

Supporting Inclusive Boards - introduction

Podcast transcript

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Kim Ansell, Senior Adviser, Advance HE

Tesse Akpeki, Director of Tesse Akpeki Associates Ltd

Key

- + **Kim Ansell:** KA (host)
- + **Tesse Akpeki:** TA

Transcript

KA: Hello, I'm Kim Ansell and I work on all things governance, leadership and management at Advance HE. I am here today to talk to Tesse Akpeki about her co-facilitation of the supporting inclusive boards community for 2023, and the second time we have offered such a programme. Tesse is a relationship coach, an organisational development specialist and facilitates conversations. She is also a professional podcaster and she was shortlisted as a governance champion at the CGI awards.

She brings an understanding of sitting on boards, and supporting boards, so I'm delighted to have her here, helping me facilitate this programme. We're planning four online developmental sessions. For me Tesse, there are two aspects to developmental. First is to develop our practice, to learn from each other and have better outcomes for our organisations. But equally important is to develop as individuals, to develop our understanding, open our minds, build our confidence and improve our agency to change and devolve what we do.

Tesse, what are your reflections about why this community is important and needed at the moment?

TA: Hi Kim. Before I give an answer on that point, how can I say this, but I am super excited about doing this programme with you again. That's my highlight for sure. And, you know, I love open spaces and hosting open spaces, and I think people coming on this programme, would come into this space that is open, that is welcoming.

There is something about this space, which is about an open mind, you know, curiosity, a willingness to learn from each other and to be in a safe, vulnerable, authentic and honest space, where there is no judgement. Instead, we have positive, intentional regard and this is really, it really is a journey of discovery.

KA: I absolutely agree Tesse. In fact, we're going to encourage participants of this programme to think in a very appreciative and asset-based way and to articulate where they are now, and what strengths they can build on to get to where they want to be. I'm really inspired by listening to people's aspirations and then helping them to think about how they will achieve them. Reflecting on the programme that we facilitated last year, I was absolutely delighted that the participants really recognised how their confidence had grown in taking the diversity and inclusion agenda to the board.

What was the most inspiring and motivating outcome for you Tesse?

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TA: Oh my word, there's so many highlights. Kim, one of my favourite programmes ever is Strictly Come Dancing. I watch the professionals and non-professionals thinking, what I really like about Strictly Come Dancing is the journey, the dance journey that people are on. They start as amateurs and by the time it's finished, it's very hard to distinguish between the professional dancers and the amateur dancers, and actually, for me, I saw this in people who came on last year, that there was something about them, becoming more confident through the reframing of induction, developing as new governors, knowing that they should support other people who are coming on board, sharing with each other, having a deeper and better understanding of the people they are involved with, seeing things differently, having different approaches, using different lenses.

But ever so much, it was the excitement that they went away with, that this was something that would make a difference, not just to the board that people were sitting with and supporting, but to the work of the university that they were involved with holistically and I thought that was simply and absolutely amazing.

KA: That's a great reflection, thank you Tessa. So, how do you think universities should be challenging their practices about board diversity and inclusivity?

TA: A great question Kim. You're on fire today, I must say. I think they need to recognise what biases are present, whether those biases are conscious, or unconscious. They need to actually explore to consider what gets in the way of good decision making, innovative thinking, problem solving, exploration, and part of this exploration is looking at what barriers exist, because even if they are perceived barriers, that becomes a reality. They need to think about ways of creating truly diverse boards and governing bodies and this is important I think.

But this is not a nice to have, this is a must have. But at the end of the must have, done well, is the fact that they will be more efficient, more effective, more productive, more impactful in the governance of university and in the work that they are doing overall.

KA: That's a great top tip Tessa. It's really about thinking about diversity and inclusion as a means to an end and not an end in itself. So, how does diversity and inclusion facilitate better discussions, better decisions and better outcomes? That's what we're really going to get to the nub of in this programme.

Any other top tips before we finish Tessa?

TA: Yes, I am super excited as I said before, to be working with you Kim, with a community that is going to benefit so much from this kind of thinking. Particularly, post-pandemic, in the cost-of-living crisis we're in now, this could not have come at a better time, to have an open mind, to be curious, but more so collectively, to increase our collective awareness of what becomes possible when we're truly inclusive, when we're truly diverse and when we respect each other's individual and collective talents. I am so, so confident that together we will be able to do this Kim.

KA: So am I. I really look forward to seeing you in the supporting inclusive board space, very soon Tessa. Bye for now.

TA: Bye for now.



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All enquiries:

Email: communications@advance-he.ac.uk

Website: www.advance-he.ac.uk

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