Webinar transcript

I want to break free. Setting your own D&I comms agenda

Russ Norton 00:05
Hi folks, welcome, welcome. I can just see people joining, so we'll give folks a few seconds to come in. Say "Hello" please, please pretty please. Could somebody please post a question or post in the chat to confirm that you can hear us loud and clear? That would be wonderful so that we aren't just speaking into an echo chamber for the next hour Normally, this is the bit where people work out GoToWebinar! I spend all of my life on Teams and Zoom. Somebody work out the chat function and just give me a "hello" or a thumbs up. I can see folks still dropping in which is fab. folks saying hello, which is wonderful. Still nobody posting a question? Pretty, pretty pretty. Please, somebody say hello. I'll give it a few more seconds and then I'll introduce us all.

Russ Norton 01:18
Folks, I'm going to kick off. Thank you. Thank you so much, Kate, that is wonderful. So folks, thank you so, so much for joining us today. I'm really excited to talk about this topic. It's something that I'm incredibly passionate about. And I'm delighted to be joined by three co-conspirators and absolute experts in their respective fields. My name is Russ Norton. I am Director of Client Experience at scarlettabbott. That means I sort of have fingers in many, many pies across the work that we do. But we're a specialist employee engagement consultancy, and we work with major organisations doing global projects. And my own area of specialism within that is diversity and inclusion, which is why we're here today to talk about that topic. So I'm going to ask my fellow panellists to introduce themselves. And by way of an introduction, please tell us your name and your role. And also tell us about your highlight from June. What has been the absolute most tip top thing that has happened to you over the last 30 days? To get you started, I'm going to kick off with the fact that it is my birthday today. So this is my highlight right now. I've been waiting 30 days for this very moment to happen. There's nothing I'd rather be doing on my birthday. I certainly wouldn't want to be on an island, drinking and whatnot! I'm going hand over in alphabetical order to you Audrey first, please.

Audrey Pantelis 02:48
Hi everyone. My name is Audrey Pantelis. I'm the director of Elevation Coaching and Consulting, which is my own consultancy, and I am a leadership coach. I also work in schools with regards to school improvement with special educational needs and disabilities. And I am an EDI or D&I trainer and facilitator. My highlight for June has been I suppose, booking a trip to Valencia next month. That was last week. I'm feeling pumped about that I have to say. But I've done some amazing work. My second thing, if I can, is that I've been working in schools with young people this month. I've loved every minute of it and it's really interesting to hear their views on DE&I.

Russ Norton 03:36
Awesome. Thank you so much, Audrey. Harry next, please.

Harry Grout 03:40
I'm a consultant at scarlettabbott and I'm excited to be on this call because accessibility, which is very much the same vein as the D&I, is a passion rof mine. It's something I'm really keen on try and share awareness about on how to do it right. My big highlight this week is very similar to yours, Russ. Not your birthday, in particular. But it was my daughter's second birthday last week, so we had a big party and I made a very, very tasty pavlova.

Russ Norton 04:14
Wonderful! And finally, Thom.

Thomas Hall 04:16
Hi, everyone. I'm Thom. I'm part of the communications team at Rolls-Royce. I lead on our global campaign - so the big things that we need to talk to everybody about, around the world and a lot of the time they come from the people world and values and behaviours, diversity inclusion, and so on. My highlight? I'm going to have two as well just because you will have! My highlights of the month are both today. So three years ago today, our adopted daughter came home. She joined our family officially and we collected her from her foster family and we've not had any peace and quiet since! And secondly, I'm sat, by the way, joining this webinar from my own personal ballroom, in a hotel in London, because we've had a leadership conference here the past couple of days. This morning, we've done a two hour session with our top 90 leaders about inclusive leadership. And we just had a brilliant conversation with them - it's gone really well. The campaign in terms of comms perspective has been ace as well. So, that's definitely been a highlight.

Russ Norton 05:36
Fantastic. Thank you so much, team. So folks, we're going to work through some questions today and really explore this topic about the diversity calendar and its connection with comms and its impact within the work that we do. By all means, please ask questions throughout as we're talking. If there's anything that you want to get into, if there's any questions that you want to ask any of the panel, if there are any topics that you're just like, "what you're going on about?", please let us know and we will do our best to answer them. So, I guess, the title of this webinar is "I want to break free" from the very, very fulsome calendar full of international awareness dates, of awareness months and weeks, and all these moments in the calendar that are tremendously important and offer a fantastic opportunity to talk. But in the world of internal communications, and in the world of employee engagement, they can feel overwhelming. They can feel like an enormous task to keep up with. There can be an enormous amount of guilt associated with them. Which ones do I mark? Which ones don't have I mark? Also, if I'm only pursuing those dates in the calendar, am I doing a fantastic job? Or are there things that I'm maybe missing out on unintentionally and excluding from my communications? So, I guess what I'm NOT saying is that we shouldn't mark those key dates, right? I'm not saying before, you all think I'm Piers Morgan, and I'm saying "What a load of work nonsense." I'm absolutely not saying that. It's Pride Month and I'm a proud member of the LGBTQ+ community. So, it would be foolish for me to suggest such a thing. What I AM saying is "is there a better way?" Is there a way to relate to these diversity dates? Is there a way to trigger conversations in large organisations that isn't so much a defined and almost externally influenced rhythm and routine? That's what I'd love to explore with our panellists

today. So, let's start with the positives. What are those fantastic opportunities that the structured diversity calendar brings to us as communicators and as consultants? Tom, would you kick us off?

Thomas Hall 07:59
Just following up on what you said around how it can be a burden. We've definitely been in that position over the past five or six years. Not being as mature, five or six years ago, we starting out talking about some of those different days and communicating about them, and getting those as part of our narrative as a company. But very quickly, it snowballs. And before you know it every day, every week, every month, there's another one that you feel compelled to, ir the D&I team, feel compelled that you've got to mark. I talk about it from a marketing perspective. It's like throwing a bucket of ping pong balls at your audience and expecting them to catch all of them. They're just not going to. Now, the positives for us? We've tried to have the conversations about going, "Okay, we want to talk about diversity inclusion, we want to talk about different aspects of diversity inclusion, but let's be really clear on the ones that we need to talk about as a company". So, what are the ones where we need to change as an organisation? Where are the ones where we need to do something differently? We've drilled it down to about eight in the year. Those moments in time that we have, and they're all really closely aligned to our inclusion strategy. So, for example, in an engineering business, we're about 85% men. Obviously, we need to talk about getting more women into the business, and making sure when women do join, that they're fairly valued. Naturally, things like International Women's Day, International Women in Engineering Day, are brilliant opportunities, But they can't just be "Woohoo, it's International Women's Day", there's got to be some substance behind that. Of going honestly, "where are we as a company? Where do we want to be? How are the people reading this going to do something differently?" So it's about learning, it's about a conversation. It's about how people can get involved and take action and do something differently. We kind of hate the word 'awareness' in our team in terms of communications. It doesn't achieve anything. It can be a stepping stone, great, but it never changed the world. One of our speakers this morning said that you can be aware of being an engineer, but does that mean you can build a jet engine? No! So, there are positives if we get that right. And we're only a year or two into really focusing on those few events. But I've seen them be powerful on different different topics.

Russ Norton 10:35
That's fantastic. All of you, what are your thoughts on the positives that the calendar brings?

Audrey Pantelis 10:42
Well, this is the thing that's interesting. From a school perspective, and especially from a special educational needs and disabilities perspective. It's great, sometimes, to have these days to kind lean into because - and I recognise your hatred of the word 'awareness' and I think I'm sharing it a bit as well, but I'm going to use it, sorry! For those young people and children, it is a way in, because obviously, cognitively, it may well be that to talk about a flag, to talk about a particular aspect of a particular characteristic, or whatever it is, is helpful. However, I think your ping pong analogy is absolutely spot on. For us in education, and especially in special needs, where you have an overload of that, kids become fatigued really quickly, going, "do I need to wear odd socks today? What am I wearing? What am I doing? We used to see behaviour issues, because we were always celebrating something. So, as much as I loved doing it, even I became fatigued pretty quickly and I then had to quickly scale it all back. I just said, it's too much. I think neurotypical people probably feel the same, but

don't know how to say it. So, they just get out the flag, get out the food, get out the fun. And actually, it's more than that. So, yeah, very much in favour of deciding and filtering out what's not important and drilling down into what is.

Russ Norton 12:17
That's brilliant. Thanks, Audrey. Harry, what's your experience from working in-house? How have you balanced getting communication out to your audience and keep up with the calendar?

Harry Grout 12:26
I always found that they never really changed every year. You'd go through the stage of asking what Awareness Day we're going to be supporting this year. And most of the time, it was the deeper ones that you would do. Pride, black history, month, everything like that. And then they'd be like, these are our hero ones. And then here are the other ones that we'll support and then you give them a different treatment. So, very much to what you're saying, though, which was we need to focus on which are going to support the business of the direction that we need to go. And then there's like, we can't really leave these ones out. But these ones we can. Because it was very much like a pick and mix scenario. But what I did like about them is although is there should be more communication throughout the year on these things in peaks and troughs. But the positives I find from them is that it gives you a chance to go "it's coming up, we should be saying something about that. This is something that we need to communicate with our employees, we need to some engagement out there, we need to get those conversations going" and it allows you that chance, and that space to do that safely, rather than springing up. So those moments in particular, I think for awareness, are a really big positive. That was kind of my two cents on it. I don't think they're going and I don't think they should go. I think there should be a moment to celebrate, there should be a chance to have a conversation. But it's one piece of the puzzle.

Russ Norton 13:54
And Thom, you recently featured in VOICE magazine talking about your experience of IDAHOBIT. Could you share with us, from a global perspective, what opportunity that brought you and the impact that it had?

Thomas Hall 14:05
Yeah, absolutely. So five or six years ago, we started our Employee Resource Group called Prism, which is a UK Employee Resource Group for LGBTQ+ employees. We've got an equivalent one in the US called Propel with Pride. And it was early days of those ERGs. We didn't talk about any kind of milestones on the LGBT calendar. We didn't talk about Pride month or anything like that. We wanted something to focus attention and have that conversation on. We've got these ERGs, we've got them for a reason, because we're not where we need to be in terms of inclusive behaviours in our teams. And that's definitely one aspect where we need to get better. So, we started talking about IDAHOBIT, and the first year we did it, it was visible. It was totally eye catching because it was a very different style of communication for us as a business. If you read the VOICE magazine, you see the photo in there. We rebranded this kind of 10 foot high logo into rainbow, which didn't go via the brand team. They just went and did it. It was really visible and it started a conversation. So, one of our senior leaders, Warwick Matthews, he was responsible for doing the logo – big supporter of Employee Resource Groups. He

was inundated from employees going "it's brilliant to see Rolls-Royce doing this" and inundated from customers. At the time he was working in civil aerospace, airlines around the world were going "brilliant you're talking about this, I didn't think Rolls-Royce would do this sort of thing." This is sort of five years ago, this is before you know, now, I'm a member of the LGBT community. I get a bit sick of seeing a rainbow on every bloody shop front and website, for the whole of June. It's just become like, everyone. But are you actually supporting the community? What are you actually doing? Or is it just one of those things? Now, the reaction globally was very different. We did have a number of employees contact us in the chat when our communications go out, going, "why are we doing this? This does not fit with values." And there are a number of religious reasons cited. The Pride flag was displayed outside one of our sites in the US and it was challenged by employees that didn't feel comfortable with that. Unfortunately, it was taken down. We didn't stand up as a company and go, "these are our values. This is what we stand for." From there, it really kind of snowballed, because that set a precedent of these D&I days through the year. The year after it was bigger. We had rainbows. There was a huge amount of activity. What I really like about these D&A days, and I hate the idea of doing loads of them, but when you get it right, you really don't have to do a lot as a comms team. The first year of International Women's Day, the first year od IDAHOBIT, we were kind of really visible with it. The second year, we were kind of going "that team over there is doing something" "Oh yeah, that sites doing something". "Oh, there's a team over in Singapore." It just snowballed. All these photos are coming in and videos coming in. It was like, "Okay, we've tapped into something that people want here and people are doing something differently because of it". I think there are lessons to be learned like in the US where the flag was taken down, which I referred to in that article. We need to be a bit more bold as a company. I think we've come a long way in terms of how we do that. Now, you'll us as in Pride marches in Indianapolis, in the UK and beyond. So I'm quite quite proud or how far we've come.

Russ Norton 18:02
What I loved, I think it was two summers ago, the co op in the UK didn't change their logo on June 1. And instead of not doing anything or not saying anything, they didn't change the logo. And then they posted an enormous thread of all the things that they do to support the LGBTQ plus community throughout the rest of the year. And they used that almost like a protest against the brands that simply put a rainbow logo up and carry on doing exactly what they do 364 days of the year. I just think that's what I'd love to see more organisations doing. Using it as a communication opportunity to talk about the things they already do, rather than doing things and communicating things because it's the date in the calendar, if you see what I mean. Audrey, I'm curious about schools and both teams within schools and the kids at schools. What dates are important to them? Is there a hierarchy between them? And how do you decide which ones to go for and which not to?

Audrey Pantelis 19:06
Absolutely, I think there is a hierarchy. And interestingly, I think Harry mentioned that when we were talking about those key dates, and I think traditionally in schools, Black History Month has always been the go to. And so initially, you can see the value of it, you can see the educational value of it, and you can see where the learning happens. But then what has happened over time is that it's become the same people in the school doing the same things. There hasn't really been a fresh approach. And it's either the whole month, or it's a day. And you know, depending on the constraints of the curriculum, the timetable, and then you tend to find is that because it's the same thing, same people, there's just an

assumption that everybody knows what the same things are. So really since the death of George Floyd, sadly you know, the death of a black man has actually resparked it. Naturally, the black square thing. I won't lie. I was livid when that all came out, because I felt that was that was tokenism at its height. I didn't do it, I wouldn't do it. And I watched people do it and just though "that's mad." Who was doing black squares when Buffalo happened a few weeks ago? So this is the thing. All the stuff hasn't gone away. So what's happening now is that schools, especially now are thinking about diversifying the curriculum. Now we're starting to get something a little bit more robust, because we're talking about an approach that will last the whole year. Some schools I'm working with are just running with the ball with this with regards to Black History Month, because that's probably the strongest one. Pride, similar to Thomas's kind of recollection, or rather yours, Russ about people talking about what they're doing all the time. I'm leaning towards that, because now the language is there within schools to talk about it from a child and young person's perspective, which was never there before, which is great. I'm seeing more of that now. So I think, really, like everything and anything, you're looking at what your community is saying. And then representing that. If you can reflect what your community needs, job's a good 'un! Really, rather than thinking, let's cherry pick and let's jump in, that's probably I think most schools are going now, where they're actually looking at it in a more holistic way. But there are still always gonna be some schools that still don't quite understand it and still think "I need to do everything and anything". And it's exactly what you were saying. How do you choose which ones to do? If you're doing Down Syndrome Day, then you're doing autism day? And then you're doing blindness day? When do we stop?

Russ Norton 21:59
It's a tricky one, because that then creates some kind of hierarchy between the different points of identity. I always one of the first conversations that I have with a client, if they talk to me about International Women's Day, is "do you mark International Men's Day?" Is there that parity? Because I think to start down this journey of doing it aligned to the calendar means you have to be mindful of giving equal airtime to all of those different characteristics of identity. Now, what I'm not doing is the whole "When's International Men's Day, then? I'm so hard done by because I'm a bloke", because the last 200 years have been International Men's Day, all day, every day. I recognise it's appropriate to turn the volume up on issues that specifically affect men one day a year, as it is appropriate to turn the volume up on issues that specifically affect women one day a year. And I think there is a conversation to be had around, does our comms calendar - the things that we choose - does it represent our audiences fairly? Is it offering equity the way that we would want to offer equity to our employees in terms of pay and opportunities? And so I do think for communicators, it's important to take that step back and go, "are we mindful about the things that we do and the things that we don't do? " As you said, Audrey, if we're going to support Down Syndrome Day, why not other types of health issues and disabilities? So what downsides are there? What other kinds of pressures have you folks noticed? Harry, I'll start with you. What would the argument be for turning your back to the calendar dates?

Harry Grout 23:41
I think there's a couple of things. For employees, to be to be brutal, this is not their job. For them to go "I'll stop here, I'm going to engage with what you're doing here." It's not what I'm getting paid for. So the biggest challenge of this is you put a lot of effort, a lot of energy, a lot resource - particularly if it's the first time you're celebrating or marking an awareness day - to then get them to stop and go "stop what

you're doing come engage with this", That conversation and that engagement can be very, very tough. Leaning on what you said earlier, Thom, it's not until really the second year you do it, or the second time it comes around, do you see the benefits from it. Because the first time is really getting people to understand it and get on board. And then things culturally, things happen throughout the time. People have this conversation that comes in the second time round. And hopefully, people are more involved and more engaged but if you're only allowing that to happen a couple of times a year, it can be tricky to actually get buy in and that's almost what you're looking for. For employees to go "Yeah, I want to get involved with it" rather than I have to get involved with it. That's a very big difference in terms of what an employee's experience is. For me, that's definitely one thing in terms of why not to do it. I think it's the pressures from it as a communicator, to know from the engineering sector, you've got International Women's Day, and International Women in Engineering very close to each other. How would you differentiate when you're saying similar messaging? There's a big pressure as a communicator because they're both probably as equally as important as each other. It comes back to your point, Russ. How would you get the hierarchy? Which one is more worthy than the other? And that, for a communicator, can be a very difficult way to navigate through.

Russ Norton 25:46
Thom, what are your thoughts?

Thomas Hall 25:47
I think the kind of the pressure it puts on a comms team, you're all working in communications, you all know this, and people watching this will know this as well. This is just one of 100 things for us to communicate and there are many more priorities beyond this, for us to communicate. Every year. We've just spent two years with our full time jobs talking about COVID, the survival of the company when there's no planes in the sky. That's how we make our money. We don't waste money on selling engines, we make money when they fly. So when they're all grounded, we're haemorrhaging cash. So there's these big things we've got to talk about. We're a big part of the climate problem. Our engines are using all of them. They're in the sky creating this current current climate crisis. So we've got big stuff that we've got to communicate with people. And what we don't want is diversity and inclusion adding to the noise that is distracting people. We want it to, add to what we're trying to do as a company. And so when we've scaled back all of these days in the D&I calendar and everything else, we've gone, "what's the opportunity to campaign around inclusion?" So we're taking a completely different approach. This year, we've started a "being included" campaigns all about being included, being our best, being Rolls-Royce is about who you are. Because yes, there are days and moments and everything else, but we're talking about when you look past all of that, when you look past the million webinars on diversity and inclusion, and the training for different people, and everything else, it's simply about being a person. How you treat other people around you, in life and at work. It's just your behaviours day to day. That's what the entire campaign is based on. It's not shying away from the fact of going, we're not where we need to be. If we want to be this high performing company, we want people to come into work and be at their best. But you look at our Gallup data, you look at all these data points. And they go 'right, we've got people who aren't even talking to their team members, or talking down to their team members. We've got incidents of bullying, harassment, we've got microaggressions, and all these kinds of things". I'm not saying they're the norm, but they exist. We need to be open about that. Forget all the kind of the woke stuff and being politically correct. And all

that kind of stuff that people use to dismiss this kind of inclusion activity. It's just about being a person, how you treat the people around you each day. That's absolutely what we're talking about. We've just shifted that narrative this year. What we had this morning was just going, "okay, leaders, we don't want to blame you. But you're the top 90 people in the organisation that have flown in from around the world. We need you to have some accountability on this. You need to show up on this. But you need to expect these behaviours of people in your teams as well." So you talk about it in the context of going, I can be my best today. But if we want to be that company that is pioneering electric flight, and all that cool stuff that we want to do in the future, we need to keep those talented people. If this isn't a place where people feel like they can be included, they'll go

Russ Norton 28:58
It's a massive risk. I think, to build on that, my own experiences. Talking about LGBTQ+ issues only in the context of Pride Month sort of makes it harder to then talk about them in other times. Then if you extrapolate that you struggle with being able to talk about anything related to sexual orientation. So, let's say, divorce, Divorce impacts a lot of people and it can be really disruptive to your employee experience at work because you're distracted by something. But we don't talk about love in all its forms right now. We focus on LGBTQ stuff, because it's Pride Month. So it feels like it's not pushing the conversation in a way that necessarily everyone can engage with. Perhaps there are other topics that are experienced more universally that that don't get discussed. I'm curious Audrey, you mentioned Black History Month, and I suppose we've talked more about racism and anti racism since the murder of George Floyd and the Black Lives Matter movement. But are we now pigeonholing that conversation about race and racism into these diversity dates, perhaps at the expense of discussing it throughout the rest of the year?

Audrey Pantelis 30:14
Good question. And I would say, thankfully, for people such as our good selves who do this work, hopefully now we're we're broadening that narrative. So, if anything, we've widened it. I think going back to what Thomas said, fundamentally, this is about people. Treating people well and that sense of belonging. I think that underpins everything, and for me, I feel this work is moralistic to a certain extent, because this is about making sure that we will treat each other as well as we can do, embracing our differences. Accepting that there is power in difference. For years we've spent all of our time making sure that we are cookie cutter people. Subsequently, that's what we're getting at. And we now know that that isn't the case. It's about empowering and giving them that language. So I think, less so if we focus just on these particular days, we find actually, that is artificial. Schools are getting to grips with that now and recognising it. Which is why the work on diversifying the curriculum is such a joy. The problem is, I guess, then people just think, well we have to do everything from Africa, we have to everything from India. So then it's about diversifying the thinking by diversifying the curriculum. So there's more work to be done on that. But yeah, it's giving people more language, more opportunities to think about it in a broader holistic sense, which is great. But it does come down to some some fundamentals. That's probably the bit is where the biggest work needs to be done. How do we embrace difference as we embrace diversity? How do we also embrace that kind of consistency, and application?

Thomas Hall 32:07

Can I give you a school example of where that's going well? I've mentioned I've got two children. They're adopted, they've got two dads and they're both mixed race. When we were going through the adoption process, the social workers would talk to us in terms of children's standing out. They've got a triple whammy there in terms of how you're going to support them and help them feel included at school and not feel like the odd ones out. Then this morning, I got a message from my son's teacher on the ClassDojo app that they use. Going "I've been thinking about the adopted children that we've got in the class - there are three adopted children in the class - and how we can, as part of the PSHE learning that they're doing about different families and sex education, talk to the class about adoption. And the teacher messaged me and said, "my sister is adopted, and she's mixed race, do you think it would be okay to invite her into the classroom tomorrow afternoon to talk to the class about being adopted and what it felt like growing up?" My partner and I were messaging each other this morning going "Yes, please!" That teacher is brilliant, and just thought about those children and how it feels for them to talk about, where babies come from, and everything else, because I got those questions. You know, when they had the lessons and anyone with children, those questions come out, when they go to bed. That's when your mind starts processing. That teacher's then thought about it and gone "What can I do to help the rest of the class understand a bit more adoption?" But then for our son to identify with a grown up who's very similar to them? Right, Yes. So it's just fantastic when those little things happen.

Audrey Pantelis 33:55
So it's happening, it's happening, it's real.

Russ Norton 33:59
I think for us as well, as a generation it puts us in a really interesting and influential position. Because if I consider the generation above us who are mostly C-suite, board level CEOs, who are, let's face it, predominantly male, predominantly white, predominantly 60+ - not very diverse at all. And the generation below us who are growing up kind of "post diverse" - they are so much more enlightened and they're growing up in such a more inclusive and accepting childhood than certainly I ever experienced. It puts us in this position of having to have a foot in their camp and understand their aspirations and their expectations and also being able to translate that up the chain. Audrey, if you could, this is an impossible question so feel free to just say it's too intense. In terms of what is top of mind for that next generation leaving in school and entering the workforce, what do you think is most important to them when they first sign their first ever contract and enter a large organisation? If you could pin two or three topics down what would they be?

Audrey Pantelis 35:11
I think definitely they're looking to think about them being their true selves, their authentic selves. They're hearing that message from us and they're recognising now the world loves that. Instagram shows them that, Facebook shows them that, Twitter shows them that. Having a voice. Now is probably for those young people who are thinking, "How do I make my mark?" That's the big thing for a number of young people who are developmentally going through that stage in life. They're confused, they're conflicted. They're struggling with that whole push/pull. I want to be individual, but I want to be with my mates. How do I do that? Invariably now, the more we can get that message out about being authentic, that's the thing, I think they don't see the categories that we see. If anything, they're looking for organisations that are broad. My son, he's 28, he corrects me on some of my terminology, and I'm like,

"Oh, but I thought I was right on. I thought I was okay." And even younger than him automatically are in correction mode for older people who may well be wanting to be well intentioned but aren't quite getting it. I think that the boundaries and the barriers have gone out the window. They're expecting organisations to match up to that. Those two things jump out. A third one. I think that there's no barriers, but they also do want that sense of belonging, as well. They do want to see that, because they welcome it in the same way that anyone would, I may well be different, but I want to know that it's okay. So, for example, I work a lot with independent schools, and a lot of independent schools wants to diversify their staff cohort. But the diverse cohort that's out there, don't want to work in these institutions, because actually, there wasn't the infrastructure there to actually recognise, and embrace and celebrate. Subsequently, until these organisations change their ways, they won't go there. So we're going to be in a bit of a cycle. Young people are seeking out areas where they know they can belong, and then they will embrace. So I think that's probably the things that are jumping out at me, especially in the fact that I've been working with young people and hearing from them and that's what they're telling me,

Russ Norton 37:58
It's fab, because none of those things are things that I didn't want. And it's so interesting to reflect back and go there's almost a game then to play, isn't there? Because there's this wanting the world, wanting the moon on a stick, but also understanding that you're entering into a capitalist system that exists to wealth accumulate, and that there are some boundaries, and there's a game to play there. So step one is kind of self awareness. I think before you can be a fantastic ally to others, you really have to understand yourself and your own privilege and your own stance, before you can start to go out there and interact. I'm delighted to say we've got some questions coming in and we've got some doozies. First of all, Thomas, your Rolls-Royce colleagues are listening, and they could not be more proud of you, which is just delightful. So pat on the back for you.

Russ Norton 38:51
We've got a question around religious festivals, specifically. And I suppose we're all talking here from a UK perspective. It's very normal for us to have days off at Easter and days off at Christmas time and to talk about Christmas. I suppose over the years, we've learned that perhaps "the holidays" is more inclusive. We've kind of adopted that from America. But there are a myriad of religious festivals throughout the year. What techniques have have you used at Rolls-Royce to navigate the different faiths that are out there and which ones to profile and which ones you haven't?

Thomas Hall 39:26
I'd say, being really honest with you, I think this is a work in progress for where we're at in terms of communications. We have, as a company, talked about the holidays at Christmas and internally and externally we talked about the holidays. See, I said the 'holidays at Christmas'? Bias on my part. But it's definitely a work in progress. We do have a multifaith network, which is one of our new ERGs that is that is helping us think this through, I'd say this year, as I mentioned, kind of boiling it down to eight moments a year, and one of them is Ramadan. That tends to be one that has quite a bit of focus for us as an organisation. And we've done more on it internally and externally this year than we have in previous years. Part of it, as well, is about other colleagues learning about it, and going, "the people around you, the people you're working with, are doing this right now, and that might affect how they

work. Or it might affect you have a conversation." We're giving people pointers on how to understand both more about Ramadan, but then how it impacts on how you can take care of people in the workplace. It's definitely a work in progress. It's the first year we've done it in this way. We don't get too much pressure on doing too many religious festivals as we do in other aspects of the D&I calendar. But it's definitely something we're looking at.

Russ Norton 40:57
I don't know if I work with any clients who've got a really definitive way of navigating that just yet, certainly not at a global level. I agree that Ramadan does have a very specific impact on the people who are observing it and who are fasting, and which means that it has more relevance, I feel, to communicate to the other employees to be fantastic allies. Perhaps that's almost part of the decision making for for communicators, as we talk about different aspects of diversity and inclusion, is to what extent can it have an impact on that individual? And what do the people around them need? Harry, that's something that you're really passionate about in terms of disability. Do you want to share a bit about your thinking towards different types of disability and therefore different kinds of needs?

Harry Grout 41:51
Certainly can. For me, accessibility comes within the whole umbrella. Everything that comes with D&I. I think when most people think of disability, they think about permanent disabilities. People who are in wheelchairs, they might have mental disabilities, all this kind of thing. This is very much in the sphere of when people think about accessibility from a tech side, from a website side. And Microsoft have done a huge amount of work around this. But in its basic form, there are three forms of disability. We've got permanent, we have temporary, and we have situational. Most people can understand a permanent one, as I've just said. People can understand a temporary one, for instance, if you're thinking of a mobility disability, if you're a mother and you're carrying your child in one arm, in that situation, you can't use your arm. That's a temporary one. Then you have a situational one. So it could be someone who's working on a factory line. And at the moment, can't be doing something else, because of focusing on this temporarily in this situation. So when it comes to that and it comes to D&I, for me, I think there's a really clear tangent, with communicating, especially around Awareness Day. If we are going to support awareness days, we're doing these ones, we've got the hierarchy, we know we're doing. You, as communicators, might be very clear. June - we're talking about Pride. But for everyone else, what else is going on in the organisation? What temporary things might affect how they might engage with that? What situational things might get in the way? So acknowledging that, because you don't want to willingly exclude anybody from it. And if you do go into the route of you just do it on that day, you're almost de facto willing to exclude people from engaging with that. So, by having much more of a holistic view around the awareness days, or the things that you support and celebrate, and making sure you're tying in where there might be temporary and situational things. So there'll be employees who are on maternity leave. How would you engage with them while they're on maternity leave? For me that's around sort of accessibility, that's where I'd like to see the shift going. It's not focusing on the people who are there in front of you. But for the people who can't necessarily be there in front of you, or temporarily, might struggle to. That's where you'll see much more engagement and conversation.

Russ Norton 44:26

It's almost as if, Harry, humans are multi-dimensional and multi-faceted and intersectional creatures with varying needs that change day to day. This is a fantastic starting point for the next part of the conversation, which is "what is the alternative?" If we were to go wild and say, right, we're turning our back on the diversity calendar, you'd probably have a bit of a kickoff. There would be some reputational risk there. That is risky for communicators. Let's also assume that you do have a separate D&I team. I do recognise in a lot of organisations, internal comms teams are doing this stuff off the side of their desks. I suppose for those people, step one is to go "hey organisation, we need to invest in this and get get a proper team to coordinate this activity." So, the middle ground that I've seen work really, really well is for organisations to set their own agenda of topics that they're going to communicate with. That could be monthly, it could be once a quarter, it could be a couple of topics per quarter. The way I like to think about it is think about when Glastonbury shows up across the BBC channels. There isn't a Glastonbury channel, and there isn't one Glastonbury programme. You'll hear commentary on the radio, you'll see Glastonbury documentaries on iPlayer, you'll see BBC4 treating Glastonbury in a slightly different way than BBC1 would. But it shows up across the channels and across the communications that they produce. So, I think for an organisation to say, "right, in March, for example, we are going to talk about race and racism in all its forms. So we're going to focus on race and ethnicity, we're going to look at the experience of white people who are from different countries and maybe have a really strong accent, or maybe that English is not their native language, we're going to also look at the experience of black people, Indian people, Chinese people, we're going to really explore and explode this topic and get get under the quite literally under the skin of it, to to explore it in all its forms with a variety of storytelling across the across the month, and with some conversation." I feel like there's a much more authentic way than going "in Britain or in America, the date says that we're supposed to talk about this topic on this date. Therefore we're kind of scrambling around for something to talk about." What I also love is that those topics that you choose can be inherently linked to your strategy and the direction of your organisation. And Tom, some work that we did with your team a couple of years ago, was the classic argument in favour of diversity and inclusion, that diverse teams are more creative and more innovative. Which is wonderful for you at Rolls-Royce, because a few of your teams exist to be very innovative and very creative. But the majority of your teams exist to be very compliant, and very safe, and very secure and very health and safety focused and dealing with high risk materials in high risk situations. So actually, why would we talk about creativity and innovation to your people, when actually it's about safety and psychological safety? I think one really strong alternative to the dates is setting your own agenda and setting that agenda to the direction and the overall overall strategy of your organisation. Thom, any other kinds of alternatives that, if you were to turn your back on those calendar days, you would do instead?

Thomas Hall 47:50
I think we're kind of at that point now, where we have this drumbeat of communications. And that's why we've tried to fill the space with the Being campaign right now, that doesn't rely on those dates. The communications, the activities we've got, the opportunities for dialogue and learning events, the team conversation tools, you name it, we've got all this stuff out there that isn't hooked to any of those days. And that's quite a nice place to be. So if we did turn them off, we've now got this kind of umbrella brand way of talking about inclusion that isn't reliant on those things. But actually, for an employee in the shop floor environment, I was in one of our shop floor environments a few months ago now. Half the shop floor people have been taken off to talk about International Women's Day. Now that's great for them,

and they have their quiz and everything else. It's fantastic having that conversation. But we actually talked about why we're celebrating that. And what we want them to do differently as a result of that day, or is it we're trying to do the right thing, let's have an International Women's Day quiz. So we've just tried to move away from it a bit. I love the days when they get that genuine engagement with people, like the snowball thing of year two, as Harry just said, where people are just running with it and you kind of go, "we've got people pulling this stuff." But we have to bring it back to why are we all here and what do we want to do? How are we going to treat each other a bit better today? And so on. If we did turn it back, I think at the moment, we're in quite a good space.

Russ Norton 49:28
That's brilliant. I've got a couple of questions coming through. I think this first one is a quick one. Audrey, based on what you were saying earlier, you'll have an opinion on this one. Somebody says: "a manager at previous employer tried to force employees to post things on their personal social media channels on certain days." What are your thoughts on it? How widespread is this and do you think we ought to do it?

Audrey Pantelis 49:54
Oh, gosh,how horrendous! Simple answer is no, don't do it! Yeah, that's not great. I'm gonna understand the perspective of the employer organisation who might be thinking, we want you to embrace the values, etc, so please support. But there's got to be free will as opposed to force. So yeah, it'll be 100% no from my perspective, I just think it's wrong. Understand that the visioning but actually there are better ways to do it. That doesn't sound like very good practice to me. Sounds a bit dodgy!

Russ Norton 50:40
Fully agree. Josh, make them stop doing that. Get in touch! So the next question is: 'In our organisation, colleagues who are based in India have very different EDI priorities to colleagues based in the UK. And so a global approach to D&I tends not to land". I guess I can share another example of this - an organisation that celebrates Veterans Day, which is a really big thing in the US where there are large, large populations of veterans in the workplace. We tend not to mark that as much over here in the UK, and it doesn't quite translate globally. So is it possible to have a global approach to diversity and inclusion? Or do you need a global blueprint, perhaps with local implementation? Tom, from a Rolls-Royce perspective, what's your thoughts?

Thomas Hall 51:35
Definitely a bit of both. You have to have a bit of both. So I work in the global comms team, our audiences 45,000 people around the world. So when we're building a campaign, when we get content on our communication channels, that is for everybody. So we do have to think is it globally relevant. We've done things in the past that hadn't been. For example, when we were doing IDAHOBIT, the US team would go, "that's not actually a big thing over here, it's more about Pride month". Now we've shifted to Pride month to talk about globally instead, because it gives us a whole month to explore loads of different angles. So I definitely think a bit of both. There are dates in the calendar that we want to mark as an organisation. They are really important in regions, but they're not as relevant globally. And what we don't want to go is "if it's not global, it doesn't matter". You want to give space for the local teams to mark things that are going on, for example, the US team marking Juneteenth just a couple of

weeks ago, you know, that's not necessarily something that was on the calendar globally, but it absolutely connects with people in in the US.

Russ Norton 52:46
I really agree. And even I had my eyes open the other day, and I was slightly ashamed to admit I didn't know this, but Pride month isn't truly global. I was on a call with some Australian colleagues, and they were like, "it's not pride month here. We have Pride month with Mardi Gras in Sydney, which is in February." I was like, I should know that. I'm gonna do better.

Russ Norton 53:10
Folks, a fantastic conversation. Audience. I really, really hope you found this useful. Tom, Audrey Harry, I'm so so grateful for your contributions for your time today. I'm left feeling bouyed. I'm left feeling that we do have a way forward, that there are alternatives, that communicators don't need to feel like they are held to this floating, aggressive, scary calendar of key dates that they must adhere to. And I'd like to think that everyone feels that they are slightly more empowered to set their own agenda, set their own narrative, communicate authentically and do it because you are passionate about it. Don't do it because the calendar tells you you ought to! So on that note, I thank you all very much for joining me and I will see you very very soon. Thank you, everyone.