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# How to embed DEI within your organisation: **DEI Roundtable** **Report**

Talent International x Zalando  
Berlin, November 2022



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## Roundtable introduction

This roundtable event focused on how to embed DEI within your organisation, with the goal of bringing like-minded people together to share experiences, discuss challenges, and establish possible solutions in a safer and confidential space. Four main discussion points formed the structure of these discussions, with knowledgeable facilitators from the DEI space leading the conversations.

Our discussion points were:

- How can we ensure that DEI stays a priority in all economic times?
- How can your organisation engage internally with DEI? And how do you think this could be impacting your company according to its size?
- How can we collect DEI-related data and address the obstacles in measuring DEI metrics?
- What kind of DEI policies and practices does your organisation have in place and how might these affect retention?

These topics formed the basis of insightful and powerful conversations between our guests and facilitators, with plenty of thought-provoking experiences coming to light. It's clear to see that, while many organisations have already made great progress with embedding DEI, there are still a range of common barriers and challenges to overcome.

### What's in the report?

You'll not only find out what our roundtable discussions uncovered, but will also gain insight on how to embed DEI into your own organisation. Many challenges raised by our discussion groups had a lot of parallels across the board - meaning you'll have likely experienced something similar as part of your DEI journey.

This report includes key insights and takeaways for each discussion point, with emphasis on how to combat barriers and create solutions. You can use the conclusions detailed here to help develop your own internal DEI strategies, working towards creating an inclusive company culture where diversity is prioritised.





## About the event

This roundtable took place in Berlin on November 17th 2022, hosted by Talent International and Zalando. 60+ people attended these discussions, including minute takers and facilitators with strong experience in the DEI space.

Guests were separated in eight smaller groups, with the opportunity to discuss all four topics with a different facilitator for each. This allowed for confidential sharing in a safe environment, with a range of challenges and solutions being openly discussed.

All attendees then came together for drinks, food and networking to build new connections and consolidate our discussions' success. It was great to see so many like-minded people in the same space, passionate about breaking the mould and working towards truly embedding DEI.

## About the hosts

### Talent International

[Talent](#) is a global technology and digital recruitment specialist committed to creating a better world of work for all.

From simple beginnings in 1995, Talent now connects thousands of tech and digital professionals annually with a diverse range of organisations through its offices in Germany, the UK, Australia, New Zealand and the US. The Talent group encompasses embedded recruitment service Talent Solutions, a specialised Talent Microsoft recruitment service, IT project delivery consultancy Avec, and its UK counterpart Talent Consulting, and youth employment charity Talent RISE.

Talent brings real value to people and organisations by building highly skilled and engaged teams, rethinking technology solutions, and improving lives by creating a strong sense of belonging.

### Zalando

[Zalando](#) is a leading European online platform for fashion and lifestyle. Founded in Berlin in 2008, Zalando now connects customers, brands and partners in 25 countries through the great passion and strong business sense of a team of more than 17,000 talents from more than 140 countries.

At Zalando, we aim to be the Starting Point for Fashion, connecting all players in the fashion and lifestyle industry and catering to their requirements with our platform strategy at the centre. In order to achieve this vision, we strive to be inclusive by design, bringing to life the diversity of our talents, leaders, customers, and partners (check out our [D&I Report 2022](#)). We are convinced that focusing on the requirements of the fashion industry as a whole is the best way for us to stay ahead of an ever-changing industry and create unique and compelling fashion experiences for our customers and find specific solutions for brand partners.

## Our organisers



### **Amber Carr (she/her)**

Talent, Principal Consultant

Not your typical Recruiter, Amber is a social justice advocate, specialising in Diversity Equity and Inclusion offering a human centric approach whilst having a deep understanding across tech and product roles.

When not recruiting, Amber helps lead Talent's internal DEI Change Team and spends time chatting with (and learning from) DEI leaders in the European tech space, writing for her blog, and hosting online and in-person events.

Connect with Amber on [LinkedIn](#).



### **Maddalena Benedetto (she/her)**

Zalando, D&I Project Manager

After several years in Content Marketing and SEO, she approached the world of D&I through the Diversity Guild, Zalando's first ERG.

In 2021 she joined Zalando D&I Central Team where she focuses on D&I Partnerships, fostering collaboration within the tech and fashion industries. She is still a core member of the Diversity Guild and co-founded the Mental Wellbeing Community at Zalando.

Connect with Maddalena on [LinkedIn](#).

## Our Host



### **Vikki Leach**

Zalando, D&I Director

A senior professional with extensive experience in Inclusion and Diversity, leading organisations and engaging business leaders to build a culturally sensitive and inclusive culture. A thought leader, delivering cross country change programs in inclusion and behavioural change. Vikki has widespread experience of working in global matrix organisations, driving change with evidence-based data driven conversations, and mobilising teams across functional and geographical boundaries.

Vikki is a certified professional coach, with an MSc in Professional Coaching and Behavioral Change and author of 'The Financial Times to Inclusion & Diversity'.

Connect with Vikki on [LinkedIn](#).

## Our facilitators



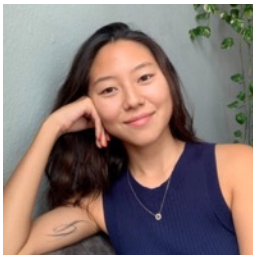
### **Nichelle Appleby (she/her)**

[WeFox, Director, Rewards and People Digitalisation](#)

Nichelle is a Total Rewards Leader in Europe. Her career spans two continents and she has spent more than 12 years driving better rewards programs. After many years of guiding professionals to negotiate better pay and helping managers make more equitable pay decisions, it became clear to her that Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion has many implications in the workplace and must be a key focus for all organisations.

Her Medium publication *Work Imagined*, is a collection of essays contemplating how to relate and perform better together at work. She currently works for WeFox, as a Director of Total Rewards and People Digitalisation, and lives in Berlin.

Connect with Nichelle on [LinkedIn](#).



### **Joann Jeong (she/her)**

[Jae, Co-Founder](#)

Joann is a New York Native turned Berliner. She is a Founder in Berlin focusing on Talent inclusion topics with background in Consulting and working in Tech. Her identity as a 2nd gen immigrant and as an expat living in Berlin has shaped her perspective and desire to make the professional ecosystem much more inclusive for everyone regardless of their background and identity. The aim is to build for the next generation of talent whereby values, talent and interests triumph race, background, or any other identifiers.

Joann is currently working at Jae which aims to empower diverse talent and also push companies to go beyond just promoting diversity statistics and commit to actioning DE&I holistically.

Connect with Joann on [LinkedIn](#).



### **Henrique Zanin (he/him)**

[Wayfair, DEI, Culture & Engagement Lead, Europe & Asia](#)

Henrique Zanin is a Brazilian DEI professional, lawyer and researcher based in Berlin, Germany. He is the DEI, Culture & Engagement Lead for Europe & Asia at Wayfair, and a faculty member in a postgraduate program in Diversity and Inclusion at the Sao Judas University.

His papers on diversity and inclusion, human rights and labour law have already been published in more than 17 journals and his past endeavours include DEI consulting firms, the Brazilian Bar Association Diversity Committee and working with NGOs in Uganda, Canada and founding one in Brazil.

Connect with Henrique on [LinkedIn](#).



**Sarah Cordivano (she/her)**

Zalando, Head of D&I Strategy & Governance for Talent and Leadership

Sarah is an expert in the field of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, with a focus on implementing successful DEI strategies and developing initiatives to create more inclusive workplaces. She brings along expertise in data analytics in order to implement impactful, data-driven DEI work.

She is also a professional speaker and writer, having recently published “Diversity, Equity and Inclusion: How to Succeed at an Impossible Job.”

Connect with Sarah on [LinkedIn](#).



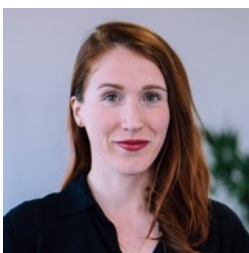
**Sandra Subel (she/her)**

Axel Springer SE, Global Head of DEI Strategy

Sandra is a passionate change maker with 15 years of professional experience. In 2020 she started her tenure as the Global Head of Diversity and Inclusion Strategy. In this role she focuses on building and executing a holistic Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion strategy for the group.

Previously she worked for Accenture in the fields of innovation and change management. She is passionate about solving complex problems, driving organisational change at scale, and helping people build their creative confidence.

Connect with Sandra on [LinkedIn](#).



**Marina Ivanović (she/her)**

Klarna, Talent Management

Marina Ivanović is a seasoned Talent Acquisition & Talent Management leader, currently working within Performance Management & DE&I at Klarna. She's worked across a variety of industries, including Gaming, Technology, Blockchain, and FinTech, in startups, scale ups, and corporate companies.

Being a certified D&I specialist and all-things-talent enthusiast, Marina found her passion in defining strategies to build a winning culture through inclusion and people-centric design.

Connect with Marina on [LinkedIn](#).



**Amber Carr (she/her)**

Talent, Principal Consultant

Not your typical Recruiter, Amber is a social justice advocate, specialising in Diversity Equity and Inclusion offering a human centric approach whilst having a deep understanding across tech and product roles.

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Connect with Amber on [LinkedIn](#).



**Gazelle Vollhase (she/her)**

idealo, Recruiting & D&I Partner

With 10 years working in Recruiting, Gazelle is an expert on individual career paths and career stories. In her role as Tech Recruiting and Diversity & Inclusion Partner at idealo, she has been passionate about supporting idealo's strong move towards an even more inclusive and diverse workplace, e.g. for (but not only) trans\* people.

Connect with Gazelle on [LinkedIn](#).



## Discussion:

### How can we ensure DEI stays a priority in all economic times?

It's no secret that economic times are difficult right now. With a global cost of living crisis facing us (and likely to remain for some time), maintaining DEI as a priority is a huge challenge. How can we ensure DEI stays high on the list and doesn't fall to the sidelines?

#### Challenges

Our groups first took time to establish the most prominent challenges within this topic, and many common themes arose across each group. This not only highlighted the prevalence of these barriers, but also showcased how important it truly is to tackle them in keeping DEI a priority.

#### Challenges discussed include:

##### Money over people

- During tough economic times, many prioritise profits and money over the wellbeing and mental health of people. This also raises the issue of a common lack of funding for DEI teams, too. During these times, money and resources are often prioritised elsewhere and DEI unfortunately gets left behind.

##### Too much emphasis on talent acquisition

- A lot of organisations rely too heavily on TA to incorporate more diversity within their teams. Instead of developing diversity from the inside out, they work from the outside in. But, if recruitment stalls during an economic downturn, this leaves little scope for DEI to truly progress.
- If tough economic times result in a loss of current staff, DEI-focused teams could heavily decrease in numbers. A reduced workforce will also have little capacity to focus on DEI, as remaining members of staff will likely have a higher workload.

##### Misconceptions around DEI

- DEI is often considered a “nice-to-have” for a lot of organisations, meaning it's unlikely to be prioritised in the first place - let alone during an economic crisis. Tough times therefore serve as an excuse not to invest in or focus on embedding DEI. In other words, it's an “easy way out”.
- DEI is sometimes seen as a money-spending initiative, rather than something that can actually *make* money for an organisation. Showing dedication to DEI and truly walking the talk is highly likely to attract top forward-thinking talent - and create an environment in which current staff members will be motivated to stay. Therefore the idea that DEI just 'wastes money' is false.



## Solutions

This topic gave our groups plenty of food for thought, with possible solutions more difficult to establish than the challenges. This shows the truly tough nature of this topic and the real need for more work to be done in prioritising DEI during all economic times.

However, innovative solutions were still pinpointed and discussed.

These include:

### Education, especially among leadership

- Seeing DEI as a “nice-to-have” often comes from the top down. To combat this, we need greater education amongst those in leadership positions. This could be done by pointing out the clear advantages of embedding DEI (i.e. financial opportunities), and building strong case studies to showcase and support DEI success.

### Make talent acquisition more transparent

- Showcase that your company prioritises people - not just profits. By being clear on exactly what your talent acquisition strategy is, you’re demonstrating an openness in your ability to be transparent.

### Challenging decision makers

- Build internal processes more focused on holding leaders accountable, and don’t be afraid to challenge ideas if you feel a decision being made is the wrong one.
- Greater DEI investment
- Put more money into DEI initiatives to ensure they don’t get left behind. This can be done by investing into change management training regarding DEI responsibilities. This, in turn, will create a better educated internal network.

## Discussion:

### How can your organisation engage internally with DEI? And how do you think this could be impacting your company according to its size?

DEI challenges will significantly differ depending on the size of an organisation. The barriers that smaller companies (<50 people) face won't be the same as larger companies (>200 people), meaning a tailored approach is absolutely key to engage with DEI successfully.

So, what are the specific challenges companies face according to their size? And how can we overcome them?

## Challenges

### Smaller companies often don't have the budget to drive DEI

- While this doesn't apply to all, smaller companies will typically have less resources than larger organisations. And if DEI is considered a "nice-to-have", it likely won't receive the investment needed to truly progress.

### Growth is the main target for smaller companies

- Organisations of this size aren't as inclusive as they should be, since profits and growth are often the main targets. True inclusiveness is something that isn't considered at the beginning.

### Mid to large-sized companies lack clear structure regarding DEI topics

- While larger companies likely have more resources and people working on DEI, clear structure and defined goals are often neglected. A dedicated team able to focus on multiple facets of DEI is difficult to establish - especially when staff are voluntarily doing this.

### Lack of diversity amongst leadership

- This challenge was felt from participants in companies of multiple sizes. For instance, many reported that those in leadership positions weren't people of colour, as white males typically took up these roles. This lack of diversity often results in a lack of understanding and empathy toward DEI from the top down.

### Large companies suffer with leadership ego

- When leading large numbers of people, those in senior roles may suffer with ego issues - especially if a lack of diversity is also present. Being aware of one's privilege is vital to begin understanding the importance of DEI, as well as being open to accepting suggestions. Some leaders simply don't want to do this.

## Solutions

These discussions clearly highlighted the varying issues many different-sized organisations face regarding DEI. From leadership ego to simply not having enough resources, embedding DEI is a multifaceted challenge that will take both time and dedication to solve.

### Companies need to make sure the C-suite is diverse and engaged

- If there are no positions available, larger companies need to ensure the next level down has diverse representation. Or, for organisations at the beginning of their DEI journey, the C-suite should be challenged to have a more diverse decision-making board.
- Often, DEI initiatives are driven from the bottom up, instead of the top down. To achieve real success, those in C-suite positions must get on board.
- Instead of looking externally to hire for C-suite/lead positions, companies should first and foremost look to hire internally. That is, developing your diverse existing team members into these roles. This will also help maintain a greater sense of inclusion and belonging within your organisation, as this should help employees feel prioritised and valued.

### Dedicate time to ensure everyone in the company understands what diversity *really* means

- Across the board, all organisations need to prioritise DEI education. DEI doesn't just include gender, ethnicity or sexual orientation. Some participants felt aspects like physical disability and neurodiversity are often neglected within organisations, making those individuals feel unsupported and undervalued.
- There must also be some individual responsibility to take charge of your own education, too. Simply stopping at what is available at work isn't enough; taking the personal time to expand further in developing your knowledge is crucial to truly progress within this space.

### Start-ups must prioritise DEI early to succeed

- To have the best chance of making authentic progress regarding DEI is to begin prioritising it as soon as possible. Adding DEI-focused initiatives later down the line will be challenging to implement - and if leadership haven't been on board since the very beginning, it could be difficult getting them to engage.



## Discussion:

### How can we collect DEI-related data and address the obstacles in measuring DEI metrics?

Data is key to not only discover your teams' thoughts on your approach as a company, but to also figure out what's working and what isn't. Without key metrics being measured, how will you establish whether your organisation is truly progressing?

During these discussions, our guests and facilitators focused on the common challenges that arise when identifying metrics and collecting data - and possible solutions to combat these barriers.

#### Challenges: Identifying Metrics

##### Lack of initial strategy

- Without a pinpointed DEI strategy already established, it's virtually impossible to identify the most targeted metrics. This can result in data that's not as relevant as it should be to the organisation in question, creating a mismatch between expectations and results.

##### Lack of 'common ground'

- It is virtually impossible to concretely pinpoint what "good" means in identifying which metrics to choose. All organisations are different, and what investors and policy makers want to see won't be the same across the board.

##### Difficult to define benchmarks

- Every company is at a different maturity level. This makes identifying benchmarks tough, especially if not many internal DEI surveys have been carried out so far. But, without benchmarks, you'll have nothing to compare your data to - yet using wrongful benchmarks could have a detrimental effect on interpreting the data. It's a very difficult task to get right.

##### Culture changes fast

- The DEI landscape is ever-changing and evolving. As a result, metrics must keep up with the times to produce genuinely impactful data. However, data collection isn't something that happens overnight. By the time responses are collected and analysed, culture (whether internal or external) could have already shifted.

#### Challenges: Collecting Data

##### GDPR

- This arose as a major challenge across all of our groups, showcasing the real impact of GDPR. Often difficult to understand and causing disastrous consequences if not followed correctly, GDPR restrictions greatly hinder a company's ability to collect meaningful data.

##### Survey overload

- By far the most common way to collect data is surveys, due to their ease of creating and distributing across a company. But, if you overload employees

with surveys, you run the risk of survey fatigue where they're reluctant to even take part.

#### Lack of trust

- This somewhat relates to survey fatigue, but also heavily depends on how you're communicating. If you're not telling employees exactly what the survey is for and how it will be used, how can you expect them to trust you enough to honestly fill it in? Or be comfortable sharing anything potentially vulnerable?

#### Cultural differences and sensitivity

- If collecting data across a global organisation, taking into account cultural differences is absolutely crucial. The 'how' and 'what' of the data you're collecting heavily depends on the countries you're operating in - how do you identify metrics that will be appropriate for all countries?
- Global surveys must be tailored dependent on location, which takes a lot more time and effort than creating one blanket survey. This extra work often puts people off, resulting in no data collection at all - or a mismatched effort that could offend people if not culturally sensitive.

### Solutions

#### Plan and design properly

- Make your surveys as short and concise as you can, and make sure they're not distributed too close in time to others i.e. engagement surveys. This will help combat survey fatigue.

#### Collaborate with other organisations

- This will help identify the most common metrics, potentially making it easier to establish which are worth choosing. Collaboration can also help influence policy makers and investors to stick to aligned metrics too.

#### Don't follow a "one size fits all" approach

- Cultural differences and changes must be taken into account if you want to collect truly meaningful data around DEI. This requires a high degree of flexibility and a willingness to create multiple tailored surveys if needed. It may take more time, but it's 100% worth doing if it avoids being insensitive across certain countries.

#### Manage expectations and communicate

- Keep employees as informed as possible. Whether via internal comms or in-person meetings, taking the time to explain the exact purpose and format of your DEI data collection will help build trust - and hopefully result in more meaningful responses. Be sure to share results as quickly as you can too, while the survey is still fresh and relevant in employees' minds.

#### Create more awareness around GDPR

- Take the time to truly understand the ins and outs of GDPR legalities and restrictions. But, if this is too time-consuming or difficult, partner with a third party well-versed in collecting and aggregating data in line with GDPR, as this will help protect you against potential privacy breaches.

## Discussion:

### What kind of DEI policies and practices does your organisation have in place and how might these affect retention?

For DEI to be truly embedded within an organisation, both policies and practices must be aligned. If not, retention could suffer and it will be incredibly difficult to make DEI a solidified element of your company's culture.

So, what policies and practices should we focus on here? And what impact could they have on employees?

Key policies and practices discussed by our guests and facilitators are below, along with potential challenges and their effect on retention.

#### Remote working

Since the pandemic, flexible working is now the new norm within our working world. In terms of DEI, remote working provides a huge range of benefits and gives employees more freedom over how they choose to work - in a way that directly supports them and their needs.

#### Challenges

##### More micromanagement amongst leaders

- This suggests less trust in employees to work as efficiently at home. Those in management positions may resort to micromanaging as a way to ease their worries, yet this could cause friction amongst employees if they feel they aren't being trusted to do their job.

##### Difficult to communicate effectively

- Remote working relies heavily on tech for employees to stay in touch and communicate as they would in person. However, if technology fails or someone isn't easy to get hold of when not in the office, this creates barriers and makes communicating very challenging - possibly hindering productivity in the process.

##### Less feeling of belonging

- The sense of "togetherness" and inclusion employees often feel when in person is very difficult to replicate if everyone is working remotely.

## Effect on retention

### The ability to choose

- The option to work remotely from home/another location is often seen as hugely positive amongst employees. Having the option to choose is often regarded as a very inclusive step, as employees are given more freedom to work in a way that works for them - as opposed to being forced to go into an office every day (not out of choice).

### DEI training for managers

- As something that has come up across multiple discussions, DEI training and education for leaders is undeniably important. Having a practice like this should be a given across all organisations if DEI is truly taken seriously.

## Challenges

### Managers not engaging

- Some may be against training like this, before even starting it in the first place. If a manager still has the view that DEI is a “nice-to-have”, they’re unlikely to dedicate real time and energy into developing their knowledge and understanding.

### Busy schedules

- Being too busy can often be a huge barrier to a manager’s ability to have DEI training. While some unengaged leaders may use ‘being busy’ as an excuse not to bother, there’s no denying that some will be genuinely keen to undergo training - but simply don’t have the time to dedicate to it.

## Effect on retention

### Positive DEI message from the top down

If you’re an employee genuinely passionate about DEI, you’re a lot more likely to remain at a company if you see your leaders equally passionate and engaged. DEI isn’t going anywhere, and the more managers who get on board and engage, the better.

### Promotes an inclusive culture

Provided managers undergoing this training are serious about it, the knowledge and development they’ll gain will be hugely positive for company culture.

### Accessibility

To achieve a truly inclusive company culture, meeting employees’ accessibility needs is crucial to help everyone feel they belong. If an employee doesn’t receive the support or resources they need to feel comfortable and safe at work, they’re unlikely to stay.

## Challenges

### Leaders don’t have the time

Those with the power to put accessibility policies and practices in place often don’t have enough time to dedicate to it - or simply don’t want to. Accessibility often isn’t given anywhere near as much priority as it should, meaning many employees could feel neglected at work.



### Cultural regulations

If working on accessibility across a global business operating in multiple countries, different laws and regulations will come into play.

### Need for greater education

Not everyone will have an understanding or personal experience of certain accessibility needs. Therefore, education is key to not only put the right support in place - but to also ensure other employees have enough knowledge.

### Effect on retention

#### Better support = better retention

It's a no brainer. If employees feel genuinely supported at work, they're likely to feel a greater sense of belonging and more desire to stay.

## To conclude...

A wide range of important and thought-provoking topics were discussed by our guests and facilitators, shedding light on where progress has been made - and where work still needs to be done.

It's clear to see that leadership engagement and commitment is crucial to truly embed DEI within an organisation, along with meaningful data collection and tailoring your policies and practises accordingly.

We hope you've gained insight into the real-life challenges and potential solutions to common barriers in embedding DEI. This event was a huge success and we will be hosting more in 2023 and beyond.

If you'd like to be the first to know about future DEI Roundtable events like this one, please join our official Slack community here [INSERT LINK]





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