INFOTOOLS
HARMONI

REPRESENT

Toward a more inclusive, diverse, equitable, and accessible insights industry

Delivering more representative insights by holistic investment in diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Conversations surrounding diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI or IDEA if you also include accessibility) have certainly increased of late. And for good reason.

The market research industry has a vital role in this conversation, by providing stakeholders with insights that are representative of respective markets. It's our industry's challenge to ensure this is facilitated by diverse teams, who source data from diverse audiences, whilst using diverse methodologies. As a result, we can expect that all people groups are fairly represented and have a voice – however large or small they may be.

Changing the way we ask demographic questions to be more inclusive is part of this equation but, as many of our recent podcast guests shared, pursuing IDEA is much more than just that.

Whether it's newly released research and best practices, task forces formed by our industry associations, or the establishment of measurable business initiatives to ensure equity - there's an encouraging amount of work already underway, yet there is plenty more to be done. Here are some of the IDEA themes we discussed with a range of thought leaders in our sector on the _Now that's Significant_ podcast.

Change is within our reach, and we all have a part to play in helping it become a reality. We trust you find this eBook as encouraging and enabling as we have in producing it.

Best,

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Industry groups championing IDEA

While there are many groups across industries that further the conversations surrounding IDEA, we were lucky enough to talk to leaders from three of them: Women in Research's WIRe in Color; the Insights Association's IDEA Council; and the Market Research Society's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Council (EDI). Also of note is ESOMAR's Diversity and Inclusion Working Group and Colour of Research, both doing important work in this arena.

WIRe in Color

This group has a very specific purpose: to raise the visibility of women of color in and outside of the market research industry and to push conversations surrounding workplace inclusion by championing racial and cultural diversity and equity. In our industry, the percentage of women in the C-suite is low, and the percentage of women of color at this level is even lower. In fact, a study recently released by Women in Research (WIRe) showed that more women are having to give up senior level leadership positions due to lack of support.

Only 23% of CEO roles are held by women, up a mere 3% in the last five years.

On a positive note, according to the same study, more companies in the industry now have at least one equality measure in place - 88% vs 73% in 2017. And 56% have a diversity program to guide hiring practices, up 8% from the previous wave five years ago. Unfortunately, people of color, specifically Black employees, still say they experience discrimination in the workplace - a whopping 95% in this study.

There is a lot of work to still be done. The WIRe in Color initiative creates a space for women of color to come together and be heard, both through online and in-person networking and educational opportunities. "Sometimes we don't know that we're here in this industry," shares Marion Elliot, one of the program's founders and leaders, who was a guest on our podcast. "It's very important to know that we have similar stories that we can share…and it's very important to me to be a catalyst in that change."

IDEA Council

The Insights Association's IDEA (Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Access) Council works to fulfil a mission to deliver measurement, education, and standards of excellence to address the lack of representation in the insights profession and the populations it researches. The initial focus of the group was on racial equity, and is now inclusive of gender and sexual orientation. The council includes a diverse group of insights industry professionals, all of whom are passionate about inclusion and diversity.

On our podcast, we were joined by Sherri Dansby and Damon Jones, founding members of the Council. Sherri and Damon shared with us some of the accomplishments the IDEA Council has achieved since its inception in 2020. We talk about:

- The "IDEAtor" fellowship program for young professionals, which is an innovative 12-month paid, remote fellowship for diverse college graduates, vocational and/or early career professionals to gain practical real work experience.
- The IDEA Toolkit, a practical guide to insight professionals and leaders on how to create inclusive, diverse, and equitable organizations and insights
- Research reports that provide guidance for improving the execution of market research studies, such as a guide on how to ask race and ethnicity in a more inclusive and sensitive way; and a position paper on how to ask demographic questions on Gender, Sexual Orientation, and Race and Ethnicity.

This group has also conducted a recent study on IDEA in the market research and consumer insights industry, meant to inform the industry on where it is today on key IDEA measures and highlight opportunities to make improvements for the future.

MRS EDI Council & more

This multi-pronged group's vision is that the market research industry will truly represent the world it seeks to understand, while providing an authentic and impactful voice leading, helping and guiding the industry on issues of representation, equality and accountability. It provides best practice guides, toolkits and programming to reach this goal.

One of the more unique aspects of this industry group is that it works with a number of "purpose groups" that fall under the MRS umbrella. These groups granularly address specific challenges and work for inclusion for several segments of the market research population. MRS Unlimited seeks change in the way the research industry, business and wider society treats and behaves around disability; MRS Social Inclusion Group is a network to improve the opportunities and amplify the voices of those disadvantaged on the basis of their social background; and MRS Pride seeks to unite LGBTQ+ professionals and allies across the sector.

On our podcast, we spoke with Sabrina Trinquetel, who serves as co-chair of MRS Pride, co-hosts its OUTsights podcast, sits on the EDI Council, and is part of the MRS Representation in Research steering group. The group is focused on changing the conversation about representative sample, and she used the example of 'nat rep' asking "what do we mean when we say nat rep?" Traditionally, we have included age, gender and region to get a nationally representative sample. She says we need to expand the focus to also include other pertinent aspects such as ethnicity, sexuality, and ability.

It is heartening to see influencers in the industry take the initiative to create programs, council, research, and guidelines to help the market research industry become more inclusive. Although progress has been slow on some fronts, the hard work that groups like these are putting into IDEA is sure to make a difference in the future of the insights space.

Improving IDEA outcomes requires end-to-end change

One of the biggest themes that came through in our discussions over the last couple of months was that in order for lasting change to happen surrounding inclusion, diversity, equity and access within the insights sector, there needs to be change across all aspects of the market research supply chain.

Clearly, our industry groups are working hard to make the industry more inclusive and representative from the ground up. While this issue is enormous in scope, we were lucky enough to explore a few key points surrounding this topic in depth with guests on our podcast.

Building representation in our demographics

There are many research-on-research projects that have been published, or are currently underway, that are seeking to understand better ways to ask demographic questions to be more inclusive and provide more diverse viewpoints. ESOMAR just published the first in its series of Demographic Best Practice Recommendations papers covering how to ask questions surrounding a respondent's age.

The Insights Association and other groups have prioritized research into how to ask other sensitive demographic questions, such as sexual orientation and gender, in a more inclusive way. This important work is ongoing, and new standards and best practices are being solidified that are sure to help ensure progress on new methodologies that have IDEA in mind.

Expanding our nat pop or gen pop metrics

Earlier, we touched on some of the work that Sabrina is doing with the MRS on representation, and it is a topic we covered more in-depth in our conversation with her. In survey research, traditional "nat. pop" or "gen pop" metrics used to define a target audience need to become more expansive.

This kind of approach will more fully represent the types of people that make up any particular audience - otherwise we are making decisions based on incomplete data. She says, "If we believe that our results are representative and we're making product and business decisions off the back of that, but you're not necessarily including the full range of people that actually represent a population or country, you are ignoring some of the voices in the room."

Cultural nuances and international survey design

Another guest, Nancy Hernon of G3 Translate, talked with us about how to build cultural relevancy and inclusion into research practices by delivering carefully translated surveys that are culturally sensitive to the target markets. This type of survey design avoids a traditional one-size-fits-all approach, and takes into account not only that the language used is relevant to the population, but also that the questions themselves are relevant and are asked in a natural way to the target audience.

This kind of approach can help avoid the introduction of bias. She says that, beyond just presenting the survey in the native language of the population, "If your wording doesn't resonate with them on a personal level, they may feel like you didn't bother to put the thought into your survey design just for them and not really give much thought to their answers." This kind of nuance is crucial when surveying respondents from diverse geographies, nationalities, and backgrounds, and taking a thoughtful

approach will help to provide higher quality data that is more representative.

Maximizing equitable participation in surveys, asking demographic questions that better represent today's populations, using language that is inclusive - these are all important steps toward transforming sample and survey design that moves us closer to true representativity.

Representation in ResTech

What does representation mean in the market research and insights technology world? Well, while software development languages may be universal in nature, with set syntax and logic, they are a means to an end.

There are often a number of ways software can be created to solve problems or help users achieve desired outcomes. And when a company has representation across its team, it can access all sorts of different views and perspectives, leading to solutions that wouldn't have otherwise been created.

There is a richness of thought and culture that blossoms when a diverse group of people work as one to drive a business forward, especially in a software engineering environment.

From our experience at Infotools, it is highly motivating and productive to see people from all walks of life come together, bringing their unique perspectives to the table, to solve complex business challenges.

The driving push for lasting change

Many an organization or business unit has initiated a program of improvement, only to see it drift off into obscurity within days, weeks, or months. The benefits of getting IDEA right are so compelling that organizations need to keep persisting.

However, this kind of change shouldn't be done just because it's what looks good in an annual report or social media stream. It has to be done because it's the right thing to do, and because it helps us to better serve the needs of society at large - not just the majorities.

Avoiding the common pitfalls of performative diversity

One trap that organizations can fall into is similar to that of greenwashing. And that's implementing an IDEA initiative, but not investing in maintaining or scaling it - putting in place the necessary infrastructure to ensure it lasts. On the surface, it looks as if the organization is doing the right thing, but it only ends up in superficial, temporary change.

Performative pitfalls in inclusivity, diversity, equity and access happen when an organization's commitment neglects to take the critical step of assigning a policy, action, group, individual or other formal initiative in order to bring it about to its full, lasting realization. One of our guests, Marion Elliot of WIRe in Color, discussed this important point with us and it is worth a closer look.

Often, a company will start an initiative and, if they don't immediately see a return on investment, they abandon the work. With IDEA implementation, setting clear guidelines, identifying the desired results, and having a mindset of "pushing through" is important if change is to happen. It needs to be a priority at every level of the organization, with involvement from people on the ground to the C-suite.

What does performative diversity look like?

Performative diversity can happen, for example, when a company hires people from diverse backgrounds but then does not put in place the adequate support to ensure that those people not only survive but thrive in their roles. Structure needs to be in place to ensure that every voice is heard, and communication is transparent across organizations. Subconscious bias, microaggressions, unequal pay and other issues that many underrepresented populations face are very real challenges, and must be openly discussed and addressed.

Marion says that diversity without inclusion or equity is "fruitless" and that companies need to be intentional about what they mean by IDEA. It needs to go beyond simply hiring to meet diversity goals, and allow individuals to flourish within the organization. It's important to recognize that many IDEA initiatives are, at their heart, performative and created outside of the groups they are meant to serve. We have a chance to take a different approach.

Marion recommends taking these steps to avoid performative diversity:

- Put formal policies in place that promote diverse hiring practices.
- Create formal communication mechanisms for diverse employees to be seen and heard.
- Engage everyone to drive IDEA initiatives, from entry-level staff to leadership, by creating a committee or other cross-functional group to drive ongoing change.
- Attach KPIs or other trackable metrics to your IDEA commitment to measure performance in a tangible way.

If an initiative has no clear goals, or makes no changes, it is performative. Not only is instituting IDEA policy the right thing to do, it also contributes to success. Marion shares, "Studies have shown that when you have a diverse, culturally-accepting and inclusive company, your profits go up!" Numbers don't lie, and equality won't wait. Companies that don't engage in diversity will get left behind.

Diversity in each step of the insights generation process

Sabrina Trinquetel also touched on the importance of diversity in the market research workplace. The people who are writing questionnaires, analyzing the data and creating the reports have a strong influence on research outcomes. Without a diverse group of people at the front-end to design the research and at the outcomes stage to identify the insights, we are setting the industry up for failure from an IDEA perspective.

IDEA initiatives like diverse hiring practices and other formal programs for IDEA are critical, not just because they're the right thing to do, but also because our insights are going to be far more effective and representative of the world if we are coming from a place of equity and diversity in the first place.

Concluding this discussion on inclusion, diversity, equity and access

Our guests all agreed that the insights industry has become a lot more diverse, with further discussions opening up and continuing the important conversations around IDEA. Many people in the industry are now doing the work and that is creating a huge change. Sherri Dansby says, "The work we are doing now will drive more inclusive workplaces as well as more inclusive research studies... IDEA is a reality for the world we live in - consumers are diverse, brands know that, and they need to access these audiences to be successful, so this will continue to be top of mind."

Damon Jones adds that just in the past two years, we have expanded the conversation itself to encompass not just diversity, but equity, access, inclusion, belonging and more, but there is a long way to go. We need more intentional movement as an industry to bring this forward.

The good news? The industry is committed to inclusion, diversity, equity, and access, and individuals in all segments of the market research space, at all levels, are beginning to work together for change. Marion says, "We are all of the same mind that we want to make the industry better, inclusive, and equitable." Let's continue this important journey together, taking action, embodying representation, and transforming insights from the inside out.

Discover Harmoni

Harmoni is one of the longest-standing MR platforms that insights teams have and are turning to, to help differentiate themselves in the market by delivering quality insights at pace. A cloud-based software platform, Harmoni is purpose-built for market research data —from data processing through to investigation, visualization, dashboards, reporting, distribution, and data alerts.

Benefits of using the Harmoni platform

- Reduce the time taken to present meaningful insights to business leaders.

- Combine multiple data sources to enrich your market research intelligence.

- Automate and streamline key tasks to spend more time analyzing data.

- Collaborate with confidence by presenting insights that are comprehensive and holistic.

How our market research analysis and reporting platform works

STEP 1
Harmonize

STEP 2
Analyze

STEP 3
Visualize

STEP 4
Share
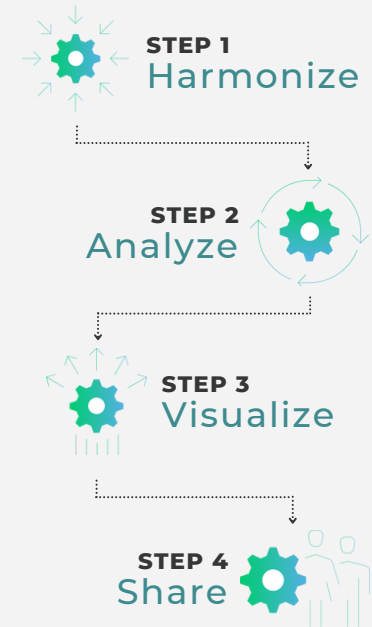
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