



*Is our approach to **EDIB** holding us back?*

Shivalry. reflects on the events of Q1 2025:

We were privileged to attend several key events in Q1 2025—from two inaugurations to regulatory and political gatherings, and most delightfully, a day of cricket at Lord's. A recurring theme across these diverse arenas was Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging (EDIB). It was discussed directly, alluded to subtly, and used as both a lens and a backdrop for broader societal conversations.

At **Shivalry.** we've advised on EDIB for many years, and we've noticed with growing concern how the dialogue is becoming cyclical. Unlike the climate change debate, which continues to struggle for consistent engagement, EDIB has enjoyed a steady increase in visibility for good and bad reasons—often catalysed by major global events. The Equality Act 2010 for example marked a legal leap forward; the murder of George Floyd, a horrifying tragedy, sparked deep and urgent reflection Europe and especially the UK.

Yet, what we often see—both in government and in organisations—is that this reflection rarely translates into sustained action. While there have been constructive steps, such as the ICEC report in sport, many initiatives lack the longevity or boldness to drive meaningful change. Too often, EDIB efforts are reduced to reactive statements or tokenistic policies that fail to disrupt the status quo. The desire to “say the right thing” can lead to inauthenticity and indecision, which in turn stalls progress.

At **Shivalry.** we always encourage those we value and work with to pause and reflect, before making major policy and/or strategic changes and announcements, for this very reason. Without that pause, efforts risk becoming performative rather than transformative. Indeed, it is hard to think of an organisation or political environment that has not had to mention or grapple with EDIB either progressively, or regressively.

Is Progress Regressing?

In our analysis, we felt we could not ignore the impact of the geopolitical dynamics that have played out following the US elections. It did seem that some organisations and circles had breathed a sigh of relief that the focus on EDIB can now be watered down, if not removed completely. Even those with the best will, had found themselves entangled in a web of indecision and people pleasing, that real authentic change had not materialised. Some of those we spoke with however felt enough change had been achieved as quotas started to be met, and we saw the risk of complacency rearing its' head.

Yet, the discussion continues. Within, for example, the Cricket circles, arguably one of the sectors hit hardest by dark EDI related revelations, there does seem to be a genuine desire to keep EDI at the forefront with the Chair of the ECB and management refusing to let go of the agenda. Conversations around race, gender and class still prevail, including transgender and disability deliberations. Of course not everything is rosy, and we would have to start a new post to cover those issues, but the point is cricket has been able to show tangible progress, at least in participation and regulation. Sustainability of this progress and real leadership diversity is another question.

The inaugurations of two formidable women which we were honoured to attend brought to light racial, sex and class discrimination. EDI featured heavily, albeit subtly, in the inaugural speeches, from struggles to be taken seriously as a woman in the Education sector, to batting away naysayers and doubters as a woman of colour in the Legal sector. Although seeing more women in these positions is a welcome change, the issues discussed were familiar struggles of the past 20 years; the difference being that although prejudice was still there, it was now harder to call out.

And then came the government events, one in particular that discussed government and civil service transformation. This one, unwittingly, highlighted the lack of progress the EDI agenda had really made, and ultimately inspired our focus for this blog. What stood out wasn't what was said, but *who* was missing. We looked around the room and at the panel, and not only was there a lack of visible diversity, the familiarity between panel and audience members showed there was a lack of *general* diversity.

The main speech, a knowledgeable and impassioned call to action on how the civil service could do things differently, promoted overseas success stories such as India's Aadhar system and Spain's Madrid Metro as models for transformation. These are undeniably impressive feats of infrastructure and technology, but we asked ourselves: was the speech celebrating the right kind of skill sets involved?

Yes, technical capabilities matter—but so does cognitive and experiential diversity. The Aadhar project succeeded not just due to engineering genius, but because of collaborative leadership across sectors, states, and stakeholders. The Madrid Metro system benefitted from streamlined decision makers and the levers of control sitting with regions rather than centrally. For India and Spain to have designed and implemented such systems, in the way they did, they would have had to *think* differently. These examples of infrastructural and technological transformation would not have been without their critics and problems, but what they had in common was an innovative approach which gave power to unitary authorities and organisations empowering them to take decisive actions, sidelining the traditionalists and bureaucracy.

For many years, prior to writing this blog, we thought we were the only ones to think about how the Indian way of life, "Jugaad" could benefit the world but it seems as though others have often had the same idea. "Jugaad" is creative problem-solving born out of necessity—it is a testament to innovation beyond formal qualifications. It's about thinking laterally, linking disparate ideas to form solutions and being open to the unthinkable. We've long believed that the world can learn from this mindset. True EDIB is not just about surface-level diversity—it's about cultivating different ways of thinking, informed by lived experience, culture, and context.

So, What Could a Different Approach to EDIB Look Like?

What would a truly inclusive transformation in government and organisations look like?

True EDIB can surely only be achieved by having many different perspectives that don't necessarily come from the same backgrounds – we stress again that this is different to having the outward diversity in terms of characteristics like race and gender (as important as that diversity is as well). For government, civil service and organisations to transform, they must balance the skills and experience of those with inside knowledge hand in hand of those with outside knowledge.

Firstly, at governmental events about transformation of existing structures and systems, why not include voices from outside the civil service — people with no public profile but with a history of delivering results in unconventional ways? These shouldn't just be those at the top, but those who have real operational experience. Why not tap into sectoral knowledge, different class perspectives,

or lived experiences outside the Westminster bubble? And if they are allowed in, don't let their minds get lost in the system.

When trying to create new initiatives for disadvantaged populations, along with using focus groups, why not include *those populations* in the planning and decision-making processes? At **Shivalry**, we see numerous well-meaning Russell group educated individuals try to solve these complex problems by themselves, in familiar echo chambers. Or those who have been in professions for too long, using the same apparatus to try to find a way to "think differently".

We believe reform will only succeed when strategic decision-making includes those who challenge the norm—those who ask, "Why not?" instead of "We could never do that."

Innovation doesn't always require new tools. Sometimes it just needs new mindsets.

There is a world outside these traditional and familiar attitudes. We've just got to embrace the unconventional.

So perhaps the real questions are:

- 1) Is our reluctance to change our approach to EDIB the real strategic obstacle?*
- 2) And if so, how do we upskill for that?*

What do you think?

[Contact us](#), we would love to help you with your thinking.