

Opening up fashion

— Empowering leaders for a diverse tomorrow

Do those who create what we wear really represent us – the communities they serve?

The answer is – not nearly enough. Studies show that the fashion industry lacks diversity, and effective leadership is crucial for fostering inclusivity. This is where you, as a participant of Knit, come in.

During the co-creation week in Stockholm, the selected participants will collaborate closely to develop practical tools that can empower leaders in their everyday work. The aim is to increase inclusivity - at all levels within the industry - of people from multifaceted backgrounds, specifically looking at ethnicity and socioeconomic class.

Background - The industry status

Fashion has long been considered “exclusive”: it’s hard to break into, difficult to move around. Recently, there’s been a degree of catching up: when, in 2022, just over half of businesses had a coordinated strategy on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI), the figure rose to 71% for 2023, according to research. But the industry is still far off from truly representing the communities it serves.

Take ethnicity. Figures show that only 10% of board roles, 11% of executive committee roles, and 6% of direct report roles are held by people with an ethnic minority background. Or socioeconomic class, where just one out of three businesses report that they have leaders at the highest levels with personal experiences of social mobility.

As a result, lack of mentoring is a major issue. In one study, only 36% of employees of color reported having a senior person to go to for advice during a challenging time, compared to 47% of white employees. Many feel they don’t belong. Black employees in particular point to an environment of non-inclusive behavior. Almost a quarter (23%) of respondents in one survey observed biased behavior with some frequency, with ethnicity, physical appearance and social class being the most common biases.

Who might hold the key to change? Leaders, research shows, have a huge impact on an individual’s sense of inclusion in the workplace — both positive and negative. The more different a person is to others in the organization, the more this impact rises. Diverse team members need leaders who understand differences and support them.

The challenge

Considering this, what practical tools can we develop that empower leaders in the fashion industry to increase participation of people from across the spectrum of race and socioeconomic class at all levels within the industry, and create a more diverse, equal, and inclusive fashion industry in the process?

Sources:

- State of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion in Fashion, MBS & British Fashion Council, 2023 & 2022 <https://www.pvh.com/-/media/Files/pvh/news/PVH-CFDA-State-of-Diversity-Equity-and-Inclusion-in-Fashion.pdf>
- <https://www.thembsgroup.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/MBS-BFC-Diversity-in-Fashion-2023.pdf>
- Diversity and Inclusion in the Fashion Industry. In-depth research and analysis from the MBS Group and the British Fashion Council.
<https://www.britishfashioncouncil.co.uk/uploads/files/1/J037890%20MBS%20Diversity%20in%20Fashion%5B40%5D.pdf>