



DIVERSITY: Beyond Demographics

FT | IE Corporate Learning Alliance held a dinner on the topic of diversity at the Financial Times on 25 September 2018. Guests were HR executives from large organisations across multiple sectors, and the dinner was co-hosted by Dr Celia de Anca, Professor of Diversity, IE Business School, and Pilita Clark, Associate Editor and business columnist, Financial Times.

Here are our five top observations from this lively discussion:

The debate has long moved on from building business cases for diversity. Diversity and inclusion is now a central business priority as companies innovate and grow. The question is now on where best to invest.

The focus on diversity is shifting from demographic to cognitive diversity. Demographic diversity, and in particular gender diversity, remains top of mind. However, the focus is moving from demographic to cognitive diversity, with organisations looking to create cultures that are more open, collaborative, and promote rather than discriminate against diverse thinking styles, knowledge, skills, values and beliefs.

To set the ground work for cognitive diversity, companies are experimenting with bold measures to help create more open and inclusive cultures. For example, one guest shared a new online feedback platform, where an employee is able to provide feedback to any other employee across the firm on what they would like that employee to Start, Stop or Continue. To the surprise of many, this approach has been well received, and is helping to create a culture where employees feel safe (or we imagine at least safer) talking truth to power.

Companies are moving away from individualism to communities of aspiration. As outlined in Celia's [Harvard Business Review](#) article earlier this year, communities of aspiration are ones where individual ideas are valued for their contribution to a common project. Building on this, another guest talked about their move away from the traditional individual performance management approach, to a team based one, that looks to encourage diversity of thinking and collaboration in order to achieve team goals.

What business outcomes are you trying to achieve through diversity? Celia's overarching message was that different types of diversity can result in very different business outcomes. We discussed gender diversity as an example, during which Pilita shared her recent [FT article](#) on how some companies are taking quite contentious steps to promote women. Innovation, for example, is often cited as a business outcome of having more women in senior leadership teams. Celia's advice: think again. If the desired outcome is more innovation, assess your cognitive diversity strategy first.

Dr Celia de Anca is the Director of the Centre for Diversity in Global Management at the IE Business School.



She is the author of *Beyond Tribalism* (McMillan 2012) and co-author of *Managing Diversity in the Global Organization* (McMillan 2007). She received

the award for women executive of the year 2008 from ASEME and was listed in the Thinkers50 ranking of global management thinkers 2013.

Pilita Clark is an Associate Editor and business columnist at the Financial Times.



She writes a weekly column on modern corporate life, as well as features and other articles. She has worked for the FT since 2003, covering

aviation and the environment, and was previously a Washington correspondent for Australian newspapers and a Nieman Fellow at Harvard University.



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Michael Skapinker

Executive Editor,
FT | IE Corporate Learning Alliance
<http://bit.ly/FTJournalists>



Bahare Heywood

Chief Risk & Compliance Officer,
Clifford Chance
<http://bit.ly/CliffordChanceTestimonial>



Rory Simpson

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