



# 5 key themes explored at the European Employer Conference

By **Mark Callaghan** - 28 November 2019

As you may have heard, with the help of colleagues from all over the world, Littler launched the European Employer Conference on 14 November 2019 right here in London, and it got off to a great start.

For those that attended the conference - we hope you enjoyed yourself! For those that couldn't make it, we thought it might be interesting to hear about a few of the themes that emerged as the day progressed.

**1. A strong workplace culture remains an absolute must in a globalised labour market.**

We knew that Allison Brown of Google, Daniel Ellis of Netflix, and Jonanthan Ollivent of Uber would each have some interesting insights into the respective cultures of each of their organisations. Their session, entitled 'Do your values have value?' hosted by London partner **Richard Harvey**, looked specifically at the importance of workplace culture across borders. However, it was striking how the importance of culture pervaded across many of the day's sessions. It was a significant point of conversation in two more of the day's sessions: 'Broadening your horizons: the challenges of expanding and operating internationally' and 'The diversity emergency'. More than one panellists endorsed Peter Drucker's famous mantra "Culture eats strategy for breakfast" and it's clear that defining and honouring their respective cultures remains a top priority for large and small employers alike.

**2. Micro-inequalities continue to contribute to a deck that is stacked against BAME candidates.**

Several panellists shared their experiences of inequality, both inside and outside the workplace. There were fascinating and, at times, sobering anecdotes, which demonstrated how the constant presence of micro-inequities in society can and do add up. They create a workplace which, for BAME employees and other under-represented groups, remains daunting and often impenetrable. There were some great insights on how employers and colleagues can challenge micro-inequalities to strive for a more equal and meritocratic workplace. An inspiring speech from our keynote speaker, Sophie Chandauka, urged our delegates to lend credibility to their less-privileged colleagues to help level the playing field. Littler's second annual European Employer Survey suggests that employers are increasingly channelling their

concerns about social and equality issues into concrete actions – read [here](#) for more.

### 3. **Employers must do better to serve employees facing mental health struggles in the workplace.**

77% of delegates said in a pre-conference questionnaire that the mental health of their employees is a top HR priority. At the conference we heard from Richard Martin, a director at Byrne Dean, who tackled this difficult issue with unparalleled experience and striking honesty. Richard was previously the head of an employment law practice in the City before he suffered a mental breakdown in 2011 and spent two years recovering. He is now a leading activist in the field of mental health and his work at Byrne Dean is focussed on helping employers support their employees and create a more understanding and supportive workplace. Richard shared with us some unique insights into his own personal story before outlining how employers can best support their employees in four distinct periods: before the employer knows there is an issue, once they know there is an issue, during an employee's absence from work, and following an employee's return to work. For further information, Byrne Dean keep a helpful [blog](#), which provides a useful first point of reference.

### 4. **Not every PR crisis is created equal.**

Our London partner [Raoul Parekh](#) ran a fascinating session on how to react to and manage a PR crisis with input from Alex Just from Montfort Communications, Vanessa Markham from Oracle and Jens Petershagen from Petershagen Kommunikation. A significant portion of the session focused on a fictional case study in which a company found its plans to close a factory leaked to the press. The panel cautioned against reacting in a 'one size fits all' manner. Where some crises merit an immediate comment to the press others might instead benefit from some internal investigation before responding. Who knows, some seemingly disastrous crises may even turn out to be an unexpected marketing gift such as KFC's #ChickenCrisis.

### 5. **Littler knows how to put on a conference!**

Ok, so this one's a little self-serving! But it was great to see so many great delegates enjoying a fantastic location, brilliant speakers, great networking and free barista coffee! We are thrilled at the reaction that we have received following the conference, and we can only hope that next year we will return on an even bigger and better stage than before! We hope to see you there!

If you have any questions regarding the European Employer Conference get in contact with your usual Littler contact or email [EuropeanEmployer@gqlittler.com](mailto:EuropeanEmployer@gqlittler.com).