

1.  
Title Page

2.  
Coming up in this module, we'll be looking at the meaning and application of intersectionality. We'll also be using this to encourage you to think about the diversity of your team and how you can get the best from other networks. We'll give some tips for good allyship and see an example of a network activity aimed at allies. And we'll conclude by seeing how sharing skills is good for widening your network.

3.  
Intersectionality is a somewhat reviled term in right-leaning media, because it is misinterpreted as an attempt at creating social division and labelling the victimisation of anyone who is not a cisgendered white male. By looking at its history, it can help us explain how it was born out of, and still best applies to, systems of discrimination, rather than individuals.

It was coined by professor Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 and remained in the relative obscurity of the law until recently. It describes how race, class, gender, and other individual characteristics "intersect" with one another and overlap. But far from creating a hierarchy of oppression with black women at the top, Crenshaw was seeking to apply this idea to demolish hierarchies altogether.

She observed that equality did not arrive because of the arrival of the civil rights acts in 1965, but remained due to the "stubborn endurance of the structures of white dominance"

As an example, *DeGraffenreid v. General Motors* was a 1976 case in which five black women sued General Motors for a seniority policy that they argued targeted black women exclusively. This is because the company didn't hire black women before 1964, meaning that when seniority-based layoffs arrived during an early 1970s recession, all the black women hired after 1964 were subsequently laid off. A policy like that didn't fall under just gender or just race discrimination. But the court decided that efforts to bind together both racial discrimination and sex discrimination claims — rather than sue on the basis of each separately — would be unworkable.

Crenshaw argues in her paper that by treating black women as purely women or purely black, the courts, as they did in 1976, have repeatedly ignored specific challenges that face black women as a group.

Crenshaw is now wryly unsurprised that the term gets misused now, and tries to clarify that. "Intersectionality was a prism to bring to light dynamics within discrimination law that weren't being appreciated by the courts. In particular, courts seem to think that race discrimination was what happened to all black people across gender and sex discrimination was what happened to all women."

As networks what we need to understand is the danger of creating a single narrative of who

our members are, and what challenges they face.

Jump to 2015 and “intersectionality” makes its debut in the Oxford English Dictionary. It’s going on Women’s Marches, to the Oscars courtesy of Salma Hayek, and its popularity starts to receive the inevitable backlash. Most critics will still acknowledge that the original theory is sound, but object to its application, because it threatens, as they see it, their right to an identity without admitting guilt. This is explored more fully in an article I’ve linked to from your Further Reading, but it concludes: “The observance of power imbalances, as is so frequently true, is far less controversial than the tool that could eliminate them.”

#### 4.

Intersectionality as it is applied continues to evolve, and we see this in the form of networks collaborating together on mutually relevant projects. Here is an example from RBS who brought together their Jewish and LGBT network for Holocaust memorial day. They said:

*“We’re delighted that we’ve received a very positive response to our event. It’s the first time our employee-led networks have come together to support Holocaust Memorial Day.*

*We are very grateful to the Holocaust survivor who will share her incredible story with us and we will also be screening a film about LGBT victims of the Holocaust.*

*The theme of ‘Don’t stand by’ mirrors our bank values from an inclusion and diversity perspective as well as in speaking up and calling out any wrongdoing.”*

For networks, this has the practical advantage of potentially doubling their audience, sharing their budget, and the time they have to work on putting on an event. And for the audience, it shifts the focus of what you’re trying to achieve away from any individual group of people, and posits it as a problem that is more systemic.

#### 5.

Many networks now also collaborate across organisational boundaries. Inclusion is an area which rarely sparks competition, and instead inspires the sharing of best practice, so external events are great for this. The example we have here is the campaign “This is me” which was a cross-London effort to remove the stigma of mental health and involved a number of organisations especially in the banking and legal sectors.

We spoke further with the City of London corporation about their activities in the intersection of networks and organisations. They told us that due to limited budgets and similar themes (for example mental health) they often host joint events internally. And externally they’ve been working closely with other City businesses on joint events, and Islington council who house the London Metropolitan Archives about LGBT history).

All their networks meet quarterly and share work plans for the upcoming quarter. There are often crossovers so they ask whether they can be hosted jointly. If it is a bigger event they will engage the appropriate network further in advance and this is often by the network who has the most resources (people wise) and can commit the time to organise.

They identified some pros and cons to this. The pros being that they can share resources (both time and money), and get different types of speakers who will often speak on intersectional topics. In the cons, networks may have differing ambitions and also commitments. So you need to be clear at the start of the process what is being committed by each network.

## 6.

This week's recommended interviews include Keela Shackell-Smith from the Cabinet Office and Simon Langley from Royal London Group. Both observe that with increased remote collaboration and online communication, networks are seeking to pool resources and host combined events, which has naturally led to an increase in attention of intersectionality. By simply including more people in the conversation new opportunities have emerged as a grassroots effort. Simon also mentions that it's valuable to think about the diversity of your skills and how you can share them as a team, so we'll be exploring that shortly. And as a call-back to the previous module about your video call background, you can see Keela's gone for the inclusive Pride flag. Find the full interviews in your bonus content which includes more about how they've used events with broad appeal to deliver more inclusive messages.

## 7.

It's important that as a network you practice what you preach - and turn the diversity and inclusion lens in on yourself. A useful question to regularly ask yourself is - how diverse is your network?

For example you might think about characteristics - do you know the spread of ethnicity in your gender network? Do you understand the spread of neurodiversity and the network opportunities you are offering to different people?

Experience - Is your committee equally represented by experienced and beginner network members, and this applies to experience within your organisation too. This really helps with keeping ideas fresh, and making sure you have a resilient network of the future, for when people move on, or get too busy.

Voice - So not only do you have a diverse network, but you include their voices too. This is more about examining the way you work to encourage diverse thinking, than it is focusing on any individual identity. But also think about the way you amplify voices, and whether the stories and opinions you gather and share are representative of your diversity.

And practical work-based things like the location of office, home-working, or flexible working also have an impact on the diversity of your network. Many networks fall into the trap of having face-to-face meetings in the organisation's main HQ, which reduces the diversity of input you can get based on changing cultures from a national or global perspective.

When assessing the intersectionality within your network, try asking questions in an open chat platform to encourage discussion and generate ideas for how you can support individuals as well as openly celebrate and demonstrate that diversity. You may want to use this to challenge some myths about intersectionality too. The great part about doing this in a chat forum, as we saw in the previous module with Lockheed Martin, is it can spin off into other chat threads that have a targeted strategy for new members to work on.

In your worksheets we've offered some conversation starters that you may want to apply to your network communications.

## 8.

When engaging with other networks, think about how you can first of all set the scene so that you get the best from this intersectional collaboration. Make sure you take an interest in their vision and strategy as well as their broader motivations, and share yours. What is their strategy to success? Ask how it has developed over time – it may be that they're a little ahead or behind you and could provide or use support. Be aware that although you should both be connected with the organisational and D&I strategy, you will apply them slightly differently depending on the needs of your network. Pay special attention to how they can help you understand your obligations around their activity (and vice versa)?

Identify and articulate to them exactly how you feel you could benefit each other. How does that fit with the overall branding of diversity and inclusion in the organisation, while maintaining your own individual identities. The clearer you communicate why you're working together on a particular project, the less likely you are to receive objections from members that feel an intersectional focus will dilute your focus as a network.

One of the great benefits of inter-network collaboration is sharing resources. So audit your own potential offering, and understand theirs too. This will apply to budget, what event space and sponsor support you have, how much time you have to work on projects, and what your network reach is according to influence and communications. Laying this out clearly will help ground expectations of who will be accountable for each stage.

While you're assessing how much time you have to offer, don't forget to think about, and perhaps challenge who the best people are to lead on this. It doesn't have to be anyone who's previously led an effort. You may find that certain members of your network are also members of another network. Use that opportunity of intersectional conversation to discover new ideas, leadership, and direction.

Early on, you will also want to think about how your audience's interact. Is this a common network pairing where the benefit is easily understood - for example in the history of intersectionality it was demonstrated between gender and ethnicity, or is it an opportunity to dispel some myths about how networks typically intersect. For example, we've some events between Faith groups and LGBT+ groups which were focused on addressing any perceived areas of conflict. Anticipating how you audiences might freely mix or not should help inform your content, and also the approach you should take to enable productive networking.

## 9.

When you're looking to widen your network by engaging allies, it's important to set out exactly what that means. Because it's easier to say you're an ally than take the necessary

actions for that to be effective.

As with all network activity, impact is in the doing to address systemic problems, not just proclaiming identity. For that reason, before we get on to some guidelines for allyship, let's address some of the common mistakes with a list of things they probably shouldn't do.

Don't expect to be taught or shown: Allies shouldn't need someone to hold their hand. Yes, we may want to engage them by running educational events (and we'll look at one in a bit). We may want to be available to answer questions. But, people are accountable for their own knowledge, especially given we live in an information age. And they should first try to educate themselves before relying on other communities to do it for them.

Don't compare oppression: Some allies will see this as a way to show empathy. They understand your struggle because they've had one too. It's better as an ally to listen and acknowledge their circumstance without drawing comparison. This doesn't solve the issue, and is an attempt to place yourself into their narrative.

Don't be "an expert": as much as good allies will come to understand their role in your network efforts, they should not present themselves as an authority, because they will always lack the lived experience. This doesn't mean they won't have a lot to offer, or achieve great things, but allies should not become liberators in their own right.

Don't take undue credit: leading on from that, it's important not to overplay your impact. It's very likely that an ally's work is building upon the efforts of many people who have come before them. Just because you had additional power to make change, does not mean you were the force behind it.

Don't assume that everyone is oppressed: there can be a temptation by allies to understand everyone's personal struggle. As we've seen in the roots of intersectionality, just because systemic oppression exists, does not mean that always manifests as proof within an individual. Many people in networks would prefer to keep an even balance of power, and not rely on allies as the unoppressed majority.

Allies themselves are subject to systemic oppression and need to acknowledge that their words and actions have been shaped by that. There will be many things they need to learn and unlearn, and accept that there will be mistakes. Allies who do not own their role in this but proudly declare their allyship could be doing more harm than good, because they present themselves as a trusted stakeholder, without doing the work to make positive impact.

## 10.

Many would-be allies fear making these mistakes because the repercussions could be being labelled as a bigot. We see this often in modern "cancel culture". So you might want to consider how your network, or even collaborating with other networks, can create a helpful guide to being a good ally. Here are five to get you started, which you'll find in your workbook. You may want to elaborate on how this specifically applies to your network or organisation to make it more convincing as a narrative.

First of all, they should "take on the issues". This means owning them for yourself, not just talking about them at a distance. For casual allies, they can dip in and out of particular struggles or projects, dealing with them when it's convenient, and switching off when it's not. Good allyship is never switching off, because the community your allying yourself to, cannot do that.

Speak out is about knowing that the repercussions for calling out unfair behaviour, for example, will be less detrimental to you, than the people you're supporting. This does not mean putting their words in your mouth, but showing how you really believe what you're saying.

Transferring power is important in any network - that's how are supposed to exist, in a resilient, sharing, uncentred way. With allies, it's about knowing what privilege you have, and attempting to share that as much as you can with the people you have around you. Stepping up to a platform yourself is one thing, but sharing that platform is better.

Decentering yourself is about not letting your story overtake that of the systemic problem. Inspirational speakers can be...inspirational, for a short time. But impactful activities, as we've seen previously, are always going to be about doing, problem solving, and regular active behaviour change.

Own your education is a good tip for allies because they probably will be awaiting instructions from you, if they're new to the game. We see this particularly in sponsors and senior stakeholders. Both parties are often waiting to hear what is expected from the other, and it results in misunderstanding and inaction. We'll look at that more in the sponsors and stakeholders module.

## 11.

This case study is from Protiviti, who you may have already heard from in our bonus interview content talking about the success of their now award-winning allies programme. Well here is where it began, with an educational webinar, in collaboration with Radius, where we spoke live with senior stakeholders and sponsors to try and set the scene for why their first employee network had been launched. It was recorded and then shared globally

on their intranet. The aim was to start right at the beginning so that no matter what their understanding, potential allies could follow the topic of conversation - this meant explaining basics like what do the letters LGBT stand for?

Potential allies can be nervous to support a network because they think there's a barrier of understanding and experience. In particular, acronyms, jargon, slang can be isolating. By offering some really basic information, you're showing it's OK not to know this stuff yet, and you're here to help educate. Although as we've explained, once a person decides to actively become an ally, education is largely their own responsibility. In this way we see the difference between attracting potential ally activities, and active allyship. Attending one of these sessions does not qualify allyship.

After a soft intro, you can begin to ramp up the complexity so that they also don't feel like they're being talked down-to. OK, they used a child's illustration here, but the genderbread person is tried and tested and really does help people understand the continuum that is gender identity, gender expression, biological sex, and sexual orientation. I've put a link to that resource in your further reading if you'd like to see more:

## 12.

Along with basic background information, it's good if you can bring it to the present day to show that your network strategy evolves, and it's not just a monolith of inclusive wishful thinking that will never come to be.

Because they're an international firm, they wanted to show the situation from a global and legal perspective. This indicates that your network is not just here for personal, one-location issues, it's a business issue too that affects how you address staff relocations and secondment. Many potential allies may not have realised that in addition to all the countries that actively criminalise LGBT+ people, there are many that simply do not offer protection either, and so it would be unreasonable to ask staff to put themselves at risk by working in other locations without having a conversation about that first.

If you can add current news stories into the mix, this also helps people realise that the need to keep up to date with issues is part of your network effort, and consequently, that of an ally. This chart in particular was making the case for allies, showing the comparative difference between what people who are straight-identifying worry about, versus LGBT+ identifying people. The large ring is highlighting that tolerance for people of other sexualities and genders is of top-three importance to 44% of LGBT+ people, but only 3% of straight people. It would seem those people are disproportionately more concerned about immigration and terrorism. If you want to read more about that, it's in your further reading.

And in their educational webinar conclusion, they made sure to ask for action: educate your teams, speak out about misconceptions, join ally events, and at the very least, go away and tell one other person about this webinar. You may want to take a similar approach.

## 13.

Shifting gear slightly, we're returning to the issue of how you construct a well-rounded team and therefore a wider network. One of the ways you can approach this is not through intersectional identity audits, but simply understanding what skills everyone has to bring to the table. A sports-team for example doesn't need 12 goalkeepers. Why, in particular, is skill-sharing so good for networks, well here are our top reasons...

1. Shared knowledge is more comprehensive - like any peer-reviewed article, or the collective intelligence of Wikipedia, a network of skills and experience gets better the larger and more secure your network connections. Don't let things sit in the minds of a small committee, or best practice document. Constantly building the touchpoints of your network - in this case people - is the key to deeper and broader knowledge.

2. Shared knowledge lasts longer - Sharing skills and knowledge outside of our own head is one of the things which defines us as a species. That ability to teach beyond first-hand experience means we can learn anything at any time, and that those skills don't leave a culture with an individual. By regularly sharing your unique skills and viewpoints, you make it less of a risk that those skills leave with you as you maybe move on to other work. Make your networks sustainable by putting your cards on the table.

3. Agile teams make light work - by sharing specialist tasks between networks, you can make lighter work of bigger strategies. For example, let's say you have a data specialist among your committee in one network, and a writer among your committee in another network. By having a co-working session you can find effective ways to better communicate how you're measuring impact across both networks. The idea is to stop struggling through the parts you find difficult, and get to know each other's strengths, as you would in any other department of your organisation.

4. Strength in unity - Getting people in your network on the same page is important, not only for better achieving your strategy, but also to feel united in how you're going to approach it. There are many reasons why people join employee networks, but that feeling of belonging, and being supported in your career advancement is certainly one of them. This is a good practical way to show that you take that seriously, and you're not just a social group.

## 14.

Sharing your expertise not only helps others in their professional endeavours, it also helps you. Here's how...

1. It engrains what you know.

Nothing helps deepen knowledge as effectively as sharing it. Things you've begun to take for granted all of a sudden have to be re-explained and re-contextualised, and this shows you really how far you've come since you first started developing these skills.

2. It expands what you know.

Sharing your expertise means inviting a new conversation. If you keep your eyes, ears, and mind open, you may learn something in the process as well.

3. It establishes your reputation as an authority.

If you want to be seen as a leader in your field, you have to stand up and be vocal about what you have to offer. But instead of *telling* people you're an expert, give them a taste in a way that helps raise their level of expertise too.

4. It increases your professional value.



When your expertise helps the entire team, you become a more valuable part of it. Your presence is worth more to the organisation—and that can translate into tangible rewards. And if you're worried about putting yourself forward as an expert because it might seem arrogant; sharing your wisdom with the people around you is not an activity born from the ego. It's about being of service. It's about them, not you. Giving, not gloating.

## 15.

Here's a starter of five ways you might consider sharing your skills. There also room in your worksheet to plan this with your active network.

### 1. Become a Mentor

There's no shortage of young professionals looking for guidance. When you see a newbie with potential but in need of support, take that person under your wing. Share the hard earned lessons you've collected over the years.

At the same time, be open to new experiences. After all, the best part about mentorship is that—when it's a strong partnership—both people learn equally. As a mentor, you'll gain a new perspective about the work you do.

### 2. Write

The written word is always a wonderful tool for reaching others. Consider writing an article for a publication catering to your industry or profession. Nothing is more empowering than putting your thoughts out there for the world to see.

Plus, as a published author—whether online or in print—you're automatically afforded a certain level of authority. It seems strange, but writers are presumed to be experts (sadly, even if they have no clue what they're saying).

My point, however, is this: A few bylines can quickly elevate your professional visibility and shape your reputation as a leader in your field. Just be sure that whatever you put into writing is something you stand by wholeheartedly and are proud of...because it creates a permanent record that can and will follow you for the rest of your career.

### 3. Train Others

Offer to present on a topic of interest at a local industry conference, network event, or meeting of your professional association. Host a lunch and learn event at your company. Present what you know with confidence, in a way that engages and enlightens your audience. Remember not to talk "down" to people; as the instructor, part of your role is to tap the wisdom in the room. Open the conversation so others can share their expertise as well. Don't presume you're the only one with something to say.

Training others in any setting, big or small, will help boost your public speaking skills (incredibly valuable for any profession) and position you as an authority. Just like writing, standing in front of a room creates automatic credibility.

### 4. Be a Resource

When you read an exceptionally helpful article, stumble upon a useful new piece of information, or find a more effective way of doing things, don't keep it to yourself. Each and every day, you likely have something worthwhile to share that could be beneficial to your colleagues. You don't have to wait for a formal training session or explicit request for help. Instead, simply shoot off an email to your co-workers that says something like:

"I found this article really helpful. Thought you might enjoy it too.", or "Not sure if you knew this, but I just figured out that XYZ software has this really cool hidden feature! Here's a

step-by-step on how to use it just in case it's new for you too."

Imagine if one of your colleagues did this for you. How would you feel? How would you view that person? Your small gesture can positively influence someone, so it's definitely worth the few minutes required.

#### 5. Take the Lead

If you have special expertise that could be beneficial to a particular task or project, don't be afraid to take the reins. We often see highly experienced folks who don't want the responsibility of leadership, so they sit back and keep their mouths shut. Then, after the project is under way, they slowly let it be known that they have expertise that could have been helpful but no one listened to them...

Don't make people beg for your help or insight. Volunteer it. Step up and offer to guide the ship if you know you'd make a good captain. If you have something to contribute, get out front. Just remember that the best leaders encourage everyone on the team to share their expertise too.

#### 16.

To conclude, what does widening your network really mean? Rather than seeing this as marketing to a wider audience, this is more about actively seeking out opportunities for collaboration and sharing. Engaging a wider network by actually doing stuff together. Visualise those interconnected nodes and you will see that the more of them you have, the more resilient and powerful your network will be.

Next time, we'll be looking at how modern organisations use strong networks in their everyday work, and use diverse thinking to push innovation.