

Fiona Jackson, Radius Consultant, and Talia Chirouf, Hogan Lovells

Names	Commentary
FJ	So I thought I'd start off then, Talia, if that's alright ... can you talk a little bit about the organisation you work for and your role there?
TALIA	Yeah absolutely ... so I work in the D&I Team for the UK at Hogan Lovells so Hogan Lovells is an international law firm ... and there are two members of the D&I Team in the UK. We also look after wellbeing and we've got about 1,500 people in the UK. So it's quite a large remit ... so we look at ... we've got a kind of 10-point strategy, a few sort of key things that we're looking at this year – BAME Retention and Progression, for example, is one of them; Respect in the Workplace ... and then we ... we do a lot of kind of wellbeing work as well, sort of recognising the main campaigns, D&I days ... throughout the year.
FJ	And what role do you play there? Do you get involved with the network activity?
TALIA	Yeah ... so we've got six employee networks. I mean, traditionally, before mine and my manager's time, because we joined around the same time, the networks were very kind of ... the D&I Team was very hands-on with the networks. So ... what we've really tried to do over the last 18 months as part of our D&I strategy is, sort of, getting the good governance in place for the networks so they're more sort of sustainable so, if me and Julie-Ann, you know, get hit by a bus one day then, you know, things continue; activity continues.
FJ	Wonderful. So ... what made you want to go on the E&LP course then?
TALIA	So I had ... recently joined Hogan Lovells when the opportunity for the E&LP came up and ... I hadn't worked in D&I before, I hadn't worked in corporate setting before and I didn't know anything about staff networks so it was ... I mean everything about the programme was relevant to me ... because it was a real kind of starting from ... starting from zero ... and it was, you know, it is part of my role to ... to interact with the networks so it was really ... it was a really useful course to go on because it's given me the kind of tools and ... you know, the tools and the knowledge ... to be able to kind of pass that on and consult to our networks internally in a sort of Best Practice way.
FJ	That sounds really promising. So, in terms of the ... the course that you ... you've been on ... what ... what struck a chord with you during the programme? What do you think was your favourite module?
TALIA	So, I ... well, I've mentioned something ... about specifically ... modules ... for a later question. What I'd sort of thought of around this ... the thing that really struck a chord with me, I think, was just the ... the fact that you've got a community of people ... a sort of readymade network of other people in really varied organisations at different stages in their network journeys ... which was invaluable. You know, some of the work we were doing ... you know, during the course we might have been working in groups or doing kind of activities in pairs or even things we were doing individually but within a kind of, you know, training setting. It was always useful to hear about people's real life examples and experiences with things and that really helped ... me to bring a lot back to Hogan Lovells. I just ... I think to understand more generally how networks work in different types of organisations ... because it's completely different, you know, the way that we ... our networks run and what our networks have historically done, you know, was really, really different to some of the examples from some of the people who were on my course.
FJ	And so ... to ... to follow up with that then a little bit further ... so what ... what do you think the ... the impact has been on ... on Hogan Lovells and the networks and that experience you've been able to bring back in then? What ... what real impact do you think you've ... being on the programme has had with you?

- TALIA So, I think the ... the ... the most important example is ... coinciding with ... me doing this course, we were in the process of setting up a brand new employee network, focused on race and ethnicity, so the fact that I had done the course really helped me to input into all of those early sessions, thinking about mission and purpose and governance and ... and what the networks, you know ... what ... what a plan of activity would look like; what sponsorship would look like and who they'd want to approach. So we're kind of in the process of, you know, that's been set up, they've had their launch and they're now going into, you know, putting their ... their plan of action into place, albeit it, you know, faced with the additional challenge of doing that remotely, but that was really ,, you know, a really tangible example of me being able to say OK, you know, when discussions were going off in ... in one direction or another direction ... I could really bring a lot of examples from what I'd done during the course ... to really kind of help them because, you know, it's not their day job to ... to be in a network – for some of them they'd never been part of an employee network so it was really, really useful, I think, for ... for them and for me to be able to offer that kind of additional ... consultancy.
- FJ So ... tell me a little bit more about how ... how you did that? So, if you've taken some of the tools and you've mentioned a couple of things there – you mentioned about ... and it sounds like the sort of strategy module, the bit that we do at the beginning with the vision and the mission and ... how did you bring that to life and ... and what tactically did you do to get that ... benefit that you ... you say that you got from it, Talia?
- TALIA Yes, so we had a couple of sessions ... where we were kind of thrashing out, you know, what the purpose of the network would be and what sort of activity it would, you know, would run and do and I think that, you know, we had a really enthusiastic group of people but there was the challenge of kind of, you know, reeling people back and saying, you know, What is actually achievable within ... you know, how much time do you have to give to this in a year and what's achievable within, you know, two days maybe that you've got to ... to, you know, give to this? And there were some parts of the ... strategy module, you know, I think just that step by step guide of saying OK , can we explain, you know, in one sentence This is the overarching mission and kind of playing around with that and making sure that that was a realistic ... you know, making ... making sure that was realistic ... to ... to our circumstance and then later, when we got into more of the nitty gritty ... around the roles within a network, for example, we had had some good input from the E&LP on what kind of roles you'd want to consider. You know, possibly having, if you've got a comms person, a sort of sub-comms person as well so, once the kind of vision had been fleshed out, it was also really helpful for me to go back and saying to ... to that group, You know, perhaps you need to think about having another person ... you know, not just one comms person, another comms person, you know, not just one ops person but a second ops person ... because people, you know, are just so time-tied with this and we really wanted to make sure that it was ... you know, that it was going to be a success from the start and we weren't stretching people too thinly.
- FJ So that ... that's good advice so it's making sure that you've got the resilience of having, you know, a lead and a shared role from ... from that perspective ... so, what do you think ... I can hear that's really helped you structure stuff; it's really helped you put in place the ... the vision statement, the mission statement and the roles ... what do you think's been the impact on Hogan Lovells of being able to set that network up so successfully at the start?
- TALIA So, I mean, this is just a key part of ... of our ... you know, a ... a key part of our D&I strategy is BAME Retention and Progression ... recruitment, retention and progression and a really key part of that is having the network in place. So I think that, you know, where you've got input from a number of different people across the business, you will have more success in terms of implementing the D&I strategy and in terms of these kind of projects taking off. So, having the network there is completely integral to us hitting, you know, some of the other sort of targets that we

have around, you know, improving race fluency within the firm, for example. We ... we definitely can't do that just as a D&I Team. You know, having that network there to be able to use their networks to also be able to ... you know, directly call on their own experiences ... you know, myself and my manager are two ... white women. There is absolutely no point in us making, you know, creating lovely, you know, comms packs and posters and things about around race fluency ... and sense checking things. There's no point of having us do that because we have not experience ... you know, the whole point of ... of the project is around, you know, what are the different experiences that BAME employees, you know, might be ... might be having within the firm and what do we need to do to, you know, create a more inclusive culture? So, having the network as a kind of sounding board and, you know, this is a great group of people who are really coming up with their own ideas as well, supporting us a lot with producing materials and ... organising ... some webinars now at the moment, so a particular focus, for example, is ... on the way that Covid is affecting BAME communities so they're kind of picking that up and, you know, spreading that word around internally and, you know, that's not something that, if you're not from a BAME community, that you might be thinking about or that might be, you know, playing on your mind. You know, you might not have family members who are more at risk because ... because of that so ... yeah, it's ... it's really integral having that kind of strong network and that foundation for us to be able to deliver our D&I strategy.

FJ That sounds like it's been really beneficial and you've ... you've started to touch on something that I was going to ... ask you on in terms of ... how has the lockdown and the Covid-19 situation ... what changes and ... and challenges have you found to ... particularly maybe that BAME network but then also maybe more generally as ... in your D&I lead role, from ... from this situation?

TALIA Yeah, so I think ... it ... it's been definitely very challenging ... just in terms of, you know, it was very ... it was very quick. You know, we went into lockdown very quickly and the first few weeks were definitely, you know, a huge focus on wellbeing and I think that the danger, you know, that we're all ... I think within the, you know, the D&I sort of practitioner space, what people are worried about is that that's going to kind of, you know, lose its place on the agenda ... so we've been really trying to kind of keep that alive while we can. I think with the networks, you know, it's incredibly difficult to know at this time sort of where people are at so we don't know, you know, what people are contending with in their home lives so, you know, where we had lots of kind of action plans in place or ... you know, we were working with some of our other networks to repurpose and get a firm steer-co, we sort of ... you know, stepped back a little bit on that activity and we're trying to focus a lot now on getting people together ... in a very informal setting, you know, not having meetings where we've got really long agendas because we don't want to add to people's, you know, definitely already long ... you know, long to do list but ... we're doing a few kind of just informal catch-ups. So our Multi-Cultural Network in our last catch-up was talking about the specific challenges that the Jewish community were facing with Passover which is normally celebrated, you know, as a really community thing with lots of people and it's all about food and you have to switch off from electricity ... and, you know, what leaders in that community were saying around that. You know, maybe actually you should use ... you know, technology and have a Zoom ... Passover meal because otherwise, you know, it ... it's completely against the point of Passover which is to spend time with your family. Challenges around Ramadan as well so we had a really good discussion about that and I think ... that ... that's the kind of core of the networks, isn't it? You know, at ... at its base, it's a group of people with the kind of similar interests, similar agenda so we're trying to ... you know, really get people to share as much as they can and see the networks now just as a space where they can talk through some of those things and that there isn't that sort of pressure of ... OK, what are you doing for the next milestone day? What are we producing for this? Because, yeah, Covid has just completely changed ... everybody's priorities so it's ... the activity's a bit softer at the moment but I think actually, you know, the value is ...

is incredibly high because the importance of connectivity is incredibly ... you know, high at the moment.

FJ And you're finding sort of deeper and richer conversations by the sound of it in terms of connecting with people and their ... own diverse characteristics?

TALIA Yeah and I think that ... you know, being in a very corporate environment, these ... these are groups where you'll find that people will share a bit more of themselves ordinarily. But I think especially in ... in this situation people are being actually, within those groups, much more open ... which is great because, you know, they know those people and they don't know them because they work with them and they're in their team necessarily. They know them as part of, you know, the Multi-Cultural Network, the Working Families' Network, the 50:50 Network so there is that kind of relationship there ... and I think, yeah, it's ... you know, it's kind of, you know, for now, focus on wellbeing and then, later, when we look back, we could really think about how we can engage them to make sure that, you know, D&I doesn't fall off the agenda, that as we're bringing people back from things like furlough, that we are looking at, you know, who got furloughed and who comes back? You know, what's been the impact on women, for example, you know, balancing childcare more potentially, you know. So I think there's ... yeah ... it's ... it's a kind of ... it's softer touch at the moment but I think, you know, keeping them going and keeping the activity going in some way is going to be really beneficial as we sort of ... move to the next phase, whatever that may look like. Return to normal although ... does normal exist anymore?

(both laugh)

TALIA What's normal? Who knows?

FJ New normal. New normal.

TALIA New normal, yeah.

FJ And ... and very interestingly, one of the questions I was going to ask you actually is about the impact ... and the perception from senior leaders or the wider business about the value of networks. So you talked then about ... having to keep[D&I on the agenda. Do you think leaders are ... are starting to value the benefit they get from networks and seeing it as a real positive thing to have in this time or actually are you fighting a bit of a battle to their attention? Where ... what's that feeling like inside your organisation?

TALIA Yeah, I think that what's ... definitely been apparent is the leaders have noticed that there are groups that they can draw upon ... if they want to get a certain perspective so we had, for example ... a Working Families' Forum that we did with about 60 people ... which initially was pushed out through our Working Families' Network and that was our Regional Managing Partner who wanted to do that and it was a really, you know, an ... an informal opportunity, a few people shared, you know, what their situation was, you know, how they're balancing work, what their partners are doing, you know, how many children they have, how old their children are ... you know, what they're doing about home-schooling ... so I think ... you know, that was a real go-to for our Regional Managing Partner. You know, OK, we need to understand what our people need ... what our people with children need but you had a readymade group there to go to, to reach out to and ... and engage with. So, yeah, I think that ... I mean on a very practical level when we're all remote and it's like Who do I reach out to? If you've got an email list of, you know, of people who are in the network, that's just a very easy ... practical way of saying OK, here's this question, well, we've got this group of people that we can ask immediately about that. So, yes, and I think that ... there's definitely ... there's a lot of transparency within the organisation about the challenges going forward and ... a ... a kind of ... a ... a commitment is that it's kind of coming through that we don't want this to be ... I think in general a lot of business are doing this ... we don't want this to be another 2008,

you know, D&I can't slip off the agenda ... like it did perhaps because it just showed later down the line, two or three years down the line, you had gaps in recruitment. You know, you didn't have enough lawyers who were three years' qualified ... because there'd been less recruitment in 2010/2011 so, yeah, I think that it's more, kind of, you know the same can't happen again. So we're just trying, our team, as much as possible to engage as many leaders ... use our sponsors that we have as well ... to keep those conversations ... on the agenda wherever possible.

FJ And ... I'd like to talk about challenges in a minute and ... and the future but, just before we go there, have you ... you've seen a lot of change with the ... the different ways of working ... on remote working and flexible working etc - have you changed how you are measuring and demonstrating your impact at all? Have you changed what you're doing as a ... a sort of D&I ... professional?

TALIA So it's a good question. I think we haven't ... yeah, it's the kind of the next step ... we haven't really sort of ... I suppose got to that point yet because ... I think because it depends on where you are ... you know, how your D&I teams are set up. Because we also look after wellbeing, there's been an overwhelming focus on wellbeing over the last kind of few weeks ... and certainly at the beginning, you know, we had an avalanche of stuff that was coming through so, yeah, for ... for the moment we haven't ... yeah, we haven't sort of looked at that and we ... we have a change actually in our organisation that our Regional Managing Partner is actually going to be moving to a Global Managing Partner for D&I and Responsible Business role in July so it's this kind of additional layer of ... I mean we don't know what's happening with Covid; we know there's going to be this restructure. They're ... they're also restructuring our regions globally so there's a lot of change happening within our organisation ... so we're just kind of waiting, I suppose, to see, you know, how that moves forward and ... which teams sort of fall under her and how we're all going to work together. So everything ... everything's changing basically at Hogan Lovells. They're putting it all in ... at the same time.

FJ Yeah ... yeah ... it sounds ... sounds very exciting actually ... sounds like a great opportunity. So, from that perspective ...

TALIA Yeah, it's a new role.

FJ Yeah so ... so from that perspective, what do you think ... sorry ... what do you think are the biggest challenges that you've had and what are the biggest positives that you've seen throughout the situation?

TALIA So I'll start with the positives because I just did the positive psychology webinar ... and I think ... I think the biggest positive has been proving that people can work remotely and that they ... they work. They will work when they are remote. There is definitely ... I mean, not just within our organisation, more widely, you know, it's a societal thing – can we have people working ... half of their time, all of their time at home? Do you get the same productivity? And I think that we've proven very quickly that actually Yes, we can do that. It was also very positive, you know, that the tech ... the tech worked, you know, we ... we were able ... where everybody is doing everything remotely, the tech continues to work, you continue to have support ... so I think that's something, you know, and that's being spoken about a lot at the moment and I think that will stay and that will be positive for a number of people and offer greater flexibility. You know, and even me, as a person who doesn't have children, maybe I'll work ... some days from home more than I used to after this. But I think the challenges that come along with that are really ... especially in the kind of wellbeing space, that we just don't, you know, we're not ... we've kind of gone into this very quickly but we haven't sort of been prepared to go into this so the ... you know, switching off from work, you know, making sure that you have a wind-down routine, making sure you sleep a lot. I think there's probably a lot of negative there. You know, we don't understand everybody's individual situation ... so there's definitely a challenge in terms of, you know, that ... that's a huge negative. I think ...

with some of the kind of ... having a lack of face to face stuff as well, especially, I think, with some of the networks and some of the big ... you know, the big ticket events that we'll do, like our Pride Lunch, you know, Pride Month is next month and we have a huge client lunch, 150 people and it's, you know, really the kind of cherry on top for the Pride Network ... and that's not going to happen and that's a very difficult thing to recreate remotely. That cannot be recreated remotely. You cannot get that level of client engagement. You know, you ... you ... you can't do that so ... that's ... that's a negative but I suppose, on the plus side, you know, it demands greater creativity. You know, you've got to really, really think What can we do remotely that's ... that's going to land and that's going to have any kind of gravitas ... short of doing another webinar which I think we're all a bit webinar'd out at the moment. So, yeah, there's ... you know, I think, we've got to try and balance it, you know, there are a lot of negatives but there are some positive things that are definitely going to come out of this and ... and lead to a better kind of ... work ... work/life balance for all of us.

FJ Yes ... so ... and potentially some more innovation in thinking in how we approach things and what you're saying, if we ... if the old doesn't work, where's ... have you got any examples of anything you can see that's sort of innovated in how it's an approach?

TALIA Well, I suppose that with ... I mean, with the Pride Network, something that ... I think with all of our networks and with networks in general, there can sometimes be like a go to for events. It's like What should we do? We should do an event but then, you know, short of having, you know, the wider ... you know, and we talked about this on the E&LP, like, what are you doing the event for? How are you measuring that success? How does it fit into your strategy? How does it fit into everything? So that's not really an option anymore. So we ... you've got to be a bit more creative ... and because the Pride Network can't have this, you know, big ticket event that they normally have, they're looking at doing a podcast series ... with some of our clients so with representatives of Pride Network ... you know, Chairs or maybe other senior people in their organisations over June, talking about, you know, some of the things that ... you know, we've done, even if it's some of the things that we've done previously in our network; how their networks work so I think, you know, there's an opportunity there to sort of press pause, do something a bit different and ... and actually engage more with networks ... at other organisations especially at our clients because, for us, working ... you know, beyond legal services' delivery, how does a law firm differentiate itself? You know, really hoping our cause can only differentiate itself, or any law firm, by its culture ... and by things it does in the D&I space and how innovative it is. You know, you're going to get a lawyer to write a contract for you for something, you could have that lawyer from Hogan Lovells, Freshfields, anywhere – it doesn't make a difference. So, clients help us to drive D&I a lot but we often don't have time, for example, yet to go out and find the other Pride Network, LGBT network Chairs, Co-Chairs, reps at Barclays, at Facebook, at Google ... and engage with them a lot. So I think there'll be more opportunity to do that; to take a bit of a step back ... and build some of those relationships which, ultimately, when we can go back and we can do events and we can, you know get together face to face, that foundation will have kind of already been set. So, yeah, I think that's ... yeah, that's a way, one way, you know, doing a podcast series, for example, that we're sort of branching out a little bit more than ... we would never do that normally, you know. It would never happen. It would always be Let's do this big event ... hey, you know, this is what we've always done.

FJ That sounds like a real positive, actually, because it's changing the thinking and it's moving us into different places in terms of ... of exciting, different ways to do the same thing ... without doing the same thing. Building that relationship with ...

TALIA Yeah

FJ ... sounds really positive.

TALIA Yeah ... absolutely. Absolutely.