

Diversity, Inclusion & Law

**REPORT 2024: LEGAL LEADERS
MAKING MEANINGFUL CHANGE**



Obelisk | **SPARK21**



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FOREWORD

Inclusion in the context of leadership is a LOT like anchovies in the context of Caesar salads.

I am not a fan of those salty little fish. When taken on their own, I find them overpowering, but I once made the mistake of demanding “no anchovies” in my Caesar dressing, and what I tasted, as a result, was underwhelming at best – an experience that I never want to repeat and one that helped me to reframe the influence of anchovies for someone who’d never appreciated them.

A call for ‘inclusive leadership’ does not demand you to drop standards, abandon performance targets or countenance mediocrity. It’s a reminder that there are essential elements of leadership that you may find personally disagreeable when consumed alone, but when they’re absent, make your leadership equally unpalatable.

Inclusive leadership is how you deliver sustainable high performance. Every one of you remembers that one leader who, through their

actions or lack of engagement, made you feel like you didn’t belong and weren’t welcome. You may have tolerated that behaviour for a period and have ‘made it’ despite their lack of inclusive leadership skills, but that doesn’t change that “leadership” you thrive despite... isn’t leadership.

It also doesn’t change the fact that the absence of inclusive leadership is no longer just a personal choice. Your organisation’s websites are littered with the promise of inclusive leadership made on your behalf. If you don’t believe me, check out the “Careers” and “About” pages on your respective departmental websites.

Inclusive leadership is energy expensive, but worth it: knowledge and skills that are a performance prerogative – a recipe for how we attract followers who want to contribute fulsomely, challenge intelligently and deliver consistently.

John Amaechi OBE



**“Fight for the things that you care about.
But do it in a way that will lead others to join you.”**

Ruth Bader Ginsburg

INTRODUCTION

Has the business world succumbed to diversity “fatigue”? We are led to believe that the policy shifts we have seen around the world in this space are indicators that leaders are tired and have moved on from this agenda item. This is one of the reasons we stop to take stock, each year, spotlighting progress in the legal sector as well as those who do it well. I believe that the legal profession is uniquely placed to weigh the pros and cons and to cut through the noise and share its wisdom on whether we have gone too far or not far enough. Our recent survey of the legal sector, coupled with interviews with key leaders in the field, highlights both the progress made and the challenges that remain in driving Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) across organisations.

The survey findings reveal that while there is a strong commitment to DEI in many legal departments, the path to truly inclusive leadership is still a work in progress. Encouragingly, over 71% of respondents reported that their businesses have a formal DEI strategy and delivery plan, reflecting a significant shift towards structured approaches to diversity and inclusion. The disparity between strategy and practice remains a critical area for development, as many legal leaders struggle to translate their DEI commitments into meaningful outcomes not least due to lack of support from their peers

internally or their organisation’s leaders. Only 24% of our legal leaders surveyed feel “very empowered” to deliver on strategic objectives. Inclusive leaders do not merely need to set the agenda but also foster an environment where every employee feels a sense of ownership and participation in the DEI journey – easier said than done!

Through my conversations with leaders in the legal sector, it has become clear that inclusive leadership is not just a desirable strategy; it is essential for sustainable success. Leaders who actively engage with their teams, promote transparency, and hold themselves accountable for DEI outcomes are better positioned to drive positive change in the wider business. These leaders understand that inclusive cultures are built on trust, open dialogue, and the ability to listen to and act upon diverse perspectives. They are committed to bridging the gap between policy and practice, ensuring that DEI is not just a box-ticking exercise but a core part of their organisational identity. This is why in this edition we highlight 12 individual inclusive leaders who are working on setting the bar higher with some great results.

Dana Denis-Smith
CEO, Obelisk Support and Trustee, Spark21

5 KEY SURVEY FINDINGS

1- DEI Strategies are being formalised more and more

71.2% of respondents reported that their organisations have a formal Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) strategy and delivery plan, indicating a significant commitment to structured DEI efforts within legal departments.

This is further indication that leaders recognise the need for a strategic approach to achieve meaningful progress - even those who are part of the **28.8%** of the respondents without a formal strategy report that steps are under way to formalise their DEI work.

“We have recently developed a comprehensive DEI strategy that includes specific targets and action plans. This has helped us keep the momentum and make real progress.”

– **Senior Manager**

“Our organisation has yet to formalise a DEI plan, but there are discussions happening at the leadership level.”

– **General Counsel**

2- Legal Leaders Seek Responsibility and Empowerment

Leadership plays a crucial role in advancing DEI. **43.2%** of respondents indicated that the responsibility for the DEI agenda falls on the Chief Diversity Officer, while **16.7%** stated it was led by the CEO.

Despite this, only **24.4%** feel “very empowered” to deliver on DEI objectives, suggesting a gap between leadership’s commitment and the empowerment felt by those in the legal departments.

“Leadership commitment is visible, but there’s a disconnect when it comes to empowering all staff to actively participate in DEI initiatives.”

– **General Counsel**

“While our CEO champions DEI, many staff members do not feel empowered or included in decision-making processes related to these initiatives.”

– **Senior Legal Counsel**

3- Funding for DEI Efforts to continue

40.4% of respondents expect their organisation's financial investment in DEI to increase over the next 12 months, showing a promising commitment to funding these initiatives.

Meanwhile, **52.6%** expect funding levels to remain unchanged, which aligns with a wider belief that DEI is important but it is not always prioritised for additional funding which in turns creates difficulty in execution.

"We are increasing our DEI budget to support more training and employee resource groups. However, this is still a struggle to justify amidst other financial priorities." – General Counsel

"Our DEI investment has remained flat, despite growing awareness of its importance. It feels like we're stuck in a holding pattern." – General Counsel

4- Barriers to Delivering DEI Initiatives

A key barrier identified over the past 12 months is the lack of sufficient time and resources, with **33.6%** of respondents reporting difficulty in dedicating personnel to DEI initiatives.

Additionally, **46.2%** of respondents stated that only 1-3 people within their team actively contribute to DEI work due to the work being outside their core responsibilities and work priorities.

"The biggest challenge is balancing DEI work with our primary responsibilities; we need more dedicated roles to make meaningful progress." – Senior Legal Counsel

"We face a lack of resources and time; DEI is often treated as an 'extra' rather than a priority." – Senior Partner

5- What gets measured, gets done

46.4% of respondents have observed a visible change in employee engagement or demographic data due to DEI initiatives in the past 12 months, indicating positive outcomes from these efforts.

This trend highlights the importance of developing robust methods to measure and communicate the effectiveness of DEI initiatives, ensuring transparency and accountability. Many leaders struggle to articulate a KPI programme that measures DEI initiatives and their success effectively and this is perhaps the biggest gap to ensuring that efforts create impact.

"Our efforts to improve diversity have led to noticeable increases in employee engagement and satisfaction, especially among underrepresented groups." – Chief Diversity Officer

"There is no clear data to show that our DEI initiatives are making a difference, which can be discouraging for those involved." – General Counsel

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

1 - Leadership Commitment is Crucial for DEI Success

The survey shows that DEI initiatives are more likely to succeed when senior leaders are visibly committed to the agenda. With 43.2% of respondents indicating that the Chief Diversity Officer is responsible for DEI, and 16.7% pointing to the CEO, it is evident that sponsorship and leadership at the highest levels in a business are necessary to set the tone and prioritise DEI as a strategic goal.

Respondents emphasise that when leaders champion DEI efforts, it sends a powerful signal throughout the organisation, encouraging wider engagement and support.

“Our CEO’s visible commitment to DEI has been a game-changer; it has fostered a culture where everyone feels responsible for promoting diversity and inclusion.”

– **General Counsel**

2 - Need for Empowerment Beyond Leadership

Despite the importance of top-level commitment, the survey indicates a gap in perceived empowerment at lower levels. Only 24.4% of respondents feel “very empowered” to deliver on DEI objectives, suggesting that inclusive leadership also involves empowering all employees, not just those at the top.

Inclusive leaders are seen as those who actively involve diverse voices in decision-making, create opportunities for growth, and remove barriers that might prevent full participation in DEI initiatives.

“While leadership is crucial, there is a need for empowerment across all levels. Everyone should feel they have a role to play in our DEI journey.”

– **HR Leader**



3 - Accountability and Transparency are Key Components

The survey highlights the importance of accountability in inclusive leadership. Leaders who set clear DEI goals and hold themselves and others accountable for meeting them help build trust and commitment within their teams.

Respondents suggest that leaders should regularly communicate progress, challenges, and successes related to DEI efforts, creating a transparent environment where everyone understands their role and the organisation's direction.

"Our leaders have started to share regular updates on our DEI progress, which has created a more open dialogue and helped us all feel part of the process."

– Senior Legal Counsel

4 - Bridging the Gap Between Policy and Practice

The survey reveals a disconnect between DEI policies at the leadership level and their implementation on the ground. Respondents call for inclusive leaders who do not just endorse DEI in theory but also actively integrate it into everyday practices and organisational culture.

Leaders are expected to model inclusive behaviours, such as listening to diverse perspectives, challenging bias, and fostering an environment where all employees feel safe, valued, and respected.

"Inclusive leadership means moving beyond policies and actively creating a culture where diversity is genuinely valued and integrated into all we do."

– Chief Diversity Officer

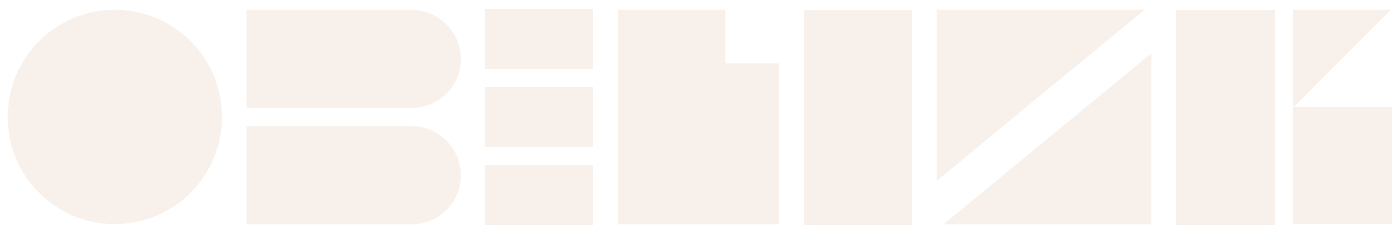
5 - Building a DEI-Driven Leadership Culture

A recurring theme is the need for a leadership culture that prioritises DEI. This involves not just having DEI-specific roles, like a Chief Diversity Officer, but ensuring all leaders are trained, evaluated, and incentivised to foster inclusivity within their teams.

Respondents advocate for leadership development programmes focused on DEI competencies, ensuring that leaders at all levels understand the value of inclusivity and how to lead diverse teams effectively.

"Creating a leadership culture where diversity and inclusion are integral to every decision is essential for sustained progress."

– General Counsel



12 INCLUSIVE LEADERS PAVING THE WAY



BANKE ODUNAIKE CBRE

“When I was explaining inclusion to my daughter (when she was five years old), I explained using a rainbow. And I said, a rainbow is beautiful, because it’s got so many different colours in it. No one would stop to look in awe at a rainbow, if it was monotone, right? Bring an inclusive leader also requires you to be a visionary for you to be able to see beyond the immediate, see what beauty lies ahead in being inclusive, in stepping outside the comfort zone, in being willing to learn and in being empathetic to different perspectives.”

Banke A. Odunaike is the Global Head of Legal for CBRE’s Global Workplace Solutions Business, overseeing Facilities and Project Management services in over 100 countries. She leads a diverse international team to enhance operational efficiency and outcomes. Previously, she served as Chief Culture Officer, focusing on ethics & compliance, senior talent, corporate philanthropy and diversity initiatives. Joining CBRE in 2017 as Senior Director for EMEA Legal, she became Head of EMEA Legal in 2020 and expanded her role to include APAC in 2023. With over 17 years of corporate law experience, she is recognised as a leading innovative lawyer in the UK and has been named in The Lawyer Magazine’s Hot 100 list.



SHARON KAHANOV, SIEMENS

“I mean, don’t be shy. People will answer if you ask the right question, even if you ask the wrong questions, at least they will appreciate if you ask. The team will tell you if things are not right and the market will tell you if things are not right. So why won’t you just be a little bit more proactive and look for it yourself? We need to have this curiosity to really engage you in the right discussions with people to achieve true improvement: virtue signalling and talking about it, it’s just not enough! You really need to start backing yourself with actions.”

Sharon Kahanov is General Counsel for Siemens plc and a member of its managing board. She joined Siemens HQ in 2009 as a senior counsel focused on mergers and acquisitions. Sharon served as interim General Counsel for the Concentrated Solar Power business in Tel Aviv and later led the Siemens equity team in London. In 2016, she became General Counsel for Siemens Israel Ltd. Sharon holds an LL.B from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and an LL.M in Corporate Law from NYU. She is qualified to practise in Israel and New York and has extensive experience in corporate law and infrastructure projects.



SAM LESTER, TD SECURITIES

“Being inclusive is about commitment in the first instance. And making that visible, authentic commitment to being inclusive as a leader and holding yourself accountable, holding others accountable to that standard. I think commitment can go a long way in terms of making things happen. Then, there’s consistency. Knowing what I am good at, knowing what I’m not great at and knowing fantastic opportunities to collaborate with others. Acknowledging that I can’t do it on my own is actually really gratifying for me as a leader as is admitting mistakes. They are all elements that play a great part in being inclusive.”

Sam Lester joined TD Securities in 2020 and is head of TD Securities Legal team for Europe, the Middle East and Africa and Asia Pacific. TD Securities is the investment bank of The Toronto-Dominion Bank, the second largest bank in Canada and one of the ten largest banks in the US, serving more than 27 million customers worldwide. Prior to joining TD Securities, Sam held senior in-house legal roles at both Credit Suisse and Jefferies.



RAMON BAKER, NATWEST

“Can I, hand on heart, say that everybody is able to bring the best of themselves to this team, this role, this meeting? I think that that, if you start with that, your answer will then determine what actions you need to take in order to be able to say yes to that! I would say the desire to be inclusive comes from within. I am a very driven person. I’m very ambitious and I want to be the best at whatever it is that I’m doing. There was a kind of eureka moment where I realised that, as a leader, one of the things that you have to do is understand what motivates people, and you need to understand and appreciate that what motivates other people will not necessarily be what motivates you. You need to be able to tap into that, to understand it first and then use the levers that are available to you to find common ground and to bring people along on a journey.”

Ramon Baker is Head of Legal at NatWest. He leads a team of 17 talented lawyers located in London and Edinburgh supporting the bank’s Business Banking, Commercial Mid-Market, Asset and Invoice Finance, Restructuring, and Balance Sheet Management teams. Ramon is a Restructuring and Insolvency lawyer by background having spent 10 years in private practice before joining the bank in 2016 and moving into his first senior leadership role in 2019. He grew up in South London and now lives in Hertfordshire with his wife, Amy, and two children, Jessica (11) and Jackson (7).



SABINE CHALMERS, BT

“Everyone has a unique personal story, right? Inclusive leaders show a couple of things. One is a great level of self-awareness of what your own story is, and how that shaped you both for the good, but also what biases or assumptions you may bring to any situation. And, secondly, they recognise that every human being that you interact with is also bringing their own personal story and experiences, and that will shape who they are, but also how they react to situations. And I think just constantly being curious about asking yourself, challenging yourself to look at the world through other people’s eyes or other people’s experiences, and make choices. Look, it’s a never-ending journey!”

Sabine Chalmers is the Group General Counsel and Regulatory Director of BT Group Plc, a leading telecommunications company. Previously, she was Chief Legal & Corporate Affairs Officer at Anheuser-Busch InBev from 2005 to 2017. Sabine holds a law degree from the London School of Economics and is qualified to practise in England and New York State. She serves on several boards, including Anheuser-Busch InBev and the Bank of England. An American/British citizen of Indian and German origin, she has lived and worked across Europe, Asia, and the Americas.



SUNIL SEHGAL, MONDELÉZ INTERNATIONAL

“You need to go beyond the business reasons and you start with the “why are you actually doing this?”; we live in a society where we are more multicultural, we’re multi-generational, we have people with more visible and non-visible disabilities and a whole variety of different things. Leaders need to recognise that that’s the world we live in and to succeed and to lead people in that world you’ve got to believe in inclusivity. And you’ve got to truly want to do it and recognise whatever privilege you might have, whatever bias you might have and address those things.”

Sunil Sehgal is the Chief Counsel for UK&I and ESG Europe at Mondelēz International, bringing two decades of experience in consumer goods and services. He chairs the Employee Resource Groups at Mondelēz UK&I, championing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion initiatives. Sunil’s leadership extends beyond his corporate role as a trustee at Wakam for Good UK, supporting vulnerable individuals through grassroots NGOs. His approach is characterised by empowering others, fostering inclusivity, and making a meaningful impact both within the company and in broader society.



RICHARD GIVEN, OPENPAYD

“The historic model of the legal profession, the partnership model, doesn’t lend itself to people’s current views of how they want to live their lives, and that tension is still being worked out. We see a huge amount of people drop out of the legal profession, because they don’t conceive of a career path that attracts them, and that’s a tragedy. Really good talent is leaving because they can’t see a way to stay, and we need to face into that. I think general counsels have a responsibility to engage their law firms in a conversation around how to make careers better.”

Richard Given is Group General Counsel at OpenPayd, a company building embedded finance and banking-as-a-service infrastructure. He previously held the position of General Counsel at 10x Banking, a cloud-native core banking platform provider. Richard’s extensive experience includes roles as Deputy General Counsel at HSBC and Regional General Counsel at Cisco. As a key business partner, Richard facilitates effective and timely decision-making for complex business matters. He also supports in-house lawyers in managing the balance between regulatory independence requirements and advising their employer. Richard’s educational background includes an alumnus status from Cambridge University and the international law firm Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer. In his leisure time, he enjoys walking the Tors of Dartmoor.



KATE CHEETHAM, LLOYDS BANK

“It’s incredibly important that we all challenge ourselves the whole time on what biases we may have, what factors may be influencing. When we think about each of these, there are individual as well as cultural and systemic factors which play an important role. Sometimes traditional ways of working don’t favour inclusivity. So really understanding what’s going on in people’s lives, what’s important and how you allow that flexibility is essential. A lack of diversity in leadership positions really can perpetuate an organisation’s lack of diversity when people with particular backgrounds are not well represented or valued because then it just looks as though you don’t really belong at the top.”

Kate Cheetham is the Chief Legal Officer and Company Secretary at Lloyds Banking Group, advising the Board on legal and governance matters while serving on the executive committee. Passionate about inclusion, she is an Executive Ally for social mobility and a Sponsor of the Black in Business initiative. Kate joined Lloyds TSB in 2005 and has held various senior roles, including Deputy Group General Counsel. She began her career as a corporate lawyer specialising in M&A at a magic circle firm. Kate lives in London with her husband and son.



ZENO CAPUCCI, DOCPANNER GROUP

“Realising that inclusivity doesn’t mean pushing an agenda, political agenda, but it means doing something in the interest of the organisation on the one side. And, on the other side, recognising that resistance to inclusivity means resistance to change and resistance to change is natural, is difficult to overcome, and someone who’s resistant to change is not necessarily the enemy, but it’s just someone with a different perspective, who needs to be invited to the table and needs to have an opportunity to foster some dialogue about what their beliefs are.”

Zeno Capucci is the Chief Legal and Risk Officer at Docplanner Group, a digital healthcare platform enhancing interactions between patients and healthcare providers. He leads a global team of over 25 legal, risk, compliance, and public affairs professionals. Before joining Docplanner, Zeno worked in FinTech at WorldRemit & Worldpay after training at Linklaters. He is a board trustee and director of the Tower Hamlets Law Centre, providing free legal advice to vulnerable individuals, and a member of Angels4Impact, supporting impact-driven startups in raising capital. Zeno is committed to social impact and empowering others in his professional endeavours.



KIRIN KALSI, EON

“I think it’s really important for people to work out for themselves their own perspective and their own priorities and what works for them. Because when you try and work by what other people are doing, that is just never going to get you to your own “happy space”. It’s really important to not just be role modelling, but also for yourself, not just to be looking at role models, but actually potentially reaching out to them, sharing where you may be struggling and getting an outside perspective around what is really important to you. It’s critical that you know not just what other people think or other people expect from you, but what is really important to you. And then that will create for you that right space to be inclusive.”

Kirin Kalsi is the General Counsel, Compliance Officer, and Data Protection Officer for E.ON UK, leading an award-winning team of 39. With E.ON for 16+ years, she became General Counsel in 2020 after serving as Head of Legal for 6 years. Kirin sponsors the E.ON Menopause Matters working group and speaks

on ESG matters. In 2024, she won Women in Law: In-house Champion at the ESG Awards. Her team supports numerous D&I initiatives. Kirin grew up in Germany and was the German Honorary Consul for the Midlands for over 20 years.



STEPHEN DOOLEY, KPMG

“Inclusive leadership does not involve just having people saying, yes, you’re right. For one thing, I think you need to be very conscious of the role that you play. Don’t be the first person to express a view if you are the decision maker. If you are the nominated leader, you’ve got to be careful to draw out the views of everybody and not just the 1 or 2 people in the room who want to talk. One of the qualities of leadership is to draw people’s views out, because it’s not always the person who makes the most noise, it’s not necessarily the smartest one who’s right. So you’ve got to look for those who are not putting themselves forward and find the right way for them to contribute. It may even be a case of they don’t want to contribute in the meeting, but in which case reach out afterwards and get their opinion.”

Stephen Dooley is Deputy General Counsel at KPMG and leads the OGC’s Commercial Team, managing a diverse group of lawyers and non-lawyers in the UK and India. Stephen joined KPMG in 2014 from technology firm DXC and previously, he worked as an Intellectual Property and Commercial Technology

lawyer in the UK, US and Hong Kong. Stephen holds an M.A. in Jurisprudence from Oxford University, a Diploma in Intellectual Property Law from Bristol University, and an M.Sc. in Psychology from Arden University.



JAMES MORGAN, MUFG

“It is a necessity in the legal industry that we change - it’s an inevitability that change will happen, generally. And lawyers are there to solve problems, legal issues for their clients. We need to think about the best way of doing that all the time. Frankly, maintaining a traditional model and not adapting to change, not being inclusive, not hearing wider opinions and staying within the box of being a technical lawyer will inevitably lead to the death of the profession. I think we really need to just think about what it is we are here to do, and being inclusive is the best way of achieving commercial goals. So, why not do it?!”

James Morgan is Managing Director and Co-General Counsel for EMEA at MUFG, overseeing a team of 80 lawyers across 10 countries. With 20 years of experience in financial services law, he manages legal issues for MUFG Bank and MUFG Securities. James began his career at magic circle

firm Slaughter and May, later working at Citigroup and NYSE Euronext. He holds a law degree from Bristol University, a post-graduate diploma from Oxford, a post-graduate certificate in legal technology, and is a qualified Solicitor-Advocate with higher court rights of audience in the UK.



CONCLUSION

The 2024 DEI Report reveals a legal sector in transition, with both significant progress and persistent challenges in fostering diversity, equity, and inclusion. While 71.2% of organisations have formalised DEI strategies, only 24.4% of legal leaders feel truly empowered to implement these initiatives.

Key areas for improvement include bridging the gap between strategy and implementation, empowering employees at all levels, allocating sufficient resources, and developing robust measurement systems. Looking ahead, the legal sector must focus on deepening the integration of DEI into core business processes, leveraging technology to support and measure efforts, and adopting a more intersectional approach to diversity. We can expect to see increased integration of DEI into overall business strategies and operations, with diversity considerations becoming standard in recruitment and promotion

processes. Despite the challenges, there are many reasons to be optimistic about the future of DEI in the legal profession. The steady increase in the proportion of women and minority ethnic lawyers in law firms over the past decade demonstrates that progress is possible and ongoing.

As we move forward, the legal profession has the opportunity to lead by example in creating more diverse, equitable, and inclusive workplaces. By learning from successful leaders and continuing to innovate in DEI practices, the legal sector can create a brighter, more representative future for all.

METHODOLOGY

For this report, we collected responses from leaders in the legal sector in a survey carried out in July- August 2024. Our survey was conducted online. It was open to leaders from across the legal profession. Responses were received from 133 legal professionals working in a variety of roles - with 3 in 4 (73%) at C-suite in house, senior manager or partner level. 44% of respondents are C-suite level general counsel.

Our methodology also included desktop research as well as interviews conducted by Obelisk Support founder-CEO Dana Denis-Smith in relation to how to be an inclusive leader and what organisations are doing to remove barriers to inclusive leadership in their business and the wider sector.



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