

HOW CAN COACHING HELP ACCELERATE YOUR EDI AGENDA?

BY CLARE HARRIS



In every progressive business today, there is a growing commitment and budget around Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI). But traditional training on these topics is known not to have the long-term impact desired. So what can HR and L&D leads do to accelerate the investment being made in EDI?

The opportunity lies in helping leaders to move beyond purely increased understanding and awareness, to the all-important progress in behaviour change.

If I can give HR and Learning leads one tip to accelerate work around EDI, it would be to ensure that coaching is part of the mix.

As an EDI consultant who has previously spent many years in HR and L&D championing EDI initiatives, what I have noticed as being the biggest opportunity to accelerate EDI is including coaching in the mix to help leaders cross the gap between understanding and action.

Whilst educating and engaging leaders in EDI is an important initial element, for most they already understand why this is an increasing priority in their work. Thankfully, the days of needing to make the business case and show the numbers are nearly behind us. What leaders need is space to explore how they can individually, and collectively as leadership teams, practice inclusive leadership skills that are going to have an impact on their teams and the wider business.

This is far from easy. The topic of EDI is fraught with anxiety, shame, nervousness about saying or doing the wrong thing (or doing the right thing, but in the wrong way using a misplaced word or phrase). This is where coaching comes in.

Offering coaching to leaders who have a genuine desire to evolve, but need a safe and open space to think through their options, is the key to unlocking meaningful progress. By having a space and safe person (i.e. their coach) to reflect on their learning and to plan how they are going to embody inclusion in their work, the efforts of HR and L&D initiatives are far more likely to translate into confident and meaningful action.



When I have worked with businesses to diagnose EDI issues and make recommendations for change, I have yet to work with a business that has not benefited from those on the leadership team engaging in some form of coaching either individually or collectively (ideally both). After all, the research around EDI impact at an organizational level is time and again attributed in large parts to setting the tone from the top. In the HBR article 'The key to inclusive leadership' (Bourke and Titus, 2020), the authors evidence how what leaders say and do makes a 70% difference as to whether an individual reports feeling included.

When coaching has been included in EDI culture change work, I have found that not only does the understanding and commitment accelerate, but there are multiple other benefits such as increasing healthy challenge amongst the team, an EDI lens taken to issues across the business's strategy and not limited just to EDI work, and an increased self-awareness and attentiveness to the behaviours at play in their teams and the wider business. As a result, the investment in EDI is seen way beyond the training aspect of the investment.

Additionally, when leaders and managers have moved beyond the learning and into the behaviour change stage, there is a multiplier effect of the investment. This is because leaders and managers then start to coach their team members with inclusive approaches.



I have had many a conversation with leaders and managers who have gone through a process of self-reflection and personal change and are then able to support others to do the same. When there is adoption of inclusive leadership practices such as listening with intent and empathy, being aware of your own privilege and impact, and working as an ally in addition to traditional management/ leadership, this creates the space for others to go through the self-awareness and personal change journey.

Rather than going through the motions of performance and development conversations, another level can be reached where psychologically safe spaces are created without fear or judgement. This provides space and opportunity to think out-loud and to consider how attitudes manifest into behaviours, and how these behaviours impact others – often subconsciously and unintentionally. When these realisations surface, it provides an opportunity for exploration and change at a fundamental level – far deeper than any training course can achieve.

For an organisation to build an inclusive culture, there needs to be a greater focus on movement from understanding to action. Whilst training and workshops can help build understanding, it is the inclusion of coaching that is where the 'value add' sits. And that is why I would argue that any EDI change agenda that includes coaching is going to see change happen faster and with greater impact.

1. McKinsey 'Diversity wins: How inclusion matters' (2020)
2. Harvard Business Review '5 Strategies to Infuse D&I into Your Organization' (2021)



An insight from
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Contact Graham Clark at The OCM today to start a conversation about how coaching can help you to support your EDI change agenda graham.clark@theoem.co.uk or **01869 338989**.