



Title	The Evolution of D&I in Asia – Reflection on the DIAN Decade
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Tina:

Welcome Kate, thank you so much for joining here.

Kate:

Thank you Tina, and hello to everybody – it's really wonderful to be here. And to share with you a little bit about the evolution of D&I here in Asia cause it's interesting, when our founder, Shalini Mahtani, set up Community Business back in 2003, there was very little conversation about D&I and what that meant for business. And she was really a pioneer. She had had very personal experiences of discrimination and exclusion as an ethnic minority woman born and raised in Hong Kong. And she was very passionate about the need to raise awareness and address issues relating to diversity and inclusion. So in 2005, she brought me on specifically to design and deliver the very first diversity and inclusion conference for the region. And she saw the opportunity to bring companies together, to begin a dialogue about a subject that was really still in its infancy. And it was the success of those early conferences that led to a number of companies coming to us and expressing an interest in the forum to explore the issues further. And so, in 2008 – that was meant to be three years after those first conferences – DIAN was born, initially as a two-year initiative, so to be here celebrating ten years is fantastic. And we had 13 founding companies at that time.

Tina:

Well yeah, I know that from 2008 until 2012, the membership actually really boomed and we took off. Why do you think the DIAN membership became so popular and in demand?

Kate:

So I'm going to talk about three key reasons. The first I think was that DIAN filled a gap. At that time, D&I was not fully functioned and there was very limited institutional knowledge to draw upon. So many would look for the opportunity to get together with peers, share challenges and just figure out what D&I looked like in this part of the world. And one of the things that has really characterised the network has been the sense of community. So one of my all-time favourite quotes – if we could just bring it up on the screen – is this one, which really highlights that the network has provided a sort of knowledge and community for members. And here are some comments we heard on the opening video. At this point, as we talk about the spirit and the sense of community about DIAN, I think it's probably worth mentioning our lead facilitator Tracy Ann Curtis. Unfortunately, she can't be with us today but many of you who come to our meetings will know that Tracy Ann is really the life and soul of DIAN. You'll also know that she has a special mantra that she shares with us at the beginning of every meeting. So although she can't be with us, we've actually got a short video in a cinch from her that we're going to show. So thank you.

Tracy:

Hi diversity friends, my name is Tracy Ann Curtis and I've been associated with Diversity and Inclusion in Asia for the past decade. But a community of people involved in that network and some of my most important friends and professional colleagues. And it breaks my heart not to be at the discussion today and in spirit of being there virtually, we're doing this video and I just want to remind all of us of Baba Hari Dass's four daily practices. And some of you in the audience who know Baba Hari Dass are aware that he is a swami, he's Indian, he took a vow of silence as his spiritual practice and he asked us to do four things every single day to lead a life of prosperity. And the first, and I hope some of you remember that, is to work honestly. The second is to laugh and play. The third is to meditate and pray, he didn't care who you meditated or prayed to, and the fourth which is



really relevant to you being in the session this afternoon as well as us being apart of the DIAN community, is to make new friends without fear. So I wish all of you a fantastic day and I'm really excited about the next decade of us being together.

Kate:

Thank you. You may notice that the Community Business team are wearing a T-shirt with some words on the back. And we shared one of these shirts with Tracy Ann before she left and she was very amused because actually, we left one of the four things off the back. So we should be doing a second iteration of the T-shirt.

Tina:

I feel like every time we speak with Tracy Ann, this always happens, we go into so many fun discussions. But going back to what we were saying on the three reasons why DIAN was so popular.

Kate:

So yeah, I think the second reason was the pure focus on Asia. So many companies were struggling with how to relate their global strategies in this part of the world. And it was clear that many issues that were on the global diversity agenda weren't relevant to locate on this part of the world. So discussions regarding race or the need to comply with Equal Opportunity legislation – they were just not drivers in this part of the world. And so DIAN provided a forum to look at things from an Asian perspective or what we often refer to as adopting an Asian lens.

And then the third key reason was that DIAN was and continues to be about driving positive change. So from the outset, we knew that we didn't just want to be a network of companies that got together and talked, but that each year, we would work collectively on a project and have a tangible output that was designed to advance discussion and understanding of diversity and inclusion in the region. And that this should not just be for the benefit of the members but also for the wider business community.

And so you can see from this timeline, in the early days, this focus was very much on much needed research. There was a gap there and more recently, we've extended that to the DIAN professional series which is really about extending the impact of what we learn through DIAN.

Tina:

You mentioned discussion and research, and using this to drive positive change. What were the key focus areas back then?

Kate:

So when we started, discussion was really focused on diversity representation. The number one issue: how can we get more women in senior leadership positions? And so the very – so not much has changed I guess – but the very first project that we worked on at that time, that companies wanted to share the data around representation of women in their organisations across the region, so that they could benchmark their performance. And talking about it now, it doesn't sound particularly ground breaking but at that time it was pretty pioneering because there was just no local available data. And I think it's interesting that this piece still continues to be one of the most popular and widely referenced bits of research.

Tina:

In fact, we are planning to have a fourth iteration of this for 2019 so hopefully that comes out to fill in that gap again.



Kate:

And then, so we talked about diversity representation, the other key discussion was how to increase the representation of local Asian talent in leadership positions. So when companies looked at the top ranks of their organisations they observed that they tended to be dominated by non-Asians. And so this has been a really important topic for us. It continues to challenge us and as a network, we did a couple of pieces of research looking at this and they'll come up on the screen in a minute. And what we really learned through both these pieces of research is that there're many companies have a challenge with western bias in their talent management processes. So the way they view, the way they access, the way they promote talent. And that can be a real barrier to progression and for companies that are really committed to this region, they're setting their sights on growth in Asia, obviously this is not logical, it's not sustainable and so it's something that we continue to revisit and will be looking at more in the future.

Tina:

Absolutely. So those were the initial conversations but how have those conversations evolved since then?

Kate:

So those key topics continue to be really important – culture and gender. But I think over the years, we've seen the conversation extend. We've seen it deepen and we've seen it broaden. So if you stop at the extending bit, we've added other diversity dimensions to the discussion, so obviously we've looked at things like disability, generations and LGBT. Some of these topics have gained more traction depending on the market. It really is a reflection of the social, cultural and legal context. So for instance, generations. Here in Hong Kong, we barely talk about generations when we're working with companies but in countries like India and the Philippines where Gen Y is very much the dominant population, that topic's very high on the agenda. And something in the markets where we have changing legislation or disability quotas like China, India, Japan, disability is higher on the list.

Tina:

And this really highlights the theme I think, that we at DIAN always do, and the work that we do at Community Business, where we always stress the need to understand the local D&I context in different markets and also really tailor make our approach to addressing these issues. I guess my next question would be: where have you seen the most progress?

Kate:

And that, with hesitation, I will say LGBT. When we started – we started looking at LGBT back in 2009 and I remember we were having conversations about board at that time, about perhaps doing an Index some time in the future and there was a lot of hesitancy and caution. And I think that things have moved dramatically since that stage. We see LGBT as really the hot topic at the moment.

Tina:

Yes, we've come a long way since then certainly here in Hong Kong, I think of all of the local LGBT+ community events. I was recently on a Walk in Tour of Hong Kong just around LGBT. We certainly had a lot of high-profile court cases as well in recent years. And of course the growing popularity of our own Community Business LGBT+ Inclusion Index and awards.

Kate:



And even in markets where the environment is more challenging, whether that's Singapore or India where we've obviously still lots more to do, there is a greater level of openness in mind discussing those and communities coming together to see what can be done so huge progress in that area. We like to think that through our research and persistent engagement with companies that we're playing a part in that and we will continue to do that.

Tina:

So yeah you were talking about extending the conversations of these topics, what was the next theme?

Kate:

The next bit is the deepening of those conversations. In the course of the ten years, we often found that companies have said to us we've struggled to engage management and local stakeholders and the like. You know "D&I is a western concept, it's not relevant here". And we kind of, you know to a certain extent there are certain elements of truth in there, the way that we approach D&I requires an approach or a set of behaviors that can be at odds with Asian cultural norms. So if you think about diversity, it's focused on the individual and empowering the individual over the group. You think about inclusion and it's disregard for things like status and hierarchy which can be very important in this part of the world. So we've kind of coming up against this thing, that it's not relevant, but we wanted to dig a little bit deeper than that and so one of our studies, examining D&I from an Asian perspective, we thought we could explore these definitions and see what reactions were. And we found that instinctively, the need to belong and be accepted was fundamental to all human groups and that the negative impact of being excluded or discriminated against was felt by all cultures. So we felt instinctively that this wasn't quite right but what we realized was we need to have a different kind of conversation. We needed to not use words "diversity" and "inclusion" and we started to talk about insider and outsider groups, which seem to resonate, and we also introduced concepts of unconscious bias. And through that process, we identified a whole host of other D&I dynamics and issues that actually typically don't make it onto the global agenda. So things like competency in English language or the amount of overseas exposure you've had or your connections and your networks, and it's not that the other things aren't important but this might be the starting point for having a conversation about diversity and inclusion. And this is a really important piece of work in terms of really looking at it through an Asian lens.

Tina:

So going back to the three things that you mentioned earlier, so deepened the conversation and also broadened these topics as well, this conversation around diversity and inclusion. Third one was around broadening.

Kate:

So yeah, it's extended, deepened and broadened. So I think increasingly today, companies are actually looking beyond the diversity strands and I'm sure you see this globally that we're looking beyond diversity strands and focusing more on the broader strategy of inclusion. Just as evidence of this, I'm sure nearly all of the companies in this room have some kind of program to promote inclusive leadership. And that wasn't a topic even in the agenda even a few years ago but certainly not a decade ago. So I think this understanding that looking beyond our labels, we need to look at this broader definition. Some companies are beginning to call into question targeted initiatives at certain groups, you know, making the point of actually, that can exclude certain people. And I think there's a greater appreciation of the complexity of our identities and the need to look at intersectionality and if you look at it through that lens, then diversity really becomes something that applies to



us all. So as a result of that, we're seeing more work around promoting allies and building an inclusive culture overall.

Tina:

So we see this amazing evolution of D&I in Asia. My question now is: well, what next? Where does the conversation go from here?

Kate:

So I think we're in very exciting times. D&I is assuming a much more strategic role within the business. And as it does so, we're seeing a number of significant shifts taking place in the organisations. So the focus on D&I is moving from diverse representation to wholistic talent management strategy, from one-off initiatives to designing for inclusion, and from a focus on the internal workplace to the external market place. And the guest speakers in our next session are going to be exploring each of these themes as part of this transformation. So yeah, I think those are the big shifts we're seeing. In our DIAN meeting last week, we were also reflecting on how the very role of the D&I professional is evolving. And so it's moving from that of being an HR and talent specialist to being much more a business advisor and coach. And in this context, we believe that DIAN remains as relevant and important as ever, and we're really looking forward to helping to continue pioneer this conversation, but also empower and support D&I professionals navigate the changing landscape. So we're excited about the next decade, where the conversation is going, and remain committed to really partnering with you to drive that forward.

Tina:

Okay, thank you so much Kate and we look forward to the future. Thank you.