

“Be Yourself, Bring Your Best”

An Interview with Smita Pillai,
Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer, Dow Jones

EDITORS' NOTE *Smita Pillai is responsible for designing and implementing a progressive, global diversity and inclusion strategy, overseeing efforts across talent management practices, leadership accountability, corporate culture and outreach efforts. Her holistic approach to diversity and inclusion seeks to create a climate of inclusion and belonging where innovation can thrive. Prior to joining Dow Jones, Pillai led global diversity and inclusion efforts in Fortune 50 companies where she led groundbreaking global diversity and marketing research projects and established clear metrics for D&I measurement and advancement.*



Smita Pillai

COMPANY BRIEF *Dow Jones (dowjones.com) is a global provider of news and business information, delivering content to consumers and organizations around the world across multiple formats, including print, digital, mobile and live events. Dow Jones has produced quality content for more than 130 years and today has one of the world's largest news-gathering operations globally. It produces leading publications and products including the flagship Wall Street Journal, America's largest newspaper by paid circulation; Factiva, Barron's, MarketWatch, Mansion Global, Financial News, Dow Jones Risk & Compliance, Dow Jones Newswires, and Dow Jones VentureSource.*

Will you provide an overview of Dow Jones' diversity and inclusion strategy and initiatives?

Dow Jones hired me to be its inaugural Chief Diversity & Inclusion Officer and the hiring request came directly from the CEO, William Lewis. He wanted someone who could take the pulse of the market and connect diversity back to business.

It's been a year for us in this journey and I can confidently say that although we were late to start, we are leapfrogging ahead in terms of our approach and vision for diversity and inclusion globally. When I came in, I didn't have to pitch diversity to anyone, what we did do is set the stage for inclusion. We are operating on the philosophy that diversity is a fact, inclusion is a choice.

We started our journey by hosting 25 listening sessions across 8 global hubs. People from all levels of the organization came completely voluntarily into these listening sessions.

We reached almost 600 people in the first 100 days through these sessions. We used the insights to create a simple phrase to frame our D&I efforts: “Be yourself, bring your best.” That's it. That then translates into talent and culture which are integral parts of our strategy.

Hiring the best and most diverse talent and creating an inclusive environment where diverse perspectives can thrive are the first steps towards making any business innovative and competitive in the marketplace.

Diversity is not just a good to do thing, it is a business imperative. At Dow Jones, we know that business growth will come if we invest in the right people so we linked talent and culture to business growth. This was the second tenet of our D&I strategy. Finally, we are a company that has been an anchor for truth and facts for the past 130 plus years. People trust us, and we have a responsibility towards society and we want everything that we do in diversity and inclusion to have a social impact.

So talent and culture, business growth and social impact are the key elements of our global D&I strategy.

Do Dow Jones' efforts to hire the best and brightest ensure a certain level of diversity or do you need to expand your reach when looking for new talent?

Dow Jones is a company that believes in true meritocracy. We want the best talent across the globe to be with us. However, the reality is also that social privilege and unconscious bias exist. It would be a fallacy to believe that the best will automatically show up on our radar. We are continuously looking to expand our reach – from eliminating bias in our job descriptions using AI, to diversifying our recruiting sources and putting specific metrics in place for diversity of slates for critical positions.

How do you measure inclusion?

Inclusion is a hard concept to measure, but it's not impossible. At the very human level, we will continue to stay connected with our employees leveraging various efforts like the employee groups, executive listening sessions, focus groups, etc. At the objective level, we have created an Inclusion Index by which we plan to measure and report employee sentiment in each leader's group. We have picked questions which are scientifically chosen to measure inclusion from three angles: overall

company commitment to diversity and inclusion, how the employees feel they are treated, and whether they can be themselves and bring their own unique perspectives.

Ultimately, we believe that when our employees can feel free to reach out across functional silos, collaborate willingly and take risks without fear and with full trust, we will be well on our path to be a truly inclusive company.

Do you utilize employee resource groups to foster inclusion at Dow Jones?

We do, but with a twist. Years of my own experience and best in class research has shown that affinity groups often end up siloing people rather than celebrating intersectionalities of diversity. At Dow Jones, we decided that we shouldn't be creating exclusive employee groups, we should be creating inclusive employee groups. In fact, we don't call them employee groups or business groups or affinity groups – we call them IRGs: Inclusive Resource Groups. So, for example, our African American/Black employee group BlackInsight@DJ welcomes people of all backgrounds and celebrates intersectionalities of race, gender, sexual orientation, disabilities, veteran status and others. The idea is that we can all learn from each other in a mutually inclusive environment.

We now have eight inclusive resource groups and each group is linked with a sponsor who is a direct report of the CEO which inspires connections across all levels of the organization. In a dynamic world, our goal is to leverage cultural awareness for leadership accountability.

In your role, how critical is it to have C-Suite support and engagement?

It is absolutely critical. If D&I leaders are kept separate from the business growth strategy, they cannot articulate why it is important for the business. As CDOs, our roles must be leveraged by the business leaders to open new doors with customers, clients and suppliers. It is critical for the C-Suite to understand D&I as a part of the overall business growth strategy. It helps bring the whole philosophy of diversity, equity and inclusion to life. Having said that, I believe CDOs play a very central and visionary role. They are central to the overarching D&I strategy, providing subject matter expertise and, at many times, being the connector and agitator. At the end of the day, D&I should not be limited to getting “people of color” in the seats, it should be about continuously engaging the company's C-Suite for business growth and for the broader societal impact. ●