

HAS DEI DIED?

or does it need to be reimagined?

DEI is under fire. Driven by shifts in political leadership, and news coverage of global businesses that have publicly scaled back their diversity initiatives. Even in the UK, where inclusion continues to be championed, employees engage with these global headlines and, consciously or unconsciously, can bring scepticism into their workplaces.

As HR and DEI leaders, how do we respond to the shifting narrative? Handle Recruitment was proud to partner with All Things People & Talent for an exclusive, facilitated discussion led by Arit Eminue as part of their Talking Talent Roundtable series. Collectively exploring today's DEI landscape, examining what's at stake and how inclusion can become deeply embedded into everyday business practices, not merely as an initiative, but as a business-critical function.



A special thank you to...

STUDIOCANAL for hosting the conversation and special guests Hailey Willington and Adeife Onwuzulike for sharing their amazing insight.

Prior to the discussion our guests completed an anonymous survey.

Do you feel your organisation's commitment to DEI has strengthened, weakened, or stayed the same in the past year?

3.3
AVERAGE

Weakened (1) – Stayed the same (3) – Strengthened (5).

COMMENTARY: An average rating of 3.3 suggests respondents perceive their organisation's commitment to DEI as having remained broadly consistent, with a slight trend towards strengthening over the past year.

Have recent challenges or resistance to DEI (whether from leadership, employees, or external pressures) affected your work?

2.7
AVERAGE

Not at all (1) – Neutral (3) – Significantly (5)

COMMENTARY: The average rating of 2.7 indicates that recent challenges or resistance to DEI have had a mild-to-moderate impact on work, suggesting some influence but not significantly widespread disruption.

What's your biggest challenge in keeping DEI embedded in everyday business practices?

36%

Lack of Resources & Budget

18%

Lack of Measurable Impact

27%

Competing Business Priorities

9%

Lack of Leadership Buy-in

9%

Resistance to Change

IN CONVERSATION

The DEI landscape is undeniably shifting. However, the need for meaningful and embedded inclusion has not disappeared, it is simply evolving.

DEI is about more than the loudest voices.

So much is happening globally that we need to look beyond the loudest voices and US dominated headlines. There is no avoiding that under Trump's current administration, companies relying on government funding or subject to legislative oversight must closely adhere to official guidelines. But for many, laws and guidance remain unchanged.

Whether DEI support is driven by loud activism or law. There is also an acknowledgement of 'DEI quiet sceptics' who are privately unconvinced by DEI initiatives and do not openly voice their concerns, but might begin to feel more confident doing so without fear of backlash or reputational risk.

The importance of data.

Data-led storytelling is most impactful when tailored to its audience, whether that's data-driven narratives or more traditional storytelling approaches. Just as you would present Excel to an Excel-oriented person or PowerPoint to someone who prefers visual direction, successful communication involves matching style to the recipient.

It's crucial to move beyond vanity metrics and actively challenge the data to gain meaningful insights. When measuring ROI, consider metrics across various dimensions, including people, commercial impact, and brand value.

By assessing Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Legal, and Environmental (PESTLE) influences, DEI leaders can anticipate risks, identify opportunities, and make a compelling case for DEI's role in driving business success. This approach shifts DEI from being seen as a "nice to have" to an essential strategy for resilience, innovation, and long-term growth.

And have patience with business partners! Many will have been going through huge challenges recently, so think about your strategy loosely, outline the business impact, and understand the terrain you're operating in.

Don't be an island.

Embedding DEI into daily business is more than the job of a single DEI team or individual. Successful DEI strategies rely on collaboration between, but not limited to, DEI specialists, People teams, Leadership, and Employee Resource Groups (ERGs).



Has DEI Died?

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For many organisations you will have already laid solid DEI foundations, but you can't reimagine your strategy if you haven't engaged people first. Effective influencing involves strategically securing stakeholder buy-in, picking your battles carefully, and ensuring DEI has a genuine seat at the decision-making table.

Recognising DEI complexity also means creating flexible strategies. Empower managers by giving them practical tools, targeted training, and resources so they can confidently handle conversations and address employee concerns.

And don't forget to celebrate individuals that have made a real difference in their role to make the organisation more diverse and inclusive.

“Face Your Front”: internal focus and external insights.

Organisations can often spend excessive time benchmarking externally rather than addressing internal needs and opportunities. DEI leaders, as business leaders, should maintain focus on internal developments and selectively engage external expertise. Adopt an entrepreneurial mindset, aligning DEI strategies closely with overall business objectives.

Effective DEI leadership is making sure you have the right people and structures in place, such as establishing a Global DEI Council or creating dedicated internal boards that can clearly communicate achievements, upcoming plans, and insights gained from within the organisation. External consultants should be selectively engaged to complement internal expertise, ensuring efforts remain targeted and impactful.

“Diversity jobs die out as Britain passes ‘peak woke’.

Private and public sector employers turn their backs on progressive hiring policies.”
Source: Adzuna

“UK businesses are divided on whether to follow their American counterparts in **scaling back diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programmes** in light of the rollback of DEI in the US under President Donald Trump.” Source: Pinsent Masons

“**49% of C-suite leaders have no plans to roll out any further changes** to their DEI programmes and initiatives.” Source: Littler

“A survey, of more than 1,000 UK organisations, found **three-quarters of businesses (74%) had a DEI programme and a quarter of these firms (26%) had increased funding** compared with the previous year. A small minority (13%) felt their organisation invested too much time and money in DEI programmes.” Source: Culture Amp.

TOP TIPS

the people perspective

- ▶ **Acknowledge the current environment.** Openly recognise the global challenges facing DEI, addressing employee concerns head-on.
- ▶ **Clarify commitment.** Reaffirm the organisation's ongoing commitment to DEI, clearly communicating its importance as a core organisational value.
- ▶ **Enhance transparency.** Increase transparency about DEI goals, progress, and challenges, sharing regular, honest updates internally.
- ▶ **Keep it fresh.** Consider regularly updating ERG leadership and integrating external voices to help maintain relevance, momentum, and innovation.
- ▶ **Redefine DEI metrics.** Evolve traditional DEI metrics beyond representation, incorporating measures of people, commercial impact, and brand value.

In Conclusion.

DEI is at a pivotal moment, requiring renewed commitment, courageous leadership, and innovative strategies. Responding proactively ensures DEI initiatives thrive, driving genuinely inclusive workplaces, organisational success, and social progress.

DEI as we've known it isn't dead, but it undeniably requires reimaging. How you deliver this is based on the needs of your organisation, culture and business objectives.

CONNECTING

and useful links

Description	Source
Common People, a community for anybody in the creative industries with experience of being from a Working Class background.	Substack
Inclusion, Equity and Diversity C-Suite Survey Report 2025.	Little
Which companies are rolling back DEI policies?	Raconteur
Inclusion and Diversity Strategy 2023-2027.	UK Parliament
Three-quarters of UK firms are still running DEI programmes.	Culture Amp
Trump's anti-DEI push splits opinion in the UK.	Pinsent Masons
Diversity jobs die out as Britain passes 'peak woke'.	Telegraph



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"Talking Talent is a series of exclusive, invite-only roundtables designed for people leaders to explore workplace challenges, share insights, and exchange strategies. Each session dives into the realities of attracting, developing, and retaining talent, creating space for honest, solutions-focused conversations that drive meaningful change."



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