1.
Title Card

2.
Coming up in this module we'll be looking at how to identify the key stakeholders who can deliver high impact for your network, and how to plan your stakeholder engagement strategy. We'll be exploring the sponsor relationship and how other organisations have formalised that. And we'll think about reaching stakeholders as a network, responding to feedback, and using our peers for support.

3.
Before we start, just a quick reminder that stakeholders are anyone with an interest in what you do. This can include: Network Members, Allies, Managers, Sponsors, Mentors, Role Models, Internal, External, Awarding Bodies, Press, Executive Team, Brand, Comms, D&I, Marketing, Product… you get the idea. In fact, it's not the most useful term, in that really it can describe anyone at a different point in time. But the key to understanding stakeholders is the detail underneath their role: knowing who you need to be aware of, at what point, what you expect of them, and what they expect of you. It's a dynamic relationship, not something that can just be identified on a organisational chart.

4.
Take a moment to reflect on what stakeholders you currently spend time with, so that you can approach this module on a personal level.

Most people say they spend the majority of their time with internal stakeholders, it is seen as the obvious place to get stuff done, operationally. Whether it's buy-in from sponsors, or budget from HR, or involvement from your network.

Fewer people say it's with external stakeholders, probably because it's seen as "not directly working with the business", but remember this includes press and awarding bodies which might be central to your success metrics, recruitment drives which might affect your diversity metrics, task-force consultants for managing change behavior, or charitable organisations that you use for research, and in return, support with volunteer days.

There's an argument for saying your efforts should be spread equally so that you have a balanced view of the impact of your network – both within your direct efforts, and more wide-ranging ones, but it can be difficult to monitor multiple projects at once, and so you may not always recognise when this is in balance and when it isn't.

And if you don't spend much time with stakeholders hopefully this module will give you the opportunity to question why that is, and whether you have opportunity to do it more often.

5.
One of the ways we can begin to understand how we're currently interacting with stakeholders, and how we might identify those opportunities is to create a stakeholder map. Here's an example inspired by the book Inclusive Leadership.

The diagram on the page looks a bit A level computer science, but don't worry, it's not at all mathematical, it's just a way to record all the stakeholders you can think of and make sure your network is all on the same page, literally. So let's look at an example in action before you create your own.

6.

In this example we're looking at an ability network, but it works just the same with any network. They've identified that their internal stakeholders are executives, leaders, comms and HR. Now this is very basic work, so what you'd want to do from here is perhaps break down the role even further – for example from HR you may want to have separate items for performance management and recruitment. Alongside that you can make a note of the activity that is relevant to both the stakeholder and your network. It's also a good idea to write the names of your stakeholders and their contact details if you want to make this a live working document that you keep updated. That can be really useful when you think about creating a sustainable network and succession planning should you no longer be there.

Then you've got external stakeholders, press, legal advice, and in the case of this network they've gone for a power list ranking too. You may want to profile any allies in the industry that could maybe visit and give a talk or advice. The latest in employment policy best practice can often be found on government websites. Charities as we've said can be great opportunities for user research and consultation, as well as offering you support. Again you should list all the contact details and dates when they were last contacted, or when you're planning to engage with them again to make this a dynamic document, and not a one-off exercise.

7.

Also in your worksheet you'll find a checklist for stakeholder engagement. It's a self-assessment to help you think about the steps you need to take to feel confident in engaging your stakeholders. So let's look at an example.

You may already be familiar with your internal stakeholders, but not really thought about your external ones yet. So your next step would be to set up some time to find out who your key strategic contacts are.

Once you have those, do you have clear goals for them? You really don't want to engage a stakeholder unless you're proposing some kind of action whether it's support, or promotion, or change behavior. Otherwise you risk becoming noise. And to be even more persuasive you should have identified what's most important to them.

Once you know the why – do you know the when? Regular check-ins will encourage you to make progress. And to really get the most from your interactions don't forget the groundwork you set in the network influence and communications modules.

You'll want to prioritise this at some point, and it will help to know who's an influencer and who's a decision maker. And if you're strapped for time, in addition to prioritising it will also be helpful to have a risk assessment of what happens if you don't keep them engaged. For

example a loss of budget from internal stakeholders, or missing out on a campaign with an external stakeholder.

8.
Let's take another pause and think about how your network is currently involving stakeholders.

The ideal setup is usually for direct and active involvement. If you've identified them as a priority stakeholder, then you want to have a clear strategy with them, and make sure they are delivering the right impact.

If you're mostly working on an ad-hoc basis like an appearance at events, you still need to make sure that it's strategic and your stakeholder is informed, so that it doesn't seem like they're just paying lip-service with token visibility.

Be cautious with indirect stakeholder involvement – not that an intermediary like HR is working against you, but you might find it doesn't have the same impact on key stakeholders that a personal story, or clearly communicating the WHY of your mission does if you were face to face.

If your key stakeholder is very strapped for time, they may only want a once-or-twice-a-year meeting to approve your strategy and budget, but this can mean they're coming in with a preconceived idea of what they want to achieve, or want you to achieve in the year, and may mean you're not as quick to respond to opportunities and threats in an agile way. In this case setting the scene and reducing bias will be important activities to consider.

And if you've identified that it's just not your role to involve stakeholders, maybe you just haven't found the right key stakeholder for you to engage with yet. Go back to your stakeholder mapping and think who could help you deliver the impact you want.

9.
How do we prioritise stakeholders? Obviously we're all low on time, so it makes sense to concentrate your efforts on high impact groups, and giving just enough to keep the less powerful groups happy. This is the basis for your engagement strategy.

One such example is a matrix that balances influence against interest. Think about which of your mapped stakeholders has a large influence, then split them between those that are actively interested in you, and those that are less so. If the stakeholder fulfils both high influence and interest, then they are your key players. They will most likely be responsible for making decisions and governance. You still want to engage your less interested influencers, but probably more in a consultative way, as you cannot guarantee they'll deliver direct impact.

And then do the same for your low influencers, some of which will be more interested in what you're doing, and these can be potential supporters for things you might not have thought of yet. If your stakeholders appear in the bottom left corner as "least vital",

obviously you don't want to be spending much time there, just offer enough general information to do the job - this might be pull information such as you'd see on an intranet, or your regular communications.

Using this matrix you should think about what actions from your strategy, what communications, and what powers of influence will drive the people on the left, to the right by increasing their interest and making them key players and supporters.

10.

You've got a matrix in your worksheet to help you plan out your engagement strategy which you can complete after you've mapped your stakeholders.

Here's an example of it in action. You have the name of your stakeholder along with where they fit into the matrix. Here we have Ali who is a key stakeholder for a mental health network. This is because they're a mental health champion, so has high interest, but he also has a global remit for new business development meaning he's high influence too. His potential is that he could help facilitate collaboration across networks in different locations. The network that wants to engage him has decided the best way to do this is offer evidence of the benefits from aligned global actions. And of course from this you can then develop the plan by deciding who from your network will take on this task, and how you'll know when it's been successful.

Another example is Ellie who is a D&I champion not specifically aligned with the network, and therefore lower in interest. But she is known for her work externally and could potentially offer advocacy beyond your network's current reach. So the network leader decides to share their strategy with Ellie and ask for her advice. By doing this you ask for active engagement, and make her care, thereby increasing her interest and starting to turn her into a key player.

11.

A quick word on engagement because we sometimes say it like it's easy. We're mostly talking about engaging stakeholders on an individual basis - but the ultimate aim of your network is to make sure that everyone feels empowered. The statistics on overall engagement, where employees feel loyal and involved with their organisation are generally low. And this isn't from one survey or organisation, this is persistent over time, globally. You'll find many reports like this, and we've put this one in your further reading.

Employee engagement is something that we've found is monitored infrequently. And because of the time and expense is not often aligned with the efforts of employee networks – which can be a missed opportunity. Just because engagement is being measured for every employee – that doesn't mean it's not an issue for individual networks. So if you can find out how and when you're organisation is measuring engagement, see if there are some joint efforts you can work on. For example, in your organisation – are people who are part of an employee network more or less engaged than on average? Rather than measuring in retrospect you can build up predictive models and test your hypotheses more frequently as

a task force.

And if your organisation is measuring engagement, maybe a reminder that it's not an end in itself, but a means to help build better relationships within organisations and also the societies in which they operate - ultimately resulting in a more inclusive culture and better business.

12.

Maybe your network sponsor has been chosen for you, maybe they self-selected, maybe you want to recruit someone specific, or maybe you have a few people interested and need to choose. Either way, you can establish a productive relationship by asking questions like what are your priorities and focus areas? How will we make the most impact? Is there anything I should be aware of? And is there anyone I need to speak to? It sounds simple, but you'd be surprised how many people forget to do this before talking about their own objectives.

Keep the questions strategic, related to work, and the specific impact you'd like to have together. We've seen sponsors who get involved because the network relates to how they identify – and while this isn't necessarily bad, and can be a good thing for empathy, it isn't a substitute for the other skills you need as a key player who is accountable for the network's success.

What are signs that you've developed a good relationship with your sponsor? You should be having regular meetings which are productive and demonstrate that you've built a good rapport. While you want things to be friendly and civil, you also want your sponsor to challenge you. It shows they're curious about your plans, and have a different perspective to offer. You should feel like you want to keep your sponsor informed because they value it, and not like it's a duty. And this will happen on a regular basis, not just when you are obliged to seek their approval or a special appearance.

13.

We heard from the BBC about one of the ways they formalised senior stakeholder engagement across their networks, which they call ENGs, different business units, trade unions, the diversity board and executives. They said:

"The Diversity Centre ran sessions for ENG chairs and the Marketing, Communications and Audiences Department to facilitate collaborative working. It ensured ENGs were able to feed in to BBC policy and practice around marketing and comms to improve targeting and reach to audience segments. Ideas and advice were then sought as routine in future."

The Diversity Centre set up and facilitated a trade union and ENG consultative forum, to discuss employee-related policy and issues – with the understanding that the Union have statutory rights to for example consultation (that ENGs do not).

ENG chairs were invited on a rotating basis to the quarterly Diversity Board (with executive directors and the Director General) The Director General was also invited to key network Annual General Meetings to listen to concerns and issues.

Maintaining that balance between formalised procedures in a hierarchy, and an authentic and productive relationship with your sponsor is key to making impactful change through your network and its stakeholders.

This week's suggested interview is with Lisa Pinney from The Coal Authority who is not only involved with employee networks but CEO too. All of the networks have a sponsor on the Executive Board that they chose themselves as she strongly believes that networks should be driven by the needs of the employee. Network leaders are invited to the Executive Team meetings frequently and there's an open door policy to speak with all the senior team. But they also recognised that the support of the senior team is not enough, so they are setting up a more formal structure to link the voice of the networks to the middle management population on a regular basis, so that they can hear from diverse voices more directly. Check it out in your bonus content.

14.

Another way you might consider getting your stakeholders together is through something like a summit. We've facilitated many of these over the years and here are the main things we've seen prove impactful for networks and the organisation. Getting sponsors together for an open discussion, a panel, or a pitching session can help to reset the way you work with them, coming up with contracted ways of working to help formalise the process, as well as hearing their personal stories to engage on a more empathetic level.

You may be surprised how little contact the sponsors have sometimes had with each other, and it can help them to see how connected all the networks really are in what they want to achieve. It exposes intersectional opportunities and brings priority strategies to the top level for practical next steps. It's also useful for networks to find peer support from other networks in their organisation about what successful engagement strategies they've managed to action.

15.

Confusingly, a network sponsor may also provide individual sponsorship, or mentoring. So let's just remind ourselves of the difference. A network sponsor is primarily there to extend the reach of your network, and offer their power and influence as yours. Individual sponsorship means concrete steps and assurances are given by one individual in power to another who will then advance in their career. Mentoring offers advice and support to get people ready for career progression.

Mentoring can benefit both parties when properly managed - you may have heard it as reverse mentoring, but really wherever you place the sphere of influence, it should encompass both mentor and mentee. We've seen before that mentoring is one of the activities that positively affects the diversity at managerial level. But a caution not to focus

only on one aspect of your diversity, because what we want is the senior stakeholder to be exposed to many different sorts of voices and experiences, not just someone who they can already relate to.

On that note, we've increasingly seen the emergence of social mobility networks, and how intersectional they are. In your further reading we've linked to a talk about the book The Class Ceiling, which has some good research about the more hidden factors which make getting ahead less effort for some people and much harder for others. It focuses on class, but comes down to privilege generally and how it perpetuates a myth of "just being better", because often seniors stakeholders don't know how to truly measure merit. One of the things they found is that sponsorship and sometimes mentoring relationships can give unfair advantage if the selection criteria is just "who I relate to as individual" and also that sometimes a "success case" such as: "this person made it, you can too" works against the idea that everyone should be raised up in their opportunities, not just shown a way one person overcame systemic bias.

What this means for your network is if you're offering up mentoring with a senior stakeholder, to think carefully about how the mentee is chosen. How can you make sure it's both the right person deserving of the opportunity, but also someone who'll move the bar for the mentor in terms of their understanding of inclusion.

It can be a tricky balance of wanting to create impact at a higher level through affinity, and remembering that what you're asking for is better diversity of thought and representation – so is this relationship going to challenge as well as support? And are you measuring the success of your network by the advancement of some, or fairness for everyone?

16.

Reaching out to peers not in your network can have a knock on effect of strengthening your relationship with them and aiding mutual understanding. Take advantage of opportunities to educate your 'day job' peers on what you're doing with the network and generate excitement and support. They may also then spot opportunities for them to support your network whether they choose the label of ally or not. Try to discover more about the insight into business direction your peers get in their roles, as well as how your network activity impacts 'their world'. Similarly, educating your network peers on what you bring to the table from your 'day job' allows them to better understand your role, conflicting priorities and expertise.

Inviting feedback and challenge from your peers, who are more removed from what you're doing can provide valuable insight that you may be too close to realise or absorb by yourself. For example: How is your activity landing in the business? Encourage feedback from them to improve your strategy and content.

Another interesting extension of engaging your peers is that some of them may be better at reaching the stakeholders you want to influence than the people currently in your employee network. For example one network was organising a pride event without budget from the organisation's D&I team. Instead their lead spoke with a colleague in marketing

who wasn't part of the employee network, they in turn said that they had some leftover budget they needed to use and could probably find a mutually beneficial solution. And so with a little product placement the group was able to be involved with Pride after all. Sometimes taking a break from your usual strategy can yield surprising results, so as much as we back the importance of planning and strategy and measurements, there will always be room for a bit of improvisation.

17.
In this slide we just want you to take a moment and contemplate a few questions which should take some time to do honestly and critically.

Thinking about the discussion we had on agile teams and how they operate like a network, do you have a healthy relationship of give and take with your broader organisation? Think of that both as a leader, and as a network. What's your reputation for giving and taking among stakeholders, sponsors, and customers or users.

And how do they know they can ask things of you as a network? Is it in your comms, are they transparent? Do you have a clear path where they can push ideas to you? Or do you actively go out and see if any stakeholders might have a request they've been holding on to. Do you demonstrate openness through your character, style and authenticity as a leader?

18.
Now that you've considered your current state, you might want to create formal processes for responding. For example how are requests received? Is it OK to be word of mouth, or do you have some sort of digital tool on your intranet? Both? Do they get directed to you as a leader, or a comms team? And do you accept requests at any time, or actively seek them on a timely basis?

And one of the reasons it's good to formalise this process is so you can recognise, measure, and celebrate when you successfully offer help to stakeholders. It will cement your relationship and show the possibilities that are offered by collaboration across the business.

Make sure to make records and publish them in your comms. This goes back to the building blocks of your comms strategy showing that you have credibility and walk the talk, hopefully changing the behaviour of people who think that employee networks are just for their own members. This creates a special kind of allyship that elevates the influence and impact of your network.

The same questions apply to how you then respond. Do you have a process for providing an authoritative voice. Do all requests go through your committee or is there a more agile process where individuals are empowered to respond and accept accountability? Does it have to align to your current strategy - which may mean you have to think about how to turn down requests and explain why.

19.
If it sounds like we just name-checked every module in the course so far, that's because we did. This is the culmination of your weeks of effort, at least in terms of your recorded

modules, worksheets and further reading. Hopefully you can look back and see how each week has built on your previous work, and if you have time, we recommend revisiting them, however briefly, as by now you'll have a slightly different perspective on what each means for you.

But your journey is far from over, and we have a few more sessions to keep you going. First of all, we have another live check-in which will give you opportunity to ask questions about the modules on widening your network, agility and innovation, and sponsors and stakeholders, along with the usual networking in small groups. Then a few weeks after that we have another live session which is a wrap-up of the whole course. This will include some insights we've had on recent employee network efforts, some tips on maintaining your drive and focus now that the course is all coming to an end. And a final chance for an open forum chat and networking so you can make future plans for collaboration.

But even after that, please do keep in touch, as you've seen, we love to share your network success stories. You will then have another week to review any last items from the course before we wish you so long and good luck.