

# Living with change

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## Tom Makokha makes the case for prioritising diversity to help meet the challenges of globalisation

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When Prof. Tim Berners-Lee published a paper entitled ['Information Management: A Proposal'](#) in August 1991, few readers would have realised that they were looking at his blueprint for a commercially viable internet and arguably the world's first website. More than 2.5 billion people now use the internet globally; few people would disagree that the world has changed drastically in the last few decades.

In the past, for instance, the core of the construction consultancy sector in the UK predominately consisted of traditional private cost consultants and project management practices, primarily servicing UK-based clients. My own introduction to the industry was as a trainee building surveyor, undertaking surveys for public authorities in London. But many of my clients now operate in domestic, pan-European and global markets, often concurrently, from a UK base.

### New markets

Globalisation has dramatically and permanently changed the way in which I and my colleagues work. This in turn has forced changes in my clients' business models, corporate cultures, diversity and the geographical locations in which they operate.

Many of these changes have been induced by global labour and consumer forces in emerging markets and the rapid advance of e-commerce. It is now possible for anyone in the world with internet access to shop virtually at any time and in any global market. Some commentators suggest that 25% of all retail sales in the US and the UK will be conducted online by 2020. But what does all this have to do with diversity?

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When commentators refer to globalisation, they usually mean the rapid socio-economic development of capitalism globally that has spurred and continues to spur profound change, drastically eroding geographical and social barriers. This has enabled communities, corporations and governments to connect with one another very efficiently, particularly in emerging markets such as Russia, India, China and South America.

### Cross-fertilisation

These connections have led to the breakdown of cultural barriers and encouraged the cross-fertilisation of ideas. It is these new ideas, generated by the markets in which our clients operate, that have changed client expectations of the scope of professional real estate service delivery models that we need to offer.

One can therefore deduce that in order for the professional real estate services sector to survive and prosper, it will need to recruit from a diverse and expanded talent pool, to satisfy the ever-more expansive demands of clients.

In May 2011, the report [Equality and Diversity: good practice for the construction sector](#) was published by the [UK Equality and Human Rights Commission](#) , on behalf of the Construction Leadership Diversity Forum.

The evidence collected for the study demonstrated that the following benefits would accrue with robust implementation of good diversity and equality practices:

- efficiency savings thanks to improved staff retention
- a wider pool of talent available to the industry from under-represented groups
- a more diverse supply chain that would offer better support for small businesses
- improved on-site working relationships based on respect for everyone's differences.

How, though, do we move the topic of diversity up the industry agenda? Many readers may recall that a similar debate took place on matters of health and safety some decades ago. To think once more in the timeframes of technology, when Apple brought out its first Mackintosh desktop in 1984, cavalier approaches to site inductions and personal protective equipment were not unusual. Would this be acceptable today?

There has clearly been a thoroughgoing cultural change in the industry that has seen a health and safety ethos inculcated into personnel at all levels. I suggest that it is high time that matters of diversity, equality and inclusion are treated in the same manner if we are to deal successfully with the numerous threats, opportunities and challenges that globalisation will continue to present.

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## **Further information**

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