



Dowshan Humzah
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Dowshan Humzah is a digital change and business transformation specialist who has delivered profitable growth for a broad range of companies in which he has held senior roles (The RSA Insurance Group, Virgin Media, Orange, Procter & Gamble). In addition, he is actively involved in a range of 'access to opportunity' projects, supporting and driving 'merit based diversity and inclusion'. He is a recognised advocate, contributes to the debate within industry and government and has some powerful connections in the diversity and opportunity fields.

The Changing World and Face of Gatekeepers

Throughout the course of modern history, empires have ruled and gatekeepers have governed. However, at any one moment in time many of these empires and gatekeepers have failed to recognise what Heraclitus, the Greek philosopher, said about 'change being the only constant'. And so, both empires and gatekeepers have come and gone.

Changing Empires

Indeed, the greatest (apology that's my bias coming through) – I should say the largest empire in history was the British Empire. The immortal words in the poem by James Thomson (taken from 'The Works of James Thomson' published 1763) and the images of privileged, well educated, white, British men building the empire may have set the tone for the original gatekeepers of the modern era. "Rule, Britannia! rule the waves: Britons never will be

slaves." Indeed, the poem is still a jolly good patriotic tide for us Brits and is sung at the 'Last Night of the Proms' at the Royal Albert Hall; our heartfelt remnants of a glorious empire. The sun has indeed set on the British empire and the baton for the most powerful 'empire' was handed to the economic and cultural powerhouse of USA in the early 20th century.

Bob Dylan may have been prophesising when writing "The Times They Are A-Changin'" back in the not too distant past, 1964 to be exact, a period of mass social change post World War II. Dylan's song became an anthem for those particularly involved with the civil rights and anti-war movements. The sentiments from then still very much resonate today with groups and organisations challenging gatekeepers and dominant forces.

- Dowshan Humzah started his career at Procter & Gamble in brand management leading the Hugo Boss fragrance portfolio in the UK. Most notably, he led the launch of Hugo which still remains P&G's most successful fragrance launch to date. He then moved into the technology space heading up International Products & Services for Orange in the early days of mobile where he developed and helped realise the vision of 'passport, tickets, money, Orange' – normalising roaming and international calling. He was then part of the broadband revolution and joined ntl (now Virgin Media) leading broadband products and eventually becoming Director of Marketing, Strategy & Planning for Internet where he led ntl to market and product leadership in the UK as well as developing the next generation network strategy. His most recent roles in a blue-chip were for The RSA Insurance Group as Product Director for More Than where he built profitability in a time of market shrinkage and then became Business Transformation Director for RSA UK to develop the new

And even as I write, many are charting the decline of the USA; its global influence as an empire and the rise of the emerging market 'superpowers'. These new 'superpowers' have realised opportunities by reaching out to their significant home populations as their own spending power via trade and connectivity via digital increases. The world has become smaller, more accessible and crowded at the top. In the space of a decade the Global 500 (the world's 500 biggest corporations by revenue) has transformed. In 2004, the majority were North American (40%+) with second place taken by western European companies – now Asia is home to more Global 500 companies than North America, and China alone (with 95 companies, c.20%) has more than UK, Germany and France combined. And, so it seems the sun is setting on another empire and change, indeed, is the only constant.

Who are gatekeepers?

Gatekeepers can be defined as those who control passage through a gate. When discussing all the aspects of diversity, inclusion and equality in modern society we tend to view gatekeepers as those maintaining the status quo and limiting access to opportunity: not quite embracing change as the only constant. Henri Tajfel, the psychologist, wrote

about 'minimal group' identities and became interested in the psychology of prejudice given his experiences in World War II. He stated that 'us' and 'them' identities can be easily developed and that the allocation of resources to members of one's own group at the expense of others can take a much subtler form – yet still exact a high price on those who are not part of that 'in group'. And so, those in the privileged position of being similar to the gatekeepers constantly receive more help than others. Potential gatecrashers suffer from the consequence of inaction and the danger is that the status quo is maintained; change then is not the constant, for the time being.

Looking through the lens of progression on the corporate ladder in USA or UK – gatekeepers though not all necessarily 'pale, stale and male' are still characterised by privilege, social status and economic wealth. However, we have gatecrashers coming to the party given social change, increased social mobility, an evolving world order and digital pervasiveness opening up new markets and opportunities.

Gatekeepers and 'access to opportunity'

Gatekeepers generally limit 'access to opportunity' to those like them or to those who are deemed as being part of

operating model. In addition, he has worked in two start-ups (new car online retail and satellite TV channel).

- Dowshan strongly believes in 'merit based diversity' in its broadest sense and focuses not just on the 'seen or visible' aspects (such as gender, race or age) but more so on the 'unseen or hidden' aspects such as experience, background and thinking style. He has delivered a number of ground breaking projects supporting 'access to opportunity' - working with organisations to help develop the next generation of talent and encourage greater diversity. Dowshan believes that all too often 'access to opportunity' is limited to the 'privileged, well-resourced or well-networked' few - and this must be broken and broadened at all levels from students to executives.
- He is a partner in two digital ventures. With one of them, a digital and social media agency, he has shown how technology can support this drive for 'access to opportunity'. An example is integrating digital and social

the dominant 'in groups'. By focusing on 'access to opportunity' we call for action to create a level playing field that allows individuals to progress and support social mobility and equality.

For some this drive for diversity is seen as means of promoting one group over another - given preference as opposed to merit and 'reverse gatekeeping'. Though, I am sure many individuals feel that some of the traditional power brokers, gatekeepers or those at the top of society (sarcastically categorised as 'pale, stale and male' in the west) - have achieved their position by being privileged to be part of a certain 'in-group' or have had significant support (financial or otherwise), a strong influential network and copious 'access to opportunity'. Diversity matters and is about ensuring equality and winning the war for talent in an open, fair and transparent manner.

But when we speak of the need for diversity, it is crucial to appreciate that is not just a case of championing minority interests or those from the 'out groups' - the benefits of diversity go to the majority and benefit all. We have increasing evidence of diversity providing benefits from strategic, societal, inclusiveness and financial perspectives.

So, let me be clear - I only support

'merit based diversity and inclusion'; the best of the best should rise to the top and we need a transparent and equal playing field for that - i.e. open 'access to opportunity' and that in turn enriches society.

Related to this diversity should not just be viewed solely from the 'seen or visible' aspects such as gender, ethnicity and age (which are, especially gender, easier to define, identify and measure) but also from the 'unseen or hidden' aspects such as experience, background, upbringing and thinking style. It is these broader aspects that truly drive behaviour, performance, influence and impact - and in capturing diverse people from those groups you generally capture those from the typical verticals of gender, ethnicity and age.

For organisations and businesses, there is a need for leadership teams to evolve in order to better reflect new customer bases, 'emerging market' opportunities and greater competition. As barriers come down, talent pools are broadening with increased access to education, opportunity and social mobility. And so, women and minorities, gatecrashers in the politest terms possible, are increasingly challenging the status quo of gatekeepers and exercising the basic democratic right to vote, progressing in professions and

media with the curriculum in schools to deliver more engaging lessons in order to drive attainment, aspiration and 'employability' for the young (especially those from not-privileged backgrounds).

- Dowshan has been a visiting lecturer at Goldsmiths College, University of London on the potential of digital media, as well as being a public speaker on digital and social media (presenting at conferences such as: Professional Publishing Association's Customer Direct, LFB's New Way of Seeing Social Media and B2B Marketing's Leaders' Forum). He is seen as a digital industry 'thought leader' having presented at numerous international conferences and written articles on topics as broad as Internet Product Development through to Digital Innovation in Education and New Revenue Streams in Publishing.
- LinkedIn Profile: <http://uk.linkedin.com/in/dowshan>

blue-chip organisations, through to holding the highest office 'in the land'.

The business case for gatecrashers and diversity

It is generally accepted that having a broad range of opinions and styles leads to better decision making – and so, diverse team composition in these respects (be it visible such as gender and race; or 'unseen' such as differences in background, experience and thinking style) should lead to greater social and economic value.

McKinsey & Company have recently presented compelling analysis showing a statistically significant relationship between more diverse leadership/teams and better financial performance of corporations.

The data set comprised of many hundreds of corporations from North America, Latin America and UK and correlated diversity (gender and race/ethnicity in leadership teams) with financial performance (average Earnings Before Interest and Tax (EBIT) for the period 2010-13). The size of the dataset provides confidence in the outcomes and has the rigour deeply associated with McKinsey.

The companies in the top quartile of gender diversity were 15% more likely to have above median financial returns,

relative to their national industry median. Companies in the top quartile of racial/ethnic diversity were 30% likely to have above median returns. When broken down, most relevant for UK plc and UK Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was that companies with a 10% higher gender and racial/ethnic diversity on management teams and boards had EBIT that was 5.6% higher whilst in the US it was 1.1% higher.

A pertinent conclusion from McKinsey was the unequal performance across companies in the same industry and same country implies that diversity is a competitive differentiator that shifts market share. Equally, McKinsey stated that "critical mass is required to drive decisions and impact". For me, this further reinforces the need to build the talent pipeline and recruit and promote top talent on merit across the board as opposed to making 'token appointments', forcing quotas/targets or merely looking to reach targets via non-executives to support a better financial return.

Being your true self and valued for who you are

It is a real testament to leaders, sports stars and media personalities who have risen through the ranks whilst having to hide their true self. A good recent example is that of Tim Cook, CEO

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Apple publishing an open letter on 30th October 2014 coming out . In his letter he stated being gay has given him a deeper understanding of what it means to be in the minority and provided a window into the challenges that people in other minority groups deal with every day.

Whilst obvious physical aspects of gender and race in the whole cannot be hidden – there are elements of our beliefs, background, personalities and orientation that individuals may choose to hide in both the work environment and society at large to better fit with the gatekeepers. Tim Cook stated that he had been open with many people about his sexual orientation and that plenty of colleagues at Apple knew he was gay. However, he stressed that he had the good fortune to work at a company that loves creativity and innovation and knows it can only flourish when you embrace people’s differences. Not everyone is so lucky.

There is a view that it is harder to be yourself in certain industries. Some women in finance have stated that they had to act in a ‘more masculine way’ to be accepted, people who don’t drink have felt pressured to drink and attend certain work events as that is where senior managers can get to know aspiring talent.

It is a shame that any minority would feel the need to hide ‘who they are’ and, in essence, ‘hang their personality on the coat hook outside of their office or workplace’ as opposed to bringing in all that richness and personality.

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A lesson from recent history revisited by Hollywood

The recent film, Selma, has brought to the fore once again the notion of gatekeepers and gatecrashers. Selma, as is well known, relates the story of Dr Martin Luther King and the people of the civil rights movement marching over the Edmund Pettus Bridge from Selma to Montgomery to highlight inequalities particularly as regards the voting rights in 1965. It is hard to believe that this is recent history - less than 50 years ago.

Cynically we may reflect on the lack of recognition given to the movie and its lead actor by the gatekeepers of

“Perhaps the ultimate and best known gatecrasher of recent times is President Obama.”

various award ceremonies (such as the Oscar academy) who may not have felt a resonance or comfortable with Selma. However, a message from Selma to the generation of today is that the people, regardless of status, background or any other grouping, should be the gatekeepers and the purveyors of true power as opposed to it residing in the hands of the few or the privileged.

On winning the Oscar for Best Song in a Motion Picture, the rapper Common with John Legend said: “Recently John and I got to go to Selma and perform Glory on the same bridge that Dr King and the people of the civil rights movement marched on 50 years ago. This bridge was once a landmark of a divided nation, but now is a symbol for change. The spirit of this bridge transcends race, gender, religion, sexual orientation and social status.” All of the people belonging to these ‘minority’ groups can be viewed as gatecrashers exercising their democratic right for

equality and inclusion to be on a par with the then (and to some extent the now) gatekeepers.

Richard Branson, founder of the Virgin group of companies and a renowned business gatecrasher upsetting many traditional business leaders and industry dynamics, observed that many of the 2015 Oscar winners’ speeches focused on and reflected the times we live in and challenges of many minority or disadvantaged groups .

The ultimate gatecrasher?

Perhaps the ultimate and best known gatecrasher of recent times is President Obama. One always assumes that in elections in a democracy there are no gatekeepers – just the people; however selection committees, due process, media coverage, financial support and, of course, voters’ own bias all act as ‘gates’. In 2008, 43 years after Selma, the US electorate chose Barack Hussein Obama (I stress the non-European nature of his name) – a black man, with African roots and an ‘Islamic name’ to be its 44th President.

Indeed, Barack Hussein Obama could only just be classed as ‘privileged’ given his elite education at Columbia and Harvard law school and traditional in his career as a Law Professor and then Senator. However, these were meritocratic achievements and allowed

him to mix with traditional gatekeepers. Coupled with a degree of mastery, funding and charisma he was able to engage with the gatekeepers and electorate. However, that is all history now and President Obama was re-elected in 2012 to serve a second term.

And so, given the special relationship between The UK and USA, I would like to end with part of President Obama’s address to our UK gatekeepers, Parliament, in the grand and history laden Westminster Hall on 25th May 2011: “...it is possible for people to be united by their ideals, instead of divided by their difference... it’s possible for hearts to change and old hatred to pass... and the grandson of a Kenyan who served as a cook in the British Army to stand before you as President of the United States.”

Thank you Mr President (and grandson of a Kenyan who served as a cook in the British Army) - and that is why ‘access to opportunity’ is so important and how gatecrashers can make an impact challenging the status quo of their former colonial gatekeepers.