

“The Future is all shades of Prism”

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Insight from Roselyn Unegbu

As we come to the end of another month celebrating Black History in the UK, our article provides powerful reflection on the current inequalities existing within the project management field, and in particular why talented female project leaders from the Global majority are yet to fully make their mark in the industry. We hear from Ros Unegbu, who's initiative Projects in Prism seeks to address this by creating a safe space for women leaders be mentored, nurtured and to thrive in the project management world.

*How **Projects in Prism** seeks to create a safe space for women project managers from a Global Majority to be mentored, nurtured and thrive in the project management world.*

I love the practice of project management; the logic of it, the need for structure, and the processes that govern it. Sometimes, your stakeholders make life difficult no matter how well-meaning your intent and despite a seemingly successful outcome. Yet it also presents opportunities for creativity and innovation, promising an often infuriatingly interesting experience and ensuring a lack of boredom, regardless of sector.

And yet, knowing the joys and tribulations, the successes, and failures and the lessons learned along the way, my love for the profession has not blinded me to some of the challenges which have been and remain specific to women from a global majority backgrounds; the lack of recognition for the unique gifts and diversity of thought and insight they bring to the table. For years, women have worn what Maya Angelou refers to as “the mask” where many of us smile amidst sadness and frustration with the so-called ‘concrete wall’ which places a firm barrier where progression should be.

Over the years, I've heard variations of the following themes ***“I want to break into project management, but do not know how”*** or ***“I'm at a point in my career where I have no idea how***

to progress to the next level” and recently “I wish I could find a safe space to share my challenges, fears and worries about being a female project manager from a global majority background”

I have grown weary over my career, of hearing those same words from so many women. Talented colleagues who should be otherwise thriving in a profession that has so much to offer.

As a profession, it is time that we change the narrative which underpins the experience of women project managers of a global majority; creating the much-needed transformation of our industry for this group to find its rightful footing.

So what of the current lack of diversity at the senior levels of our major projects and developments? Whilst the industry seeks to take steps to address the issues, those at the front line continue to see their progression opportunities diminish.

The stats are unflinchingly clear; out of 133 major projects currently listed on the UK Government Major Project Portfolio, only 9 (around 22%) of the appointed senior responsible officers are women.

According to recent research from the Project Management Institute (PMI) in the field of project management, male project managers outnumber female project managers by 3:1, with the numbers for global majority women falling even lower.

88% of project professionals say having diverse project teams increases value and although the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic persists, research projects that 25 million new project professionals will be needed by 2030. The case for acknowledging the value of global majority women in this space has never been more keenly felt.

Whilst the ultimate solution of ensuring there is fair and abundant opportunity to all within the profession remains the goal, there is currently no obvious panacea or silver bullet to fix the multifaceted inequalities that are currently in place. Creating genuine safe spaces for global majority thought leaders and organisations to meet, and exchange knowledge and ideas, industry techniques, mentorship and a nurturing safe environment, is one such way to encourage those within this demographic to foster and facilitate self-development. Learning lessons from the progress seen in other under-represented groups in the industry,

This tried and tested method of creating powerful peer-to-peer support communities, can be a valuable resource at any stage on the career ladder – from aspiring project managers with no clear idea of how to navigate their way into the profession, to women who are unsure of the next step towards progression – there is something for everyone.

In both the US and the UK, I am seeing a rise in the number of these groups, supporting both the members in their personal development and as an organised collective bringing about pressure for change to the industry. It is also encouraging that many of the major project, engineering and technology associations and accrediting bodies are also challenging their internal status quo, and shining a light on the systemic and institutional inequalities that continue to reinforce the disparity. From biases in recruitment practices

to issues in certification procedures that favour one group over another, to the way that groups are portrayed or are even completely hidden when it comes to promotion of the industry, awards and accolades.

My view on how best our industry needs to move forward on this issue can be summarised simply – collaborative change; where difficult conversations are discussed in a collaborative setting, as a catalyst for change.

Underpinning all of this is the sober recognition that it would be disastrous to see yet another generation of wasted talent.

Roselyn Unegbu is the founder of Projects in Prism, a bold new networking organisation, which encourages women to meet and discuss all things project management in a supportive environment; providing real-life tools to enable women to grow and thrive, based on the lived experiences of project leaders who have been there and are still doing it.

Prism is on the path to creating an inclusive networking space for women in the global majority who are either considering embarking on a career in project management or are already on a PM career path and would like the tools to succeed. Through working with various organisations, it aims to provide practical solutions to navigate real-life workplace and career challenges.

Sponsored by the Association for Project Management (APM) and supported by the Chartered Institute of Building (CIOB) and PW Living, Prism celebrates its first anniversary and is working to expand its reach by having sessions across various parts of the country and beyond through Virtual Prism for those outside of the UK or unable to get to face-to-face sessions.

The next Prism event is at 6pm on November 21st at Informa, Blackfriars. Doors open at 5.30pm. [The book link is here.](#)