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Title card

2.

Coming up in this, your longest of modules, we'll be covering the important groundwork of strategy. Including tips on its creation and implementation, linking your strategy with the business, and making the moral, legal and business cases. We'll look at ways to clarify your network's purpose and membership roles, leading to a renewed commitment of the way you work as a team.

3.

As we enter the wonderful world of strategy, don't forget that the materials tab contains your downloadable worksheets as well as further reading. And that if you have any questions you can submit them at any time through the Q&A submission form, and this can be addressed in our live session.

Journalist, author and political activist Barbara Ehrenreich talks about the dangers of mandatory corporate cheerfulness in a talk called Smile or Die, which you can find in your further reading on the materials tab. She talks about how joining a support group and being told to "look on the bright side" is damaging because positivity is a delusion. She also says negativity is a delusion - so we're not about to advocate gloominess here. What she's setting us up for is the power of realism. She suggests that humans are hard-wired for vigilance, because rather than believing that the movement in the grass is probably just fine, or we'll be doomed if we try anything anyway so let's stand still, it's better to do something about the present reality and run away from the leopard. In the heart of realism - neither optimistic or pessimistic - is strategy.

As employee networks considering your future actions, bear this mind. What is your reality? What can move you away from difficulties most effectively. What is an awareness event, or a celebration, or well-wishing sponsor, or an ally wearing a lanyard, or a positive statement of intention on a website? Find your problem, find solutions. That's a strategy.

4.

People theorise about strategy in different ways. Some think it's about anticipating changes and planning for the future. Others think that we now live in a time of perpetual uncertainty and strategies have to be ever-evolving. The specifics of how this plays out is down to you, your organisation and the environment in which you operate. I'll try to give you options and material to think for yourself, critically and practically.

Most organisations will have an all-up corporate strategy which guides the big picture including values and a vision. Then business units may also have their own strategy which focuses on goals based on their own resources and market-forces. And a team may also have a strategy which focuses on their unique ability to deliver against organisational goals. In the context of your network you will want to consider your team strategy as a subsection of other organisational strategies. So ask yourself:

- How will the organisation succeed in the upcoming period?
- How do your goals align with the organisation?

- What will your team do to achieve these goals?

But how do you create a strategy? One method is the three Es: Examine, Explore, Evaluate. First you need to unearth where you're at as a team, and what opportunities are open to you. In a moment we'll look at one way to do this with a matrix analysis. But strategies are not all data-crunching, you get to be creative in your problem solving. The simplest way to open this up is with a brainstorm of ideas. The more diverse your team in its skills, experiences, and ways of thinking, the more powerful your brainstorm is likely to be. There are many other ways to generate innovative ideas, which we'll look at in a future module. And once you have a collection of ideas, you need to choose which ones will go forward into your strategy. Another matrix based on decision-making may help you here, which helps you imagine the impact your efforts will have. And we'll discover that in the next module: Measuring Impact.

When you have a strategy, how do you begin to implement it? First, recognise that you'll have spent some time working on this, and may take certain ideas or language for granted. Clarify your strategy to make sure that anyone can understand it. You may want to use a test audience or some key stakeholders for feedback. Next you'll want to make sure that isn't just published and left somewhere, but actively communicated to key audiences in a range of methods. You want to make sure you're connected and listening, not just speaking. And Cascade the relevant actions to your team, sponsors, and supportive members so that they can see it's a living, breathing plan of doing, not just saying. Again we'll explore more in communication later on. As with leadership, you'll find it will be useful to return to your strategy worksheets throughout the course, and see what you can update.

5.

Now let's look at a SWOT and PEST matrix, which will help you with the Examine stage of your strategy creation.

A SWOT analysis stands for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. It's used to assess the current position of your organisation or network. SWOTs help you make the most of what you've got. Especially in terms of skills and resources.

**STRENGTHS:** For networks, you might want to consider not only what your strength and USP is as an organisation, but what strengths you have as a network - such as lived experience, passion for change, and highly engaged members. Also try to imagine what other people in the organisation think are your strengths - or don't imagine - ask them!

**WEAKNESSES:** What could you improve? Do you lack certain resources - like time to devote to network activities. What do others think your weaknesses are - could be clarity of purpose or sheer numbers?

**OPPORTUNITIES:** What opportunities are open to you? Are there trends in your industry, or in D&I, or the media you could use to your advantage? Are you getting more support from your sponsors right now? How do your strengths come in to play to make your vision a reality?

**THREATS:** What threats could hinder your activities as a network? Is there a problem in the education system for example which challenges your drive to diverse recruitment? Or do competitors have a stronger brand when it comes to inclusion? Is there a pandemic?

A PEST analysis stands for Political, Economic, Socio-Cultural and Technological. It's used to identify business or personal opportunities. It's particularly good at times of change so that you can go with the direction of that change, rather than against it. This may help you to avoid or abandon projects that are likely to face an uphill struggle or failure. It's also useful in gaining an objective view of your work environment when you enter a new location. Fill out the sections just like you would with a SWOT analysis.

**Political:** Are there any political factors which are likely to affect your activities. For example lockdown and service restrictions, environmental issues, changes to equality laws, corporate social responsibility, or pay gap reporting.

**Economic:** How stable are the economics that affect you? Will it affect your network budget? Or your network members personally? Or your end customers? How about globally?

**Socio-cultural:** Does engagement with your activities changes generationally? Does social mobility affect your member's likelihood to be involved with the network? What are the prevailing social attitudes across different office locations and are there recent changes that might affect this? How are protected characteristics treated legally in the countries that your organisation spans?

**Technological:** Are you using your existing technology infrastructure to its fullest? Are there any new technologies that you could be using? What do other organisations use - both within your industry, and beyond? What needs are not currently being met by your technology?

Once you've identified what changes are at the forefront of these themes, it's time to brainstorm the opportunities that these might bring (leading to ideas for innovation) or the threats that might occur (meaning you can offer advice or support to mitigate negative effects).

Try this on your worksheets. You may prefer to work with other members of your team. Once you have completed your SWOT and PEST, this can help you to explore specific actions you'd like to take as a network. Think creatively at this time and build up ideas before you return to evaluate which ones will have the most positive impact.

6.

As I mentioned before, an essential starting point for creating your strategy is to familiarise yourself and your network members with other strategies and action plans it aligns with. For example, your organisation's overall strategy and your organisation's D&I strategy. In order to get stronger stakeholder buy-in, you want to show you're working in tandem with these

strategies, not against them. If any part of these is not clear to you, then make an action to understand it with the help of your line manager or D&I lead, and explain why you're taking the time to understand it too, as that will be appreciated. If you don't yet have a published or up to date D&I strategy then this may be in the works, and it's worth asking if there's any opportunity for understanding what stage it is in, and whether employee network input would be valuable at this time.

7.

Here is an example of a linked D&I strategy from a law firm - I'm not using this to say it's best practice, but it's real, and I think illustrates linked strategies. You can read that the top line Vision, Strategy and Objectives are complemented by individual goals for each network. It's also useful to see this all on one page (just) so that you can see how the various efforts harmonise. You may want to spend some time on this slide reviewing the content and decide what you like and don't like about this. Consider whether you know the strategic goals of other networks in your organisation. This could be a good opportunity to collaborate on updating your goals in-line with the D&I strategy. We'll look at how these specific objectives were measured in the next module.

8.

Playing to your strengths when creating a strategy is key. So understanding the case for employee networks can help form a solid basis of what can and should be achievable.

The moral case is probably the reason you got involved with employee networks in the place. Your passion to make things better, and to solve problems facing certain communities. As an individual, you may only need the moral case to motivate you, and that's fine. But in strategic terms it doesn't often move the needle when it comes to engaging people outside of your network, or at least takes a lot more effort.

Your network may have initially been set up to ensure certain protections against discrimination and bias, or to monitor pay gaps. This is an excellent foundation and be drawn upon when you're pitching for senior stakeholder and budgetary support. It's a reminder that what you're doing isn't a "nice to have" or an excuse to socialise at work, but essential for the running of a safe work environment. If you can, familiarise yourself with your organisation's responsibility to abide by equality laws and keep abreast of any developments.

The business case will usually be your most-used of all the cases, because it links most clearly to solid outcomes for the organisation, like profit and sustainability, and can be key in getting senior buy-in. You'll often be asked for proof of this, so we'll explore it in greater detail.

9.

Making the business case for employee networks, and D&I generally, is not as demanding, or faced with skepticism as it used to be. However all network leaders should be ready to make the case if they need to. And that's best achieved with research, data and case

studies.

10.

Higher Performance is one of the most convincing arguments for people who like hard data without the personal stories. This might cover greater profitability and productivity. Even though this argument has been made repeatedly for several decades with supporting evidence, there will always be stakeholders who remain skeptical unless given a very recent study. So it pays to be on the lookout for new information.

McKinsey's has a lot of research covering the data on how diverse teams perform better, including their *Why Diversity Matters* study from 2014 and *Delivering through diversity* in 2017.

Here we see that companies in the top-quartile for gender diversity on their executive teams were 21% more likely to have above-average profitability than companies in the fourth quartile. For ethnic and cultural diversity, top-quartile companies were 33% more likely to outperform on profitability.

You can look through the full reports from your Materials tab.

11.

Measuring engagement can be a tricky thing, because people tend not to respond to engagement surveys consistently. That's not to say they're actively lying, but it's affected by mood, and what they're currently working on, for example. So you need to be creative and strategic about how you prove a satisfied employee. This is an interesting example from a pharmaceutical company where mentoring relationships were mapped in a compellingly visual way. It shows not only the increased number of people receiving mentoring, which is particularly effective in organisations, but also how it's the nature of networking that is having this positive effect. It also demonstrated that knowledge, power and influence isn't only coming from one place. And empowered employees are happy employees.

12.

Your networks can be a great source to help educate the broader organisation on issues they may not have encountered, or fully understand. Not only does this apply to your colleagues, but to your end users or customers as well. Running educational opportunities that are free from judgement is an inclusive way to tackle this gap in understanding.

A network member from The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy recently got their Deputy Director to write a blog entitled 'dear white people, we need to talk about race'. It received over 3000 views which was the second most engaged article on their blog. A survey was tagged on which gave striking results (80% saying they agree they find it difficult talking about race) information which they then sent to their Permanent Secretary. The long-term aim was to suggest recommendations for a full time member of staff working on race issues, which would follow the model of the Ministry of Justice and the Home Office. They also linked up with the policy leads for Ethnicity Pay Gap reporting, and aspired to influence government policy on the issue across the country.

13.

In the design world, considering the needs of all sorts of users has been a mainstay of user experience design. This relates to understanding the needs of real people, so that you can make products and services that better suit their needs. Whoever understands the problem best, tends to come up with the best solution.

Typically this research has taken the form of select user testing out in the real world. But increasingly design teams are consulting their employee networks for insights as a fast way of considering what issues might affect different sorts of people.

For example, EDF Energy worked with their carers network to generate innovative ideas for a connected home.

EDF Energy and tech start-up Howz launched a home monitoring system that uses energy data and connected home technology to empower the elderly, or those with additional needs, to live independently for longer.

The system monitors the energy usage of electrical appliances and combines this with information from a series of sensors that detect factors such as movement and temperature in a person's home to build up a pattern of daily behaviour. Using the app, customers can check in on their family or friends and will receive alerts if the user's normal routine is broken.

14.

There are many reasons why employee networks not only attract, but retain talent. For organisations, they can prove that they take the career progression of every employee seriously, and actively fight bias which might hinder an individual's worklife. But it's also interesting to note that desire to join a network is growing. About half of workers aged 34 and under are interested in joining a network, and cite it as a reason for joining a company. Although it should be said that this doesn't necessarily relate to protected characteristics, but a familiarity with online, networked, non-hierarchical interaction from younger people. The anomaly of over interest from over 65's is up for debate, but possibly reflects the desire for involvement an employee would have in their organisation after typical retirement age.

15.

Now think about which elements are most important to you, and crucially, which would have more influence on the key stakeholders in your organisation? There's space to consider this in your worksheet, where you can build your own well-rounded business case. I also suggest you continue your thinking with research from the Further Reading.

16.

Another publication you may use to bolster your strategy is the UK Corporate Governance

Code. (If you're in another location you may have a local independent regulator equivalent to the Financial Reporting Council). In 2018 they included updates which specifically refer to values and culture - a far cry from simple account auditing.

The two most relevant sections are:

B. The board should establish the company's purpose, values and strategy, and satisfy itself that these and its culture are aligned. All directors must act with integrity, lead by example and promote the desired culture.

and

E. The board should ensure that workforce policies and practices are consistent with the company's values and support its long-term sustainable success. The workforce should be able to raise any matters of concern.

This is arguably because as consumers we no longer just purchase goods (like a bag of coffee beans), or services (like a latte from a coffee chain), but brand promises and values (like an ethically sourced oat-flat white from a local cafe who supports independent growers, pays a living wage, and gives back to its community).

And it's not just consumers, employees also want to work somewhere that understands and mirrors their values.

As the FRC's Chair says

"Rules and sanctions clearly have their place, but will not on their own deliver productive behaviours over the long-term. This report looks at the increasing importance which corporate culture plays in delivering long-term business and economic success."

You may want to look at how your own governance and board codes match up with this recent evolution.

17.

Sometimes you'll be asked to write a Vision or Mission statement, and you can get bogged down in semantics or historic ways of doing things. I find breaking it down into these four questions can help bring clarity around your network statement without getting distracted by the form that comes in.

WHY - This is where you start with any project or group: Whose needs are you meeting, and how are you uniquely equipped to do that? What's your reason for being? Why should people spend time and resources on your existence?

HOW - What roles do you have and what is active membership? Who are your stakeholders and sponsors? How is it governed?

WHAT - What principles or values inform your decision making? How is your strategy formed? What other strategies do you align to? What business needs are you fulfilling?

WHERE - What's the grand vision? Pick timescales and discuss what you'd like to achieve. What can help you get there and what barriers might you face? Long-term (values)  
Short-term (agile)

In your worksheets, have a go now at building up this statement, and see how it changes over time with the input of this course, and your team members.

18.

And speaking of your team, when initially drumming up support and membership for your network, it's often the case that you don't want to turn down requests to join, but that eventually, there can be too many people closely involved to work effectively and cohesively. It's therefore an important process to establish types of member, roles and responsibilities as early as possible.

Consider the types of skills and strengths you need in order to have a well balanced team to drive network activity and impact. It's important to think about how many people you initially need in this most active team or committee. Then consider who will be aligned as support to your network but won't have set responsibilities demanding a significant amount of their time. Finally, consider who sponsors your network and remains in close communication but isn't technically a part of your network. What do you expect from each group and how are you ensuring clarity? You'll find a template of roles to help build out your active team members in your worksheets.

19.

When your network members initially join, it may be that the expectation is that they, or even you as a leader go on indefinitely. Consider the benefits and drawbacks of this to inform your strategy and decisions around a possible set tenure for active members. While it may feel tough setting an 'end date' on someone's close involvement, it can create new ideas, alleviate members from a heavy workload in the longer term, and grow support and interest through new network members. If you're establishing a set tenure, decide how you're communicating this and the benefits to your existing and potential members, how you're ensuring smooth handover so as not to stunt growth, and ensure that you're thinking about how members who have served their tenure can still be involved in your efforts, as an emeritus chair or advisor for example. As we outlined in leadership, thinking about the long-term sustainability of your network is a key skill, so formalising this with everyone



involved will help you secure that legacy.

20.

Another aspect you should consider formalising with your team is how you work together. This helps to set expectations early on, so there are no misunderstandings or disputes further down the line.

First of all I recommend outlining guidance on face to face meetings - even if you're not having them right now. This is because you can actually get a lot done in your network, without meeting at all - which may have now become apparent. So deciding the exact purpose of a face-to-face - like an opportunity to collaborate - reduces wasted time, or a descent into clique socialising, or pointless round-table updates. What are these meetings actually for and why should they be face to face? How often are they, when and where do you run them? And always be mindful of how they could be improved.

Online working should make up the majority of your activity, because it means that anyone can contribute whatever their circumstances. So be specific about how people can get involved, what technology they need to understand and use, how is activity tracked, and how are you embracing modern collaboration like agile working.

Above all this is an opportunity to agree on commitments and accountability. How do you agree roles and expectations? What happens if someone doesn't meet these? Don't forget to update the previous template on roles with your own details.

And that's not to say that cold process overtakes your previous work on values. How are you proving your values by empowering your members to get work done?

You may want to go as far as creating a charter than all active members sign their name to.

21.

"Without strategy execution is aimless. Without execution strategy is useless". Strategy is just your start - otherwise it probably wouldn't have been the second module.

Next time we're going to pay more attention to execution and evaluation by thinking about how we anticipate and measure impact.