism or prejudice but, as with unconscious bias, it often goes unnoticed by a person as a set of advantages that helps them achieve more. It might be uncomfortable and a distortion of its previous meaning, but the current meaning of privilege is a useful one to gain a sense of responsibility.

> ❝ There will always be tension between those who see diversity as a fad and those who see it as true progress ❞

Practically, this means managers need to be accessible and have open and honest conversations. An organisation's literature, its brand and its communications need to consistently set the tone.

AWKWARD ASKING

This begs the question of whether forcing uncomfortable conversation is really necessary.

"It's about doing it appropriately," says Boughey. "So, yes, we do have to have and raise some conversations that may make people feel uncomfortable. However it's the manner in which we do this that should be inclusive as opposed to alienating individuals or cementing things and making them even worse."

Gender bias in the workplace and experiencing bias against herself as a young mother form part of Boughey's experience on diversity. She has seen

at where you're getting your talent from and if you are using ways of retaining individuals, like returnships [high-level internships for people who are returning to the workplace following a career break]."

Step five, Boughey's final step, is about embedding, which she says is the most important. "What typically tends to happen is these organisations do some of these things but they are one-offs – they don't become part of the organisation's DNA." While senior leadership and champions for diversity are useful, they can move on, whereas an organisation and its diversity programme needs resilience.

"There will be people who resist change – they will want to go back to the good old days," she adds. Zero tolerance for that perspective only works when an organisation clearly sets out what is unacceptable, so that

"You can be an advocate for inclusion and diversity regardless of your race, gender and sexual orientation," says Boughey.

And Bryan adds: "There's no point a person of privilege saying 'I'll give it all up and therefore not access it for the benefit of anyone else.' That does not help if we all go down to zero: where's the benefit of that? It can't be ground zero and we bask in poverty together. Give me equality at the top level."

After all that has been said, both sides of every debate on diversity and its related subjects have to work things out, as well as how to move forward on the issues. And there is a responsibility there, as much as there is for the existence of a civil society at all. ●