

# Be Inclusive; Explore Diversity...

The third in this series, reflects on the concept of “Inclusiveness”, in the context of Professional Scepticism.

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## The Inexorable Drift Toward Diversity

“A civilization that withdraws into itself, atrophies”, so said the African poet [Aimé Césaire](#). To him, the diverse connection of different civilisations was an intensely powerful interaction, as if drawing in a deep, fresh, full breath of “oxygen”.

Sympathetically, in “[The 2020 Workplace](#)”, Jeanne Meister & Karie Willyerd signalled how diversity will become fundamental to business in the near future. Connectivity, collaboration, & creativity, all fused within different technologies, teams, practices, cultures, and, age ranges.

If these ideas are valid, and this may be the way that business is going, then what might that mean for Accountancy as a profession? How might being open and receptive to these ideas, even embracing them, impact us as we plough our furrow as trusted business advisors?

## Change, and Our Inner Critic

I know that in penning those few words above, I’ve already triggered a form of natural scepticism that lies deep inside each of all of us. The merest suggestion of the slightest change, and “bingo”, for safety’s sake, our minds naturally reflex whilst saying “... hang on a minute”.

The change signalled above though, is not small, is it? Civilisation, and the way businesses fundamentally operate, are major ideas to conceive. Rather than a considered and inclusive open-armed embrace, we are more likely to rapidly reject them out of hand, aren’t we? “Yes”.

“Yes”, is the natural sceptic within us coming out. That inner critic resides inside of our heads. We often hear them talking to us at important moments. And, I know that you too are listening to him, or to her, right now, aren’t you?

I also know that as people interested in financial matters, we value facts and logic; we like to let the data speak. This means that we have the capacity and desire when we choose, to listen to, and to understand, both sides of any debate that interests us.

If the authors above are wrong, there's little need to run through the options. You've already modelled likely scenarios & consequences in your heads, haven't you? This allows you to feel relaxed; safe, cocooned, and comforted, with an understanding that you need do nothing more.

However, what if these authors are right?



## **Scepticism, and Professional Scepticism**

Professional scepticism is an attitude of mind that is deeply valued within the field of accountancy. The lack of it, would be a concern.

A “Sceptic” is a person that harbours deep doubts and distrust. If I can't prove it, a sceptic won't believe it. They hold a mindset that can often leave them impervious to change. This attitude is often driven by their own internal values system.

Curiosity and a questioning mind are marvellous resources to have, though sceptics often lack one key element; objectivity. They may shoot down the message because they don't like the messenger. Or, they may shoot down the messenger, because they don't like the message!

In contrast, “Professional Scepticism” is to be encouraged. It is a mindset that examines the evidence in a critical way, using objective criteria. It is not about making moral or internal value based judgments, either of the data, or the people.

Professional scepticism is about a mature exploration of the evidence. It requires professional probing, active listening, and critical assessment of the responses. Having established relevant criteria, and elicited relevant responses, then, and only then, can a view be taken.

It bubbles up and out of a mindset that's keen to explore fresh perspectives. It delves deep to gain a broader appreciation of key assumptions driving a business, the context within which assumptions are constructed, the data relevant to business models used, the decision-making calculus deployed, and, business plans formed. It is a mindset, comfortable with differences.

## **An Inclusive Approach Brings Benefits**

It wasn't until I joined a UK firm of Chartered Accountants that an obvious truth struck me; Accountancy is a profession that deals with every type of industry. Internal professionals even, working within the Finance function, cut across all boundaries, all divisions, all departments.

To be effective, professionals must speak the business language of their client, understand how clients think, and appreciate the imperatives that drive the business operations. Diversity enhances the skill sets within an organisation, enabling them to speak in their client's language.

The different perspectives that heterogeneity brings, is also an important ingredient in the creative problem solving process. It helps enhance the role of an accountant, furthering the professional claims as a trusted advisor who helps their clients address real business issues.

Risk is also a central element in any business equation too, and one that financial folk understand well. Choosing to invest in a more diversified "portfolio" of people, is thus a smart part of a sensible risk management philosophy. In addition, a diverse and inclusive approach increases the size of the catchment pool of available talent for hire.

However, to take advantage of the many positives, adopting a more inclusive approach may require some changes on the part of an organisation too. It requires a mindset that respects and honours the strengths present in differences, rather than a mindset that just forces conformance to existing practices. This can sometimes be easier to say, than to enact.

An inclusive mindset is always open to listen to what others have to say, allowing the people behind those ideas to feel accepted, not ignored, nor rejected. It may also need changes to assumptions we make of them; for sure, they won't know everything that an accounting graduate knows, yet they will know other things that accounting grads don't.

In closing, in a client's world where the traditional status quo has now lost its status, change is their norm. As a profession, a more open mind and a more inclusive heart will all collaborate to help build the strong and diverse professional background we desire to flourish for the future.

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