

[00:00:06.410] - Zina Smith

Hello and welcome to our new podcast, CT Brief: Honest Conversations. Last year, George Floyd's murder sparked an urgent reawakening in society about systemic racism and more widely debates around diversity, equity and inclusion in the first episode of this new podcast, we begin with a chat between Campbell Tickell partner, Radojka Miljevic and Dawn Matthews, senior consultant, focusing on HR and recruitment and what they've witnessed within their spheres of work over the past year. Radojka and Dawn reflect on the conversations they've had with clients about diversity and inclusion, the importance of being honest when it comes to discussing race and ethnicity and what it means to be inclusive.

[00:00:46.700] - Zina Smith

Plus, more. Throughout this new podcast, we aim to reflect on both professional as well as personal experiences and insights and hope to offer you some key takeaways that you can discuss within your networks. Join us as we have open and honest conversations on a wide range of topics that matter to people working within the housing charity, social care, local government and sports sectors. We plan to discuss everything from diversity and inclusion to football regulation. We'd love to get your feedback and suggestions so to get in touch on the links provided with this episode.

[00:01:18.770] - Zina Smith

Enjoy.

[00:01:23.750] - Radojka Miljevic

So Dawn, we know we've had COVID over the last 15 months, but we also know in both of our fields of work mine around governance and strategy, yours around HR and recruitment, that there's been a lot of change going on in relation to diversity and inclusion. Should we just start a little bit with what we've been seeing in our respective disciplines, in the different sectors that we operate in? Tell me a bit about what's been going on with HR and recruitment that feels different to, say, two or three years ago?

[00:01:55.430] - Dawn Matthews

Yes, Rad. There has been a lot that's been happening. The landscape, I think, has changed quite considerably. I think in the aftermath of George Floyd's death or murder, as I like to call it, organisations are really kind of trying to take diversity a lot more seriously. And as you know, diversity has many protective characteristics, organisations seem to be focusing on ethnicity. And what I have noticed is that many clients that we are doing work with in terms of recruitment, in particular, whether that be executive recruitment or non-executive, they're really keen to improve the diversity of their leadership teams of their boards.

[00:02:37.220] - Dawn Matthews

And so and I think the fact that globally, so many people, regardless of the colour of their skin, came out in protest over the death of George Floyd. I think it really kind of put down a marker and made organisations think more about what they were doing and maybe how people of colour are oppressed in so many different ways. So what I'm finding is that there really is a much stronger focus on genuinely trying to increase diversity in organisations.

[00:03:08.480] - Radojka Miljevic

I feel really moved to hear that because I feel, it's been a subject that's been in people's line of sight for quite a number of years, but something has shifted, hasn't it, since George Floyd was killed? And it feels like it's no longer sufficient or adequate or satisfactory that boards and senior teams don't get to grips with their own organisations and ensuring that their own organisations meet their own aspirations and ethics and values around fairness and equality, and I think you're right that it's had -

[00:03:51.250] - Radojka Miljevic

In a way, it's been pursued with more rigour, it's amongst the items at the top of the agenda. For the first time last year, I went to a Broad awayday where the first topic on the agenda was diversity and inclusion, framed within the context of George Floyd's death and the Black Lives Matter movement. I can't remember in 18 and a half years of consultancy of that ever being the case. So it's terrible that it

took, you know, what what did it take for that to be the number one item?

[00:04:27.590] - Radojka Miljevic

It took a terrible event, but nevertheless, I felt it was really brave of that board to live with their discomfort because this wasn't the subject they were used to talking about, to live with their discomfort and feel that they needed to challenge themselves to do better.

[00:04:45.590] - Dawn Matthews

Absolutely. I think that's really good. I think it's a really good thing. And, you I've seen the same in the recruitment industry, really, where people are genuinely trying to take this seriously. I mean, to be honest with you, I think it's a lot deeper rooted than just recruiting more diverse people. I think, you know, organisations need to look at the culture, how people of colour are supported in those environments, etc. But for me, it's a small step in the right direction.

[00:05:17.560] - Dawn Matthews

At least, you know, they are now kind of seriously considering how they can actually change the makeup of their organisations, not just the sort of middle management and entry levels, but also at the senior levels, because especially in our field of work, where a lot of our clients are in the housing sector, in charities and so on, a lot of the actual service users, it's very, very, very diverse. So how do you know what somebody from a background different to yours or different ethnicities yours really needs?

[00:05:50.680] - Dawn Matthews

What do you know about the lived experience of someone? And that's where diversity is so important in terms of shaping services, shaping provision and making sure that there are - there's representation at the right levels to influence that change. Yes, so I think -

[00:06:08.680] - Radojka Miljevic

And it's the voices that aren't in the room, isn't it?

[00:06:11.530] - Dawn Matthews

Absolutely.

[00:06:11.530] - Radojka Miljevic

It's you know, let's put the voices in the room, you know, thinking about some of the clients we work with. Some of them are also public bodies who are there to protect and serve the interests of the public.

[00:06:21.730] - Radojka Miljevic

So it's important that a range of backgrounds are in the room. And that's not just about race, is it? It's about socio-economic characteristics. It's about disability. Sometimes I feel that disability gets overlooked in conversations, focusing on diversity it sort of it feels like it's somehow relegated and it should have sort of parity with the other protective characteristics.

[00:06:46.540] - Dawn Matthews

I agree.

[00:06:46.540] - Radojka Miljevic

Should we should we talk a little bit about - so we've both been seeing a bit of the "what" haven't we?

[00:06:51.130] - Radojka Miljevic

You know, what are we going to do about diversity? Let's try and have more diverse workforces. Let's try and have more diverse boards. And we welcome that, don't we? That's that's something, you know.

[00:07:04.000] - Dawn Matthews

Definitely.

[00:07:04.000] - Radojka Miljevic
But we both know that's not enough, don't we?

[00:07:06.340] - Dawn Matthews
Absolutely Rad.

[00:07:07.540]
We know that the getting in is one thing, but getting on and feeling that your voice is heard. So let's just talk about the inclusion aspect. I sometimes think of diversity as the "what" inclusion as the "how," but I'm sure there are people listening to this, you know better than me. So I'm still learning as well. Let's talk about the "how" - how do we see the other part, the other part of this concept and debate that we're trying to have.

[00:07:32.920] - Radojka Miljevic
How does - how should organisations be addressing inclusion?

[00:07:38.040] - Dawn Matthews
For me, I think inclusion needs to be addressed by - although it sounds cliché, being just that, making sure that everybody is included, particularly in decision making, I think there's nothing worse than having something done to you. You know, I mean, as a resident in my borough, quite often you have people who will come in and they'll put, I don't know, LTN's (Low Traffic Neighbourhoods) in the neighbourhood or they'll change traffic signals, what have you. They don't live in the borough.

[00:08:08.320] - Dawn Matthews
They don't know the very real issues of the people that live there, they live somewhere in the suburbs, they come in here, they do it to us and then they go home to their lovely suburbs, you know, and I think it's very similar in organisations. It's about letting people have a voice. And that sounds really simple, but I think there are many different facets to that. So, for example, you're working on a strategy or you're working on an initiative.

[00:08:32.110] - Dawn Matthews
You're asking people, what would you like to see? There are people in every organisation that are very vocal, their are residents that are very vocal. There are always those that are quite quiet. And it's finding different ways to hear the voices, even those people who are quite silent and don't make a lot of noise engaging with them in whatever way works for them. I also think when we think about diversity, there's a whole neurodiversity aspects of how people digest information, how they receive information and so on.

[00:09:04.240] - Dawn Matthews
You know, there's times that I myself look at things. I might look at an Excel spreadsheet or graph, and it makes no sense to me. Translate that into a narrative and words. I totally get it. So it's really, really broad. It's not just kind of one thing. I do think it's about reaching out to people in different ways at different times so that everybody feels that they've at least had an opportunity. And that's the most important thing.

[00:09:29.260] - Dawn Matthews
Everybody's not going to engage. Everybody is not going to want to speak up. But if as an organisation, you're giving them that chance to do so again, I think that's a step in the right direction it's making sure everybody is included in the whole shaping, etc.

[00:09:48.790] - Radojka Miljevic
And I would even, I'd add something to that, because there's something there's something about creating the space, but there's also something about creating the value in them and that they feel. "I'm not just being afforded a space, someone is actually valuing the things that I may contribute." And I think it's been interesting over the last year since organisations have been subjecting themselves to kind of more rigorous scrutiny about, well, how well are we doing on inclusion that actually I found

one or two clients where the leadership has been quite surprised to find once they started to lift some stones and once they started to look harder at retention rates, you know, broken down by different protected characteristics, that actually their cultures have been far less inclusive than they had first believed, and maybe that's said something about their own leadership and whether they'd thought about things in a wider frame.

[00:10:56.030] - Radojka Miljevic

But I think it showed maybe that some of the surveys that have been conducted, all the ways of collecting information, had perhaps not reached into areas around belonging, around being psychologically safe and around sort of feeling that there are informal channels as well as formal channels to raise points and contribute issues. And I think I've seen a widening of the kind of pulse surveys to have some other metrics in there to try and have some measures. I mean, there are all sorts of different methods out there, but there are methods now for sort of saying there are features around inclusion that you can try and measure through employee pulse surveys.

[00:11:42.170] - Radojka Miljevic

And that seems to me a positive step forward, as well as all of the normal things that you'd expect in a great organisational culture around employee voice in different ways. One of my challenges, and I'm interested in your experience of working with boards, is I wonder whether boards have really thought about inclusion for themselves. So I feel conscious of boards wanting, you know, having really good intentions, you know, recognising that the need to change their own composition in different ways to make sure that there isn't groupthink and that there is diversity.

[00:12:16.430] - Radojka Miljevic

But I wonder whether they have really reflected on the topic of inclusion or even what they mean by diversity, sometimes. I suspect in your work there will be vague requests around diversity. But I'm interested in how does that conversation go? Does an organisation hiring us for recruitment say, I want more diverse board and what's your experience of that topic and discussion?

[00:12:45.680] - Dawn Matthews

Yes, I mean, yes, that's one of the top requests that I have when I'm working with a client on a recruitment campaign, particularly for NED (non-executive director) roles, but also for executive roles. And, you know, one of the things that really stands out to me is that - that's exactly what they will say Rad. They will say "we want a diverse pool of candidates" - without naming what they mean by diverse, you know, and it's almost like they're really scared to kind of say, actually, when we're talking about diversity in this particular context for this particular project, we are talking about ethnicity.

[00:13:19.160] - Dawn Matthews

And one of the things I have an issue with is if you cannot, as I would say, name the issue in air quotes, then how are we going to start to really tackle that problem? You know, and that's something that I really struggle with. And I have had conversations with clients to say, look, I can by all means find you a very diverse pool of candidates, not just ethnicity, age, gender, etc., However, if you are not willing to kind of maybe look at their application and be a bit more, I guess, open minded, because we have to remember that various people from various backgrounds, different socio-economic backgrounds etc., may not have had the same opportunities as others.

[00:14:05.840] - Dawn Matthews

So the way that I write may not be as well presented as somebody else. It doesn't mean to say that I can't do the role. And one of the things that really frustrates me and with this whole thing about having more diversity in particular around race, in senior roles and so on, I kind of think about countries that are non-white. So I think about, you know, the Caribbean or Africa or Asia in the continent, and I think "well who's running the large corporations there?"

[00:14:38.870] - Dawn Matthews

Who's running the business, is running the hospitals, etc. They are people more than likely from the diaspora, which tells me that the colour of your skin doesn't prevent you from being able to operate at a strategic level, at board level, etc. What prevents you in the UK, is the opportunities that are or are

not afforded to you. It's not that you're not capable, you're just not given that opportunity. And that for me is a very hard pill to swallow.

[00:15:10.760] - Dawn Matthews

And that's the kind of message that I try to get through to some of our clients, you know. We may present them with a long list and kind of think, look, this person may not have presented himself as strongly as this candidate. However, let's look at roles they've had, let's look at some of the achievements. They've definitely got it. Let's see them at first age, etc. And it just having those kinds of conversations not being so rigid, but really being open minded and genuinely wanting to give people an opportunity to present themselves in the best possible way.

[00:15:47.060] - Radojka Miljevic

Yes. And I think I've heard you as a team sometimes saying things like we need to let people shine. And I like that philosophy around the interview process, it's not about catching people out or somehow, I don't know, somehow finding them out in the sort of unpleasant way, but it's rather about how can we unearth their treasure? How can we how can we bring to the front their qualities and attributes and actually understand those better?

[00:16:22.930] - Dawn Matthews

Absolutely. And I also think Rad to touch on something that you said a little earlier. I think that clients also need to look into themselves. So, as recruiters or as consultants, there's only so much we can do. You know, I speak to people sometimes and I say, well. Think about how you got to where you are as a not a person of colour, so as a white person, for example, think about how you got to where you are.

[00:16:53.010] - Dawn Matthews

And that could have been you went to university or what have you. You've mixed in certain circles. You've mixed in certain networks. You've been allowed into those networks. Now, one way of tackling diversity is to kind of reach back for somebody that doesn't look like you. Somebody that's not the same gender as you, somebody that may not be able bodied like you are - and bring them into those networks, bring them into those circles, let them have that exposure.

[00:17:19.320] - Dawn Matthews

You know, it's a small thing. It's a simple thing, but it can help to make a difference. It's not always about what you have physically done. Sometimes it's about what you've been exposed to. And that then helps to kind of open your thinking, helps you to present yourself in a different way, speaking a different way, etc. So I think that's also another element that people very, very often overlook and to me it's a very small and simple thing.

[00:17:46.650] - Radojka Miljevic

I love that Dawn.

[00:17:50.420] - Radojka Miljevic

I think it's the power of helping people build their social capital or who their networks are who their contacts are, who they can reach out to as allies, because, as you said, in a way, the things that we're trying to remedy are, you know, years and years long structural inequalities. And we're not going to overturn them overnight. But there are. So that's the takeaway, isn't it? There's something about the reaching out and bringing people into the richness of whatever it is that you have, that you can share, that can help them develop in their careers.

[00:18:26.120] - Dawn Matthews

Yes.

[00:18:26.780] - Radojka Miljevic

For me, a kind of other thing that I would like people to take away is that the board actually has a conversation, a discussion about diversity and inclusion that doesn't immediately leap to you know, "we've got to get more people of colour on the board", but actually unpacks what it is that they mean

by diversity. How they're beginning to think about it, how they understand inclusion in the boardroom environment, what makes for an inclusive environment, how they understand whether their organisational culture is inclusive, and what kinds of questions get asked about employees, what kind of data they look at around retention and recruitment.

[00:19:11.240] - Radojka Miljevic

So I think there is a bit more of a rigorous sort of self reflection that's about acknowledging some things that may feel uncomfortable, some bits of - uncertainty about how to talk about some things, I feel that, that should be the first step before starting to set the targets and the actions.

[00:19:37.210] - Dawn Matthews

Yes.

[00:19:37.990] - Radojka Miljevic

Is there anything else that you think we should be leaving our listeners with? This has been a sort of short little sprint. But what about our own?

[00:19:48.490] - Dawn Matthews

I mean, internally, we've been trying to reflect on things, haven't we?

[00:19:52.810] - Dawn Matthews

We have we've had lots of conversations internally. And, you know, I actually liked our starting point, which was a few months ago when, you know, everybody was invited to take part in a Zoom call and just talk a bit about their heritage, where they came from, etc. you know, and people weren't obliged to share. Some people could just listen. But what I really liked about that was I know that Campbell Tickell is very kind of diverse in terms of ethnicity, gender, sexuality, the whole lot.

[00:20:25.280] - Dawn Matthews

But it was really good hearing individual stories and getting to understand a bit more about the kind of the fibre of our organisation, the people within it. You know, that was really, really nice. I think you may recall my dad was here at the time and we spoke to him first hand.

[00:20:41.870] - Radojka Miljevic

And we actually started interviewing your father didn't we?

[00:20:46.040] - Dawn Matthews

But, you know, it's really, really interesting. And I think that's something that any organisation can do, you know, whether in small groups or big groups. Really kind of try to get under the skin of your employees or your board members what have you. And really understand a bit about their heritage, their history. You know, sometimes I think we all are guilty of making judgements of people. And unless we kind of have a conversation with them, we're not going to know where they're really coming from.

[00:21:17.230] - Dawn Matthews

We're not going to know what really makes them tick. You're not going to understand why is it when I say a certain word to Dawn, she seems to get a bit triggered. You know, but if you've had this conversation, you're like, "oh I get it, it kind of brings up some unhappy memories" - or whatever the case may be. So, you know, it's not about baring your soul and being completely vulnerable, but it's about taking the time to actually understand where people come from and understand how all that diversity, you know, how everybody brings something a little bit different and the beautiful kind of products that that then creates.

[00:21:54.580] - Radojka Miljevic

I absolutely love that Dawn it's also about storytelling. You know, as human beings, I think we're attracted to stories and actually understanding something about the story that someone might want us to understand about them. I always think if you give people the space to tell you something about themselves, they'll tell you what you need to know about them and how it shapes them in some way.

And I think giving space to finding out about each other is you know, an enriching and moving process.

[00:22:29.620] - Radojka Miljevic

And in a way, we found out a lot more about some of our colleagues than we ever would have anticipated. I think from that session,

[00:22:36.820] - Dawn Matthews

We definitely did. Yeah.

[00:22:39.400] - Zina Smith

We really hope you enjoyed the first episode of the CT Brief: Honest Conversations podcast. If you'd like to delve further into these issues, head to our website, where you can read the latest CT Brief issue 54 - Diversity and Inclusion edition. This pulls together a wide range of perspectives in the hope of inspiring organisations and individuals to action, but also making us reflect on culture. Do take a read and see you next time for another of CT's honest conversations.