

**[00:00:00.360] - Speaker 1**

Welcome to Investment Committees of the Future in Conversation.

**[00:00:11.090] - Speaker 1**

In this series, we speak to leaders and change makers about their experience of Good Finances Investment Committees of the Future programme. Investment Committees of the Future is a programme that seeks to lift the lid on investment committees and emphasise the value of lived experience in decision making positions. In this episode, I speak to Sung-Hyui Park, who's a and partner at Bates Wells. Sung-Hyui began her career as a banking lawyer before moving to Bates Wells to support charities, investors, and social purpose organisations who are trying to make an impact through their businesses and activities. Sung-Hyui joined the Investment Committees of the Future programme as a learner, and has also joined the Investment Advisory Committee of the Growth Impact Fund. I'm really interested to hear more about her learnings and takeaways from the programme and what skills and experience she's been able to bring and apply to the investment committee. Hi, Sung-Hyui. Thank you so much for joining me today. Just to kick off, can I get you to introduce yourself and tell us a little bit about the work that you do?

**[00:01:09.910] - Speaker 2**

Of course. Hi, Olivia. Thank you, firstly, so much for inviting me to join you today. To give a little bit of an intro, my name is Sung-Hyui Park, and I am a lawyer and a partner at a law firm called Bates Wells in the UK. I've been at Bates Wells for, oh, gosh, coming up to up to up to up to up to next month. Before I joined Bates Wells, I was at a commercial international law firm called Clifford Chance, where I was a banking lawyer. What I do at Bates Wells now is that all of my clients I'm very lucky to say, are organisations that are trying to have a positive impact, including social investors, charities, and purposeful organisations like social enterprises and B-corps.

**[00:01:58.410] - Speaker 1**

Oh, fantastic. And somehow, I know that you recently joined the Investment Committee for the Growth Impact Fund. Can you tell me a little bit more about that? How did that opportunity come about? And had you ever joined an investment committee before?

**[00:02:11.740] - Speaker 2**

Yeah, of course. So, joining the Growth Impact Funds Investment Advisory Committee, as they call it, the IAC, is my first ever IAC appointment. I joined that committee last March, I think. About this March, actually, so about six months ago. Just for those who might not be so familiar with the

Growth Impact Fund, as a very brief summary, it's a fund co-led by Big Issue Invest and Unlimited. It provides social investment for fairly early-stage social purpose organisations that are either diverse-led and/or focused on tackling inequality. It's a fund that I've been following and admiring from a distance for quite a long time. I got involved because last year I was co-leading an initiative called the Equalising Deal Terms Project, the EDT Project, which focused on looking at power imbalances between impact investors and investees, particularly in relation to legal processes, because of my legal background. It just so happened that around the same time, Growth Impact Fund was reviewing their own legal processes and the legal support provided by their pro bono legal firms. A lot of the themes that we were exploring for the EDT project were being faced and reviewed by the GIF team.

We collaborated on a number of projects, including hosting round tables for their lawyers on how they could streamline and make the legal processes more equitable and fairer for the investees. Following on from that, they very kindly me to join the IAC, particularly because of my legal background, I suppose, and my interest in equitable investment terms. I was a little bit daunted, but just really honoured to accept. That has been my first IAC appointment, and I've been on that ever since.

**[00:04:23.640] - Speaker 1**

Sounds like a really exciting opportunity.  
What exactly does the role involve?

**[00:04:29.470] - Speaker 2**

Yeah, of course. The IAC is an advisory investment committee, so it will review and assess potential investment opportunities, which will have been sourced and initially reviewed by the investment deal team at Growth Impact Fund. The investment advisory committee will look at it. They will receive investment papers. We have monthly meetings to discuss. Then the The IAC will give their recommendation as to whether or not they want to proceed with the investment or not. The ultimate decision will rest with the deal team. But on the IAC, we have quite a range of different ranges of experience. We have those that are very experienced in investment, those who are in a very experienced and supporting early-stage founders, those who have lived experience, and supporting a wide range of grassroots and diverse led organisations. Then you have the lawyer in the group, which is myself. A really interesting and quite inspiring range of fellow ISE members.

**[00:05:41.480] - Speaker 1**

It sounds very much like it. I guess somehow, given that your experience is as a lawyer, you must be very familiar with looking at contracts, all that stuff. Did you find that transition into the investment committee quite an easy transition?

**[00:05:57.790] - Speaker 2**

It's a very good question. I think what people don't realise is that even if you are a finance lawyer, you don't really get involved or know much about the IC processes. Before I joined the GIF IAC, we always hear about deals that we work on having to go through IC approval, but we don't actually know what that means. We don't know how they have come to making their decisions. What we usually get as lawyers, as part of the contracting round, as you say, is like a term sheet or a document that sets out what the key clauses are, but without the context. For me, it was really enlightening and eye-opening to understand why and where those clauses come from. I think what has been really enlightening for me joining the ICI is understanding the thought processes as to what is seen to be the key risk areas or key opportunity areas from a commercial financial perspective, and then how that might translate into certain conditions to go into the legal document. It's been a great learning process for me.

**[00:07:07.200] - Speaker 1**

It must be quite an interesting experience to then go on and sit in that investment committee and see it from a different perspective. Was there anything in particular that surprised you or anything that you took away from that experience?

**[00:07:20.290] - Speaker 2**

I think it's not been any surprises as such, but I've just been so grateful to have the whole IC process demystified for me. Even as lawyers, you imagine this stately group of IC members with their hooded cloaks making holy decisions about investments, and you don't really know how they reach those decisions or what factors get discussed. I think for me, what's been really enlightening is understanding what the investment papers say and what they look at. It's been really good for me to learn what is important when making a decision about saying yes or no to a There are certain categories of that. Things like you would look at whether or not it fits in with the investment funds impact profile in terms of what focus points are there, what the governance of your investing might look like, obviously what the financial performance is in terms of cash flow. Those are the areas which I think I find most challenging, and perhaps others who don't have financial experience find most challenging. Things like what the market looks like, what your competitors look like, and what the legal structure looks like as well. For me, a really good piece of feedback has been, a lot of the time you don't have a lawyer in the room, they'll make a decision.

Then later on down the line, they hadn't thought about a specific legal thing, so I've been very happy to make some contribution on that front, to the extent that I can. But just seeing how all of those factors play together and seeing the interaction between those with the IC experience with the deal team as well, who have spent the most time with the founders, talking to them, getting to understand their business, and seeing the discussions that happen and how a decision was reached has been very enlightening for me.

**[00:09:17.020] - Speaker 1**

I guess you mentioned being able to really bring that legal expertise to the process and that there's quite a diverse range of skills on the IC that you sit on in terms of lived experience, learned experience. How does that dynamic play out in practise? What does that look like? I'm not sure if it's the chair of your committee, or how does the committee ensure that everybody has a say?

**[00:09:40.860] - Speaker 2**

Yeah, that's a very good question. I think that it is really important to have a balance of both lived experience and learned experience on the committee, and I have seen it played out in a number of ways. For example, if you have a very narrow IC that is predominantly or fully made up of people who have very commercial financial experience, perhaps in the context of things like private equity or venture capital or investment banking, then the way that you make decisions or impose conditions on your investees could sometimes have inadvertent consequences when you are investing in grassroots, early stage, impact-first organisations. So that having lived experience members, it's so important to be able to play a very healthy counterbalance to those assumptions and approach. To give a very concrete example, there was an investment that we were looking at where it was a business focusing on a specific local community, and the governance board was very small and made up of friends and family. If you're a commercial investor, you go, Oh my God, that's terrible. You have to make it really independent and have a wide range of skills. But it was so important to have someone in the IAC pipe up and say, Actually, that's completely normal for these types of businesses in this type of area, serving this type of community.

It's nothing to be alarmed about. Definitely in two calls, we might suggest including an additional board member or providing some capacity building, but it would actually hurt the business to push too many and too many different types of personalities into the board too early. That was a really nice example that I saw where you have a traditional investment approach, and then you have that insight that comes from the reality of what it's like to run that business and work in that community. I think you need both. I think just having the lived experience then has the reverse set of problems in terms of the ability to scale or be financially sustainable, etc. In terms of your question as to how you can strike that balance in reality is probably twofold. Firstly, I think the

actual social investment senior management team, or the investor management team/investor deal team need to be intentional about how they want a diverse investment committee, and that needs to play through in how they draught the terms of reference for that investment committee or the recruitment process for finding a diverse range. And by diverse, I don't necessarily just mean like racially diverse or culturally diverse, but in terms of diverse in a range of experiences, including lived experience, learned experience, et cetera.

And also, diversity of views and approaches of seeing the world rather than it being an echo chamber of a very specific way. And this is particularly where with something like the Growth Impact Fund, we are trying to serve underrepresented communities, so we need to try to be as reflective of that as possible. Secondly, your choice of chair is very important, as you've alluded to, because the chair needs to always ensure that the environment and culture of an IAC supports the hearing of a diverse range of views and is a safe space to do that rather than being one that shuns or pushes down or rejects different approaches or different ways of seeing things. I think those two factors are quite I feel like I've been very fortunate in seeing both of those dynamics play out very well in the ISE that I'm in.

**[00:13:37.540] - Speaker 1**

You mentioned that despite your experience and despite all the skills that you have developed, which are so valuable on an investment committee, it still felt like quite a daunting process. Was there anything in particular that you felt apprehensive about, and how did you overcome this?

**[00:13:54.500] - Speaker 2**

I think the biggest hurdle for those who might be interested in joining an investment committee is just not feeling like you're good enough and have the relevant skills. I think it's because if you've ever heard or interacted with social or other investors, ICs are always placed on such a pedestal as having the final say on investment. So they seem so senior. And especially if you don't come from a financial background and haven't studied finance, haven't worked in investment, you How can I, first of all, contribute in a meaningful way? And how can I keep up with the discussions that are going on and understand what they're talking about? And this plays out even for finance lawyers. When I was invited to join the GIF, I actually asked my colleagues, I said, Does anybody else have experience of having been on an IC? And not a single person has. Which is surprising in a way, with Arthur and Bates Wells, we have loads of lawyers who are trustees of charities, and the non-executive directors of social enterprises, but none in ICs. It goes to show that that is quite an obstacle, even for those who you would assume are quite financial to overcome.

In terms of how you overcome it, I think this is where the course, the Investment Committee of the Future course, is so valuable as a way of demystifying identifying the process and empowering those who may be interested in joining to feel like they can join, and perhaps very importantly, to signal how they might add value, to give them the confidence to join, So I would love to see this course amplified and shared more widely and become more visible, because just for me talking to my colleagues, a few of them have piped up and said that they would be interested in doing that as well. I think it's a really wonderful gateway for that.

**[00:16:01.960] - Speaker 1**

And what was it that led you to sign up for the Investment Committees of the Future programme?

**[00:16:07.250] - Speaker 2**

Mel was an amazing champion of the Equalising Deal Terms Project and has contributed loads of ideas. I think she mentioned the IACs of the future course in perhaps including more of a focus on EDI, and in that context, EDT, for the IAC members to become more aware, perhaps, of the inadvertent power and balances that they might exacerbate with potential investees. When I heard about that, I was like, Oh, my God, I'd love to jump at the opportunity to be able to learn more so that I could perform better at my role as an IAC member at GIF. I joined the course, and there were a number of things that have already been incredibly helpful. I think having a cohort of fellow, of course, joinees is really great because it's a bit less daunting when we had a welcome session where everyone introduced themselves and everyone shared the variety of experiences that they had. There were those who had experience and those who had none. Being able to share that was very helpful. There was also a really great panel discussion with existing IC members, many of whom are pretty seasoned IC members, which we were invited to join.

That was incredibly reassuring, and I can still remember key snippets of that which I try to carry in my work. For one example, Anna Sheil from Better Society Capital said something that has stayed with me, which is, You might have been recruited onto your IC for specific skill sets. In my case, legal and that equitable perspective. But she said, Don't let that be the limit of what you contribute to an IC, bring the whole of yourself to your IC meetings. That It was very empowering for me to feel like I can express views and suggestions about areas that might not be in my comfort zone, including the financial piece or the market piece or the more commercial elements of it. Because although everyone has certain skill sets that they bring, they will have a host of other very valuable insights and experiences that they also bring. So the message was not to be afraid of contributing those and to continue refining your skill sets in those as well. And there was another quote there from somebody else who talked about imposter syndrome and how they felt it. And it

was so reassuring to hear that, that it wasn't just me who felt it, and that was a very common occurrence.

And to remind yourself of the part that you are, you have value and can contribute. That was very good for confidence. I just think that the way that the course has been set out is so brilliant. It's so accessible and approachable. For example, there's sections on how to read investment papers and how to look out for certain elements of it. I found that I do use that when I review my own investment papers, and it shows you the key areas that are most common areas of discussion. That has been a very helpful, practical source of inspiration for my work.

**[00:19:25.110] - Speaker 1**

It's really interesting because I think the more that I have these conversations with people, the more I recognise that everyone faces imposter syndrome at some point. It's really interesting that you were saying about, Don't just be limited by the skill that you were brought into the investment committee to share or to contribute. I'm just wondering, in practise, because obviously everyone has a wide range of skills and contribute in many different ways, how have you been able to overcome some of that imposter syndrome and feel a bit more confident when you are sharing something that maybe isn't directly in your comfort zone?

**[00:20:03.100] - Speaker 2**

Yeah. I think that goes a lot back to culture of the ICs. I think that the chair and the other IC members and the deal team and how they respond to comments that might sometimes be a bit more tentative from IC members. You might not have that as their core skillset is incredibly important in fostering that sense of safety to be able to practise with that. And getting feedback is really important. So there was another investment that we were looking at where it was discussion about whether or not you could have a shop, an actual retail shop in this day and age, in the age of Amazon and online deliveries and the death of the high street and all of these things. There were worries about that from a sector perspective. But the investment that we were thinking about was for a specific local community. As a Korean person, let alone a lawyer or like EDT project or anything like that, I was able to say, Well, In my experience, in our local community in New Malden and Southwest London, Korean shops are thriving. This is the same that I can see for those Eastern European/Middle Eastern shops serving those local communities.

That blanket assumption that grocery shops aren't doing very well is not enough. You have to look at it from the perspective of the local communities that you are focusing on. That was out of my cup at St Olivia, because this was my lived experience at talking. I felt, Oh, my gosh, do I even have the right to say something like this? And is it even helpful? But later I got feedback saying,

Oh, that was helpful, and that came a new perspective. I think that encouragement and feedback when members of the IAC are offering perspectives on areas that are not why they were specifically recruited, it's also very helpful in encouraging that culture.

**[00:22:10.510] - Speaker 1**

Absolutely. I think that really speaks to the value of lived experience in any decision-making process. But to look at that process more widely, when you have people coming from different perspectives, people who have different expertise coming to this process, I imagine there's a lot of time when you get diverging opinions. How do you navigate that?

**[00:22:31.550] - Speaker 2**

Yeah, it's a very good question. I've seen that on a few occasions, but it has always been very respectful. So where you have an environment where the majority of the view is supportive or the majority isn't, and you do have views are different. What I really like about our committee is that people are able to share those really, and they are well received, but any different voices are very respectfully shared. I think it's about, and I think it's more because they are all very seasoned, ISE members, and they've had lots of experience with that. I think it is very healthy to not have an echo chamber and to have that range of views. We have had meetings where people have come with one perspective, and over the course of the discussion, they have changed their minds as well. I think openness, rather than being entrenched in your own view, is very important on an individual level. But then having a culture where dissenting voices and the proving voices are respectfully shared. So there's been no fights or anything like that. It's all been incredibly respectful, but I have really appreciated when people have been able to feel like they can share a differing perspective.

I think that's very healthy and important.

**[00:24:04.250] - Speaker 1**

Absolutely. I wanted to come back to a point that you alluded to earlier around power dynamics, because inherently with an investment committee and an investee, there is a power imbalance. Now, naturally, when one party has the money, holds the purse strings, is in that decision making position, they have the power over somebody that is looking for that investment. How do you navigate that? And is there any process in place to try and redress power imbalance?

**[00:24:31.860] - Speaker 2**



Yeah, no, it's a question that I have been very interested in with my EDT hat on because I raised that in my ATT report, and it was a very key part of some of the dynamics that I thought we needed to address, and so being in the IAC forum has enabled me to learn a bit more about it. A couple of immediate observations. First is When we were doing our induction for joining as new IAC members, I said, Can we have a section in there that talks about the deal team's reflections on the IAC and honest, candid feedback about where they think that we are helpful and where they think that we could do better, particularly from the perspective of where they think that we put too much emphasis on certain things and not enough on others. So I asked for that feedback as part of our induction, which they were really brilliant about and was very helpful to me in terms of being mindful of these things going forward. So I think as a takeaway from that, as an IC member, challenge your own privilege. Once you become Can I, as a member, never forget all those things where you were worried about ICs and those power imbalances.

If you are there, challenge your own power and privilege. Then second of all is For those where investments have been rejected, either by IC and/or by team. We are trying to get a bit more information about why they were rejected, whether there are any common themes Unconscious bias by way of sector, by way of demographic, so that we can actually just examine that again and make sure that if there's any other factors that we need to really get into, that we address those as well. Those are two very immediate ways that we are making sure that, as you say, our own power doesn't go unchained and that we are accountable.

**[00:26:54.290] - Speaker 1**

I know on the Investment Communities of the Future programme, we get people who come to the programme from quite a wide range of experience, expertise, from people working for charities, social investors, frontline organisations, social enterprises, from different areas of the sector. And I guess the one thing they have in common is they're interested in learning more about investment committees and potentially sitting on an investment committee. But I still, I think a lot of people do feel, as you talked about before, that imposter syndrome, that feeling that maybe their experience is less valuable someone else's experience. What advice would you give to somebody who maybe feels that way?

**[00:27:37.580] - Speaker 2**

I would say that... It sounds like a cliché, but their input is very valuable and that they will have perspectives and experiences and insights that, especially if they are from the investee, entrepreneur, running a business, running an organisation, lived experience perspective that the investment side of the IAC just won't have. I would say your courage in being able to join an IAC and share honestly those experiences is what will enable more equitable investments. It will

hopefully perhaps open doors for investors that might have been otherwise overlooked. It will enable investment conditions that could be fairer for those investees, which then would otherwise have been the case if you hadn't been on the IC. Their experience and insights are crucial to enable us to actually amplify our impact as a community as a whole, where we are not inadvertently investing or choosing investments in a way that go to our unconscious biases as finance professionals, including myself as a finance lawyer, many of us who come from quite traditional finance backgrounds. We need you We need your honesty, and we need your guidance to be able to collaborate better to increase the positive impact that we're all trying to ultimately achieve.

**[00:29:24.440] - Speaker 1**

Thank you so much, Sung-Hyui, for talking to me today. It's been really lovely to hear your insights and advice for people thinking about joining investment committees or joining the investment committees of the future programme. We just wanted to say a huge thank you.

**[00:29:39.650] - Speaker 2**

Thank you so much for running the programme, Olivia. Thank you so much for inviting me to speak.

**[00:29:51.680] - Speaker 1**

Thank you for listening to Investment Committees of the Future in Conversation. If you'd like to find out more about Investment Committees of the Future or any of Good Finance's e-learning programmes, visit [www.goodfinance.org.uk](http://www.goodfinance.org.uk)