AdvanceHE

Mindsets, Paths and Identities: the Experiences of Senior Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Leaders in Higher Education

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Context

What can we learn from the experiences of senior Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) leaders about what is involved in attaining positions of leadership in British higher education? It is increasingly acknowledged that there is significant under-representation of BAME people at senior levels in higher education institutions (HEIs) (Equality Challenge Unit, 2017). There is also increasing interest in the experiences of senior BAME staff in higher education, particularly of what they believe assisted them to attain these positions. In this report we intend to convey these experiences from the perspectives of senior BAME higher education staff, interviewed individually and/or through focus groups. In this way we hope to shed light on how some BAME individuals find their way through British academia, the conditions and situations they encounter, and the mindsets they developed in order to shape opportunities. Rather than seeking to provide a template of factors contributing to success, we aim to offer a picture of broad experiences and the thinking that has shaped and is shaping their careers. We hope that this will give a deeper appreciation of their experiences, along with stimulating and inspiring BAME staff to create pathways which work for them. We also seek to shine a spotlight onto perhaps previously unlit areas where HEIs can innovate to create more conducive conditions for BAME leadership.
We have chosen to use the term BAME, rather than BME, as a significant proportion of our participants were from various Asian backgrounds.

Twelve people – six women and six men – participated in this project. All of them occupied positions of reader and higher, with the bulk holding professorial positions and/or academic management (eg dean or associate dean) or other more senior management positions. One person held a professional services position. The group included a mix of people from black and Asian backgrounds (spanning both South and East Asian heritages), both British-born and those who had migrated from elsewhere. One person from a black background and one from an Asian background had worked internationally. Participants came from a range of universities from Russell Group to 1960s and post-1992.

Two focus groups were held involving nine people, and three individual interviews were held (two face to face and one by phone). Focus group interviews were recorded and transcribed. Phone interviews were recorded by note-taking. All transcriptions and notes were then analysed thematically. The analysis aimed to focus primarily on the main themes raised by the participants regarding their own perspectives on their experiences of being BAME in British higher education today and, more specifically, on what they felt had contributed to their ability to progress towards senior leadership. We have sought to present a holistic view of how different factors might have worked together in peoples' experiences, rather than to present individual cases. We have also done this in an effort to preserve confidentiality as, given the small numbers and the relative seniority of the people included, there may be a temptation to try to identify specific people.

Although the focus in this project was intended to be on celebrating the relative success of senior BAME leaders, we begin with an acknowledgment that, while it was clear that several people – those who had attained very senior academic management positions – felt satisfied and indeed energised by their achievement, for the vast majority there was still a perception of frustration, either that they felt there was further to go for themselves, or for BAME colleagues. For all, there was the definite recognition that discrimination and barriers still existed in subtle, and not so subtle, ways. Of course we will touch on these later on.

We begin with this acknowledgment as it recognises that the environment in higher education in the UK must still be seen as one which needs extensive changes, despite the fact that there are BAME individuals who have managed to rise to leadership positions. There is clearly still a need for broader systematic, systemic and cultural changes. However, overall in this report we present the experiences of BAME leaders in their words and from their perspectives. This largely takes the form of reflecting about what factors or situations in their lives have supported them to attain their current levels of leadership. It is helpful to note here

that these experiences can be conceptualised in a number of different ways and that, significantly, race and ethnicity in relation to leadership can be seen as both liberating and constraining (Ospina and Foldy, 2009). We therefore think it is crucial that we present their experiences in a holistic manner, rather than more simply as either barriers to or supports for success. On the whole, people spoke a great deal about ways of thinking about themselves, about leadership and about their abilities in higher education. How they created a path for themselves, the identities they created, and the style of leadership and underpinning of values were a large part of the story. Where these values and thinking came from, and how their backgrounds played a role, were also part of the picture. However, the role of others, particularly family, and individual mentors was significant for many, as was the role of serendipity. How prejudice and discrimination were handled finishes the story as these, being a key part of experiences, are important in how they play into the whole story.

A note on reflexivity

It is now fashionable in academic thinking to factor in the role of one's own social position when conducting research. While we are not presenting a conventional piece of academic research in this report, we do think it is appropriate to mention our own position, as two women of Asian backgrounds.

Vijaya's parents are third generation Indians, born in Guyana South America. Vijaya was born in Scotland and schooled in Guyana, Canada and the United Kingdom. In appearance Indian, she speaks English with a transatlantic accent and has a working knowledge of Arabic. She has significant experience in developing leaders in the private, not for profit and public sector – twenty years of which have been in support of clinical and non-clinical leaders in the NHS and two plus years of working with leaders in UK HEIs.

"I am conscious of a deepening curiosity at this time in my life to understand the lenses through which individuals of visible BAME characteristics are evaluated, valued and treated. I continue to believe that my childhood and upbringing and all the various geographical and cultural influences on my heritage are positive and that indeed, to many, it would appear that I, like many we talked to, have on the surface achieved more than our forefathers. And there is, I confess, a residual fatigue and weariness at having to prove worth and competence more than colleagues from the mono culture. I have been struck by the absence of voices representing the BAME community in thought leadership, leadership models, organisation policies, mainstream sociology, psychology and within experiential learning – this paucity, the 'widening black attainment gap' for students and differential patient outcomes for BAME patients are all factors that require no more evidence. We need to make it possible for difficult conversations about difference to be had and for cultures in organisations to be well led, to be inclusive of all their constituent parts. This imperative convinced me to contribute to this particular piece listening to senior BAME leaders speaking their truth and writing this up with an intention of encouraging the majority of those holding leadership offices to see, hear and feel how accessing the talent existing in their organisations can produce better outcomes and experiences for all. I share the determination of my fellow researcher and Advance HE to encourage aspirant BAME leaders to continue to push forward to achieve their potential."

Jan is of third generation Australian-born Chinese descent, in appearance fully Chinese, but speaking only English with an Australian accent. She moved to the UK from Australia over a decade ago and has worked in a variety of HEIs in the two countries as well as in Canada.

"I am aware I have attained academic leadership (a professorship) relatively early in my career, but in Australia I was also aware that my attainments were treated with a fair degree of suspicion by many of my peers. From an external perspective, I have achieved a good deal of international success, but this has been against a backdrop of small discriminations, and an almost ever-present perception of "not fitting", of being told I was "too direct", and of not picking up on cultural cues. These latter experiences were known about only to a very small circle of personal friends and, of those, it was only the friends of colour I confided in. I was aware that for many people of colour, speaking about discrimination which is personally experienced is not something shared easily with white friends or colleagues. Sometimes this is because you are not always sure it is racial discrimination and you don't want to seem as if you are a "victim". Sometimes it is because (certainly in my experience) white people are so discomforted by the idea that their friend or colleague might have been subjected to racism, that they try to interpret potentially discriminating behaviour in other ways. This latter response clearly discourages further confidences. Overall, I have been acutely aware, particularly in Australia, of how speaking about race and racism is highly disconcerting, both for BAME people and white people, together and separately. This background, I believe, gave me a readiness and sensitivity to elicit stories of BAME leaders' experiences in the way they wanted to tell it, and without feeling they needed to censor what they said for an audience who might not appreciate them from their perspective."

We are aware of criticisms of people of colour in conducting studies of other people of colour, that they may not be seen as "objective"; that the research they are doing is "MEsearch". This view, often held by social science and humanities researchers, implies that white norms are universally held and are therefore "objective" (Ray, 2016). Ray criticises this perspective in that it arises not only because of the socially dominant position of white people, but can also allow the voices of ethnically or racially marginal people to be appropriated by researchers. All researchers, from a reflexive point of view, engage in mesearch. It is disturbing that there is still a need to criticise the "mesearch" perspective in 2016, when decades earlier there was significant recognition that research arising from a shared background and the personal experience of the researcher, could be especially valuable. This gave rise to a whole approach called "heuristic research" (Moustakis, 1981). Bearing these issues in mind, here we have deliberately chosen to capitalise on our own backgrounds and experiences. While we believe we have tried to faithfully present our participants' experiences, we also believe that our participants' perceptions of us facilitated them to speak more freely, and perhaps to divulge more about themselves and their experiences than they might have to researchers from white backgrounds. We have been aware, from the outset, of trying not to colonise the stories we present here, but to simply present them in a way which makes them accessible to a wide range of readers.

Below we describe these different aspects of peoples' stories.

Theme 1: "there's still a long way to go..."

This was a resounding first response for many of the participants, when asked initially if they felt they had achieved their full potential.

"…good progress in my academic career but I still feel there is a lot more I can do and able to do."

This echoes the distinct feeling from a substantial portion of the participants that they felt they could do better, in fact a lot better. Given the opportunity, one person felt that she could attain deputy vice-chancellor level. The desire to advance was also tempered, for some, by a sense of the ongoing, perhaps relentless, experience of sustaining optimism in the face of feeling isolated.

"… I don't know whether I've achieved my potential in the sense that whether I could go further with leadership roles. I'm not certain that I necessarily want to. But I'm not certain why I don't want to and whether that's something to do with the isolation, just being tired of it."

This overarching experience is characterised by a sense that even if they might not have personally experienced racial discrimination, the awareness of its existence contributed to a questioning of whether leadership roles for a BAME person were desirable. This in one person's case was underpinned by a weariness (as in the quote above) at the prospect of having to put up with discrimination.

"A couple of things that I think have kept me back. One of them is around talking to other black colleagues who have taken on leadership… who have spoken to me in confidence and spoken about the kind of discrimination they've faced, particularly from subordinates… So, that's kind of made me feel do I really want the kind of hassle?"

Elaborating on the sense of weariness above, this participant spoke of

"…what wears you down is just – it's the sort of thing (that we talked about earlier) – that leadership is a relationship and that the followers, for want of a better word, struggle often for reasons they don't understand themselves; there's just something that – there's a discomfort with being led by or represented by someone who isn't ordinarily in that position. And that's- and, you know, there's just tiny, little sort of daily wearing…"

What this participant is drawing out is the daily experience of maintaining a leadership role with people who are not used to seeing someone like yourself (BAME person) in such a position, and having to weather the small, subtle, perhaps even unintended questioning of someone like yourself in that role.

Another example of this kind of experience was provided by one of the other participants:

"You get students who write to you in a certain way (or people who make complaints) and once they realise that I'm a black woman (because they've looked me up) they'll stop calling me professor or head of school and they start calling me by my first name… I mean, it's utterly silly stuff."

There was, of course, clear awareness of the lack of BAME leaders in British academia (*"why do people at the top all look the same"*) accompanied by a strong desire to understand, and have an effective analysis of, why this persists. There was quite a bit of early discussion (in the focus groups) of *"the secret language of likeness"* which they felt people from BAME backgrounds were not privy to, and even if they had attended good universities didn't necessarily make them feel included. There was some discussion about what this "secret language" involved. For example, was it a particular turn of phrase? Some speculated that it was the fact that BAME people were perceived as too direct and:

"I've asked the question because the senior leadership team which is the executive group they are all of the same, they're mostly white, I think there's one female I think, mostly white certainly no person of colour. I'm the only black person or minority ethnic and I've asked the question because I would like to know how the decisions are made, how can we get promoted to that level."

These quotes and experiences highlight how the overall visible (eg presence of other BAME leaders) and cultural (eg use of language and ways of relating) environment play a large role in motivating and supporting BAME people to both seek and sustain themselves in positions of leadership. It is therefore vital that attention is given to creating environments which express the value of diversity in both physical appearances and cultural practices.

Theme 2: what's background got to do with it?

The discussion about the "secret language of likeness" led to discussion of perceptions of how peoples' backgrounds had played a role in their career development. Of course, as we might imagine, this could be a very mixed bag, but surprisingly, participants did not on the whole mention that their background (ethnic, racial or cultural) was a drawback. Rather, in at least two cases, background and upbringing was seen as positive. In one case, a person's parents had raised their children to seek

education, having a *"huge confidence and belief in it"*. As we know, this is the case for many migrant families, who often migrate in order to seek out social improvement. Education is seen as a major route to this.

The importance of living by role-modelled familial values was emphasised eg the example below where speaker recalls their mother's words and acknowledges their impact even now:

"…instilled in me the fundamental values. Humanity and humility very important in working with others. Integrity, honesty – these four values should be our guiding posts – set you up well for leadership."

Another reflects on how her mother:

"has always brought us up to work really, really hard and be strong and be good at what you've trained to do and trust yourself."

Another quote echoes this strong sense of familial values and positive self belief:

"It's not just that you're just as good as anyone but nobody's any better than you are, and it's really more that level…"
and
"I had a very strong upbringing around work ethics and generating trust to deal with difficult issues."

Another person recognised the fact that his father has also been an academic, and that as a child he had lived in several different countries, meant that he understood university life and culture, and could particularly appreciate university politics. However, he also recognised that for people who are first generation immigrants, and especially those from Asian backgrounds:

"there are some hidden dimensions… not so much outwardly outgoing…pushy is the wrong word… I think people from BAME backgrounds are less likely to be in these networks."

We will return to the issue of the importance of particular values further on, but in this section it is relevant to note that what were seen as important values by some participants derived specifically from their own family and cultural backgrounds.

Theme 3: mindsets, identities and path creation

When asked how they thought of themselves, and what they felt had contributed to their progression, there was a mixed set of responses. We have termed one set as "mindsets" which refers to the ways of thinking people felt they had deliberately developed in order to cope with experiences of failure or of personal slights. Common words used were: "persistence" and "courage".

"…try, try, try again, if at first you don't succeed just try and try again, that's what my dad used to say."

"…don't get discouraged just try again."

"…be brave, to commit to your beliefs."

"…be prepared to compete and to accept failure as part of a competitive world."

For one person, the mindset was termed as a type of resilience which, in some ways, as described below, involved not taking setbacks personally:

"It's only when you get here you think oh-oh and that makes you think I can get round this because you've got a different mindset that says this is not about me this is just an obstacle in the road and so I think there may be a different sense of persistence, there may be a different kind of resilience."

For one person, the mindset also included a commitment to being "best at what I do" coupled with a passion for their work and the determination:

"to complete it to the best quality possible knowing that there are also constraints in real life and never stop believing that there's something bigger and better I can do if the opportunity arises."

For others, there might also be a sense of having to do better than others, because of being a BAME person:

"…and so I feel that I have to exercise that in a way that shows that here she is and she's from a BAME background."

The same person spoke specifically about how she dealt with possible negativity by deliberately deciding not to turn this into self-pity:

"… I know of the issues that some black women in senior positions have faced, I might have faced them myself but, for me, the issue is more about am I going to take that as a negative thing and therefore feel, oh, poor me?"

A similar sentiment was expressed by another participant when speaking about discrimination:

"If I believe there is always a bias then the end will always be negative … then becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy."

This speaks of a deliberate decision not to cast oneself solely in the negative terms which the constant experience of discrimination might imply.

In the light of people's recognition of discrimination and bias, and the fact that HEI culture was not inclusive of people like them, several people spoke of the need to **"identify a path"** and be clear about the vision this entails. As one person said:

"Going forward that we need to think very carefully about what is it we want to do, what will success look like, what information we need and who is responsible for that information, and that approach has really served me well in pushing big changes by being clear about what is it I am responsible for and where others need to come in."

In broad terms this also means **constructing an identity**, and also a way of using that identity, not necessarily for progression, but as a way to conceptualise your contribution to your HEI.

For some this vision might involve:

"We will have leaders who look like me and express themselves in a particular way and that's just how it is…"

For another Sikh participant, his contribution involved directly using his BAME cultural inheritance in his teaching:

"I find that the students are exhilarated when I slip from a Yorkshire identity to a Sikh identity. And sometimes I even start speaking in Punjabi. I will, you know, in the lecture I'll say, look, I just can't find the word in English but this is what it means in Punjabi."

Speaking from an angle which recognised the role of the broader social context, one participant suggested that…

"So I think there is a sense where we are all pigeonholed by the media and those of us who are successful can't rise above that media profiling and that profiling, that strong negative profiling actually dominates everything and unless we can get the media to start looking at BAME issues in a more positive way…"

The path, in this sense, might involve working at a broader level to provide a more positive perspective. (Incidentally this participant was very interested in this project and what it sought to provide). This indicates that strategies to change perceptions of BAME experiences, perhaps as more normalised, rather than negative, experiences, may make a vial contribution to changing the context in which BAME people can thrive.

The path, for another person, involved a well thought-through way of using his experiences in his academic work as a teacher. For example:

"So it's a kind of pedagogical… Because I'm aware of all these processes of representation and misrepresentation, I use that as a kind of pedagogical strategy. You know? I use it in ways that hopefully enable people to reflect You know? So I'm in charge; I think I'm in control of that. You know?"

This person also spoke of himself as a "critical change aid" and a "loyal rebel" who could use his experience, and social position as a BAME person to contribute in his academic work or the experience of other BAME people. In this way he had constructed and labelled his marginal identity and status in a way which could be integrated into his academic work and community.

"I'm always who I am – that gaze is there and people – people make of it what they will, and it's going to be framed by all sorts of traditions and heritages and the colonial gaze and so on and so forth. So, I'll make a set of choices as to how I am."

"I cannot just follow my own personal path. You know? Whether I like it or not, I am representing the aspirations of other black people."

This sense of social responsibility can clearly be important in framing a person's understanding of themselves and their contribution to their HEI and also their community.

Another person spoke of this type of leadership role and what she felt it entailed because she was a black woman:

"White colleagues who joined at the same time me were probably much freer to just get on with the mainstream stuff, there was a lot of kind of leadership work that was just – I'm not – I mean, I was happy with but a soft leadership or the emotional leadership work. And I think then that's just something that comes when you're one of, you know, when you're a black woman or, you know, a minority in this position – you're the only person who looks like this. And however much your mentors are trying to, you know, build you up and things, they can't – there are limits as to how much they can do about that because there just aren't enough people around to share that work. And so there is an additional level of work."

"The point is, this is additional work that needs to be done because of your identity in a way that I don't believe my white colleagues particularly have to even think about these things… But it's a level of work that people don't see or understand, and it is work."

These quotes speak to the extra sense of responsibility, and sometimes burden, BAME leaders perceive that they have, compared to their white colleagues. It may not be recognised as work, because it is invisible to those (white colleagues) who don't have to do it (perhaps similar to housework ie only visible or recognised when it is not done) and also not necessarily valued until it is perceived as being absent. This also speaks to the possibly devalued position of BAME people, in that when they do not fulfil

additional responsibilities which are taken for granted, this is seen as negative.

For another woman, an important part of her identity was to recognise that she was as good as anybody else. This was a view instilled by her parents but which she nevertheless still needs to remind herself of:

"...it made me realise there was just nothing behind the curtain and, you know, my parents had told me – I heard everybody say it. My parents had said that to us all our lives too but you kind of still tend to put these people on a pedestal. But it's a lesson you forget; I have to keep reminding myself of it. But it's that, you know, really – It's not just that you're just as good as anyone but nobody's any better than you are…"

For two other people the issue of identity also involved ensuring that other people could see and realise that the sort of person you are and that this might involve demonstrating capability, responsibility and carving out a non-stereotypical identity.

"…get to know people and help them realise I could be quite decent…responsibility for those of us who are in leadership roles we need to act in ways which show we are professionally capable and to debunk stereotyping views."

For one person this might also involve "not to be too self-conscious of one's ethnicity."

This point, about the place of one's ethnicity in one's self-identity, is a crucial issue. Perhaps the ethnic identity is easily ascribed to a BAME person by others because of visible physical, cultural and social differences, but how this is taken on by the BAME person themselves is another issue. The importance of being in control of one's own identity is indeed a vital aspect of identity politics.

Theme 4: what's luck got to do with it? The role of serendipity?

In this section we look at factors which were unplanned or unpredicted. These, in some ways, may be the sorts of experiences which occur for many people, and are not exclusive to the BAME experience. In other ways, of course, it may be that being BAME allows a person to take advantage of specific opportunities in particular ways.

Two very senior academic managers spoke about how they had never planned to be in the positions they were in, but that it was very much about either using opportunities (and being flexible around this) and/or creating opportunities. One in particular spoke of the need to be open and flexible, that opportunities might arise which hadn't been planned for or expected but that being open to whatever else they might bring could lead to further unexpected opportunities:

"Being in the right place at the right time…don't absolutely set your heart on a career trajectory…be open."

There was also a recognition that the politics of ethnicity and gender played an enabling role in the example below. One woman spoke of the interest in gender issues in higher education, and how she felt this had created an opportunity for her to progress. The serendipitous nature of work in academia may also mean that being good at other things may lead to leadership opportunities:

"So, I mean, it's building your reputation for doing things other than leadership. I mean, that's the weird thing about academia, right? In terms of getting onto leadership and success, it's because you're perceived as good at other things."

This theme, of being open to what opportunities might come from doing other things, was picked up by quite a few people. The following quote traces how different opportunities unfolded for one person, initially trained as a social worker.

"…initially my enthusiasm for my profession (propelled me) and then moving into a teaching role meant that I could be sharing that, clinically, and also within the university context, and that was just brilliant. In doing so, the other opportunities came and, actually, grasping those when they arrive rather than taking that sort of long time to make a decision really did help. And, certainly, support from individuals who believed in me was important."

It's important to note here the support of other people which will be discussed as a separate theme.

With regard to opportunities, several people spoke about being more proactive – for example, actively looking for gaps and creating opportunities to address them, and then:

"when opportunities occurred I put myself forward... just threw myself in at the deep end…then trod water and swam my way to the top."

Another senior man, a dean, emphasised the importance of making the best of the opportunities, knowing that "opportunities may be limited".

For another person who had established a strong academic reputation, this functioned as a spring board for further opportunities, perhaps because it had increased his visibility, and further effort on his part capitalised on what his reputation had already achieved:

"My reputation preceded me and people wanted me, and when I do a job I put 150% in. I concentrate energy and make the best of opportunities."

This sentiment was echoed by the dean referred to above, who believed that early success (gaining substantial research funding) and gaining a deputy head position:

"has given me further confidence that I can deliver success even at a very successful pace and getting people to recognise that even if you're not born in this country and even if you're not white, if you deliver success people will respect you and they will, they will support you going forward."

Another senior male academic manager gave more detail about specific opportunities and how to use them:

"What I always say is to ask whether you can be put on a committee … start to get a broader view … hear the views of others, senior people, how they manage meetings, how they get consensus and their own way, get sent on secondments. Get onto national bodies. Get networks and exposure … start to understand the world of universities from other people's perspectives."

These views can be taken as encouragement to BAME people who aspire to lead to take opportunities and to be proactive in seeking out and indeed creating opportunities to broaden their expertise, perceptions of themselves, and indeed their own self-perceptions.

Theme 5: do we need other people? (family, mentors, networks, trusted others)

Not surprisingly, this was a consistent theme for most people.

Prominent was the recognition of family support ("moral support from my wife") or

"I have a very supportive and understanding wife and wider family network…allowed me to be away from home…this is a critical part of my success."

In this latter case, this man felt that being able to move to new more senior positions which sometimes meant having to live away from home, allowed him to pursue career progress.

Still another way of viewing the role of family support was the idea that an element of "wanting to do my family and community proud" was an important motivator, and source of support in aspiring to a leadership position.

However, the role of trusted colleagues or mentors, not necessarily from a BAME background, was also strongly acknowledged. There were, for example, occasions on which the BAME staff person was encouraged to apply for a job they might not have considered themselves.

"It's just significant individuals who have believed in you. And that's really been a thing that's thrust me forward … significant individuals, as I said, who've said to me, you know, you've got something. And that affirmation I think is really crucial for me – affirmation from people who you respect in their own right. So, particularly in academia – I think that's been crucial."

"I've had the support, I've had some really good role models, but I have to say they were not from my background … But it was about working with people who believed in my ability to do what it is to do. So I have the support even when it came to being in the university and then wanting to do the PhD. Support was there. However, being conscious of the fact that the more I progressed in the career, the less I saw of anyone like me, meant that I did end up, through the professional body, talking to individuals who are from my background or other backgrounds just to get a sense of what was going on and, in a way, to locate what was happening within my own career. So I have to say it has been positive."

"But I did get a lot of support from this person who was really clearly looking for opportunities for me and all sorts of things."

A small number spoke of sponsorship, when people leading departments or other organisational sections actively promoted them informally at meetings. For example:

"Many have helped on the way … a senior person at Bristol was very supportive…a very inclusive person...probably because she had to fight her way up … two types of people – first help others up and then those who pull the ladder up behind them…"

Moving away from the role of significant individuals, another person spoke of the general workplace environment:

"I'm just inspired by the environment I work in. There's a lot of successful people from students to researchers to academics and that environment has almost acted as incubator."

A lot has been written about the role of networks in contributing to career progression for BAME people (Fenton, 2000).

Illustrating this, a dean, spoke of the importance of networks:

"So, I do have a network of local and external networks and that tends to be built not with intention to sort of achieving the next role but just to talk to people, learn from people, let people know what you're doing and it is an important thing that needs to be done."

The issue of networking is, of course, not always spoken about in these terms, but is implicit in other ideas expressed by some other senior men when discussing how to use and create opportunities (in the foregoing section). The idea of creating opportunities to become visible to white senior colleagues, and to mix and allow them to familiarise themselves with who you are and what you are able to do, are all functions which would be facilitated through networking. Some literature however indicates that networking is not necessarily something which is undertaken easily by BAME people (Moses, 1989). It requires time and, in some cases, access.

Theme 6: values and ethics? Is it just about achievement, skills and knowledge?

The importance of a work ethic to "work hard" has already come up in several persons' accounts, but some take this to another level in emphasising how the value of hard work has clearly underpinned their approach to their professional and work life. One person spoke of how work ethics played a role in building up internal and external networks and helped "generate trust to deal with difficult issues".

Along with the value of hard work though, a senior man, of Chinese background, also spoke of perhaps a more important value, that of "being selfless". For him this involved trying to "offer solutions but also championing actions"; trying to demonstrate, that regardless of whatever system you work "people will appreciate if you try to make a difference". In his words:

"Leadership comes from being selfless first… then leadership comes naturally."

Elaborating on this he explained that he learnt his personal value system from his mother who

"always emphasised doing good, being honest, Buddhist values…will be treated well in the next life…but don't ask for return…instilled in me the fundamental values. Humanity and humility very important in working with others. Integrity, honesty – these four values should be our guiding posts – set you up well for leadership."

Another very senior male academic manager echoed a similar idea:

"I paid a lot of attention to high quality personal skills and human interaction … there has to be an element of authenticity in leaders."
and
"I am committed to doing a good job and to making a difference."

The same man also spoke of needing a breadth of knowledge, and the skill of being able to read organisational culture as very important.

Theme 7: what to do with prejudice?

Despite sound ideas about how to fashion an individual path towards leadership, there still remains a question of how to deal with ongoing discrimination, and sometimes outright prejudice. As noted earlier, such ongoing experiences take their toll and effectively discourage BAME people from seeking positions of leadership. Clearly there must be organisational and systemic initiatives to address these issues, although interestingly none of our participants spoke of these. Earlier we discussed the effect of discrimination on self-belief, and we will return to this theme again below.

For some, the discrimination took the form of lack of access and development to take on more senior roles:

"So, my dean was, [his deanship] was coming to an end and all the professors were invited to apply and I said to him well we can't apply because we don't know the job, we don't know the role, we don't know how to do it, the only person who could apply was the deputy because she was the person who had insight into the role, she knew all about the contracting for nurses and so on, all these issues where are completely outside the education and researcher role. So, in some respects how do we apply?"

An overarching theme was the general acknowledgement of ongoing discrimination within the organisational culture of HEI's (as mention earlier) and of the need to address this, however they also referred to specific ways BAME people might overcome the negative outcomes of the experience of encountering daily prejudice.

For example, earlier we discussed several people's ideas that taking on a self-pitying, or over-ethnically-determined, identity could be counterproductive. However, when the issue is viewed as more of a cultural or social phenomenon in the workplace the suggestions of one senior man could be helpful. In acknowledging biases in the workplace he advised the need to work extremely hard to overcome these by acknowledging any shortcomings in your own skill sets and to particularly address *"communication skills which contribute to an ability to assimilate into the mainstream… If you are considered an outlier or so different it is hard to exercise leadership."*

The advice from this man, and one other, was to actively network so that you are exposed to other senior people, mingle with decision makers, socialise with them so that you understand policies and systems.

What does it all mean?

"We're creating history and we're also reducing the sort of the – stoked the denial of the problem, which I think is really very, very important and it's kind of knowing."

We have tried to represent faithfully, as far as possible, the experiences of some senior BAME leaders in British higher education. We are aware that they come from a variety of disciplines and ethnic, racial and cultural backgrounds. Not everyone will agree with their analyses, perceptions of their experiences, or the strategies they have developed to make their way in the British academy.

We hope that we have contributed by focusing on stories from senior BAME people themselves, rather than dwelling on what barriers or inhibitors such people experience. We have deliberately avoided using terms such as "positive" or "negative" experiences here, as we hope these stories will show that experiences themselves are not inherently positive or negative, but it is how they are incorporated into a mindset, pathway or identity which becomes more lastingly important. Experience in this sense is a holistic phenomenon, made up of perceptions of past experiences, actual events, the context of these events and the meaning made of it all.

From our perspective the stories have been primarily focused on the individual efforts and mindsets which these BAME leaders feel have underpinned their career trajectories. This is to be expected as many of us do not naturally assume a more organisationally focused perspective in thinking about our own experience. We, of course, would not want to suggest that, if anyone simply followed similar ways of thinking and acting, their own career trajectory would mirror that of the people in the study.

However, by way of conclusion, we proffer some ideas about strategies in HEIs that might support BAME leaders, to which the stories themselves give some direction.

Broadly, training programmes, action learning sets or support groups might include assisting BAME people to create their own story or path in higher education. Creating a mindset and identity which preserves a person's sense of who they are, personally, social

and culturally, that also incorporates facets which they recognise are needed in order to gain positions of leadership in British higher education would be a vital component of such training. For example, this might involve helping to articulate their own values in relation to leadership (one that is congruent with their own cultural background); it might involve developing a form of leadership which is congruent with these values; it might also include helping to develop an identity which is inclusive of their ethnic identity but perhaps not solely dependent on it. It might also help individual BAME people develop a political and cultural analysis of their own organisation or workplace section and then, after becoming aware of their own specific ways of communicating and relating, work out how they might preserve and adapt their own ways of working to be effective in the broader workplace culture.

These initiatives must, of course, also involve changing the predominant workplace culture in a way that is more generally inclusive, and which capitalises on the different ways of thinking and acting that can be contributed by people from many different backgrounds, not just BAME backgrounds. Thinking about what kinds of networks or activities can help make other people in the workplace more aware of, exposed to, and familiar with different BAME cultural ways of working would be an important contribution.

Setting up networks is not a new idea but perhaps more thought can be given to establishing different kinds of networks which cut across different groupings and divides. These could be across universities, across different ethnic groupings, or around different levels of leadership. Of course, these already exist, but more thought might be given to how networks can also become action groups who target particular initiatives relating to BAME progression. Such networks might also be sources for locating like-minded individuals to sit on for.

Even as this goes to publication there are anecdotal accounts of the successes of reverse mentoring schemes, which enable senior leaders from the mono culture to be paired with BAME leaders in an intervention, which

foregrounds the learning that BAME leaders bring to thinking differently and enabling those leading HEIs and organisations to be open to development through this often informal arrangement.

We would encourage those leading HEIs to invest more formally in the development of BAME staff at all levels in the institution as part of their overall talent management strategy. This means processes for recruitment and selection to development opportunities (eg coaching , open programmes and study days) being subjected to fair and transparent processes, as organisations undertaking development or consultancy in the sector work with pre-selected candidates. These development activities need to be undertaken in tandem with a cultural audit of an organisation's culture for inclusion across all protected characteristics. The message to reinforce is about foregrounding the importance of creating an inclusive workplace culture as opposed to 'fixing' those BAME leaders. As our brief study shows, these leaders have flourished and brought excellence to the organisations they are part of. To you, we say your best is already good enough.

Finally, we are confident that those leading Higher Education Institutions in the UK, Ireland and globally will demonstrate genuine curiosity and openness to learning about what has thus far proved to be a challenging agenda. We believe that you will rise to the challenge of representing and foregrounding equality, diversity and inclusion; that you will draw learning from within and without your institution. We invite you to listen to the stories within your organisations as well as the ones that are not being told. As those charged with leading HEIs, you will take action not because of an imposed policy decision, but because you know and believe that it's the right thing to do now. Our students, staff and wider society will be the beneficiaries of this culture change.

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