

White Paper: The Need for "Call-In" Working Groups in Driving Equity, Diversity and Inclusion in the Construction Industry

Summary:

The construction industry is at a pivotal moment, recognising the critical need to evolve beyond traditional practices and foster a more equitable, diverse and inclusive environment. This transformation is not merely a social imperative but a strategic necessity for sustainable growth and innovation. The "Call-In" initiative, conceptualised by Priti Gadani and Ellie Lawford, Komfort Partitioning, directly addresses this need by establishing a series of focused working groups dedicated to **Allyship, Competence, Accountability and Investment** throughout 2025. This white paper argues for the fundamental importance of these "Call-In" groups, demonstrating how their structured approach can drive meaningful change, enhance industry performance, attract a broader talent pool and cultivate a resilient and inclusive future for the construction sector.

1. The Current Landscape: A Call for Change

The construction industry continues to face ongoing challenges in achieving genuine equity and diversity. Underrepresentation of women, younger generations, ethnic minorities and individuals with disabilities remains a significant concern, particularly in on-site and leadership positions. This lack of diversity not only undermines social equity but also hinders the industry's opportunity for innovation, productivity and resilience. Key challenges include:

- **Skills Shortages:** A critical talent gap in our industry is made worse because we aren't drawing in enough diverse candidates. This holds us back from meeting demand and adopting new technologies.
- **Cultural Barriers:** Unconscious biases and a lack of inclusive communication are creating unwelcoming environments, causing us to lose valuable talent.
- **Lack of Psychological Safety:** Employees often fear expressing concerns or challenging norms, which hinders innovation and stops crucial feedback.
- **Limited Representation:** With so few diverse role models in top positions, existing imbalances continue, and aspiring talent is less likely to enter our sector.

- **Ineffective EDI Initiatives:** Many previous efforts have focused on surface-level compliance rather than truly transforming our culture, resulting in minimal tangible change.

The "Call-In" initiative presents a proactive and collaborative alternative, emphasising education, mutual respect and collective problem-solving to address these systemic issues.

2. The "Call-In" Framework: A Holistic Approach to EDI

The "Call-In" initiative is organised into distinct working groups, each focusing on a fundamental pillar of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion. This approach ensures a holistic and actionable strategy for transforming the construction industry.

These vital working groups are collaboratively driven by a consortium of dedicated industry leaders: **Priti Gadani (Komfort), Eleanor Strange (AEW Architects), Louise Grimes (M1NT Studio Ltd), Matthew Gavin & Martina Mastrangeli (HORIZON Fletcher Rae), Aida Ahmad & Frances Phillips (BDP), and Jonah Speaks (Turner & Townsend)**. Their collective leadership is instrumental in translating discussions into concrete outcomes.

2.1. Allyship: Fostering a Culture of Support and Advocacy

The initial "Allyship Call-In" session effectively demonstrated the power of creating secure environments for open dialogue and sharing personal experiences. Its primary objectives were to:

- Identify opportunities to strengthen allyship within the industry.
- Understand practical methods for enhancing allyship in professional settings.
- Translate discussions into meaningful actions.

Need for Allyship: In a traditionally male-dominated sector like construction, active and visible allyship from individuals in positions of influence is crucial for breaking down these barriers. Allies play a vital role in challenging biases within decision-making processes, recruitment and organisational culture. By promoting inclusive language, demonstrating

exemplary behaviour and actively intervening against exclusionary actions, allies can cultivate supportive environments where all individuals feel valued and empowered.

Actionable Steps from Allyship Call-In:

- Establish safe spaces for open dialogue and active listening.
- Challenge biases in decision-making, recruitment and organisational culture.
- Promote inclusive language and behaviors in daily interactions.
- Utilise available EDI resources for continuous learning.
- Lead by example, demonstrating inclusive practices.
- Intervene when witnessing exclusionary or discriminatory behavior.
- Actively participate in EDI initiatives, working groups and policy reviews.
- Implement accountability measures, tracking progress and responsibility.
- Provide mentorship, guidance and advocacy for underrepresented colleagues.
- Challenge outdated industry norms and advocate for inclusive policies.
- Commit to consistent and ongoing action.

2.2. Competence: Building a Skilled and Adaptable Workforce for the Future

Need for Competence: As the construction industry rapidly evolves with new technologies and methodologies, ensuring a highly skilled and adaptable workforce is paramount. The "Call-In" identified crucial gaps in competence among younger professionals and highlighted the intergenerational responsibility in fostering a supportive learning environment. A focus on competence, free from unconscious bias, is essential for identifying and nurturing talent from all backgrounds, particularly in a sector facing persistent skills shortages.

The "Competence Call-In" highlighted the evolving demands of the modern workforce and the importance of continuous professional development.

The Necessity of Competence: As the construction industry rapidly evolves with new technologies, ensuring a highly skilled and adaptable workforce is imperative. The "Call-In" session identified critical gaps in competence among younger professionals and highlighted the intergenerational responsibility in fostering a supportive learning ecosystem. A focus on competence, without unconscious bias, is essential for identifying and nurturing talent from all backgrounds, particularly given the ongoing skills shortages facing the sector. The crucial role of company leadership in driving awareness and promoting positive behaviours related to competence was a key takeaway.

Key Takeaways from Competence Call-In:

- Identified crucial gap analysis in areas where support is most needed for younger professionals.
- Emphasised the vital role of all generations in fostering a supportive environment.
- Stressed the essential role of continuous support from company leadership in driving awareness and influencing positive behaviours around competence.

The insights from this session will inform actionable strategies to enhance skill development and ensure equitable opportunities for all professionals.

2.3. Accountability: Driving Sustainable Change through Responsibility

The upcoming "Accountability Call-In" is crucial for translating intentions into measurable results.

Need for Accountability: Without clear accountability, EDI initiatives often remain aspirational rather than transformational. The construction industry needs to track progress, identify roadblocks and ensure that commitments to EDI are embedded in organisational practices.

2.4. Investment: Fuelling a Diverse and Innovative Future

The "Investment Call-In" will address the financial and resource allocation necessary to sustain meaningful EDI efforts.

Need for Investment: Achieving comprehensive EDI requires strategic investment – not just financial, but also in time, training and cultural transformation. This includes investing in:

- **Training and Education**
- **Support Systems**
- **Infrastructure**
- **Technology**

Investing in EDI is not an expense; it is an investment in people, ultimately leading to enhanced productivity, innovation, talent retention and a stronger, more resilient industry. Companies that prioritise EDI are more likely to attract top talent, enhance their reputation and better serve a diverse client base.

3. The "Call-In" Advantage: Beyond "Calling Out"

"Call-In" offers a constructive alternative to "calling out," emphasising education, mutual respect and positive change. This approach fosters a deeper understanding of diverse perspectives and empowers individuals to actively contribute to creating supportive workplace environments. By creating a collaborative rather than confrontational space, the initiative encourages genuine engagement and a shared commitment to progress.

4. Conclusion: Building an Inclusive and Resilient Construction Industry

The "Call-In" working groups on Allyship, Competence, Accountability and Investment are not just beneficial, they are essential for the future success and sustainability of the construction industry. By proactively addressing systemic barriers and fostering a culture of genuine inclusion, the sector can:

- **Mitigate skills shortages** by attracting and retaining a broader, more diverse talent pool.
- **Enhance innovation and problem-solving** through diverse perspectives and collaborative environments.
- **Improve employee engagement and well-being**, leading to increased productivity and reduced confrontation.
- **Strengthen its reputation** as a forward-thinking and socially responsible industry.
- **Build a more resilient and adaptable workforce** capable of navigating future challenges.

The commitment shown by industry leaders in initiating and participating in these "Call-In" sessions, particularly with the support of Komfort Partitioning, demonstrates a collective resolve for change. The upcoming follow-up initiatives to ensure implementation of the insights gathered are crucial for cementing the long-term impact of "Call-In." By embracing the principles of these working groups, the construction industry can lay the foundation for a truly equitable, diverse and prosperous future for all.

