Embedding the rich conceptual tapestry of equality, diversity, and inclusion in the business school context:

Teaching, learning and curriculum development

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The Chartered ABS Scholarship programme offers funding opportunities for our members to undertake research which is of direct relevance to the priorities of the Chartered ABS and of benefit to our members. The current series supported three projects between 2019 and 2021.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In February 2019, the University of Bedfordshire, in partnership with the University of Greenwich, was awarded a grant by the Chartered Association of Business Schools (the Chartered ABS) to develop and run a series of workshops using LEGO® Serious Play® (hereinafter LSP). The aim of the workshops was to use the innovative LSP methodology to explore issues concerning the embedding of equality, diversity and inclusion into business school curriculum and student facing services. A presentation to the Chartered ABS by Perriton and Elliot (2018) has suggested that this is a significant issue, with as little as 8.5% of business schools including core diversity modules/units in their curriculum. From March 2019 through to February 2020 the project team ran four day-long workshops as well as conference presentations and shorter training sessions with postgraduate students and academic staff. Sessions were evaluated and follow-up interviews conducted in July 2020.

The three main findings of this work have been:

1. There is considerable level of anxiety and stress -even fear- amongst the participants when attempting to engage meaningfully with issues of equality, diversity, and inclusion within the academy, in the classroom and when developing the curriculum.
2. There are tensions inherent in the equality, diversity, and inclusion agenda with the one between similarity and difference being the most prominent in participants’ narratives.
3. The LSP methodology did help participants to ‘see’ EDI issues as the complex issues that they are. The ability to perceive EDI as systemic, and as inextricably interconnected within the wider contexts of institution and society was an important experience for all participants.

Given the importance of EDI this is alarming and highlights the need for further investigation to explore why academic staff and those staff managing student-facing services seem unable or unwilling to address EDI in a prominent and systematic way within their own curriculum and set of activities. Our project aimed to explore these issues by using LEGO® Serious Play® workshops. The workshops aimed to achieve the following outcomes:

1. To enhance business school staff’s understanding of the challenges and opportunities of EDI when embedding it in the business school curriculum.
2. To generate recommendations on how to approach EDI issues in learning and teaching contexts.
3. To facilitate interdisciplinary collaboration and brainstorming among business school practitioners and academics using the LSP methodology.

We made three assumptions regarding EDI in the HE sectors:

1. Despite being within the UK Higher Education sector, individual institutions may vary in terms of their EDI challenges because of contextual differences.
2. The EDI strategies/approaches are negotiated amongst multiple players within each unique institutional context. That is, a single player cannot produce an effective solution without considering multiple stakeholders’ perspectives.
3. The LSP helps with making explicit the implicit assumptions of participants’ EDI understanding.
Therefore, we identified three research questions:

1. What are the challenges/barriers in embedding EDI in the curricula that participants would identify?
2. What new insights, opportunities and teaching strategies LEGO® Serious Play® can bring about when staff embed EDI within their specific teaching areas?
3. What was the impact of the workshops on participants’ practice following the workshop?

We found that workshop participants realised during the workshops that embedding EDI in the Higher Education context is challenging. There have been a wide range of contextual parameters and issues to consider, from Brexit to the in-class students’ diversity, and the local institutional context. LEGO® Serious Play® offered a playful and non-threatening medium and opportunity for the participants to tell their stories regarding EDI within their localised contexts as expressed via the LEGO models they built. We found some of these stories to be quite intimate and connected to the very particular understandings of EDI each participant held, and its relevance to their workplace as linked to their own identities and their own history.

Amongst the insights that participants gained from the workshops there was the recurring theme of facing and overcoming challenges. Amongst the insights that participants gained from the workshops there was the recurring theme of facing and overcoming challenges, facing the unknown and struggling with uncertainty. Issues of EDI linked consistently to the participants’ efforts of overcoming adversity. At the same time, there was a certain hesitancy by the participants in responding appropriately to the challenges; it was clear from our workshops that there is too much complexity, too many unknowns regarding EDI for our participants to respond appropriately. Notably, the lack of resources and training were highlighted continuously as an issue when attempting to incorporate EDI in business school curricula. Concerns surrounding international students and facilitating change within the business school were prominent. Thus, in a sense, embedding EDI in the business school is a change management process and it presents a range of challenges.

This report begins with a brief overview of some of the tensions and challenges posed by the EDI agenda. We describe the LSP approach generally and provide a more detailed description of the design of our workshops. We then present insights gathered from data collected during the workshops and in subsequent evaluation forms and interviews. We conclude with three overarching recommendations for policy and practice.
The Chartered ABS has documented that, despite its importance, there is insufficient embeddedness of EDI concepts and issues in the educational curriculum of the business schools.

**THE EQUALITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION AGENDA**

The effective implementation of Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) policies and practices is a principal issue that needs to be tackled effectively by business schools in the UK and in the wider educational community. As noted previously, the Chartered ABS has documented that, despite its importance, there is insufficient embeddedness of EDI concepts and issues in the educational curriculum of the business schools. Our project was designed to probe more deeply into what some of the underlying causes and challenges might be.

We began from a position that EDI is an overly complex issue with many underlying tensions and paradoxes that compound it. The complexity that arises from these tensions but also from the sensitivities surrounding EDI make it an overly sensitive topic to engage with, especially in the current socio-political climate.

Firstly, although the shorthand phrase ‘EDI’ is increasingly common, these three elements - Equality, Diversity and Inclusion - differ from each other in significant ways and tend to be linked to different priorities. Some of these priorities may overlap or complement each other, but others may conflict. We summarise some of the key distinctions below:

1. **Assimilation**
2. **Segregation**
3. **Commonality**
4. **Identity as fluid & mutable**
5. **Identity as separate and categorised**
6. **Difference**

**Figure 1: Three tensions in EDI**

The first tension relates to the concepts of assimilation and segregation. These two concepts exert a set of competing dynamics; one towards the denial of difference while the other tends towards what the Cantle report characterised as ‘separate lives’. Ideally, there is a balance to strike between the extent different people, communities and societies converge to achieve equality and segregate to achieve the protection of diversity.

The second tension relates to the extent to which we see our identities as being ‘fixed’ - determined by birth or by genes (the assumption that underpins monitoring practices) versus an understanding of identity as multiple and fluid, constructed differently in various times and spaces.

The third tension is that between an emphasis on those experiences or aspects of identity that we share and those we do not.

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These tensions complicate attempts to present EDI in curriculum and are aligned with different policy initiatives; some complementing and others conflicting. The table below indicates some of these initiatives:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Associated Social and Political Issues:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Equality  | • Direct and indirect discrimination  
|           | • Institutional versus individual prejudice                                          |
| Diversity | • Valuing difference  
|           | • The ‘business case’ for diversity                                                 |
| Inclusion | • Micro-aggressions  
|           | • ‘Canteen’ culture                                                                |

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THE LSP METHODOLOGY

Our use of LSP draws on empirical work regarding the use of the LSP methodology in organisations, such as Roos & Viktor’s research with corporations, and top executives. Theoretically, this approach is grounded in constructivism, constructionism, auto-poietic organisational epistemology and on metaphorical, or associational patterns of thinking.

The LSP methodology is an innovative process designed to enhance innovation and potentially resolve complex problems. The initial idea of the LSP methodology was developed by Professor Johan Roos and Professor Bart Victor at IMD in Switzerland in 1990. Meanwhile, the LEGO Group CEO and (at that time) owner Kjeld Kirk Kristiansen was exploring alternative strategic planning tools and systems to manage the LEGO group. The three collaborated to develop a strategy for the company and the two academics suggested to use LEGO for the development of live three-dimensional strategy models of business issues and challenges, models that would help LEGO employees to understand the context and challenges the company was facing at the time.

The LSP methodology relies on the knowledge of the hand, and not only the mind. In a sense, the methodology relies on the notion of the stream of consciousness as expressed via our bodies. Engaging with the construction of LSP models enables us to express our unconscious into the conscious. It involves play because fundamentally the methodology perceives play as a potent and powerful way to learn. It is more so in the case of LEGO Serious Play, because it allows participants to utilise visual, auditory, and kinaesthetic skills to learn and listen, and the process is egalitarian because it provides all participants with a voice.

The basic LSP process is shown below in Figure 2. Participants are led by a trained LSP facilitator through a series of questions (or challenges), probing deeper and deeper into the subject matter through LEGO model building and participants’ interpretations of their own LEGO models. The 3D LEGO models serve effectively as the stimulus for self-exploration and group discussion, enabling knowledge sharing, problem-solving, and decision-making. The LSP methodology thus deepens the reflection process of participants and supports an effective dialogue among the participants.

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Engaging with the construction of LSP models enables us to express our unconscious into the conscious.

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7 Piaget J. (1951) Principal factors determining intellectual evolution from childhood to adult life.

Figure 2: Basic LSP process of inquiry
To facilitate this there is a set of heuristics when organising a LSP workshop. These heuristics amount to an LSP ‘code of conduct’ (Open Source, 2010). The basic heuristics are as follows:

1. The answer to the question should be sought in the LEGO models built during the LSP activity.
2. To facilitate the stream of consciousness, the building of the models should be done without social interactions.
3. There is no singular answer; the expectation is that there would be different perspectives.
4. The models are not the result of the process; they are just the medium for people to understand themselves.
5. Participants are not to offer opinions and interpretations of other people’s models and stories; any questions posed should be neutral and open-ended.
6. Any questions should focus on the models people have built, not on people and their stories.

The basic principles behind the code of conduct are designed to allow participants to express their thoughts, feelings, and stories without censoring by other participants. The connections with other participants happen by connecting the models together, a “connection of the eye” rather than through talking. The LSP code of conduct allows for a non-intrusive and self-reflective inquiry of participants’ conceptualisations of EDI.
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DESIGNING THE WORKSHOPS

Designing the workshops took six months. Figure 4 (shown on page 11) outlines the overall structure of the project, and although we adjusted for the Covid-19 pandemic, it broadly remained the same (for more detail see Appendix 1).

The project team used the LSP Identity and Landscape Kit, which is used in conjunction with the Starter Kit for workshops longer than three to five hours and for a group of ten to twelve workshop participants. The kit includes a special mix of LEGO bricks consisting of larger DUPLO elements including animals, specialised elements (e.g. wheels, tires, windows, trees, minifigure parts, sticks, globes, spiral tubes, ladders, and fences), and a wide selection of base plates, and sorting trays (LEGO® Serious Play, 2020).

The development of the LSP workshop and its associated material was the most complex task for this project. We underestimated the difficulties and the complexity of designing and implementing the workshops and the work involved in creating a workable plan that is coherent, meaningful, and deliverable within a day. We carried out two pilot sessions with students which yielded mixed results but were helpful in giving us experience and highlighting what would and would not work.

Originally, we intended for each workshop to run over two days, as this is more in keeping with the LEGO® Serious Play design. However, on reflection, we realised that the chances of getting busy academics to commit themselves to two days was not highly likely, so early on we scaled down the design. Each iteration has been more streamlined and more focused, and this has improved the participants’ experience and delivery. Our final design included a warm-up exercise followed up with each stage of the main exercise/challenge including the four sub-processes that follow the basic LSP process structure (Open Source, 2010) as shown below in Figure 3:

Figure 3: LSP workshop flow

The Warm-up exercise: Building the duck

Our warm-up exercise included four parts: the first part was for participants to draw as many designs of ducks as they could. The second part was to 'build' designs of ducks using only seven LEGO bricks (pre-selected by ourselves). In the third part, we asked participants to select seven random LEGO pieces and create a new kind of duck. Finally, they individually explained why their duck should be considered a duck. Then collectively, each group identified their group-specific criteria for defining the quality of a duck. Groups then had to compare the differences in the criteria. The goal of this warm-up exercise was two-fold. First, it helped participants become familiar with the process of LSP and the code of conduct. Second, it linked to the underlying EDI themes of identity, commonality and difference.
The timeline below summarises the initial plan for the delivery of the workshops and the accompanying activities.

**EXTERNAL Facing**

1st Stream Workshops

2nd Stream Complementary Marketing & Communication Activities

1st Workshop Luton/Greenwich

2nd Workshop Luton/Greenwich

3rd Workshop Bedford/Kent

4th Workshop Bedford/Kent

PDW in CABS Conference

PDW in BAM Conference

**TIME**

FEBRUARY 2019

APRIL 2019

JUNE 2019

AUGUST 2019

OCTOBER 2019

DECEMBER 2019

FEBRUARY 2020

APRIL 2020

JULY 2020

**1st Stream Planning Sessions x2**

Details the Research Methodology

Development of Marketing Material

Development of LSP Material

**Planning Session**

Data Collection

Data Analysis

Interim Report

**Data Collection**

Recruit Assistant

3rd Stream Resources & Outcomes

**SURVEY**

Data Write-up

Delivering Main Report

**3rd Stream Research Process**

**INTERNAL Facing**

Marketing via CABS, BAM and other media

CABS mini workshop (and advertising)

CIPD mini workshop

BAM Mini Workshop

Communication for Conducting the Survey

**INTERIOR Facing**

Figure 4: Project structure overview
After this warm-up exercise, we moved on to the main LEGO challenge. We began by asking each participant to write down on a sheet of paper what he or she saw as the main EDI challenges/barriers in their job role. We collected these in and referred to them at the end of the day. We then moved on to the focus of the workshop which was organised around three stages that each included two of the basic steps that typify an LSP workshop (see Figure 5):

1. Use the LEGO resource to investigate the basic Concepts of EDI in the Business School Context
2. Create LEGO Models to show how the concepts are interlinked and connect the individual perceptions in the metanarrative
3. Once the metanarrative is constructed, testing of the metanarrative via prototyping and testing is conducted that allows for experimentation and searching of boundaries

![Figure 5: Typical stages in an LSP workshop](image)

**Stage 1: Understanding EDI in the context of business schools**

This stage aimed to encourage each participant to construct and made sense of a personally meaningful teaching and learning environment. Thus, this stage included the first two steps of a typical LSP process: understanding and observation. First, participants were asked to individually build a Lego model by capturing all the emotional, psychological, physical, and conceptual aspects of their personal understanding of learning and teaching (L&T). They then shared the interpretation of their model to group members. After each participant shared their story of their model, they were asked to reposition individual LEGO models and form a shared group LEGO model. Through a process of negotiating the reposition of individual models, the group agreed on what the shared group LEGO model would look like. That led to the establishment of shared understandings and the appreciation of the complexity of the subject matter by observing each other’s models.

**Stage 2: Defining and ideating the EDI landscape**

The second stage aimed to set up the context of a group’s EDI ‘landscape.’ The project team first introduced the concept of ‘agents,’ meaning any EDI related factors that have an impact on one’s L&T approach, whether the impact is direct or indirect, positive, or negative. The participants then individually built models of agents and labelled each agent using post-it notes.

After each agent was explained to group members, the group amended and placed all agents into the appropriate physical space and to each other in the shared group LEGO model. The agents’ locations indicate both importance and connection. That is, agents that were closer to a certain aspect of the group model meant that they are more important to that aspect than the agents placed further apart. Also, agents placed within the same
This process of making connections within a complex landscape is critical for solving complex problems.
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Table 1 provides some photographic exhibits of each stage to get a flavour of how the models develop and increase in complexity, meaning and beauty.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Illustrative Photographic exhibits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stage 1</strong></td>
<td>Understanding and observation of your and the teams’ conceptual understanding of Learning and Teaching (linked to EDI)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stage 2</strong></td>
<td>Identifying and ideating the EDI Landscape</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stage 3</strong></td>
<td>Prototyping and Testing the LSP Model against crises</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Examples for each stage of the LSP process
THEMES IDENTIFIED IN THE WORKSHOPS

We ran four workshops between June 2019-January 2020 (we planned for a fifth, but it was cancelled because of the first coronavirus lockdown in March 2020). In total, we attracted 48 participants, some originated from the universities where the research was situated (Bedfordshire and Greenwich), others from several other universities located within the UK. We ran two workshops in Greenwich, one in Luton and one in Chatham. We captured data during the workshops by photographing all the LSP models at every stage and by recording the group conversations. Both recordings and photographs were coded using NVivo software.

The coding was of two types: categorical coding (based on concepts of categorisation such as participants, types of activities etc.) and conceptual coding. The latter includes all themes linked to EDI and the codes were derived from the conversations among participants. These codes formed the basis of the first level of coding and determined the structure of the data analysis. The first level codes were a result of literature and brainstorming among the members of the team and the process of coding was thematic, but not inflexible. The coding was exhaustive, meaning that when we identified a particular concept as worth coding then all data from the workshops were coded against that concept. (For more detail on the NVivo coding process, please see Appendix 2).

Here we present an overview of participants' experiences and the themes identified in the workshop sessions and as significant in the coding. Informally, many of the participants enjoyed the workshops and specifically commented on their novelty as a training intervention. Several participants said they would like to incorporate some elements into their own teaching. The models revealed a wide diversity of conceptualisations of diversity, some more narrow than others.

One of the most striking and consistent observations in each of the workshops was that while participants enjoyed the process of model making, the models themselves contained imagery and narratives of anxiety and even fear with regards to the Higher Education context and tackling EDI. For example:

*I think the three connections [in the model] I made were all to do with the struggle aspect. So the person sinking with the sharks that was connected to racism and prejudice. One was also connected to the red tape. Or the fact that maybe institutions don't have, they can't move forward because there are policies they need to go through that must stop them.*

Embedding EDI in the Higher Education context emerges as challenging; the models were complex and illustrated a multitude of parameters to consider from Brexit to the in-class students' diversity, and the local contexts. Participants consistently highlighted a lack of resources and training as issues in any attempt to incorporate EDI. This is something we revisit further down. Some relevant observations:

*So this agent [in the model] is about diversity of students and how some students might not be very engaging in class and that leads to classroom management problems. That's leading to this bit of model whereby the different colours symbolise again the diversity of student, teachers, and facilitator role. So that's interconnected together in terms of the diversity of students and how the teachers managing classrooms in different contexts.*

*It was also quite interesting how we also conceptualise this idea of power, the ivory towers, and sort of, quite big structures there and how that has so much bearing what we do day to day…*
We have been active in organising a committee that looks into being part of a faculty with diversity with people of other ethnicities. It was important to acknowledge that sometimes these other issues are very uncomfortable to deal with.

Within this overarching theme of fear as exemplified in the various meta-narratives, there were also issues of facing and overcoming challenges, facing the unknown and struggling with uncertainty. The issues surrounding EDI are linked to such efforts of overcoming adversity. At the same time there was a certain hesitancy by the participants in responding to such challenges, there is too much complexity, too many unknowns to respond appropriately. This has been the most fascinating finding from the analysis of the workshops.

It (the workshop) definitely made me think a lot more about the issues of EDI in the workplace and how various issues are connected to each other and the difficulties of trying to address some of these issues particularly where there may be issues related to gender or race that need to be addressed. But then at the same time, how can you address those without causing perhaps further issues, or triggering other people’s sensitivities about these topics. So it really highlighted the difficulties of managing the situations as diplomatically as possible.

So, this is supposed to be a ladder "laughs" being the reader, to go where information is created, new ideas. So I think that is my first approach. Second is to get out of your comfort zone. I think to make it possible for me to be listening to others and wanting to make changes means to leave a comfort zone because it is a big investment and we risk that we get a lot of criticism etc.[…]. I have to always make sure I can remind myself that there is a positive side that propels joy to be discovered in the process and being inquisitive in so look for positive and break with a lot of institutional constraints. I wouldn’t underestimate the constraints that the institutions have on us.

Another of the challenges identified is that of managing the tensions mentioned above between similarity and difference:

… the kinds of approaches to teaching and learning which would deliver fairness and credibility. But I suppose the one thing I'm not absolutely sure is, to came back from the very initial question that you put up - when is it more appropriate to treat people differently? And how do you ensure fairness? I can see some techniques, which are about going down this personalised learning, making sure that you make the environment rich, dealing with well-being issues, dealing with spatial issues, all of those things, everything that we've put into the holistic entity that we developed, it still comes back to when is appropriate to treat people differently and I don't know the answer to that!

We expected the workshops to flesh out some very vivid narratives from the participants. Our expectations were exceeded as some of the stories we recorded were quite intimate stories, connected to the participants’ understandings of EDI, its relevance to their workplace, and its meaning when considering their own sense of identity and history.

I think because I've grown up with having a disability and actually feeling the effects of that. I fought very hard as a child to defend that. So I think I found my voice quite early. So I have no problem in saying to someone you know, excuse me. I've seen a member of staff who took great delight in talking to my foot. Yes. Can I just say I really find that offensive that you won't look me in the eye when you talk to me.

And, of course, these connections to past experiences were also relevant for students.
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Identifying and understanding how our own experiences affect our teaching of EDI can be challenging and responding may require a degree of personal courage, and ‘re-education of the self’.

…the learners [are] very different in the nature of what they want, some of their backgrounds, what they come to us with, some of the emotional issues and things to be dealing with, they all look very different; or they might be young, older females and binary, and all of these issues that they come to the classroom with different life experiences. And then we kind of have, what I have to do as a learning and teaching facilitator is take the student, give them some of the skills that they [already] have.

Identifying and understanding how our own experiences affect our teaching of EDI can be challenging and responding may require a degree of personal courage, and ‘re-education of the self’.

…reflecting on a journey I’ve been through recently about me as a white person and my role and how that is influenced by the institution. And so that I’ve been on a journey, and it’s taken me a long time. And the elephant is still in the room because most people never understood that time or don’t even see where it needs more than the rest. So that’s why I put the lack of time [in the model] really close to the elephant in the room.

You can never say that you are neutral, you know, it’s an education challenge for myself, I need to educate myself, because I am totally convinced that is the right thing to do […] an injury, some reflex, some activity that you don’t even know that actually makes you discover that, oh, I hadn’t thought about it, it is something I have to change. I have to include that because it may be a bad habit or not having thought through all aspects of it. So yeah, it’s a challenge. It’s a challenge because we have to re-educate ourselves.

We also observed that EDI seems closely aligned to the mental health and well-being of staff and students. It appears as an important aspect of the successful handling of EDI; if EDI is managed well, it promotes well-being. Some more examples:

My [personal EDI Challenge] was about helping others understand how to support […] those who are going through culture shock, helping students adjust to difference, helping staff help students learn to work with that difference […] and supporting students who are struggling with mental health.

…if you’re doing equality, equality, diversity inclusion, you’re going to have lots of this wellbeing stuff because it’s, it’s an easy example of stuff to do.

The bridge [her LEGO piece], which, hopefully with equality and diversity and inclusion will help people come from that side, feeling left out in the grey areas, or sinking …

The issue of resourcing EDI also came up; especially concerning international students or facilitating change within the business school. It appears to be challenging to facilitate change or secure resources for EDI-related activities. In a sense, embedding EDI in the business school is a change management process and that is accompanied with its own challenges.

Well, I feel like equality and diversity could be improved if there was more funding because then they’ll have specific things to encourage [international students] to come to study at the university. Compared to some universities which aren’t as diverse…

I think you can […] bring awareness to something and you can try to introduce new procedures [but] to actually achieve impact I think is a lot harder. And I guess our barriers could be the long-standing inequalities that are difficult to address. Various economic factors, some people holding prejudices towards people of particular race, or gender or sexuality or whatever it may be. And those things are still beneath the surface but not expressed outwardly. They’re still influencing the process even though we’re under the surface even though it’s not readily apparent. So I think those could be barriers as well. I guess it’s just how do you go from awareness to trying to change things to then how to achieve an impact to true impact. That’s the best. That’s the way I see where the difficulty is.
And finally, the relationship between change in the classroom vis-à-vis the world outside the gates:

Okay, so I took the question of my understanding of learning and teaching and the impact of the EDI. So, I had this in mind that to me, learning and teaching is giving the individual the ability of reaching a target […] it’s something that allows you to go up higher. So that's what learning should be. What can EDI do in this and why is it important? It removes walls. But until it allows transparency, I could help people just by lifting them up the wall, but I think diversity and inclusion and respect for diversity is just to allow them to be who they are and remove the wall […] And that is what to me is the challenges of EDI is not changing people, but changing the obstacle in front of them.

Summary

The main themes we have identified here are firstly, the overarching issue of fear and anxiety; sometimes formless, other times expressed in terms of more specific fears such as the risk of offending someone or worse, triggering memories of traumatic life events; not knowing how to balance the competing tensions between treating people similarly or differently, creating a ’comfort zone’ or needing to move beyond it. Some of these challenges require ‘self-work’; the need to be open to challenging ourselves, to self-learning (perhaps of uncomfortable ‘truths’) and transformation. Not surprisingly, participants see connections between EDI and mental health and well-being alongside the need for more resources at all levels, including those needed to respond to the broader societal challenges, ’not changing people, but changing the obstacle in front of them.’
While most of the participants were already quite familiar with EDI they still seem to have enjoyed the workshop and found it quite useful.

IMPACT OF THE WORKSHOPS

To capture the impact the workshops had on the participants’ practice we firstly sent evaluation forms to all participants a few days after the workshop was held, including a mix of quantitative and qualitative fields. Secondly, in May and June 2020 we contacted all the participants to ask if they would be willing to participate in a follow-up interview. Here we report on our analysis of these data.

Immediate impact

We received 10 completed evaluation forms out of a potential of 31 (forms were not sent to the participants of one of the workshops owing to a miscommunication). This is a response rate of 33% – quite low, but not unusually so. The forms contained a combination of text-based questions and multiple-choice questions with a Likert rating scale of 1 (low) – 5 (high). Overall, the results were positive and have been summarised below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Range: 3-5</th>
<th>Average:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge and understanding of EDI prior to the workshop</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of EDI concepts in your job prior to the workshop</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How would you rate the learning you gained from the workshop?</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall, how would you rate the workshop?</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While most of the participants were already quite familiar with EDI they still seem to have enjoyed the workshop and found it quite useful. We had three open-ended questions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualitative Question</th>
<th>Indicative Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What are the three most significant things you learned from the workshop?</td>
<td>1. Discussion of hate crime; importance of tackling EDI at the micro-level; how LEGO can help to de-escalate scenarios and provide a constructive approach to the dialogue.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Other people’s understanding of EDI and the landscape, testing assumptions and LEGO® Serious Play.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. That EDI is complex and there is a great deal of subjectivity in interpreting the various situations that can occur. We are influenced by our own specific biases which further cloud our judgement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Incorporating agents in models, making sense of aspects of EDI in the bigger picture, learning the interconnections between different themes in Learning and Teaching.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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How will you use the learning gained from the workshop?

1. Finding ways to incorporate differences when organising teaching material or setting up group activities.
2. Implementing learning exercises considering the needs from diverse student groups. Appreciate how communication barriers come about based on cultural differences and seek ways to overcome this.
3. Allowing for more space to discuss difference and how this is good and enriching for all. Taking more time in lecture space and group work to engage with cultural differences in the learning environment.
4. Focusing on learners’ experiences and their values.
5. Using it to facilitate the delivery of new sustainable business models.
6. Looking for one-size-fits-all approaches to EDI is not possible, it is too complex, and each situation should be considered specifically. However, there could be some guiding principles to assist with decision-making.

Would you suggest any future improvements in running the workshop?

1. To find ways to incorporate differences when organising teaching material or setting up group activities.
2. I felt that my need to leave early because of childcare was considered a real inconvenience, a shame given that it was EDI focussed.
3. Running a workshop with more people and groups would be beneficial. Knowing that research was being carried out and data collection was taking place in the workshop prior to attending would be helpful and polite.
4. Online links to each group work with some related theoretical framework.
5. Well-structured workshop with good insights.
6. I can’t think of any.

Longer-term impact: data from the follow-up interviews

Ten people (out of 48 contacted) initially responded to the invitation to participate in a follow-up interview and eight were finally interviewed. Owing to the restrictions in place because of Covid-19 the interviews were carried out using Zoom and were audio recorded and transcribed. Not surprisingly, many of the themes echo those initially identified in our analysis of the data from the workshops.

In keeping with the findings of the more immediate evaluation forms, even many months later, interviewees in general felt positive about the workshop and found it valuable. One participant summarised their experience of the LSP workshop as follows, putting much emphasis on the kinaesthetic elements: ‘It was fun […] and because you’re having something physical to do, you can talk more freely, and connect with people a bit more easily and be creative.’ Others also thought that the kinaesthetic experience raised their awareness of the diverse range of students they work with, their own biases and stereotypes as educators, and helped them reflect on the extent to which their own approaches to current curriculum design were inclusive.
One interviewee explicitly said that the workshop reminded them that they need to be more aware of making sure everybody is treated in a fair manner and is given fair opportunity. She commented:

(Y)ou need to consider different students, and especially for new lecturers, what they are always focused on one side of the classroom which are very active as opposed to the other side. I try to make them more aware of what they’re doing.

Moving on from the more generalised notion of ‘fairness’, the following comment demonstrates the challenges this raises for working with difference. Interestingly, this tutor begins with a reference to ‘learning styles’ (arguably a more ‘acceptable’ form of difference requiring different treatment) to issues around physical or mental challenges (arguably more controversial).

I do realise that by only delivering what are required for students to learn academically is not always enough. So relating to the inclusive approach, because not all students learn in the same way and some may experience a physical or a mental challenge, or other difficulties they are facing. So my role of being a personal tutor, it is about supporting them on a social level and also on a personal level…. Based on how well I know that student and how well I know how the student has been performing for the academic year, I am able to tailor the specific points I’d like to discuss with a student in our personal tutoring meetings.

Another interviewee takes this dilemma further, explicitly saying that, talking about ‘consciously engaging with the fact that these are different populations. Then trying to come up with a way of articulating that wasn’t stereotyping’ although even she then relates this to ‘safer’ issues: ‘because I think it is very easy in business faculties to kind of go, oh, yes, well, of course your accounting and finance students, they don’t talk in classes because they do numbers, you know, but your marketing students are the creative ones, which isn’t actually true’; rather than to the more confronting differences arising from gender, ethnicity and culture.

The workshops were purposefully designed to help participants build on the knowledge they already had prior to the training.

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The workshops were purposefully designed to help participants build on the knowledge they already had prior to the training, test their underlying assumptions and implicit understandings of EDI, and urge them to negotiate a shared interpretation of the Higher Education reality in relation to Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion. It was not aiming to ‘teach’ participants ‘new’ knowledge on Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion. We found some evidence that this effort has been successful, however, we also found that while most interviewees remembered the personal EDI challenges that they had identified at the start of the workshop they attended, others could not. For some participants, the workshop was not a transformational experience as they have previously been interested in EDI and attuned to related issues.

Part of the reason I signed up for the workshop was I was already interested in and active in those areas. So unfortunately, I can’t claim the workshop has changed me.

We asked participants what they had done since the workshop. Due to the academic year’s cycle, many change initiatives could not be implemented formally until the new academic year. The move to virtual campuses occasioned by the Covid-19 lockdowns created further disruptions. However, one participant reported that they had become more involved in EDI initiatives.

I became part of a mentorship scheme, for which addressed the issues of equality, diversity, and inclusion until I have been trained to become a mentor for both students or ethnic minority […] and I also have started to collect some systematic data, some institutional data on the gaps, and so everything that is related to the consequences of lack of attention, or lack of awareness of diversity, inclusion, and equality.
Some participants were more motivated using Lego than by issues regarding EDI. Although they pointed out that the actual workshop design is not easily transferrable to their institutional or teaching contexts, they had produced creative ideas to apply LSP in teaching and staff team building. Three examples:

- ‘I would use LEGO to ask students to explain a concept for instance, rather than myself explain it, I think I would use it to assess the understanding of, say, a production function or nomic system with different sectors.’
- ‘I am using the LEGO series play for my own career as I am writing an article on play and games in executive education. So I will be using LSP as an example.’
- ‘Before the pandemic, we organised an outreach activity. It is LEGO based and I have received some funding and there are colleagues in our university who have all the LEGO material and they will assist us.’

However, the costs of the Lego materials were a barrier for some:

- ‘I did look into LSP a bit after the workshop, but I don’t have anyone to sponsor the training fees and certification fees.’

Another resourcing issue is the heavy workload many participants carry, when measured against the time needed to design and to run a LEGO session.

- ‘I think one of the biggest hurdles is workloads, to be honest […] You want to be EDI friendly, but then our workload and our commitments, doesn’t allow that because there’s only so much we can do.’
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CONCLUSIONS

Our workshops aimed to achieve the following outcomes:

1. To enhance business school staffs’ understanding of the challenges and opportunities of EDI when embedding it in the business school curriculum.

2. To generate recommendations on how to approach EDI issues in learning and teaching contexts.

3. To facilitate interdisciplinary collaboration and brainstorming among business school practitioners and academics using the LSP methodology.

In this concluding section we will address each one of these in turn.

Enhancing staff understanding of the challenges and opportunities with EDI when embedding it in the business school curriculum.

Most of our participants came with a high degree of understanding and commitment to EDI. When answering the questions in the evaluation form about prior learning no-one gave themselves less than a ‘3’ and some scored ‘4’ or ‘5’. In this sense, the workshops did not reach those who were less engaged. For example, in one of the interviews one participant commented that our workshops reached the ‘champions’.

*I’ve always been very attuned on the issue of equality, diversity and inclusion. And I worked in several projects, I used to be a champion for the BAME.*

An unexpected, but relevant challenge was the emergence of the pandemic and the move to online teaching. Our follow-up interviews were carried out towards the end of the period of full lockdown and it was clear that this had had a dramatic impact, such that the space to experiment with more innovative teaching was entirely channelled to meeting the demands of finishing the semester without too much detriment to students.

However, even for the knowledgeable and committed there was evidence that the workshops did enhance their understanding of EDI and there was evidence that the use of LEGO, in addition to being very enjoyable, did facilitate a greater apprehension of complexity:

*(W)e ended up creating a visual in physical space that represented an actual journey. Mine was an elephant crossing the mountains and some other one was like, a floor of lava with sharks. And it’s, you know, many of them were about accessibility and transformation, and how to bring individuals and groups from an initial state to learn an ideal…*

All the participants enjoyed using LEGO for their personal learning journey. However, even from the very first workshop we noticed that the elements of fear, challenge and anxiety were surfacing quite a lot (sometimes metaphorically, through elephants and sharks and ‘floors of lava’). One participant, who did not work directly in a business school, commented in the follow-up interview that:

*(O)ne of the challenges though, is to do with the sensitivities of trying to talk about these issues within business schools, and I think perhaps a feeling that people didn’t really feel comfortable talking about them.*

LEGO provides a means to ‘surface’ these more disquieting concerns by giving them metaphorical expression. This was further evidenced in the evaluation form comment cited as one of the most important things they had learned from the workshop.
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Discussion of hate crime; importance of tackling EDI at the micro-level; how LEGO can help to de-escalate scenarios and provide a constructive approach to the dialogue…

Recommendations on embedding EDI in Learning and Teaching

Within the workshop programme each group had to formulate their own ‘simple guiding principles’ (SGPs) at the end of the day which were supposed to be clearly linked to the ways in which the challenges identified in creating the models could be overcome. In practice, groups tended to produce quite general suggestions, such as:

(W)e value experimentation and reflection; outcome focused and flexible approach; but also ‘courage to talk about the elephant in the room (institutional racism)’.

As the workshops progressed, we became more directive in encouraging less generic SGPs such as ‘managing the EDI process roll out so that it is not overwhelming’.

While there were some difficulties during the early workshops to generate explicit recommendations that process improved in later workshops. However, what became apparent was that the participants valued the LSP methodology and process more than the guiding principles they generated at the end.

Interdisciplinary collaboration and brainstorming

Participants valued the opportunity to work with colleagues from other parts of the business school and from other campuses and universities. They welcomed learning more about other colleagues’ roles and their experiences. The Lego exercises facilitated this process seamlessly:

The thing that I do remember is it seemed to be very easy to make the connections between the different models, okay, even if those models made by the people, we could find the connections which, I guess, have to highlight how interconnected a lot of these issues are; without doing those models, it probably wouldn't have been as apparent where and how all these different issues connected, again, all felt very intuitive.

One interviewee even suggested that we should consider developing the workshops for staff involved in implementing the Athena Swan standards and similar diversity policy work, saying:

I think these kinds of service committees bring together a lot of well-meaning people with individual experiences and ideas who all want to make the school they love, a better place, but it can be very difficult to figure out where to start. And are we even all talking about the same thing? Her suggestion is that creating the LEGO models together provides a useful introduction and opportunity to explore each other’s understandings and challenges.
IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

This project 'worked' on two levels; on one level there was the process of designing the workshop using LEGO® Serious Play on another there was the focus on developing the relevant exercises to generate the content: the insights into equality, diversity, and inclusion that the participants revealed during their discussions. In the paragraphs above we have concentrated particularly on responding to the project's objectives which were specifically concerned with embedding EDI within business school curriculum.

However, participants' learning went beyond that – many found the experience of using LEGO so profound that they wanted to use it in a variety of settings and situations. One person is thinking of training to be a LSP facilitator; another asked one of the project team to run a LEGO session for her students, many others commented on the possibilities the methodology can offer. The most vivid memories of the workshops were of the models, the ducks were particularly highlighted (!). Conversely, the challenges of promoting kinaesthetic learning online also featured in the interviews.

We now return to the main themes that emerged from the three different forms of evaluation data and draw out some of the implications for practice. Firstly, there is the overarching issue of fear and anxiety; sometimes formless, other times expressed in terms of more specific fears; secondly, the challenge of balancing the competing tensions between treating people similarly or differently; and thirdly, managing the connections between EDI and mental health and well-being alongside the need to respond to the broader societal challenges. As our participants acknowledge, responding to these challenges may require 'self-work'; the need to be open to challenging ourselves, to self-learning (perhaps of uncomfortable truths) and transformation. However, in these final paragraphs we look specifically at the challenges for senior management and education policy.

Fear and anxiety

Fear and anxiety, whether specific or a more formless, but constant dread, permeated the models our participants created and featured in many of the conversations. Fear was expressed metaphorically in terms of LEGO figures such as sharks, serpents, and (literally) elephants in the LEGO rooms(!). What we concluded from this is that for our participants embedding EDI issues within the curriculum is not straightforward nor risk-free. Treating EDI issues as relatively straightforward may contribute to the sense of unease that our participants expressed – the fears then become more, rather than less invasive. Many of these dangers are well known; the dangers of offending someone or triggering memories of traumatic life events; the risks to our own careers of mistakes and missteps that can lead to complaints, suspension, loss of job and reputation.

We suggest that these risks need to be openly acknowledged. We need to recognise that the skills to discuss potentially contentious issues in the classrooms need to be recognised and developed; these are highly sophisticated skills and teachers do not necessarily possess them if their main topic areas have not required them to acquire these skills. Senior staff also need to ensure that there is a supportive culture in which mistakes can be acknowledged, and we can learn from such mistakes without the fear of humiliation or blame.

The tensions between similarity and difference

Edwards\(^\text{12}\) writes that the key question is *which of a multitude of differences between people justify us in treating them differently and which similarities justify similar treatment?*. Much of what literature exists on managing diversity assumes that this question has an obvious answer, so obvious in fact that there are very few guidelines offered. Where there are, they mostly concern disability access, religious holidays and time-off for childcare. The literature on learning and pedagogy does attempt to contribute to this debate; for

example, some of the work on different approaches to learning, but even this literature becomes vaguer when issues of assessment are concerned.

Our evidence suggests that this question does not go away just by being ignored or treated as unproblematic. There were many references in the workshops and in the interviews regarding the dilemmas and complexities this issue causes, and while these could be resolved, at least to some extent, by using Lego pieces as proxies, in the world of the classroom they pose challenges. Again, we suggest that there is an urgent need for nuanced, critical thinking that can inform policy and practice, and that this challenge needs to be taken up at a senior level.

Acknowledging that EDI is a change initiative

Addressing the EDI issues means that individuals, departments, universities, and the wider society cannot assume that the surrounding systems, contexts, and cultures will remain unaffected. Change cannot be compartmentalised. As one participant put it: ‘not changing people, but changing the obstacle in front of them’.

While we do not entirely agree with this comment, in that changing people is indeed likely to be needed as the discussions on recognising the impacts of our own histories and experiences demonstrate. However, we do agree with the point that change will be needed also at the systemic and societal levels. Many senior managers recognise this in principle but managing change throughout the system is more challenging. Yet without such change, progress will remain patchy, at best.

This means that adopting EDI in the classrooms, in the learning and teaching curriculum, in assessments is a much more complex process than some of the literature implies. It must be treated as a change management project; it would need clarity and constant steer from all levels of a Higher Education Institution if it is adopted as a guiding principle. Half-hearted attempts to include EDI in the curriculum or adopting EDI policies may not resolve the issue at heart.
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APPENDIX 1: PLANNING THE WORKSHOPS

The project group held four planning sessions on the 7th February, 8th March, 13th May and 14th June 2019 with numerous more informal communications in-between. During these meetings we focused on developing the workshop design and the process and rationale for collecting research data. We designed an online form for participant evaluation to be completed shortly after attending the workshops. We also applied for (and received) ethical clearance for data collection during the workshops.

We planned to deliver five workshops. These were scheduled initially for June 2019 (Greenwich), July 2019 (Luton), September 2019 (Bedford), November 2019 (Chatham), and December 2019 (Greenwich).

The first workshop occurred as planned on the 24th June in Greenwich and the second on the 1st of July in Luton. Each workshop attracted 12 participants. The third workshop was initially planned for September, in Bedford. We had very few people interested so initially postponed it to October 2019. We still had only two people signed up so then decided to cancel it and organise an additional workshop in Greenwich, as that was a better location. The 22nd November workshop went ahead as planned, in Chatham, Kent. This was successful and attracted 7 participants.

The fourth workshop was held in Greenwich on 10th January 2020 with 17 participants. In all workshops attendees were drawn mostly from the host university’s business school, including staff involved in supporting business students but also people from other universities attracted through the publicity mailings. By this stage, because of the delay in organising the autumn workshops, there was a six-month extension to the end of the project. We planned for a final workshop in early May 2020 but cancelled it when the emergence of Covid-19 forced a lockdown.

We initially piloted our workshop design through two mini-workshops, which were invaluable in terms of testing out the design and modifying it in the light of feedback and experience. These were: i. A workshop on the 19th March to a group of postgraduate HRM students. It was attended by 8 students.

ii. A second mini-workshop was organised for Greenwich Summer School on 29th of May where we developed the 2-hour workshop version of our EDI workshop.

Each of the sessions was well-received and provided us with an opportunity to ‘test’ various aspects of the workshop design and modify it as needed.
APPENDIX 2: NVIVO CODING AND ANALYSIS

There were two qualities we sought when creating the analytical, conceptual codes:
1. Is the concept recurrent in the data?
2. Is the concept interesting and relevant?

The recurrence was judged after an initial review of the data, while the level of interest for each code was inter-subjectively determined by the team. Our underlying, guiding principle was that each conceptual code should be linked to the context and the relevant concepts of learning and teaching. Then we juxtaposed the set of codes to the EDI conceptualisations we developed.

Overall, we split the codes across six conceptual groups:
1. EDI concepts: derived from the literature and coded in the data.
2. Health & Well-being: this conceptual group of codes was very prominent in the data. EDI issues do link closely with understandings of well-being and health.
4. Narratives: storytelling emerged as one of the dominant conceptual families in the data. Unsurprisingly as the LSP asks for the exercise of imagination and playful narration of one’s models.
5. The challenges and the unknown: ideas of the alien, the challenges of dealing with the other were quite dominant in the models and conversations of the participants. That was a bit of a surprise for the team as this imagery was often tinted with fear and stress.
6. Workplace environment: the context within which EDI should be occurring appears prominently in the models and the discussions; often connected with other conceptual groups.

In more detail, these are the codes developed per conceptual group:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conceptual Group</th>
<th>Codes within each Conceptual Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>G1: EDI</td>
<td>Diversity; Equality; Inclusion; Privilege</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G2: Health and Wellbeing</td>
<td>Emotions; Mental health; Pressure; Well-being</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G3: Higher Education</td>
<td>Classroom; Disruption in learning; Education; Environment; Student experience; Student support; Teaching; University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G4: Narratives</td>
<td>Background; Courage; Family; Fears; Goals; Growth; Hope; Knowledge; Learning journey; Learning model; Life; Narrative; Past experiences; Pre-conceptions; Social influence; Subjects; Travel; Use of colours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G5: Challenges and the Unknown</td>
<td>Barriers; Bias; Challenges; Minefields and challenges; Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G6: Workplace Environment</td>
<td>Change; Colleagues; Communication; Flexibility; Management; Policies; Resources; Skill set; Support at work; Training; Work; Workload</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Once the first level of analysis was completed we proceeded to cross analyse the data by juxtaposing the EDI conceptual Group (G1) against the other five conceptual groups (G2-G6) and then analysing the text that was located in the intersections of each pair of codes.

An example of such a cross-matrix showing the EDI codes juxtaposed against the Higher Education Codes is shown below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classroom Disruption in learning</th>
<th>Education Environment</th>
<th>Student experience</th>
<th>Student support</th>
<th>Teaching</th>
<th>University</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Diversity</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equality</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusion</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Privilege</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 6: Conceptual cross-matrix

Shading indicates heavy coding for a particular cross section. The analysis that follows focuses on the heavily shaded areas of each of the five cross-matrices we created:

Cross-matrix 1: EDI vs. Health & Well-being
Cross-matrix 2: EDI vs. Higher Education
Cross-matrix 3: EDI vs. Narratives
Cross-matrix 4: EDI vs. Challenges and the Unknown
Cross-matrix 5: EDI vs. Workplace Environment

Each shaded area becomes then a text (see an example in Figure 6) that we explored in order to get a sense of how the EDI codes link to other areas that affect learning and teaching in business schools.

In our analysis each individual node is indicated by underlining them. For each cross-matrix only the more heavily shaded cross-sections are considered, assuming that a frequently shaded intersection of two concepts indicates a connection between the two concepts under investigation.
APPENDIX 3: DISSEMINATION

We have presented workshops or conference papers at a number of key events including:

A presentation at the 5th Annual Workshop on Leadership and Diversity at the Copenhagen Business School (14 May 2019) to a group of 30 participants from business schools in Denmark, the UK and beyond demonstrating our methodology and philosophy underlying the project’s workshops.

A Professional Development Workshop for participants at the annual Chartered ABS Learning and Teaching conference (Manchester, 14th May 2019). It was extremely well-attended (40+ participants) and the feedback to the organisers was positive. Our session was highlighted as one of the most popular sessions. We were invited to submit a blog entry to the Chartered ABS website to discuss our work:

Source: The Chartered Association of Business Schools website (2019)

A workshop for researchers at the University of Bedfordshire ‘BMRI Day’ (Business and Management Research Institute) 13 January 2020

A presentation on ‘Evaluating the impact’ 24 July 2020: Research webinar organised by the University of Bedfordshire

A Professional Development Workshop at the 2020 online Chartered ABS festival of LTSE Conference.