

The time is now for the Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Officer

At Maddyness, we have recently launched our job board to connect the right people with the right roles. As part of our commitment to shed some light on what these roles mean, we're diving into the responsibilities, strategic importance and talent-profiles attached to them. This week, we look into the diversity, equality and inclusion officer.

Temps de lecture : minute

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At the heart of any business are its people. Companies have a responsibility for their health, safety and well-being, and also for ensuring they have equitable access to benefits, professional development and promotion opportunities.

Although companies used to consider these responsibilities only as a regulatory requirement - and only to those they employed directly - this is changing as global value chains become complex and companies address their social impact more broadly, with companies recognising human capital as a key business driver.

Cometh the hour; cometh the chief diversity officers (CDOs). [Research from McKinsey](#) demonstrates the demand for CDOs has grown exponentially in recent years, with the US seeing a fourfold surge in diversity, equality and inclusion (DE&I) roles over the past five. This year, CDO appointments have tripled compared to the preceding 16 months. Moreover, over half of Fortune 500 companies have a CDO or equivalent, with more than 60 appointing their first diversity leader since May 2020.

DE&I: the bigger picture

The global conversation on DE&I has seen many successes, from India's Supreme Court's 2017 declaration of freedom of sexual orientation as a fundamental right, to initiatives across Asian countries for greater gender parity, to German efforts to increase female representation in the technology sector beyond the current 15% of data analytics roles.

This growth has not only enabled greater individual freedom, but has also become a critical business driver, with organisations recognising the connection between DE&I and financial and talent outcomes. As such, the number of DE&I-related roles has seen a meteoric rise, particularly following the murder of George Floyd in 2020, when job postings jumped 123% in the following three months. *These figures* are representative of broader societal shifts, such as a 70% increase in the number of married same-sex households from 2014 to 2019.

D,E&I Officers in the UK

The D,E&I officer role should reflect an organisation's DE&I strategy, although deciding which areas to prioritise can be difficult. Internally, organisations can focus on creating diversity, fostering inclusion, and providing equitable access. Externally, they can target DE&I outcomes through corporate and social responsibility, operations, investment processes, and core business.

For example, the *Chefsache initiative in Germany* has seen organisations launching initiatives such as job advertising, parent-child offices, and communities for support, as well as grants to train and mentor women in data analytics. Organisations don't need to try to do it all, but the CDO role should be tailored to their DE&I aspirations.

Diversity and inclusion officers play a key role in helping to create this

environment by developing and implementing policies and initiatives that foster diversity and inclusion. This involves working with organisations to identify and address any areas of inequality, challenge systemic bias and create a workplace culture that celebrates the strengths and contributions of all employees.

They also work to create a sense of acceptance, understanding and appreciation of different cultures, religions and beliefs, and strive to ensure that everyone feels safe and respected in their working environment.

The role of diversity and inclusion officers is also important in helping to ensure that organisations remain compliant with the UK's legal and regulatory framework, which requires employers to ensure that their recruitment processes and working environments are free from discrimination.

Finally, the role also involves conducting research into the impact of diversity and inclusion on the organisation, as well as developing strategies to ensure that the company is able to attract and retain a diverse workforce.

Would it suit me?

The ideal candidate for this role will have a strong understanding of the challenges and opportunities posed by diversity and inclusion in the tech and innovation economy.

They should also have experience of developing and implementing diversity and inclusion initiatives, as well as a comprehensive understanding of the legal and regulatory framework surrounding these issues.

Research highlights that candidates should possess a comprehensive understanding of DE&I, as well as the ability to manage programs and create meaningful change. They should be able to create strategies, foster trust from stakeholders, and motivate commitment to diversity objectives. Additionally, D,E&I officers should possess organisational development and learning and development expertise (which only 33% of CDOs at S&P 500 companies have), problem-solving ability, and communication skills. Experience in progressive leadership, indicating the capacity to lead multifaceted teams and effect large-scale change, is also highly sought-after, provided it is combined with other knowledge, skills, abilities, and experience.

Okay – and quickly, how is it different from HR?

The D,E&I officer role is separate from Human Resources, as the role requires a more holistic approach to tackling issues of diversity and inclusion. The role looks beyond recruitment and policies to create a culture of inclusion, which is far more complex than the traditional HR function.

This includes understanding and recognising different cultures, working with different teams to ensure everyone is respected and valued, and managing any potential conflict that could arise as a result of cultural differences.

Q&A with Amrit Sandhar, founder of The Engagement Coach

Finally, we caught up with Amrit Sandhar, founder of *The Engagement Coach*, a group of passionate people focused on helping organisations develop their cultures, leaders, managers and colleagues.

What is the role of a D,E&I officer?

D,E&I Officers are a key driver of success, helping organisations to deliver their strategic objectives, aligned to their purpose and mission, through creating and tapping into the skills and experiences of a diverse workforce. Every touch point of the employee lifecycle can be an opportunity to create a sense of belonging and an inclusive environment for all. Their responsibilities are educating about the critical role of a diverse workforce, raising awareness of the demographic make-up of the workforce within their organisation, and helping leaders and managers to create a more diverse workforce. This role supports organisations to increase the likelihood of developing cognitive diversity, thereby improving innovation, creativity, and experiences for their diverse customers

How has this role changed in recent years?

Whilst initially these roles were seen as compliance officers, focusing on ensuring organisations were meeting their legal obligations for equal opportunities, the role has evolved to being more focused on helping create a more inclusive culture, and creating an environment where employees feel a deep sense of belonging with their organisation, helping achieve financial success.

Attitudes towards this role, represent changing attitudes generally, where quotas are no longer seen as a way of improving diversity, with a greater focus on improving the general culture of an organisation as a whole.

What team does the D,E&I officer sit in? And are they often consultants?

D,E&I officers are often based in the HR team, working with other HR departments and HR business partners. Whilst they work with their fellow

HR colleagues including employee engagement teams, they often also liaise with operations teams and leadership teams, supporting them with raising awareness and helping to create a more inclusive culture.

Historically many companies would have chosen to take on someone as a consultant rather than to recruit someone to lead this within their organisation. It has often been seen as a supportive function, to get the organisation where it needs to be in terms of compliance, whilst providing a HR employee with some experience to carry on the task as extra duties to their role, when the consultant's work was complete. This also reflected the attitudes of organisations at the time, seeing the implementation of initiatives to improve the representation of minority groups amongst the workforce as the focus of the task, rather than linking this to business objectives and performance.

There now seems to be a greater move to incorporate this role as a permanent presence within organisations, moving the role away from what has been seen as a transactional attempt to increase representation across an organisation, to one of helping create an environment where everyone feels that they belong - a culture of inclusiveness for all, driving greater organisational success.

*What are some key metrics to measure performance?
Should metrics be used?*

Whilst it will always be important to understand the representation of employees from different backgrounds within an organisation, the focus for this role is much more on the broader experiences of all employees at work. This demonstrates the shift to creating a more accepting environment of cognitive diversity. This makes metrics challenging, causing many organisations to use employee engagement survey results, in which additional questions are added to support. Other metrics used are turnover rates, promotion rates and representation and retention

rates, tracked through demographic data.

Leaders are critical to the success of this role and measuring leadership commitments through their involvement in D&I activities will be important. Ultimately, this role is here to help the organisation's success, so the financial performance of an organisation should be an important measure.

From your experience, how does the tech, startup and innovation economy utilise this role?

From my own experiences, organisations in the tech/ start-up/ innovation economy are less focused on diversity and creating inclusive cultures, and more on financial success. Culture often is a secondary consideration once the organisation is stable and performing. What many organisations often miss is that a diverse workforce could be the critical factor in achieving success

Finally, what type of person would this role suit?

It's important for this person to be an effective communicator, able to include and involve all those they interact with. They need to be effective in data analytics and storytelling, to take others on the journey of why diversity matters. Understanding how others feel, through high empathy will also be important, as well as being a role model of creating an inclusive culture, allowing people to feel psychologically safe and feel a sense of belonging within their organisation. This requires them having excellent communication skills and having the ability to build strong, meaningful relationships with others.

Check out a range of live roles at our [comprehensive jobs board here](#) - which includes this [D,E&I role in London!](#)

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