

DE&I at a Crossroads: Reimagining Inclusion for the Future of Financial Services

The financial services industry stands at a pivotal moment in its diversity, equity and inclusion journey. As cultural narratives shift and regulatory landscapes evolve, forward-thinking institutions have an opportunity to transform these challenges into meaningful progress.

The Reality Behind the Rhetoric

Despite years of diversity initiatives, the numbers tell a troubling story. Women hold only about 20% of executive committee roles in major financial firms, while 64% of C-suite executives are White men—a systemic challenge requiring more than surface-level solutions.

The "broken rung" phenomenon represents countless talented women who enter financial services (making up 52% of entry-level positions) but find their career paths narrowing with each step up. A recent FS survey revealed a decline in perceived DE&I commitment, with 40% doubting their leaders' dedication to addressing racial discrimination in the UK alone.

Geopolitical Landscape: A Time for Reflection

Our UK landscape does not exist in isolation. Political shifts globally have created ripple effects across DE&I initiatives, causing many organisations to pause and reassess their efforts.

This moment presents an opportunity to reflect: Were all our DE&I efforts on the right trajectory? Have some approaches created unintended polarisation? For those whose values align closely with DE&I principles, there's an opportunity to revisit what true inclusion means—acknowledging that all voices should be heard.

Purpose as the North Star: Culture

A strong sense of organisational purpose is proving to be a stabilising force in this shifting landscape. Purpose provides direction, creating a common meaning and reason to connect, fostering genuine belonging in the workplace.

Organisations that have built authentic cultures will weather today's shifts more effectively than those that have only engaged superficially with DE&I efforts. Culture—not just strategy—determines what endures.

The Evolution of Language and Approach

Many institutions now lead with inclusion rather than diversity, recognising that when inclusion is done well, diversity becomes a natural outcome. This evolution reflects a deeper integration of inclusive values into how financial institutions operate at every level.

While headlines suggest a reduction in DE&I leader roles, closer inspection reveals many global organisations evolving job titles to 'Belonging and Culture Leaders'. Their mission remains building sustainable workplaces where diverse perspectives thrive, but the positioning has shifted from checkbox diversity to meaningful cultural transformation.

Navigating Regulatory and Cultural Changes

HR leaders must stay ahead of regulatory shifts while voices like Baroness Helena Morrissey continue to advocate for maintaining focus on DE&I's connection to healthy organisational cultures.

To leadership teams wondering, "When can we stop talking about DE&I?" the answer remains "Not today." As humanity continues to evolve, so should leader commitment to creating inclusive spaces that enable organisations to adapt in an era of complex challenges.

True Inclusivity for All

True inclusion doesn't require uniform beliefs, but rather respectful dialogue across differences. We cannot ignore that 8 in 10 ethnic minority professionals in UK finance report experiencing discrimination or unwelcome comments at work.

Surface-level inclusion—diversity photos, hiring events, cultural celebrations—fall short of creating truly inclusive environments. Deep-level inclusion builds a culture where everyone feels valued, respected, and empowered to contribute their unique perspectives.

[Connection as the Catalyst for Change](#)

Human connection is the common thread across all these shifts. This becomes particularly important when considering the mid-career exodus of women from finance, often citing culture and lack of advancement.

Connection isn't just a nice-to-have—it's a driver of success. Teams with strong connections across different backgrounds demonstrate better decision-making, risk management, and client service.

The Road Ahead

As we look to the future of DE&I in financial services, the question isn't whether to evolve our approach to inclusion. It's how to do so with authenticity, clarity, and care.

Yes, the path forward is challenging. Yes, we're facing resistance. But this is long haul work—and it's not the wrong haul. We're reshaping the very fabric of our workplaces and ultimately our society, worth every ounce of effort we put in.

[Let's Connect.](#)

At [Talking Talent](#), we specialise in helping financial organisations navigate the evolving DE&I landscape. For over 20 years we've worked with [clients](#) around the world to shape positive new cultures. Making them more inclusive, more connected and more open, creating environments where all talent thrives and profits flourish.

Contact us at info@talking-talent.com to learn how we can partner with you on this critical journey.