

Workplace Summit Dublin Feb 2019

Hello Everybody,

I'm delighted to have been asked to speak at this event this afternoon

Many thanks to all the team at Workplace Summit for organising this, it's very important to have events like this and to ensure they happen and thank you for allowing me a platform to talk about diversity and inclusion in the workplace .

The drive to make workplaces more diverse is often rooted in social justice and the idea that different experiences and points of view make for a more engaging work environment.

Awareness of the business case for inclusion is also on the rise, as companies really have in the main begun to see diversity as a source of competitive advantage and an enabler of growth.

In two comprehensive reports published in the last years, McKinsey found a strong correlation between gender diversity and a company's bottom line.

For many of you this should be no surprise, however it still is not a reality for a lot of organisations based on the fact they do not invest in this area.

In the most recent survey, companies in the top quartile of executive-level gender diversity worldwide had a 21 percent likelihood of outperforming their fourth-quartile industry peers in earnings before interest and taxes, and a 27 percent likelihood of outperforming on longer-term value creation.

I hope this sets the stage for the importance of this topic and today I would like to look at how our organisations are meeting the Diversity and inclusion challenge , what are the benefits and a little on some operational delivery ideas.

Let me begin by telling you background in this space and then elocute some of my thoughts on what the key areas are for our business and what the landscape looks like.

Marcel Proust said *'the real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new lands but in seeing with new eyes'*.

This is very true for me. I think I saw differently from a very young age. I grew up in rural Ireland in the seventies. I was a curious child, curious about why things were the way they were, why certain definitions of world order were as they were set up to be. I questioned.

At a young age I questioned religion or the administration of it, the place of females in it, 'respectability' and all its implications, and fitting in. I know I was so anxious to grow up and get out and I did as soon as I could.

I finished school/ college and went exploring a bit, and throughout all that I had my own journey, one of discovery and emergence and coming to terms with being a gay woman. I rallied against it for a long time. Mostly, I believe, because I was afraid, afraid of the convention, of breaking the rules, of not being 'respectable'. And the fears of being illegal until 1993 and of losing your job and being bullied and harassed.

Now you need to frame all this in the time - 1980's Ireland.

I got involved with work in Sodexo about 15 years ago now, in our (then) Diversity and Inclusion Council (

.....background to this.....) . I found it to be a safe space and it opened my eyes to change.

Here I found a lot of people who were open, lived the value of this in an organisation, who had challenging conversations, who wanted to see different outcomes and who wanted things to be different in the future.

About this change.....

What I felt was a strong sense of excitement, no definite certainty of the outcome but a real emergence of challenge, of different thinking and after a period of this, no going back to how it was before.

This was very personal. It was also in tandem with this that I started to come out in work and my personal life even more so. I had been out in a private sense, but this was now different. I was involved in shifting and changing some aspects of our work culture. I came to see and understand diversity and inclusion, about how important it is to have all voices at the table. We did exactly that, involved people in discussion in conversation regarding areas such as race, gender, sexual orientation, ability/ disability etc.

So that gives you a picture of my personal journey and some information around my initial involvement in Diversity and inclusion in my workplace.

So that places me well to look at how organisations are meeting the challenges, in my personal view I think it's varied.

Bigger global organisations are in the main involved, some **very** involved, some very mature and some approaching this with a high level of authentic and leader led passion.

However, we are also seeing a lot of other organisations giving lip service to this or none at all. This is definitely something I have seen in small to medium enterprises.

It's understandable that resources are often the main challenge as is lack of knowledge and fear of getting into something we are not comfortable with.

However it's fundamental to the very core of our world, we work in buildings and in the main we work with humans.

Our buildings do not cater for all; they are often designed by people with bias and for a very standard user rather than the variety of us as a species.

Recently I saw the Irish blogger Sinead Burke comment at Davos about how difficult it is for her as a small person to navigate around a lot of the modern buildings. Think about

folks within the autism spectrum who might struggle with the light or the noise or the way the building is set up .

It's not about just setting up buildings and workplace for disability but rather for ability and collaboration and productivity and inclusivity.

I see diversity and inclusion as a business imperative and I know that this sentiment is shared by leaders in many companies.

It makes good business sense to have an employee base that looks like our customer base, to truly serve the populations we want to serve; we need diverse groups of employees, suppliers and vendors.

The business case for attracting a wider range of employees will only get stronger as the country grows more diverse and already we are seeing the hunt for talent and the unprecedented growth of opportunities here in Ireland.

Diversity is not just about mirroring the country's demographics. It's also about innovation and performance.

Attracting, retaining and developing diverse professionals stirs innovation and drives growth

That statement is backed by decades of sociological and economic research, and there are myriad reasons it holds true. In part it's because people with different backgrounds and perspectives bring different information to the table. Members of diverse teams can't take for granted that their

teammates think the same way they do. That leads them to question their own assumptions and anticipate alternate viewpoints. The result? More-creative ideas and solutions.

Diversity and inclusion is all about creating shared values by working together for a common mission, taking one small step at a time. The mission is bigger and more complex than individual roles and responsibilities, as there are numerous moving parts in an inclusive hiring programme.

The members of tomorrow's workforce are ready to be more purpose-driven than their predecessors, and it is for the companies to harness their positive and creative energy into executable actions in alignment with strategic inclusion goals.

How did we do it organisationally at Sodexo and other organisation I have had an insight into? I would say with a lot of leadership support, a strong business case, and a team who were determined to make a change and who worked to build a winning coalition. That was not easy at the beginning and is still struggle especially in this disruptive world of geopolitical challenge.

We knew as an organisation we wanted this to be a 'lived' experience in our organisation, and wanted an outcome that looked different to that that was there at the time.

Make no mistake: Achieving a truly diverse and inclusive workplace is a lot of work. Among the hardest things to

combat are the biases people embrace on an unconscious level—deep prejudices or stereotypes imparted by upbringing, culture and mass media that influence our perceptions about others.

Making employees aware of unconscious bias, which research has shown everyone has, is not sufficient. HR and business leaders must develop practices to mitigate it. Education is only the beginning of the conversation, it's like joining the gym—you still have to exercise.

Fortunately, there are many new ways that companies can get that workout. Tech tools and companies are sprouting up all over the place to help leaders hire, manage and retain a vital and diverse workforce. And an emerging crop of innovators, including those highlighted here, are thinking about diversity and inclusion in new and exciting ways that seem to represent a win-win for employees and company leaders.

It's beyond the right thing to do. It is necessary as the building block to bake this thinking into our strategy and design and live it in our workplaces.

Has it made a big difference for me? 'Yes' is the answer and in so many ways and mostly in a new freedom and approach to my role and growth and development and in enhancing

my career. Thus this is one of the reasons I get involved in and am happy to speak at events like this - to share and learn and develop, and build and shape this world into the future.

The workplace of the future is our key Theme today and as you have heard earlier from other speakers, it's definitely going to be an interesting one, a challenging one and most definitely a different one.

We have looked at change and how we integrate technology and people and how we do that in a way that makes us human, feel involved, and motivated.

So that brings me back to what I feel might be the areas and thoughts you might need to consider for the path forward for your marketplace and businesses and workplace. I caveat this by saying these are my ideas only and totally open to challenge and discussion and are based on my experiences and what I am seeing happening out there.

Employees having to hide who or how they are ,comes at the cost of individual employee engagement and retention, and reveals broader challenges of full inclusion in the workplace – not just with respect to sexual orientation and gender

identity, but along other lines of diversity such as gender, race and ability.

A group of major corporates took an unprecedented stand in the debate on marriage equality: Accenture, American Express, AT&T, Barclays, BCG, EY, GlaxoSmithKline, Google, McKinsey, Microsoft, PwC, and Thomson Reuters were among 370 businesses who signed a successful petition to the U.S. Supreme Court. They were protesting against state laws banning same-sex marriage: the laws contradicted their principles, and were against their business interests.

A number of global firms allow their teams to work on global issues pro bono to enhance their CSR and D and I values in the workplace,

Firms across Europe are supporting their teams who are involved internally and externally on a number of emerging challenges and supporting their teams in parts of the world and encouraging them to look beyond their current world

and workplace to bring new innovation and business opportunities

The business and economic case for inclusion exists and has been updated and strengthened with new evidence.

Highlights include:

- National Competitiveness: new evidence shows that inclusion is strongly linked to national economic competitiveness - which underpins the ability of countries to sustainably grow the prosperity of their citizens.
- Corruption: new data shows discrimination is associated with corrupt practices and a lack of openness; inclusion may signal a country is a good place to do business.
- Innovation: new research indicates companies that are more diverse and inclusive have higher levels of innovation and creativity, and they are better able to foster a culture of innovation.

Consumer Power: the spending power of the global diverse groups such as the LGBT+ community is greater than the GDP of Germany, UK, India or Brazil. Several new studies illustrate the large, growing, global spending power of LGBT+ consumers.

- Brand Strength: new evidence demonstrates that inclusion attracts- inclusive and diverse companies have greater brand appeal and loyalty with a broad range of consumers.

- Employee Engagement: new studies find that employees at inclusive companies are more likely to say they are proud to work for their employer, and are significantly more likely to “go the extra mile” for their company’s success. They enhance your brand and reputation.

Financial Performance: several studies show improved financial results for inclusive companies: they have better share price performance, higher return on equity, higher market valuations and stronger cash flows.

Investment firms like Blackrock are saying they will only invest in organisations that have inclusions policies

Procurement is now driving for inclusion to be a standard for firms tendering and is indeed being integrated here in Ireland

So what can firms like your do?

- Be aware of the marketplace and ensure that your firm is a key player in this space and supports your teams to be both internally and externally.
- Look and think about design, think differently , invite people who might bring a different perspective to your

design and planning team , involve and be open to other ideas.

- Watch and review the global changes in this demographic group especially around wealth and provisions for life and healthcare and investment
- Harnessing the power of the wider diverse communities in our workplace by being aware and inclusive and ensuring that your brand is one that is considered by this consumers/business when making a buying decision.
- Continue to engage with NGOs and agencies for change and to think about funding vehicles for these and how do you get access to best practice.
- Working to provide safe and equitable environments, and healthcare and education, and provision around partnership and equality for all your teams.
- Build on the employee engagement you already have in this space and move to the next level.
- Be open to new ideas and products and services that may spring from your inclusive teams and associates as some will be founding stones for the next level of innovation in this space.

Kahil Gibran (The Shadow of the Prophet) says '*the obvious is that which is never seen until someone expresses it simply*'.

I now believe in and see change as a positive and feel that my journey is hopefully leaving behind a trail that helps me find the next new challenge, and in doing so that we all make a different world and a new paradigm.

To conclude, thank you for listening to me this afternoon. Thanks to you all for the space to have this conversation – that's important. Thanks for all who organised the conference I will leave you with this thought:

Fundamental change is underway and these changes have real meaning for our future and for our families and how we work, act, behave and live our lives. We can choose how we react to these and that, in itself, is a transformative event.

Many thanks.