

Interview with Fiona Jackson, Radius Consultant, and Mark McLane, Head of Diversity, Inclusion & Wellbeing, M&G plc

Names	Commentary
FJ	Thank you very much for agreeing to be interviewed today Mark. Let's start by talking about the employee networks that you have within your organisation. So, why do you have them and what do you see as the value of them to you?
MM	I think the, look in every organisation that I've worked in as the Head of Diversity we've been fortunate to have in play resource groups. Depending upon what you call them, diversity networks, sometimes affinity groups. I'm less concerned really about the name that's assigned to the groups and more that there's an interest from colleagues to help advance a diversity and inclusion strategy. At M&G plc we launched our diversity networks last July and, in some cases, it was a relaunch and in other cases they were new diversity networks as part of establishing our diversity strategy and really where they play a role is two-fold. One is employee resource groups or diversity networks should really focus on the inclusion component. Knowing better than anyone what it takes for Mark McLane to feel included in an organisation. That becomes the voice. Not just the voice but of his constituency but also then helping the organisation move to action. Whether it's based on gender, whether it's based on sexual orientation. It doesn't matter the framework; it's about having the voice as part of the strategy and that as a Head of Diversity should be taken into account with everything I do. So, it's a two-way situation. How do our networks fit into our governance model and delivery on the strategy and then what are you hearing from your diversity networks and how are you putting them into action? And also partnering. So, for me it's a two-way dialogue. The diversity networks aren't there to point out what's not going well, they're there to uncover, help fill the gaps but then also help deliver on it. They've got to be a part of the delivery of your strategy. They're not the mechanism to deliver your strategy, they're a mechanism by which and that's a big difference. Some organisations I've either spoken with in the past have looked at the diversity networks as almost the delivery mechanism for the diversity and inclusion strategy. They're not. They're a mechanism, they're a component. We also have to have leaders; it has to be aligned to your talent management strategy. There's multiple components but diversity networks should be an intricate cog in the wheel.
FJ	Yeah yea, definitely an essential part of the whole process of implementation and have that ...
MM	Because they're the voice, they're the voice of your consumer. We say colleague but they're a constituency voice. So, if you want to put it in business terms, consumer products of this company are a great example. You go out to the market, you run focus groups, you ask customers what it is that the product is missing, what would make it better. That's what we should be doing with our employee resource groups or diversity networks. Say Fiona, what would make it better for you here at XYZ Organisation but then taking that information and help putting it into practice and also I always ask the diversity network. What are you going to do with this information? How would you see it come to fruition? That's the partnership. And I think unfortunately that's lacking in some organisations.
FJ	So, from that perspective then, so what resources do you give your networks to help enable that to happen then Mark?
MM	I guess there is a bit of a list. I'll hit what I think are the most important. Everyone talks about funding. I do think diversity networks should have funding. I also think that most diversity networks never think funding's enough. OK? But I've always said come up with an idea, come up with a business case for more, then I'll got to the business. Right, again this partnership. I've also in most organisations that I've worked at, employee diversity networks and employee resource groups although

funded usually are underspent by the end of the year. So, it's this push and pull. I do think there should be funding available because that's, that enables the network to be able to deliver back to their constituency more broadly across the organisation without always having to ask for more funding and more funding. So, there's some autonomy there. I think you have to align good leadership with the networks and I don't mean at sort of the co-chair or the committee level, I think the networks needs to determine who sits in those seats, I mean at the sponsor level. OK. Whether it's a regional sponsor or an executive sponsor, whatever your framework looks like. I think the office of diversity has a real responsibility to help get the right person on seat and then holds some account to those executive directors. And then the third thing I do is I get our network co-chairs together every other month for a cross-network collaborative meeting. And two things happen there. One is they're briefed on sort of what's coming up in the next 90 days from a strategy standpoint at the top line and then they share network to network the work that they're doing and that collaboration then starts to really breed this idea of intersectionality which is a really fancy word for "we should do some things together", reach a broader audience. Well you have to have a mechanism by which the network leaders can get together on a regular basis to have that collaborative dialogue and I think those are three really key components from the standpoint of being a successful network from a delivery standpoint.

FJ Sounds like you're giving them good materials. I was really interested at one of the points that you said there that you find that they, your networks never think they have enough but they always have some left.

MM Yes.

FJ Why do you think they, that is? Why do you think they have some left for example?

MM Well I think it, it's like most business delivery. You put a plan together for the year, you map out your spend and then something always changes. So you have always had one or two networks who may not be able to deliver on a programme or on an event by the end of the year. So I think that's part of it. I also think there's sometimes a lack of discipline around budget management and diversity networks because we see ourselves as not necessarily a business delivery and I try to instil that no matter, no matter that the networks are volunteer led, we have a responsibility to the organisation to manage our budget just like any other business unit or function in an organisation would and I think there's a bit of yes, but, we're a voluntary organisation and we have some wriggle room.

FJ And in that formal organisation that you put in place, how do you govern things? So how are leads elected, how do you, how you ensure that as you say, there is an element of delivering your strategy but how do you make sure it's sort of all going in the right direction for you? And you mentioned about some of your networks relaunching. Does that mean they've got some sort of life cycle involved?

MM Well no because we're a little bit unique. M&G plc demerged from Prudential last May and in that we had diversity networks that sat with Prudential, we had diversity networks that sat with M&G and neither the twain shall meet issue will. And the interface network was called the Prudential Women's Network. The colleagues at M&G plc said we don't want to be known as the you know the sort of the network formerly known as Prudential Women's Network and we want to establish a gender-based network. So we have a network called Elevate for the first time ever. So it's brand new. Some of our other networks like the M&G Pride Network wasn't established in the Prudential brand so now it's just available to all colleagues and that's what I mean about relaunch. So new from the standpoint of establishing a different approach to gender but the relaunch was all of our networks regardless of what part of the business you sit in, what part of the portfolio brand is available to all colleagues because they're now called at the plc level not at the individual business unit level. And that's part of the governing.

FJ It feels like, yeah, it feels a bit like it's evolved and had an evolution as your business evolved.

MM Exactly right. And that's how your diversity and inclusion strategy should be aligned. It's to your operating model and delivering in the same way that we're delivering on the business so you asked about governance, that's part of the governance. Is that our diversity networks all sit at the plc level. They're aligned to the five pillars of our strategy being gender, disability, LGBT+, ethnicity nationality and what we're calling life stages. They sit within and the alignment with those pillars so that they are aware of the delivery. There's an executive committee member assigned to each of those pillars and then the assigning of an executive sponsor to the networks happens after the executive team minus one level. OK, so very senior individuals. I talk with the networks about who they think would be a good executive sponsor for the network, asked the questions why, what do you think what value they're going to bring based on your objectives and then help approach that senior leader with the ask.

FJ Interestingly it's a sort of mutual decision but the networks ask for who they want and then you see whether that's of interest to that senior leader. So ..

MM And also ...

FJ ... network driven then.

MM Yeah it's network driven but is it a good fit? And also you know if I'm coming to you Fiona I hope to have a good understanding of where you are in the business. What are the business pressures that you're under and will you have the time to be able to spend? And I also give senior leaders an opportunity to say no. And I think that's part of my role, to have that conversation with you to say the network is interested, I think you would be a good fit but Fiona if you know, if we're in the middle of a acquisition let's say, and you're leading that, right now might not be the right time. A year from now might be or six months from now and I think it's having those mature conversations that then get the right fit. Because there's nothing worse than with good intentions saying yes and then not being available or not being present to help lead the network.

FJ Yeah, yeah, need active, active sponsors and supporters, very much so, yeah.

MM Exactly right.

FJ And how do you measure that success and whether those networks are being successful Mark?

MM Well the network sets out objectives annually and then we review if they've their objectives at the end of the year. No different than any other performance management structure.

FJ Wonderful. Very straight forward. It's sort of making it feel like it's just part of the business and another piece of business activity. Is that what you're aiming to do with how you're generating, creating this?

MM What it should be.

FJ Yeah.

MM Right. So and you know someone might say that well that's great for a Head of Diversity to say but you don't really know what it's like to run a network. Well, yeah I do. Say I was the chair of the Pride Network at Whirlpool Corporation, now somewhere about 15/18 years ago.

FJ Yeah.

MM So, I do know what it's like and then I do know what it's like to align to the strategy because with Whirlpool it was slightly different. There you had to have a business case to start a diversity network. You had to show alignment to the consumer. Slightly different structure, a little bit more business driven but I do know and I do understand the pressures of running a diversity network alongside with delivering on your own ...

FJ A job, yeah

MM ... risk objective. Right?

FJ Absolutely. So, we're in unusual circumstances at the moment, Mark, as this video conversation shows. How have things changed since lockdown and Covid 19 for what you're doing with your networks?

MM I don't think anything has changed differently for the networks than it has for the business. And this is again staying aligned with where the organisation's going. So we're all working remotely which means the networks are working remotely. We're delivering to customers in a remote fashion and being more technology driven. Our diversity networks have taken on the same challenge. How do they continue to deliver to our colleagues in a remote working and much more technology driven environment? So some of the things that have happened almost immediately where our mentoring circles who used to get together are now virtual. So they don't have to stop. The delivery is slightly different but it's no different than the environment we're in today because probably six months ago you all would've called and said can we come and film you and we would be sitting in an office at M&G with the film crew and here we are today on Zoom. So it's adapting and showing the ability to be able to still focus on what colleagues need and help to bring them to bear in a virtual world.

FJ And that feels like an opportunity in some ways because actually we would've had to all travel and it would've been much harder to do where to some degree you know meeting online has been easier. Is there any particular additional challenges or anything else that your networks are asking for help with that you've experienced in the last couple of months?

MM Well I think one of the greatest challenges and this is just colleague-wide is the social isolation that has come with this lockdown. Except for some colleagues it's the first time they've ever worked from home or worked remotely on a less than maybe one day a week basis which is very difficult. For me I've run sales divisions in the past so I'm used to working remotely on a full time basis but what's really been difficult is both what's come with the lockdown. So for individuals with families and younger children, working remotely and having your children at home all day, they're no longer going to school has brought a huge change and different demands on individuals with children. The other end of the spectrum is colleagues who are isolated alone and have no interaction during the day and we've been doing that work and asking our networks to then support the work that's been pushed out to our colleagues and help deliver on that. So we've just delivered a learning module called "Alone but not lonely" specifically for individuals who find themselves at home alone and if you just step back and think about that, the challenges at the end of the day who do I speak with? So my partner and I and our dog, I get to shut down Zoom in a little while or Skype or whatever you're using, I go downstairs and we have a conversation, we're together. If you're at home alone the challenge there is well I'll just keep working. I don't have a lot to distract me and this is where our diversity networks have (1) help uncover some of what our colleagues need but (2) help deliver on that. Continue to take the resources and put them into their newsletters, encourage colleagues to utilise a lot of the great work we've done around mental health and wellbeing, our virtual yoga classes. So they've become a communication tool without having to develop the work but have picked it up and recognised they have a voice into their constituency that I may not.

- FJ And so do you think there's been more interest in networks because they are able to be that voice to your employees and a way to communicate with them? And if so, do you think some networks are more important now than others? Are you seeing any difference?
- MM I don't think any network is ever more important than any other network. Regardless of the circumstances. I think there are points in time where depending upon the work or the environment we found ourselves, that some networks may need to lead from a position of strength because the impact is greater on one constituency or another. I think right now we just had this conversation about the different challenges of individuals who might be isolating alone or with family. I think the delivery mechanism to those are different but I don't think one, any one network is ever more important nor do I think the work is ever more important for one group or another. I think the impact at different points in time in our history call that work to the fore and then move on to the next body of importance. Does that make sense?
- FJ Yes, yes it does. It would be really interesting to hear any sort of examples of what you mean to sort of bring that to life if you could.
- MM So I think right now mental health and wellbeing, very important, for all of the reasons we've been talking about. Helping individuals be at home, understand how to connect, how to close down, at points in time for the LGBT community whether equal marriage would a great example, achieving equal marriage doesn't mean the work is done but the intensity and the resource that took to get to that point is now different and positioned in other aspects of the community. I think those are just two aspects of the work that it's a point in time.
- FJ I see that and yeah, and it's sort of how it's innovating now. You're seeing your networks, you've talked about moving things like the mentoring circles online, are you seeing any other examples of how your networks are innovating to cope with this today. You know if they had, if they have, if they were going to go to Pride or you know anything like that. What are you seeing are they doing to innovate?
- MM Well our networks do movie nights. So each network takes two months out of the year and then that month our Elevate gender network will promote a movie, people come, watch it, we'll we can't all go sit in the auditorium and watch a movie. So they've turned it almost into a book club which I thought was brilliantly innovative is to pick a movie or two I think one network did, and said watch this at your leisure, on Wednesday at this time we're all going to get together and we're going to have a chat about the movie. So I think there's something that they've just taken this idea of a book club and made it almost a movie club overnight didn't have to stop the process it's just a different delivery mechanism and I think again, simple but innovative and it keeps community within the networks.
- FJ And it achieves some of the same objectives doesn't it in terms of bringing people together, maybe learning something, watching something you might not have watched before.
- MM Yes.
- FJ And still engaging with other people to discuss it. Yeah, really interesting.
- MM Exactly right, exactly right.
- FJ Brilliant. So what do you think, if we imagine a world where we start coming out of lockdown or the lockdown rules are easing as we can see with some shops opening etc with directionally there. What do you think the future of networks is going look like in the new ways of working that aren't back to normal but different? Do you see anything for the future?

MM I think the networks should be watching what the business is doing. So as we come out of lockdown some of the great paradigms that have been broken through this period are, well that job can't be done remotely. Well that's not necessarily the case anymore. We've proven a lot of, a lot of the work and the cultural barriers that were in place have now resolved away. I think there's an opportunity for our networks to help continue to reinforce that culture. OK? I think they also need to look at where's the organisation going. We call it the future of work at M&G. We launched a week ago, our CEO came out and said look as the governments are having conversations about easing out of lockdown across all of the countries that we're in, we'll continue to monitor that but at M&G we will come out of, we'll approach the future of work on a colleague by colleague basis not putting anyone in danger or in harms way in anyway and I think our networks have to start to really hear what senior leaders are saying. So our senior leaders are saying you know we're not going to return to the office the way we used to, well now it's not going to be one or two days a week from working remotely it might be two or three for some colleagues. Well if that's the case and if we've gone from a in-person delivery model now to a virtual delivery model, how do you take what we've built and hold that to a centre point. To say ok movie night might be a hybrid now. We may at some point be able to sit in an auditorium or in a smaller room or studio at M&G and then some colleagues will be at home and how do we all come together to have that post event dialogue? How do we have a hybrid model that does start to point to the future? So you know you can turn that around and say well Mark how are you doing that? How are you setting the example for your networks? A few ways. We used to have yoga classes on site, we now have virtual yoga classes at M&G. We have virtual Zumba classes. They're not going to go away. So as I have colleagues potentially going back to the office I'm to have again more remote working and if you Fiona have been getting up two or three days a week, going to your virtual yoga class at M&G why would that stop in the future? So I think it's thinking about what the future looks like. How do we hold on to what is good coming out of such a difficult situation and how do we hold on to that? Another example that's very tactical but I think diversity networks could help drive this. I've been hearing about the paperless office for now about 25 years in my career, we've finally achieved it through this lockdown.

FJ Because we had to.

MM Right. Because we didn't have a choice. Exactly right. So now as diversity network we're looking at carbon footprint or sustainability, here's a perfect opportunity to continue to promote as we return to working you know in office why would we start printing again? So I think there's an opportunity for our networks to look at the future and remind us of what's good, what good has come out of a really, really difficult situation.

FJ How can the networks help you hold onto the best bits?

MM Exactly right. Be a bit of our conscious. Reminding senior leaders yeah but we you know, so I hear diversity network members and leaders sometimes say you know I'm tired of hearing we can't. Well now you get to be the voice to say that we have. So turn that voice around a bit.

FJ Yeah, yeah. Say why not, why not.

MM Not even why not. We have, we've done it. We have, we are running major FTSE 100 companies remotely, we're not running into meeting rooms with pages and pages of PowerPoint presentations. It's not that we're not creating the presentations, we all become so much more comfortable using our technology. This is an opportunity for us to hold onto that.

FJ Wonderful, wonderful. Thanks ever so much for your time Mark. I'm very conscious it's already half past. Doesn't it go quick?

MM Oh my goodness. That went quick.

FJ We've just beaten half past actually and just to give you the opportunity, is there anything that you had prepared or thought about that hasn't come out that you think's a really good case study that we could share with our leadership group or anything particularly you're really proud of you've been doing at M&G that we haven't cover at the moment?

MM You know I would just say what I'm really proud of, of the diversity networks at M&G is, their ability to pivot while the business was pivoting in this current situation and not me having to go to the networks and say how are you going to deliver remotely or more virtually, them coming to me and saying, here's what we're going to do with Every Women and we're going to turn that into a virtual coffee mornings with role models and having round table discussions or our, as I said earlier, our mentoring circles, and again I am going to go back to our movie night because I do just think it's innovative, it's a bit of fun at a time when people really need it and that's what I'm most proud of is they took the leadership in making certain they could continue to deliver to our colleagues and anyone watching this, I would ask you to do the same in your organisation.

FJ Yeah. Take the leadership in it and innovate and create and keep going. Just differently.

MM Exactly right.

FJ Wonderful. It's sound wonderful. It sounds a really good example of what's been happening, really nice to hear what's been going on Mark and really appreciate your time.

MM Fiona, it's been my pleasure, thank you.

FJ Thanks very much indeed.