GLOBAL DIVERSITY PRACTICE

Unlocking Diverse Talent

Strategies for engaging underrepresented groups in your talent pipeline

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Do you have a blocked or leaking talent pipeline?	3
Designing career development programmes for diverse underrepresented talent	5
Career development programmes in action – case study	7
Smash career blockers by acting on the insight from your programmes	8

Do you have a blocked or leaking talent pipeline?

Diverse underrepresented talent (DUT) refers to individuals belonging to demographics who are traditionally underrepresented in leadership or key decision making positions. This means that DUT refers to different demographics across different parts of the world. Each organisation has its own understanding of its demographics, and by comparing their demographics to regional data available on representation in the workforce, can establish who exactly belongs to a diverse underrepresented group. Retaining these groups can be challenging and presents unique obstacles.

Understanding these challenges is the first step toward creating equitable environments that foster retention and growth for all. Paying particular attention and focus to underrepresented and underserved groups benefits your company, and it is also critical that the interventions are not developed with a deficit mentality.

Research confirms that most DUT is either overqualified or possesses considerable transferable skills to qualify for leadership positions; however, the opportunities are not open to them, which in turn creates leaking pipelines and blocked career progression.

These are some of the specific challenges historically DUT encounter within the workplace:

- Limited presence in leadership roles.
- Experiencing bias and mistreatment.
- Enduring microaggressions.
- Struggling to access opportunities and valuable career enhancing networks.
- Facing disparities in accessing career-enhancing resources.
- Experiencing pay inequity.

These career blockers have a significant impact on DUT in a variety of ways, often leading to:

- Less satisfaction with their roles.
- Negative effects on their mental, psychological, and emotional wellbeing.
- Diminished belief in their capabilities.
- Elevated levels of stress, exhaustion and anxiety.
- Obstacles to professional advancement.
- Ignoring or minimising intersectionality, which is crucial for understanding how aspects of identities overlap and can create additional disadvantages.

These challenges also have consequences for the workplace, leading to:

- Missing out on diverse insights, perspectives and experiences.
- Lower overall efficiency and output.
- Not maximising the benefits of DUT.
- Lack of retention for underrepresented groups.
- Negative impact on the organisation's image.

View these challenges as opportunities for improving equity

By reframing these challenges, you can create opportunities for enhancing equity and inclusivity.

Rather than viewing these challenges as insurmountable obstacles, they can be seen as opportunities for:

- Creating a workplace that values and includes diverse perspectives.
- Harnessing the power of varied viewpoints to drive innovation and growth.
- Becoming a magnet for diverse, talented individuals.
- Fostering higher levels of commitment and dedication from your workforce.
- Better aligning with diverse customer bases.
- Demonstrating a commitment to progress on social justice.

There is a link between a comprehensive understanding of these challenges and higher retention rates. Successfully navigating these challenges can lead to:

- **Inclusivity and belonging:** creating an environment where individuals from all backgrounds feel valued and included, reducing turnover.
- **Enhanced employee engagement:** addressing biases and barriers promotes higher levels of engagement and commitment.
- **Career development opportunities:** targeted efforts to remove obstacles to career advancement.
- **Reduced turnover costs:** fostering an inclusive culture reduces the expenses associated with high turnover rates.
- **Positive employer branding:** building a reputation as inclusive and responsible employers, attracting, and retaining top talent.
- **Business imperative:** creating an equitable workplace positively impacts the bottom line. It bolsters brand reputation and positions a business as a preferred employer of choice in a competitive, diverse market.

Designing career development programmes for diverse underrepresented talent

Career development and progression of DUT cannot happen in a vacuum, follow these steps to create effective career development programmes:

- **Identify specific needs:** begin with a comprehensive needs assessment to pinpoint challenges and skill gaps. Use the findings to set clear objectives with measurable outcomes.
- **Collaborate with stakeholders:** engage underrepresented groups by seeking their input and perspectives. Form a diverse task force to gather relevant insights.
- **Develop tailored content:** design a curriculum that directly addresses the identified needs. Incorporate diverse perspectives and success stories to make the content relatable and inspiring.
- **Debias performance appraisals:** focus on ensuring processes to debias performance appraisals ensuring no aspect mitigates against the opportunity for progression.
- **Train line managers:** ensure line managers are trained in how to support underrepresented groups and are positively supporting these programmes and behaviours to support the rise of DUT.
- **Create developmental pathways:** develop clear pathways that include opportunities for shadowing, placements, or involvement in high-visibility opportunities.

  These pathways should provide a platform for individuals to showcase their abilities, especially to senior leaders who make talent and succession decisions.
- **Mentorship/sponsorship programmes:** when implementing mentorship or sponsorship programs, ensure that mentors and sponsors understand the unique challenges faced by DUT. Structure the programme with clear goals, guidelines, and regular check-ins.

  Developing empathy and understanding is key to effectively mentoring or sponsoring DUT. It's critical to foster understanding and then generate positive opportunities. Sponsorship is a more active and useful approach as it helps to overcome some of the barriers.

- **Create safe spaces:** foster an inclusive environment that encourages open sharing. Promote dialogue, mutual respect, and support for individual well-being and experiences as well as the impact of career blockers.
- **Evaluate and measure progress:** continuously assess the effectiveness of these initiatives. Establish metrics and key performance indicators (KPIs) to measure their impact focussed on progression and succession. Establish a baseline and then track actively and intentionally.

It's essential to ensure that personal development initiatives are seamlessly aligned with the broader organisational strategy, including diversity, inclusion, and talent and retention goals:

- **Alignment with goals:** make certain that these initiatives align with the organisation's diversity, inclusion, and retention strategy.
- **Leadership support:** gain endorsement and active support from top-level leadership, as their buy-in is critical to the success of these programmes.
- **Performance management integration:** incorporate personal development initiatives into the organisation's performance management processes to make them an integral part of employees' growth and development.
- **Communication and awareness:** develop a clear plan for communicating how these initiatives connect to the organisation's strategy, fostering awareness and engagement among employees.
- **Resource allocation:** provide the necessary financial and human resources to ensure the success and sustainability of these initiatives.
- **Monitoring and evaluation:** continuously assess progress in line with the organisation's strategy. Regularly collect feedback and data to gauge effectiveness and make necessary improvements.

Career development workshops in particular offer a unique space where underrepresented individuals can come together, share experiences, and engage in meaningful discussions. These workshops foster a sense of community and provide a platform for participants to connect with others who share similar challenges and aspirations.

Through interactive sessions, skill-building exercises, and mentorship opportunities, individuals gain valuable insights and learn strategies to navigate barriers and leverage enablers in their professional journeys. Moreover, these workshops create a safe and supportive environment that encourages honest dialogue and the sharing of personal experiences.

Participants can openly discuss their career challenges, including issues related to psychological safety, code-switching, impostor syndrome, and a sense of belonging. When DUT engages in social camouflage, masking, or attempts to fit in, they can lose their unique identity and perspective, often feeling compromised and not being their authentic selves. Providing a space for vulnerability and empathy, career development workshops empower individuals to embrace their authentic selves and leveraging their unique strengths in fostering personal growth and professional development.

Career development programmes in action – case study

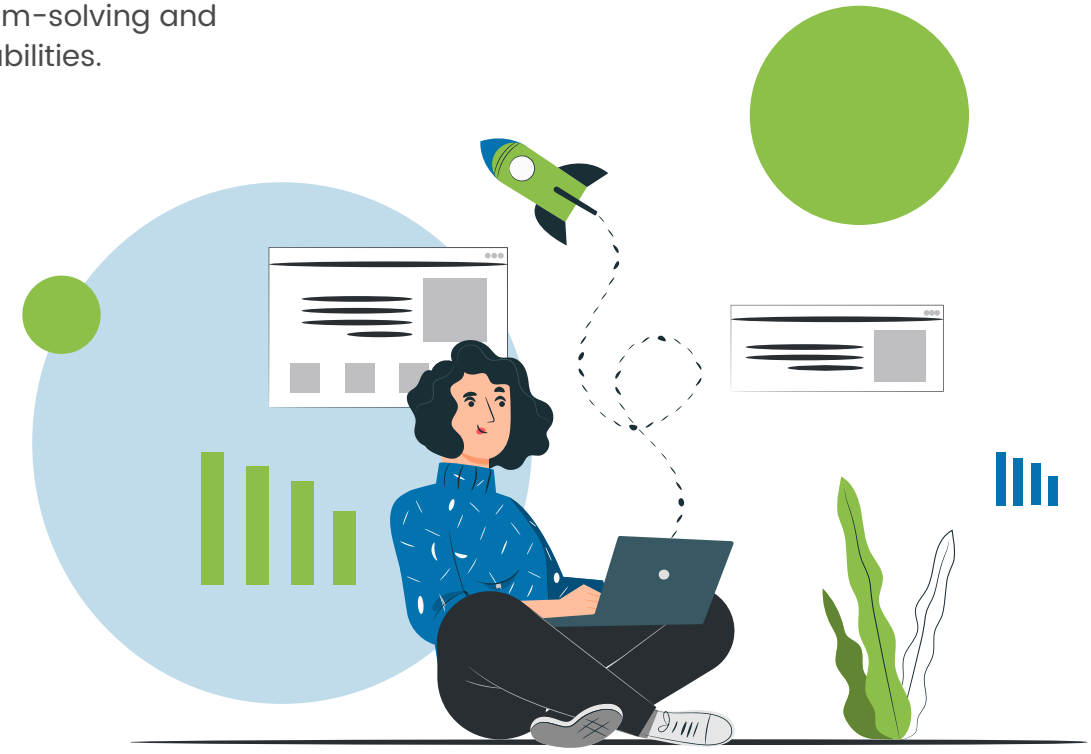
This case study focusses on a career programme at a multinational company, specifically designed to empower and elevate underrepresented groups within the organisation. Recognising a significant shortfall in diversity, especially in its leadership ranks, the company initiated a programme to elevate women and underrepresented groups into leadership roles.

Historical diversity challenges

The company recognised its poor record in diversity, particularly in top leadership roles. This aligned with broader industry trends1 where, for example, 78% of respondents from firms with limited 2D diversity in leadership reported significant disparities in idea sponsorship: women were 20% less likely, people of colour 24% less likely, and LGBTQ+ individuals 21% less likely to have their ideas supported compared to their straight, white male counterparts.

Programme structure and implementation

- **Pilot groups:** the programme was designed with input from two pilot groups representing underrepresented employees. This ensured the programme addressed their specific needs. The pilot included women and underrepresented groups in leadership roles.
- **Cohort-based approach:** the programme was executed across seven cohorts, each consisting of 35-50 attendees.
- **Interactive sessions and workshops:** the delivery included interactive sessions, workshops on topics such as leadership skills, discussions on overcoming systemic biases, and networking events designed to foster connections and idea-sharing among participants.
- **Real-world application:** practical exercises were integrated, where participants could apply learnt skills in realistic scenarios, enhancing their problem-solving and decision-making capabilities.
- **Guest speakers and mentors:** sessions were often led by senior executives and external thought leaders, providing insights and mentorship opportunities. These sessions also included co-teaching formats, where executives and experts collaborated to deliver content.
- **Personal case projects:** participants engaged in personal case projects, allowing them to directly apply the concepts learnt to their unique professional challenges.
- **Leadership involvement:** the programme also included a track for leaders who directly supervised the participants. This was crucial for ensuring that the learning and changes were supported and reinforced at all levels of the organisation.



Outcomes and impact

- Direct addressing of idea sponsorship gap: the programme aimed to counter the trend of unequal idea sponsorship, focussing on empowering the participants with the skills and networks necessary for their ideas to gain traction.
- Feedback and continuous improvement: participant feedback played a critical role in evolving the programme to better meet the needs of its cohorts.
- Organisational culture shift: the programme's success led to a noticeable shift in the organisation's leadership diversity and organisational culture, promoting inclusivity and diversity.

Challenges and lessons learnt

- **Balancing targeted support and inclusivity:** navigating the perception of exclusivity was a challenge, as the programme was initially exclusive to certain groups. The organisation addressed this by highlighting the overall benefit of a diverse leadership to the entire organisation.
- **Overcoming stigma:** ensuring the program was perceived as a prestigious development opportunity rather than a remedial measure was key to its acceptance and effectiveness.

The multinational's leadership development programme provides a compelling example of how targeted leadership development can effectively address diversity and inclusion challenges. By combining practical skills training, realworld applications, and senior leadership involvement, the organisation successfully enhanced its leadership diversity and fostered an inclusive culture.

Smash career blockers by acting on the insight from your programmes

Career development programmes provide a wealth of insights that can also drive meaningful change within organisations. Here are some tips for leveraging these insights:

- **Identify patterns and trends:** analyse the feedback and discussions from the workshops to identify recurring themes and challenges faced by underrepresented groups. This will help you pinpoint areas where organisational policies and practices can be improved.
- **Collaborative approach:** engage leaders, HR professionals, and employees from diverse backgrounds to collectively review the workshop findings and brainstorm potential solutions. Emphasise the importance of involving individuals with lived experiences in decision-making processes.
- **Update Policies and practices:** use the insights gained from the workshops to inform the development and revision of organisational policies, practices, and procedures. This may involve addressing biases in processes and procedures, implementing flexible work arrangements, or establishing mentorship and sponsorship programmes.
- **Embed inclusion in the organisational culture:** ensure that the lessons learnt from the workshops are integrated into the organisation's culture and values. Encourage ongoing dialogue, training, and awareness programmes to foster a supportive and inclusive environment for all employees.

Implementing the lessons learnt from career development programmes requires a thoughtful and systematic approach. Here are some steps to guide the implementation process:

- **Establish clear objectives:** Define specific goals and outcomes based on the insights gained from the workshops and communicate them widely across the organisation. Determine the desired changes in policies, practices, and culture that align with the organisation's DEI goals.
- **Develop an action plan:** Create a detailed action plan that outlines the steps, responsibilities, and timelines for implementing the identified changes. Assign dedicated resources to drive the initiatives forward.
- **Communicate and educate:** Transparently communicate the rationale and benefits of the proposed changes to employees at all levels. Provide training and educational resources to ensure everyone understands the importance of initiatives and their role in achieving them.
- **Monitor and evaluate:** Regularly monitor the progress of the implementation, gather feedback, and assess the impact of the changes. Adjust as necessary and don't forget to celebrate successes along the way!

Career development programmes, tailored for DUT, provide a powerful platform for dialogue, learning, and feedback. They not only equip individuals with the tools to overcome career blockers and leverage their strengths, but also foster a sense of belonging and connection within the workplace.

By conducting these in an inclusive fashion, organisations can leverage the insights gained to improve policies, practices, and culture, leading to a more inclusive and equitable work environment. It is through implementing the lessons learnt from these programmes that we can drive meaningful change and create a future where all DUT can thrive, regardless of their background or identity.

As a minority led business with diverse leadership, and lived experience, preparing, and progressing DUT is at the heart of what we do. We understand intimately the challenges and the huge opportunity this affords both individuals and companies.

If your organisation is interested in exploring solutions that help to promote workplace diversity, equity and inclusion, get in touch for an initial consultation where we can provide tailored guidance and recommendations for your context.

Contributors

Calum Gaudette // Farrah Qureshi // Irina Neagu // Joanne Ogogo // Waseem Ilyas

GLOBAL
DIVERSITY
PRACTICE

+44 (0)845 459 6041

info@globaldiversitypractice.com

globaldiversitypractice.com