

1.

Title card

2.

Coming up, we'll be thinking about more than network strategy, we'll be thinking about strategies that are networked. From influencing your organisation to collaborating across boundaries. We'll see how some network leaders have gone on to become consulting specialists, and extend their developmental guidance across the whole organisation. We'll also be offering some progressive economic models to help challenge the typical business cases for employee networks and evolve the way you work with external stakeholders.

3.

In the earlier stages of building your network strategy, you will have realised the importance of seeing it as a subsection of the D&I strategy, which in turn emerges from the organisational strategy - nested like concentric rings. But as your network matures you will want to develop and challenge the flow of influence throughout these strategies, so that you're not only seen as a subset, but an important stakeholder within the D&I strategy. This means seeing it more as an ecosystem of networks, wherein you are the specialist in your area, and will be consulted in that manner across the organisation, not only about your network activities.

Within this ecosystem there are also other employee networks to take into account. Do you assess the synergy of your intersectional strategies before putting them into action - because this means not only listening to the needs of your members, but the needs of a much broader community.

You may also be ready to think of putting your network leadership on to a global platform - whether that's joining an existing global committee, or establishing it with your network for the first time. In this instance the strategic preparation that needs to take place to account for a global community should not be underestimated. You cannot simply invite the organisation to your existing network, which is based on a local strategy and identity. You should research what localisation needs there are to address, and find local advocates to help you execute your strategy in different regions. This is best achieved with full executive support due to the nature of increased resource demand, and advocating in other regions.

With sharing power and knowledge as a key feature of network strategy, you should be able to take inspiration from the organisation, from other networks, and from other regions, and in turn, influence them too. But to get there you will need to have trusted connections, clear communication, and a reputation for inclusive and impactful leadership. We advise beginner networks to create a stakeholder map with living information about how they are engaging with different stakeholders. If this is a practice you once did, but have abandoned, we encourage you to think again, because as your strategy grows in ambition to be more influential, you will need to remember who you are influencing, why, and how. It makes good sense to combine your stakeholder mapping and strategic planning skills into a living project management tool, which will also help you measure your progress, accountability and impact.

4.

If influencing the organisation more broadly is appealing, then you will want to consider models for change, like Organisational Development. Dr David Zatz maintained that this approach looked at organisations as complex living systems, and that every department or process affected each other. One change in an area could affect the whole business, and so OD helps to identify what parts connect and how they might be damaged or improved.

Key to successful OD is that it places people at the heart of the process - and that could be anyone within the organisation. There are four easy-sounding steps to a typical process, so we'll go through these with reference to your employee network.

Step one - define the problem.

Let's say your network has seen a noticeable drop in morale lately. Your well-meaning events manager suggests a celebration for the upcoming awareness month will lift spirits. But further investigation suggests that there has been a lot of informal chat about a recent press article which criticised an insensitive marketing campaign by your organisation. A party isn't going to solve that. You realise that this is a challenge that extends beyond your network.

Step two - diagnose the cause.

Depending on the problem, this might involve focus groups, surveys, looking at data, or talking with senior management. In this instance you realise you need to talk with someone in marketing to find the relevant stakeholders. If you are going to use this as an opportunity to find the real grassroots issue, and change behaviours, then you need to make sure this is done without putting anyone in defensive mode - it might just be the toughest part of the whole process. You find a network member who is close to the issue and use their assumed trust to get you past this hurdle. The marketing team responsible say that they were likewise mortified by the campaign, but they'd outsourced it to an agency because they were so busy, and had not seen it for approval. You may now be convinced that what you thought was a cultural problem is more about process - or you may continue to dig deeper in this stage, but eventually you'll need to decide you're ready to act.

Step three - design and act.

Remembering that this is a process which puts people at the centre and sees the organisation as a complex ecosystem, you won't want to just hand this problem on to HR, or Marketing, or your own network, but involve many stakeholders, diverse in their roles and character. In this instance the network suggests external agencies and any partners that the organisation works with should have well developed D&I practices. Someone from finance observes that it would have saved them more money and pain in the long run if they'd never used an agency but kept such an important campaign in-house. The marketing suggest that their deadlines should never be shortened, as they were in this case, because it leaves them unable to properly execute their planned strategy. PR suggests they should meet with employee networks to help them prepare statements for the next time this happens. You can see how there are different valid solutions, but more importantly how by working as a network and understanding the rippling effect that every action has, you can have more consideration in general as a workforce. It might seem strange to say the ultimate reaction of an employee network, faced with an unacceptable marketing campaign would be to advocate for more empathetic decision making as a work-culture, rather than to make a statement about how they were affected as individuals - but that's maybe a sign of maturity.

Step four - evaluate and embed.

The action may not work, it may need tweaking, or changing altogether. You should be clear about measurements and accountability. While the marketing team in this instance may have been made accountable for all output, even if it's an agency, you may have made yourself accountable for seeing an improvement in the original situation you observed - the morale of your membership. Did you take the time to explain what you did about it, and how they can contribute to ongoing efforts? Did giving your members power for change enhance their morale more than free canapes? Hopefully the answer is yes.

If you want to know more about the behavioural science behind this there's a recommendation in your further reading.

5.

Another aspect which strengthens your strategic influence within the organisation is to clearly partner on multi-network strategies with demonstrable outcomes. We have two recent examples to help illustrate this.

A wellbeing network was spearheading a project to introduce designated mental health first-aiders into the workplace. After successful sign-off from the leadership team, they received only a few applications for the training, all of whom were in the network, and sat in the same department. They realised this wouldn't have the intended impact due to lack of reach, and so revisited the assumptions of their strategy. They had believed that if they obtained the training and permission, that people would come to them for it. What was missing was the assessment of how they find the volunteers, and ensure that they are diverse. Rather than go through another marketing and comms campaign, they decided to ask the other networks directly to find a representative within their membership, and make it part of their upcoming strategy to contribute to how this project would now develop.

This has the impact of recruiting a broader spread of volunteers, but also exposed particular issues regarding mental health within different communities. By working together they were able to provide more robust guidance than had initially been offered, and show the organisation the value of having networks to rely on when hierarchical team dynamics might fall short.

In our second example an LGBT+ network wanted to introduce rainbow lanyards for a project on encouraging more open allyship. One member of the network leadership team had experience of this in a previous organisation and told their story. What had initially been seen as a successful campaign had led to tensions further down the line when other networks also introduced their own allyship lanyards. Before long empathetic D&I leaders were practically suffering from neck injuries from all the symbols of allyship they felt they had to wear. And so the LGBT+ network reached out to the other networks to see whether they could create a combined strategy plan to engage allies in a non-competing way. Before they even arrived a conclusion, they began by exploring their own allyship practices towards each other, and realised they were not as active as they could be, because they were so busy representing their own networks. This led to the realisation that allyship should be a conscious effort, and not a display of intent. This led to the creation of an allyship week in which all the networks offered tangible ways to allyship, no matter which characteristic you were affiliated with. Potential allies were then faced with describing the actions they had taken, rather than showing to which community they had allied themselves.

6.

Your legacy plans may include moving from being the network lead, to an ongoing specialist - many other leads have taken this route and it's a great way to develop your career too. Take a moment to remember what people expected from you as a leader when you started, versus what you have to offer now. Hopefully, you can see what a journey you've been on, and better understand your own strengths and experience. We often hear that in the first few months of leadership, people are overwhelmed by others thinking they have all the answers, and can speak for an entire community. This is your chance to communicate exactly what answers you have, and who you now speak for.

Organisations often confer with specialists externally such as agencies or individual consultants, but they may also use your network, or cross-company focus groups. Here are some tips for budding specialists.

- 1) Take a holistic view. If you're being asked to advise the organisation, remember you're not just representing your network community anymore, and should reflect that in your approach.
- 2) Define your scope. Remember you may not be working to a grand vision anymore, but within a specific set of parameters. Your advice should be based on what they are able to achieve, not what you would like to see. Focus on a few key decisions at a time and see how it goes.
- 3) Build a relationship. Teams usually engage specialists because they want a new trusted stakeholder, not just a set of instructions. Think about the kind of conversations that make you trust other people in the workplace, and make opportunity for that. Also find ways to continue that relationship even after the project is over.
- 4) Track progress. One good way to continue your relationship is to track their ongoing progress. This should also help you realise what has the most impact among the advice you're giving, so you can adjust your approach with other projects too. You can also use this to continue building up the business case for employee networks, and proving the career development opportunities that come with voluntary leadership.

7.

A key tip to executing your strategy faster, is to identify the activation point. Simply put, this is how many people you would need to convince, in order to get the behavioural or process change you need. It is almost always smaller than you think. And so the work is identifying exactly who that is, and what it would take to influence them. This is how successful protest movements operate with limited resources, by putting pressure on leaders that will actually act, and also be followed by others. It's a relief to your committee when you realise that spending time trying to lobby an immovable object is not the best strategy. There are usually smaller rocks you can move to create a better landscape.

By choosing the most influential targets and changing their behaviour you create a new social norm, into which others are invited. This creates positive opportunity, rather than focussing on the guilt of wrongdoing. As an example, an environmental group who had campaigned for home improvement retailers to sell sustainable wood had not met with success on a large scale. Their efforts were focussed on the message, and retailers as a whole. When they shifted their attention to only one retailer - the largest in the region - with a consistent and repeated campaign, they managed to convince them to adopt new sustainable practices. That retailer had

established a new social norm, and also developed a brand advantage over others. Shortly afterwards, most retailers followed suit so that they were not defined by being the outsiders who held on to outdated practices.

As networks, this suggests that an awareness campaign may be taking up resources that could be more focussed on specific change-makers. For example, do your most influential senior managers endorse your awareness campaign, or do they actively demonstrate the changes you're campaigning for, and make it unacceptable not to.

We've laid out some key questions for you to answer in your worksheet which will help you strategically target your activation point.

8.

Networks and D&I professionals are often frustrated at having to make the business case again and again to people who want to hear first about how it will affect the bottom line. This situation can be reflective of shareholder capitalism, in which the dominant metric is how much profit is made for shareholders and executives, sometimes at the expense of customers, employees, the environment, and society as a whole.

More recently, economists and organisations have started to embrace the values associated with stakeholder capitalism, which rejects the idea of maximising one value to the exclusion of others, and encourages compromise to balance the needs of all stakeholders. For employee networks this is an opportunity to push back against the business case as it may have traditionally been understood. For example, how is the organisation monitoring its impact on all stakeholders, and how does the strategy reflect that? On the positive end of this zeitgeist, we've seen new ethical businesses emerge, which we'll look at on the next slide. But it's also a structure which is quite easily adopted without committing to any real change. As shareholders and executives are indeed also stakeholders, existing practices fit in part under this new model, and PR can be used to put a gloss on how the organisation is fulfilling the needs of their other stakeholders - like society in general. If networks are to say that fairness is a core value of their existence, then they should take account of their role in any potential PR glossing. You may recognise that the structure of a true network lends itself very well to stakeholder capitalism models, as the focus is on dissemination of power and reward.

You can read more about these principle in the Davos Manifesto and from the World Economic Forum, but for now we'll give a couple of examples in action.

9.

Phool was created to solve the problem of river pollution created by temple floral waste in India. In addition to collecting this waste, the company turns it into incense, compost and packaging. They also employ local women who were previously only allowed to work in sanitation due to the outdated caste system, paying above average wages. Although they could have made more profit as a business selling incense, using the stakeholder capitalism model they considered all touchpoints of a circular economy and improved the environment and people's lives.

Despite its profitability in developed countries, 50% of Colombian cacao farmers are impoverished. Cacao de Colombia acts as a network for cacao farmers to improve their supply chain, provide training to improve productivity and quality, and help them increase their income. By focussing first on their community relationships as the priority stakeholder, rather than the profitability of cacao for investors, they were able to build trust and sustainable co-operatives, showing farmers a legitimate alternative to illegal drug trades and conflict.

Both of these examples come from some recommended reading: "Manifesto for a Moral Revolution" by Jacqueline Novagratz, and provide an example for the kinds of practices that emerge from treating all stakeholders equally. For employee networks, suggesting that they can overhaul an organisation's entire economic approach is ambitious, however, understanding that change is possible, and seeing examples that other people have set, will mean that conversations you have about stakeholder inclusion can be based on real world stories, not just a vision of your own making.

10.

As you engage further with the possibilities of broader stakeholder involvement, you may find your network collaborating with external communities as part of your strategy. As with your own network involvement in the organisation, it's important to recognise what value both parties are getting, and not fall into the trap of using them for research, or good PR, without making sure they receive rewards too. This might include mentorship programmes, or free services, or community funding. As a tip, try to make sure that there isn't a perceived power imbalance, even though you may have many more resources than the group you're working with. Otherwise they may be made to feel "lucky" that you've asked for their involvement.

As an example of where this can go wrong, a media company wanted to engage more content creators from a black and minority ethnic background. Through their network they offered free training and mentorship. On the surface this seemed like a positive step, and one the network could get behind. Through the process of engaging with external groups, it emerged that the organisation's content algorithm was biased against the very same creators they were trying to encourage. By setting the challenge of "more representation" on the network, they had failed to accept accountability for their own business at the highest level. The network could have started from a position of consultation with the external group about what challenges they were actually facing in getting their content distributed, rather than assume they need help with training.

When it comes to organisations engaging with external communities, beware of deals that might be described as win-win. This is a language of business in which both parties gain profit or influence - a traditional approach to the business case. In cases of bias, or underrepresentation, what we're usually asking for is not a deal in which the person in a position of privilege is about to gain something, but that the system become more fair. The people at the top may very well lose something in the process, which would satisfy stakeholder capitalism, but not shareholder. In your further reading you have a link to a short animation that exposes the problems of

win-win situations when what you really want is just to be treated fairly.

11.

Another model you might consider to influence your strategy is doughnut economics, which alas has nothing to do with fried dough. It draws on insights from diverse schools of economic thought - including ecological, feminist, institutional, behavioural and complexity economics.

The doughnut consists of two concentric rings: a social foundation, to ensure that no one is left falling short on life's essentials, and an ecological ceiling, to ensure that humanity does not collectively overshoot the planetary boundaries that protect Earth's life-supporting systems. Between these two sets of boundaries lies a doughnut-shaped space that is both ecologically safe and socially just: a space in which humanity can thrive.

If you'd like to see more about this there are links in your further reading, but for now we'll go through the principles of practice, which like the other discussions we've had on economics are intended to show you frameworks which may challenge the traditional approach to the business case in strategies you've seen so far.

Embrace the 21st goal - this is about meeting the needs of all people, like stakeholder capitalism. It specifically references your organisation's purpose, governance, ownership, finance, and encouragingly for us - networks - although this is meant in the broadest sense, not just employee networks.

Seeing the big picture - this is about understanding the many roles people have in their lives, not just as consumers or employees, but within the household, the state, and in common spaces and voluntary work.

Nurture human nature - this will be familiar to employee networks, it's about promoting diversity, collaboration, wellbeing and strengthening community networks.

Think in systems - to be alert to system thinking you must believe in continuous improvement, experimenting, learning, evolving, and looking for activation points.

Be distributive - following your learnings from system thinking, design should happen in the open and the results shared with the people who helped create it, with reward being distributed equally among stakeholders.

Be regenerative - work within the means of the planet, reduce travel, energy consumption and waste. Aim to repair systems and work within sustainable cycles.

Aim to thrive, rather than grow - as you reflect on what measurements really matter in your network strategy, consider that in doughnut economics, growth in itself is not favourable. Thriving is about sharing the work opportunity with others so that people, societies and systems can develop with an equal share of influence.

12.

Whether you now choose to focus on becoming a specialist, collaborating more strategically with other networks, organisational development, or challenging the business case with new economic models, you will need to think not only about the practical steps, but the overall narrative. Stories are convincing shortcuts for people who may not have time to understand all your background thinking.

How do we move from being branded as a community group responding to diversity metrics, to a force for change that tells a compelling story about the power of inclusion. We'll look at that in the next session.

### Video Interviews Transcript

Names	Commentary
CH	The networks that we have in the Bank of England are really, really important. They are core to the delivery of our D and I Strategy.
FD	Yeah.
CH	We have twelve (12) networks in total, so we cover a wide range of demographic groups...
FD	Yeah.
CH	...and they are, one they are there to support colleagues, but they are also there to effect change in the Bank as well...
FD	Mmm, mmm.
CH	...and, you know, to push forward where there are things that actually they feel, you know, would improve the experiences of colleagues. So, they are very effective. They have the opportunity to have an audience with our court of directors once a year at least...
FD	Mmm.
CH	...for each of the networks. So, you know, there's visibility for our networks right the way to the top of the organisation and what they say is listened to.
AH	The second piece for us at Lockheed Martin is really around using those employee networks to understand how our employees are feeling, how they are receiving the environment. So, with our LGBT network, Pride UK in particular, what we found is that they've given us some very helpful, very honest feedback around how our policies are perceived by the LGBT community and some of the changes that we can make, often very simple changes, to help people understand how our maternity,



paternity, shared parental leave policies might support our LGBT community as well.

AH They're really important vehicles in helping to provide feedback to our business on what we're doing and how we're structuring our work.

FJ And have you, erm, so in terms of the policies, are they actually helping you re-write them and then edit them? Is there a very practical element of that?

AH Yeah. So, we have a policy review mechanism where our HR team regularly review and look at our policies and as a kind of a starting point when I joined the organisation at just over a year ago now, I was involved in a lot of those, a lot of those conversations in terms of how we can make our policies more inclusive. Now, as the groups are developing, we're starting to give them a seat at the table. I think what it's really important to do is that we find a balance between recognising that these are employee led groups and not putting a lot of the business ownership over activity onto these groups.

FJ Mmm.

AH So, yes they're there as an incredibly helpful voice to steer and guide us, but I personally don't believe that they should be the, the network of people who are having to do some of the large scale changes or the re-writes of the policy. That responsibility I think still falls within the HR environment, but it's really important that we listen to that community and hear their voice and then use that information to think about how we edit and change what we're doing.

CH And is there an example perhaps of recently where you've influenced that strategy? So, one of those ideas you've fed up for example.

AC One of the greatest thing recently, and I'm talking about we've got a new inclusion toolkit developed and rolled out by our HR function.

CH Okay.

AC One of the biggest things within Virgin Money's policies is we always say, "this policy applies to all colleagues" or "this policy applies to part-time colleagues" or "key time colleagues"; it's always that clear definition. Within Virgin Money and Heritage Clydesdale Bank, we used to use the phrase "all"...

CH Mmm, mmm.

AC ...because we believed that included everyone. It's really, really, clear; it applies to all employees. One of the bits of feedback we gave HR was when you come from a group who have been "other" quite a lot of the time – so you're always outside, so when somebody says, "let's all go to

the pub”, were you included? No, you weren’t included because you’re from an “other” group. So, you’ve been “othered”. So, therefore, “all” may sound inclusive, but is it really clear?

CH Mmm.

AC On the other side of it, we’re acutely aware of we don’t all our policies and procedures to become so wordy and have so many...

CH Yeah.

AC ...examples that they’re actually not very helpful for somebody like me who’s dyslexic, somebody with any other learning disability and also you need them to be real, quick, easy to read. So, putting in a definition of “all” in all policies is just, it’s going the complete opposite away. You’re not actually again, you’re not being inclusive. So, we have created what “all” means to us within Virgin Money and it’s about a paragraph and...

CH Mmm, mmm.

AC ...to be honest, it is a bit of fun when you read it cos it doesn’t cover everyone but it gives examples; it’s almost like an A to Z of what, who we think “all” is and everybody in between. It just brings it to life as an inclusion, what the inclusion toolkit and inclusion policies are for. It applies across our slightly drier and more enforcement policies I would call them...

CH Yeah.

AC ...that sort of thing, the drier ones. It applies across the nice ones like adoption leave, holidays and stuff like that. But, I think that’s a great example of where HR roles are like yeah but “all” is inclusive but if we step back a bit, let’s put in slightly more fun, slightly but still very, very meaningful definition of what “all” means to us within Virgin Money.

CH Is there an example then of when you’ve sat on one of those Boards or within one of those kind of Steering Committees where you’ve then been able to kind of influence the direction of perhaps those key Stakeholders or the direction of the organisation.

MS Yes. So, when they set up the Shadow Race Board, we were – in terms of the National Race Network – we were excluded from that. You know, for whatever reason, they had made the decision that we should be, myself and my Co-Chair would have been excluded from that and so what we did is, we used the Steering Group which was setting up the Race Board as a vehicle to come to the conclusion, well actually, you know what, having the staff network – the National Race Network involved – adds credibility to your agenda but, more importantly, makes sure there is a two way process of engagement and so we were able to

convince our senior leaders who were a part of that group, that we should be on the Race Board and we ultimately now, are.

FJ So, in that D and I Strategy being created, did you...were you able to influence that in your organisation?

PA Yes, yeah. All of the network chairs were able to influence it. So, we had sight of the draft strategy before it got released publicly to not just the company, but the company have actually released it externally as well via LinkedIn and on the website as well. So, we're not secretive about the D and I Strategy. So, yeah, we had again taken feedback from network members, we've been looking at, you know, what we've been sort of asking for, for the past year, which has still not been achieved and trying to emphasise that and saying look, we really do need to do this. So for example, recruitment I think was a big thing and there have been a lot of promises about how we're changing our recruitment strategy but, again, that had not been achieved so because there had been a changeover in staff and what not and now with this new Strategy, I think that there seems to be quite good targets that's being set and realistic targets I think. So, I think everything, all the feedback that people had raised and the concerns people had raised – not just myself but the other network chairs – had all been captured. So, we're really, really happy with how it's been sort of dealt with and, going forward, I think it will be a very crucial twelve (12) months ahead.