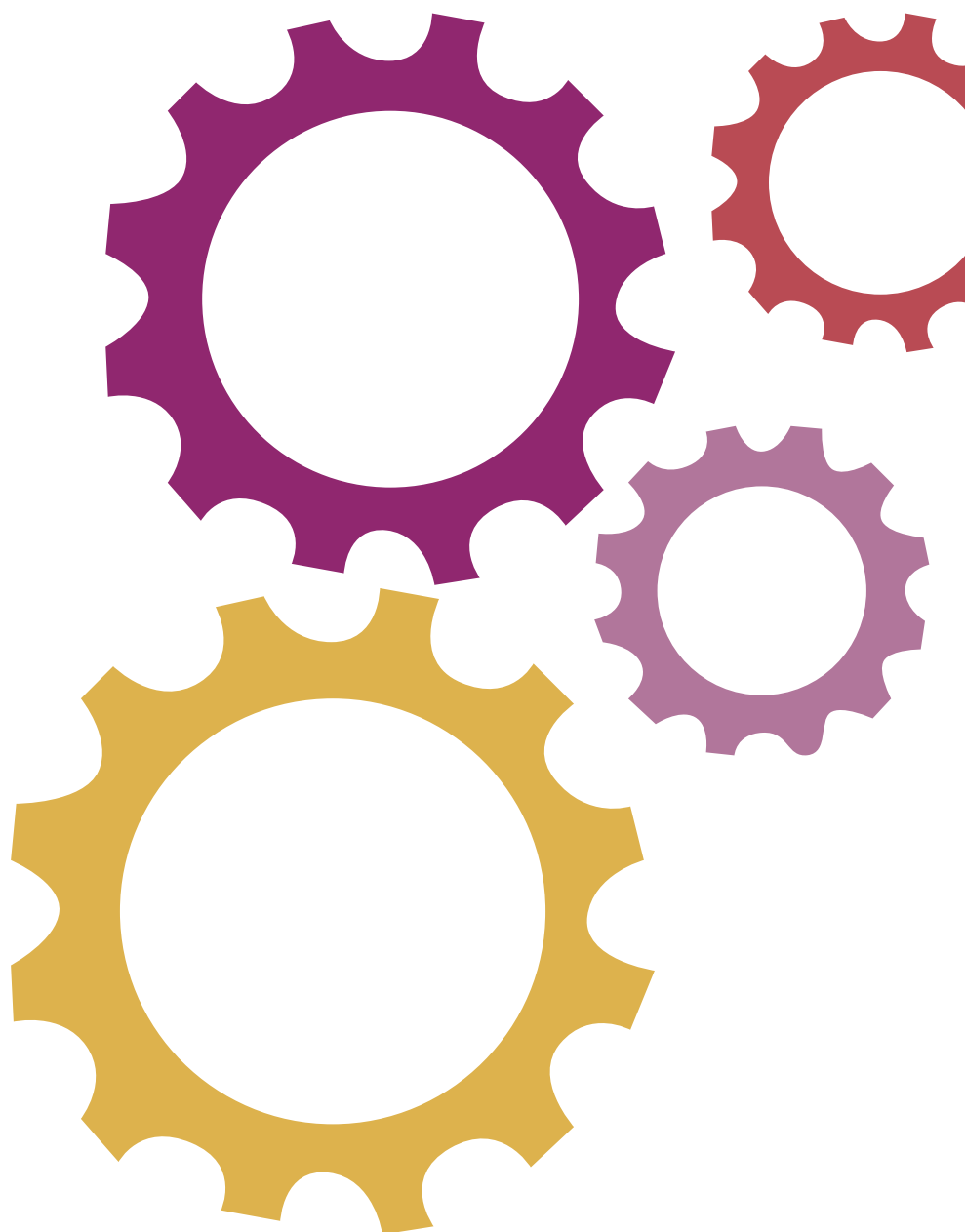


# People and Culture Group: meeting output

Spring 2022



# Introduction

## People and Culture Group – Spring 2022 meeting output

We recently hosted a discussion with a range of HR professionals from fellow B Corps.

At our 9 March meeting the topics were:

- Celebrating women every day and
- Social causes at the heart of business

This note captures the discussion.

## Celebrating women every day

International Women's Day (IWD) was founded in the US in 1909. Initially, they campaigned for shorter hours, voting rights and better pay. These are still issues for women internationally, but certainly in the UK a lot of progress has been made on these fronts. We are now in a position where we are even debating the question "What is a woman?" – moving us beyond the original issues that caused IWD to be founded in the first place.

These are really interesting new areas but how do we navigate the need not to treat women as victims who need to be rescued, versus the need to appreciate the different needs women have and the historical barriers women face, which mean they need to be supported and celebrated in different ways?

Women are 50% of the population, regardless of your view on what constitutes a woman. We have seen in the Ukraine crisis so many different faces of womanhood, from women armed with rifles fighting, to women nurturing wounded troops. We have seen a brilliant representation of what womanhood can be.

### Discussion– IWD

Our discussions highlighted the wide range of ways that organisations marked IWD. Some organisations invited inspirational female speakers to talk to their employees, with one organisation creating a video from their talk which they fed back to other organisations within their wider group. On the other hand, other organisations had a much more 'light touch approach', refraining from organising organisation-wide events, but instead allowing employees to mark IWD more individually, such as through attending Chambers events.

Several organisations have also started to consider how men can interact with IWD. Unfortunately, many organisations are still encountering comments from male employees along the lines of "When is the day for men?". Whilst no concrete ideas emerged from these discussions, it was clear that these organisations would continue to think about how to get men "on board" with IWD.

**"How do we navigate the need not to treat women as victims who need to be rescued, versus the need to appreciate the different needs women have and the historical barriers women face, which mean they need to be supported and celebrated in different ways?"**



# Celebrating women every day

## Advice for women at the start of their careers

We discussed advice one could give to women at the start of their careers. Top advice included:

- Start a pension in your 20s to avoid being financially reliant on anyone else.
- Find as much breadth in your career at the start – specialisation can happen further down the line.
- Be confident in your opinions – people do want to hear you.
- Look at senior leadership and its diversity – and diversity at each level of the organisation – this will give you an insight into what an organisation is really like ‘under the hood’.

## How can men help?

We discussed the ways that men can help women in the workplace. Again, this discussion yielded a range of responses, including:

- Champion women across the organisation. Do not be afraid to “sponsor” the women in your organisation.
- Have empathy, particularly in relation to the unique challenges that women face in the workplace. *Understand that we do not yet live in a complete meritocracy* – acknowledge and understand the barriers women face men might not encounter.
- An awareness of how women’s cycle’s function is important, especially as women approach menopause. This conversation needs to be cracked open at all levels and sectors and can no longer be a taboo.

## Top advice for women at the start of their careers

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Look at senior leadership and its diversity – and diversity at each level of the organisation – this will give you an insight into what an organisation is really like ‘under the hood’.

## General ways to celebrate women

Lastly, we discussed general ways to continue to celebrate women. Common themes emerged across all the organisations, including:

- **Mentoring:** Several organisations agreed that mentoring of women in the workplace needed to start earlier, before the senior level, because for many women it is often a challenge to reach this stage in the first place. Similarly, other organisations have introduced a buddy system to help foster open conversations, on a possibly more informal basis than mentoring.
- **The need for, and role of, women's working groups:** Many organisations have set up, or are in the process of, setting up women's working groups. Challenges faced in this regard included how to communicate the purpose of these working groups to the rest of the organisation, and how to communicate the group's findings in a way that will actually bring about positive change.
- A common thread throughout these working groups was the role such groups can play in being the catalyst for fostering important conversations relating to the experiences of women in the workplace, such as discussions on addressing the gender pay gap (with transparent salary bands and salaries included in job descriptions being seen as ways to level the playing field), as well as more generalised discussions on how organisations can champion women in the workplace.

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Finally, we discussed the fact that a lot of what is done for women in the workplace relates to their role as mothers/carers, with not enough consideration of other women, be it women who do not have children, to women who have had children but whose responsibilities no longer impact their work on a day-to-day basis. How can our organisations support women in ways that don't relate quite as narrowly on motherhood?



# Social causes at the heart of business

## Key questions are:

- **What do you consider a social cause to be? (I.e., discrimination, gender equality, violence against women, EDI, etc.)**
- **What does your organisation do to promote the social cause of EDI?**
- **What kind of social cause volunteering does your organisation support?**
- **What difference are you making? How do we measure impact and how can this be reported?**

## Discussion – What do you consider a social cause to be?

When discussing what we considered a social cause to be, it became clear that almost all our organisations have considered planet-related social causes in light of the climate emergency.

Our organisations discussed how they can monitor their environmental impact, with several organisations having specific sustainability strategies. A wide range of strategies emerged during these discussions. One organisation has published a profit impact report, to try to influence other business across the sustainability spectrum. Another organisation has decided to focus on “Being better than net zero – being better for our communities”. For one organisation, an energy company, planet-related social causes are an intrinsic part of what they do, and they routinely help other organisations get to net zero.

## What does your organisation do to promote EDI?

There was broad acknowledgement that EDI is a journey, and every organisation starts somewhere. What works for one organisation will not necessarily work for another – and it was therefore unsurprising to see a wide variety of strategies employed by our organisations to promote EDI. Highlights included:

- For one educational organisation – a focus on promoting men in Early Years education, where they are currently underrepresented.
- Many of our organisations offer consistent inclusion training, or routinely bring in external speakers for seminars.
- Several of our organisations have also brought in specialists to look at recruitment practices and ensure decisions are made without any unconscious bias. To this end, organisations have introduced, for instance, blind CV recruitment and randomised interview questions.
- Many organisations have looked back at their policies to ensure they are inclusive as possible, for example by changing policies linked to maternity and paternity leave.
- Flexible working (made all the more commonplace by the Covid-19 pandemic) is widely seen as a positive force in promoting EDI.



“When discussing what we considered a social cause to be, it became clear that almost all our organisations have considered planet-related social causes in light of the climate emergency.”

As well as the strategies outlined above, organisations also reported many challenges in promoting EDI, often stemming from a lack of resources to really tackle the issues. One interesting example of a challenge was given by an organisation which is a premium brand and reported that premium brands in particular struggle with EDI recruitment and attracting diverse talent due to the association with premium brands and non-diverse consumers.

### What kind of social cause volunteering does your organisation support?

Our organisations' volunteering policies varied widely, and it was during this element of our discussions that we saw the most variance, with some offering anywhere from two to six volunteering days a year. For most organisations, volunteering days were optional for employees, but one organisation mandated two volunteering days a year for its employees.

Likewise, there was a real variety in the types of causes our organisations allowed their employees to volunteer for. Some organisations had quite open policies, where employees could volunteer for any cause they chose (provided it these causes did not have an overtly political slant), where other organisations were more prescriptive in the causes they allowed their employees to volunteer for in the organisations time. Usually with a desire to ensure the time spent is aligned to broader organisational objectives.

**“For most organisations, volunteering days were optional for employees, but one organisation mandated two volunteering days a year for its employees.”**

Across the board, volunteering uptake is generally not high within our organisations. To combat this, one organisation is specifically relaunching its volunteering policy as part of B Corp month to try to breathe some life back into it and encourage higher uptake. Similarly, another organisation has started to offer its employees volunteering options rather than relying on employees to source their own opportunities. Another organisation surveyed staff on the projects most important to them and used this feedback to run volunteering days aligned with their interests.

There was also much discussion on how organisations could track the impact of their volunteering. One organisation in particular already tracks its volunteering programme through impact reports but note the difficulties in getting employees to engage with this process and log their volunteering hours, etc., reducing the reliability of the reporting. Some organisations measured the amount of time spent by their employees volunteering, but the general sense was that people are finding it difficult measure the impact of these hours, which is perhaps something to think about moving forwards.

### What difference are you making? How do we measure impact and how can this be reported?

In addition to the discussions around measuring the impact of climate initiatives and volunteering, we also discussed how to measure impact in a more general sense, and how this can be reported.

Various ideas emerged during this element of the discussion. Several organisations have started to utilise online calculators, such as 'HACT', to help measure their impact. These online tools can at least be a starting point for organisations wanting to measure value.

## General discussion points

In addition to the question prompts outlined above, further points of discussion and possible strategies also emerged during the session. These included:

- For organisations whose clients were themselves set up to further a social cause, it can often be tricky to champion particular causes without being seen to favour one cause over another and risk upsetting clients.
- Organisations are hearing a much louder employee voice on these issues, whereas before this was probably brushed under the rug. It is no longer possible to ignore employee demand that their organisations engage with these causes.
- Some organisations had experienced the fact that, because they were relatively small organisations and/or had a pragmatic founder, the issues the organisations were involved with were those close to the founder's heart. As these organisations grow, other people come in and want to focus on different things. Does this dilute the impact you have collectively? The challenge is how to join that up.
- One organisation has a 'Grant for Good' – seeking applications from other organisations to get some free services from the business. This in turn might enable other organisations to go away and do 'good' too, etc.
- Several organisations donate to charitable causes, giving profits to charities on an ongoing basis.

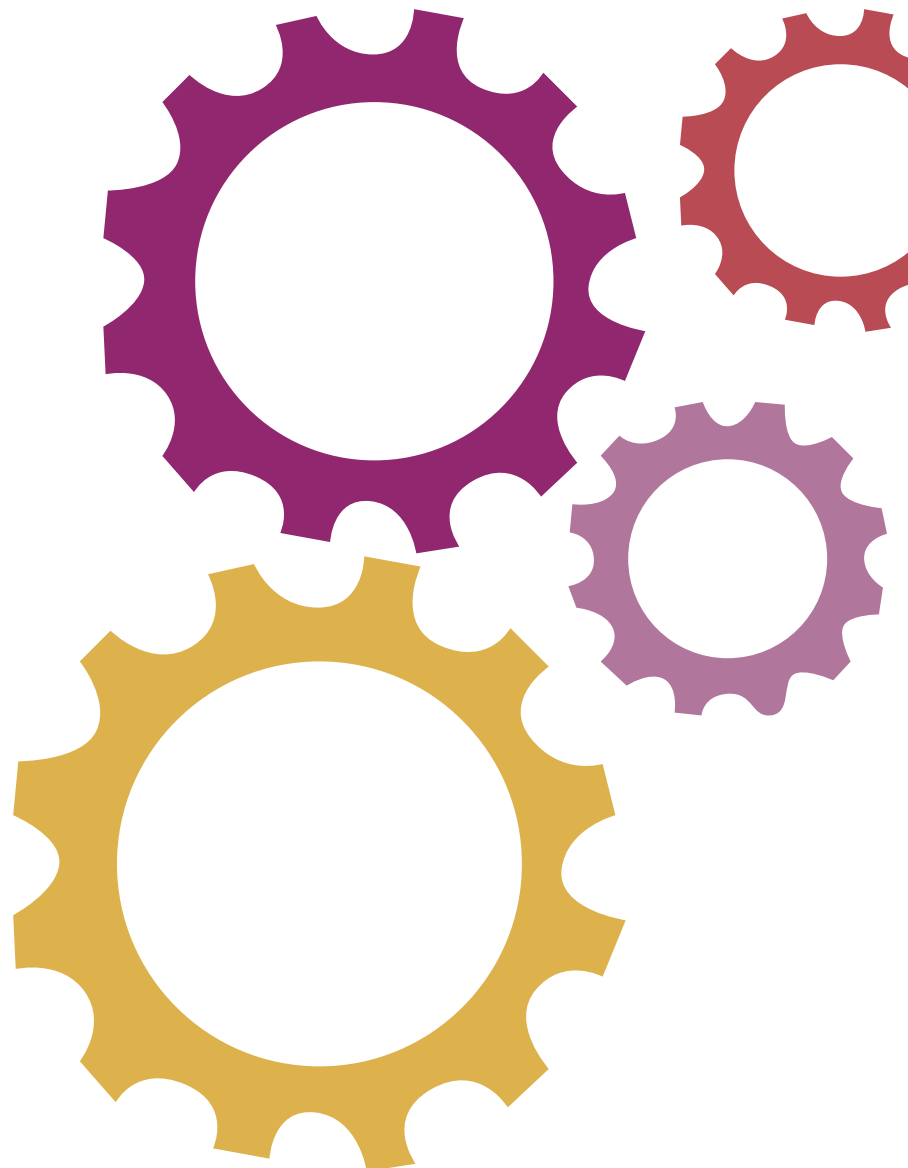




# Key contacts



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