Widening the AV industry's horizons

Diversity is one of those words that triggers strong reactions from all sides of the AV industry, yet a diversity of backgrounds is also important for the success of any business in this interconnected world. Our research shows there are positive attitudes towards policies of inclusion, says *Clive Couldwell*.

»» "Whilst the Equality Act 2010 enshrines people's rights under protected characteristics the recognition by all of us to understand our own cultural upbringing and beliefs and how this affects others is some way off. Many of our actions, both male and female are implicit in our nature. I suppose raising awareness is the only way to change things if indeed it is felt the benefits are necessary," said one of our poll respondents.

Diversity promotes growth

One could argue diversity communicates some kind of digression from the norm, but we'd like to think that diversity acts as a key to opening a door to variety within the AV industry, and that it will promote growth and place AV more in the forefront of the technology sector.

Says Sanj Surati, digital atelier and founder of Tiger Heart: "I started my journey in the AV space through the music industry around 25 years ago. I've always felt through my experience that the arts, events and AV worlds have always been very diverse with people coming from different backgrounds, ages, sexes and everything in between. I've also always believed that diversity in business is about ensuring organisations have a mosaic of mindsets from different backgrounds. And that this investment into diversity will bring prosperity to the business."

Surati's view was reflected in our poll: "To promote diversity and inclusion within the AV sector we need first to promote ourselves as a viable career to a wider audience. There is a very small pool of talent coming into the business and this works against the principles of diversity and Inclusion," said one respondent.
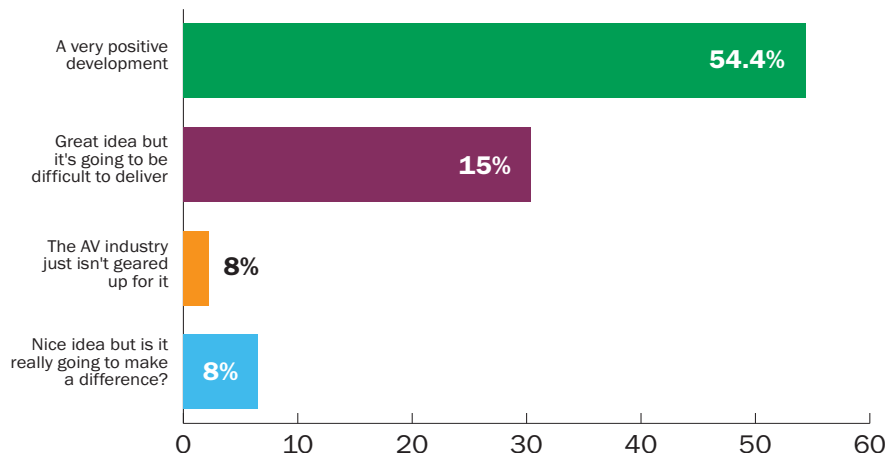
Two of the AV industry's recruitment

The Royal Society of Medicine/ AVIXA Diversity Council held an event which explored the benefits of diversity in the workplace

SOPHIE WARD

CHART 1

Source: AV online research, March 2019

Do you think pursuing diversity in the AV industry is a positive move, or just the latest incarnation of political correctness?

A very positive development	54.4%
Great idea but it's going to be difficult to deliver	15%
The AV industry just isn't geared up for it	8%
Nice idea but is it really going to make a difference?	8%

(x-axis: 0, 10, 20, 30, 40, 50, 60)

SOPHIE WARD

Simon Minty discusses diversity at the RSM/AVIXA Diversity Council event

Does your organisation list diversity & inclusion as one of its stated values and/or priority areas?

specialists also added their thoughts. "We are in a creative, dynamic and innovative industry requiring a variety of talent, skills and individuality for the wide range of roles. As a niche market - which compared to other industries is still in its infancy - it's essential we embrace workforce diversity. It's also an imperative time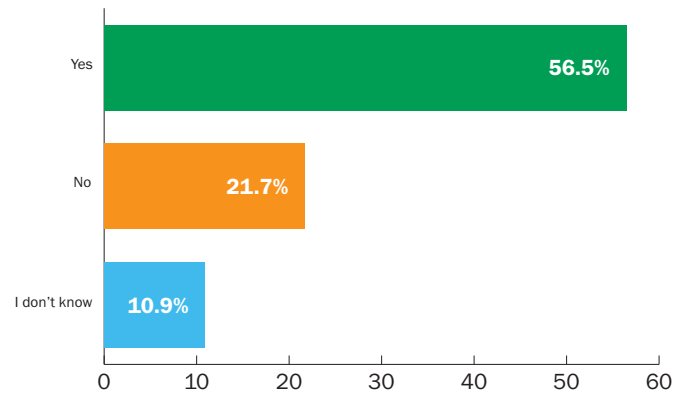 for market growth and development, so having a wealth of diversity within the industry will enrich and encourage younger generations to start a career within AV," said Denise O'Keeffe, director, Woop Jobs!

"Creating and maintaining cultures with support inclusion starts at C-level in a company through their approach to hiring new talent. Brands not understanding their own employment structure or the needs of their employees can have a huge knock-on effect throughout a whole workforce. But we can make a positive impact on our industry by encouraging open minded and forward thinking attitudes in the workplace to minimise prejudice."

Says JacobsMassey's managing director, Graeme Massey: "If we take the freelance sector in isolation it still remains very male dominated. Out of 180 active freelancers we have, six are females working within AV and production. Our workforce is split 50:50 between UK and European freelancers but it's overwhelmingly male. So this is a direct insight into how far the market needs to shift to address one aspect of diversity being gender.

Massey maintains we can learn about practical support from other »

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO BUILD A SUCCESSFUL PROGRAMME

What does it take to build a diversity and inclusion programme that is able to attract and retain talent, enable greater innovation, bolster financial performance, and accelerate other business objectives? tvONE's *Denise Nemchev* suggests the following:

Diversity – what you see
»» *Individual and group-social differences*
»» *Challenge is greater representation, opportunity and access.*

Inclusion – how you feel
»» *Harness the collective diverse forces in a way that is beneficial to both individuals as well as the company (getting invited to the dance one you are at the party)*
»» *Challenge is recognising uniqueness and feeling a true sense of belonging.*

Why is diversity and inclusion Important?
»» *Increases talent pool*
»» *Strengthens customer engagement*
»» *Increases employee satisfaction*
»» *Improves decision making*
»» *Enhances the company image*
»» *Continued research supports the theory that companies that embrace diversity and inclusion perform better than those that don't.*

Impacting diversity – what can organisations do?
1. Articulate the business case: *enriching the diversity of an organisation will drive a more successful business.*

2. Establish metrics and hold leaders accountable

3. Pay attention to inclusion, not just diversity

4. Recruitment
»» *Talent search*
»» *Job descriptions*
»» *Interview process*
»» *Selection criteria.*

5. Advancement
»» *Performance reviews*
»» *Promotion process*
»» *Selection criteria*
»» *Networking, mentoring, sponsoring, professional development.*

6. Retention
»» *Culture*
»» *Success criteria*
»» *Pay equity*
»» *Workplace practices*
»» *Networking, mentoring, sponsoring, professional development.*

7. General
»» *Respect everyone the same.*
»» *Engage in dialogue not debate. Work on conversation to bridge gaps.*
»» *Assume positive intent.*

8. Be mindful of conscious and unconscious biases. *Help others' awareness and fill gaps of ignorance when appropriate.*

9. Continue to walk the talk *Review HR policies such as holiday/ paid time off, maternity/paternity leave, flexible working hours, team member composition.*

10. Impacting inclusion: leadership practices
The goal for inclusion is to harness diverse forces for the benefits of both the individual and the company by recognising uniqueness and cultivating a sense of belonging.
»» *Centre yourself on the mindset of inclusive leadership*
»» *Engage your team in dialogue that creates an inclusive culture.*
»» *Champion efforts toward advancing inclusion in the workplace.*

Catalyst answer to what each person can do better on the subject of diversity and inclusion:
»» *E = Empowerment*
»» *A = Accountability*
»» *C = Courage*
»» *H = Humility (head & heart).*

Diverse workforces
»» *Understand the marketplace better*
»» *Create more innovation*
»» *Uncover more issues ahead of time .*

industries. "One example is mechanical engineering. Universities have partnered with some Formula 1 racing teams to actively encourage young female trainee mechanics to look at engineering as a career. Openings have been created, and placements formed for students. The same could be created within AV companies," he says.

How important is diversity in today's AV workplace?

"Diversity and inclusivity is one of the most important ways a company can grow. It is important to reflect the needs of the wider audience. It's also great way to enhance growth," said another of our poll respondents.

"It is a growing technology market which historically has been largely populated by male employees. However users of AV technology do not follow this stereotype, therefore diversity in the AV workforce is key if the industry is to grow to its full potential," adds Massey.

And it can't be seen as tokenism either. Just over 33 per cent of companies who responded to our poll said they had programmes in place to demonstrate fairness in performance and compensation decisions, although just under 14 per cent operated programmes

> **"Diversity and inclusion is one of the most important ways a company can grow. It's important to reflect the needs of the wider audience. It's also a great way to enhance growth."**
> **Poll respondent**

to recruit diverse candidates.

"The bottom line is that if companies don't make D&I a core strategy, not just a checklist, they will lose in the long game," says Denise Nemchev, president and ceo, tvONE

Headquartered in China, Absen has eight international subsidiaries so it faces daily challenges around language, culture and time differences, especially when staff are working continually with colleagues from other regions. "Around two thirds of the Chinese sales team looking after the European market are women. Being able to communicate in the local language is a necessity and Absen makes a conscientious effort to hire graduates with foreign language skills. However, in China, it is mostly women who study languages at university and therefore gender diversity has happened more as a consequence of there not being as many men with the same degree of language skills. Regardless of gender, Absen provides all new hires with extensive sales and technical training as part of their induction programme," says Huitong Sun, Absen Europe's operations manager.

"HR can definitely lend a hand in the (diversity) process, starting at the first recruitment stage with resume screening. HR can also influence hiring decisions by speaking with and convincing the hiring departments. In our European team, we have recently hired a female engineer, managers from the UK and Spain, as well as technicians from India and Turkey, making our team very diverse. Moreover, HR can help reach more mutual understanding between team members by organising team building activities and conducting work reviews." ∎

CHART 3
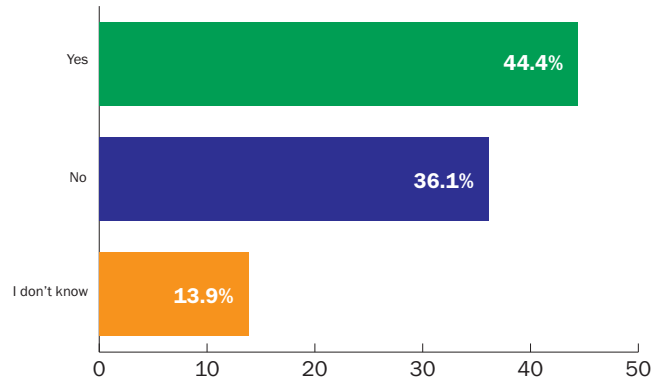*Source: AV online research, March 2019*

The primary objective of my organisation's diversity & inclusion programme is to:
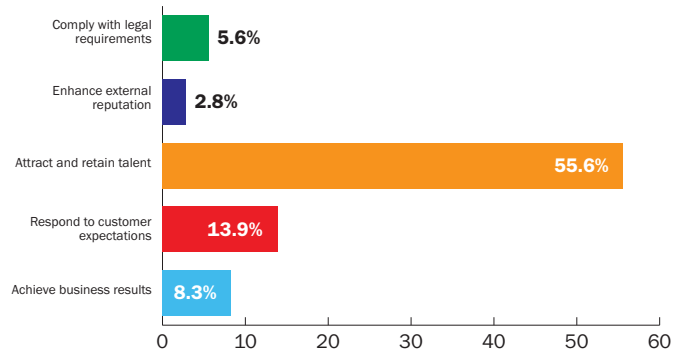
CHART 4
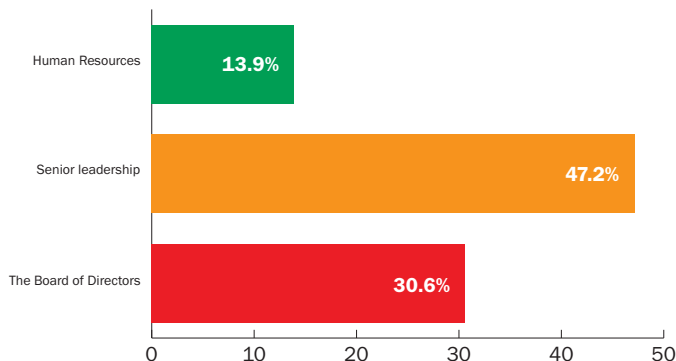*Source: AV online research, March 2019*

My organisation publicly communicates information about its diversity goals

CHART 5
Source: AV online research, March 2019

Primary oversight and decision-making authority for diversity & inclusion initiatives lies with:

CHART 6
Source: AV online research, March 2019

Do you think diversity & inclusion programmes at your organisation should have a strong focus on: