

Diversity & Inclusion

A Special Report, Thursday, October 24, 2019

Edited by Edel Morgan



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It's critical that companies have diversity of thought

Committed companies are continually innovating to engage employees in their inclusion strategies

SANDRA O'CONNELL

To keep diversity and inclusion at the top of your organisation's agenda, you need to keep it to the fore of people's minds. How to do that, without the message getting stale, is crucial.

It matters, particularly if you are to continue attracting top talent to your organisation, points out Lorraine Roche, HR director at Matheson, the first Irish law firm to win an Investor in Diversity & Inclusion Award. The law firm employs more than 700 people across offices in Dublin, Cork, London and New York.

"For businesses to be competitive, we have to attract top talent," says Roche, who adds that in recent years the approach it takes to its diversity and inclusion (D&I) agenda has become much more innovative, despite the fact that, by its nature, the legal world is conservative.

Changes have included the introduction of a much more flexible "agile" working programme, with much more flexibility around working hours, including working from home. This emphasis on "soft starts and hard finishes" can help staff better manage their work-life balance.

"D&I should not be something remarkable but simply embedded in the values. However, to keep it fresh we must continually get feedback about it, and diversity of thought about it. It is critical that businesses get a wide range of ideas

and views, and agree the priorities," says Roche.

Getting staff involved, as Matheson does, through the establishment of diversity and inclusion ambassadors and steering committees helps ensure staff "buy in". Staff volunteer to work across areas such as generational issues, family, gender, LGBTQ+, cultural and social mobility, as well as ability levels, with mental health wrapped around all of them. Taking an innovative approach to mentoring helps too.

Having younger workers mentor older ones breaks down stale stereotypes about people being either "too old to learn or too young to understand", says Roche, who believes the best way to ensure the D&I agenda stays fresh is to keep talking about it. "It's all about communications," she says.

It's also about making it tangible, says Lynn Gallagher, associate director of manufacturing technology at pharmaceutical company Bristol-Myers Squibb (BMS). That means ensuring people understand – and get to fully live – the benefits of embracing it in their work life.

The company has a number of people and business re-

“While it is difficult to change a bias, we can, however, create habits that mitigate our biases

source groups including its own network of women, CLIMB (cultivating leadership in Millennials and beyond) LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and allies) and DAWN (differently abled workplace network). Last year, it launched Possibility Lives. "It is a strategic, multi-year initiative to drive inclusion across the enterprise based on the guiding principle that inclusion promotes innovation and business performance, and is the role of everyone," says Gallagher.

Neuroscience research

Fittingly as a science-based business, BMS is leveraging the advancements of neuroscience research to accelerate its inclusion strategy. "Extensive and cutting-edge neuroscience research indicates that in order to effect real-world, sustained behavioural change across a large organisation, focus must be on forming new habits," says Gallagher.

"The research tells us that we can, create and adopt habits that drive business performance through inclusion. The research also tells us that introducing the right habits in the right order at the right time is the most effective way to bring sustainable change across the enterprise."

BMS's approach encourages employees to adopt three habits in order to create a more inclusive environment. The habits are themed 'encourage every voice', 'explore new ideas' and 'eliminate barriers'.



"Every three months via all internal communications channels we will introduce one of three new habits and each month we will ask the organisation to adopt one of nine new tangible actions," says Gallagher.

For example, these could include making sure that no meeting finishes up without everybody first being asked for their opinion. It could be as simple as introducing yourself to a new colleague each week, to break down barriers.

For its graduate programme, it's about providing both mentors and 'buddies', so that new arrivals have people to whom they can talk frankly or ask questions of. At Deloitte, the key to ensuring that D&I stays fresh is that a member of the executive team is made responsible for tracking and reporting on progress.

"If it is not an agenda item at the most senior level, it becomes a 'nice to have' rather than a strategic priority," explains Valarie Daunt, the professional services firm's part-

ner in human capital management. A lot of D&I practices start by celebrating diversity through events and initiatives. While this is a good starting point, to make real progress, inclusion needs to be embedded into everything the organisation does relating to people, she says.

Deloitte has broken down all the people-related processes such as recruitment, promotions, people returning from

maternity leave, flexible working, on-boarding and has analysed what best practice, from an inclusion perspective, would be at each stage of the process.

"Then we can conduct gap analyses and set clear strategic priorities around closing any gaps. This is a very focused and systematic approach that over time aims to ensure that inclusion is fully embedded into all decision processes impacting

people. This is measured annually across all Deloitte member firms to track progress and hold senior leaders accountable."

It recently piloted Deloitte's Inclusive Leadership Assessment (ILA) within one of its practice areas. The ILA assesses senior leaders against the six traits it sees as inclusive leader having. These are commitment, courage, cognisance (awareness of bias), curiosity,

■ A lot of D&I practices start by celebrating diversity through events and initiatives

cultural intelligence and collaboration. "We believe that a leader who embodies all of these traits operates more effectively, better connects, and accesses a more diverse spectrum of ideas in the workforce to reach their full potential," says Daunt.

Gender balance is a male issue too

BARRY McCALL

"Women are not a diversity dimension," says Avivah Wittenberg-Cox. "Why in the world do we talk about gender diversity if we are only talking about men and women? That's incredibly insulting unless you are talking about the 52 genders you can find on Facebook. Gender is either in balance or out of balance."

Chief executive of international gender-balance consultancy 20-first, Wittenberg-Cox was in Dublin recently to pick up the lifetime achievement award from PWN Global, the international professional women's network she helped found.

She believes most organisations are taking the wrong approach in relation to gender balance. But they are beginning to take it more seriously for hard-nosed business reasons. "Women now make up some 60 per cent of university graduates globally; 80 per cent of consumer goods buying decisions are made by women; and in the next two decades women are set to inherit millions of dollars in wealth from families and spouses," she says.

"In the face of this opportunity, why are 93 per cent of creative advertising directors young men aged under 35? Women now have total wealth bigger than the combined GDP of China and India, yet nobody seems to get it. There is also a growing body of research to show that more gender-balanced companies have higher profits and perform better. The question is not why, but why organisations are not availing of the resource represented by the low hanging fruit that's sitting across from their leaders – at the kitchen table at home in many cases."

It's partly because the issue was addressed up until now,



she contends. "Fix the woman. Companies spend a lot of time well-meaningly trying to help women succeed. It's as if they lack something. It's not women that need fixing. It's the leaders and their systems that need adapting to 21st-century realities."

The usual solution has been to have the problem off to a diversity committee or women's

“It's not women that need fixing. It's the leaders and their systems that need adapting to 21st-century realities

network. "Let's start a women's committee," she adds. "But some companies have changed. There is definitely a first-mover group of high-performing great companies that are gender balanced."

The others are lagging behind because the way the topic is framed is not business-orient-

ed or strategic.

"Diversity and inclusion committees think it's their job to gender-balance the business, but they can't because the system has been set up to fail and it needs to be adapted," she continues.

Culture shift

But there is a desire to change. "The higher up you go in organisations, the more concerned they are. But the chief executives delegate it to others. We need to get them to realise that it is their responsibility. It is about a culture shift for the 21st century."

A fundamental change in approach is required if that shift is to be achieved. "The whole issue is man on man but the way it is being framed today is woman on woman. The top teams don't realise they have to lead the change. It's not about empowering women, it's about leading change in the executive team and throughout the organisation. Gender is a male-on-male issue."

She compares the situation to South Africa in 1990, where it took a white leader to lead

■ Avivah Wittenberg-Cox: Chief executive of international gender-balance consultancy 20-first

the white population to move away from apartheid and share power and eventually transfer it to the black population.

"Women have risen throughout the 20th century and now it's men's turn to have to adapt," she adds. "We are waiting for a de Klerk figure for males. It is not more female role models that we need, we need male leaders who know how to lead change as role models. Organisations built and designed by men for men with wives at home who don't work outside the home and designed for single-earner couples are not flexing fast enough for the reality of where today's talent is and what today's market is. Why are we getting all these young men with male messaging pushing products at women? Every organisation that has been designed for me by men is going to have to adapt to the 21st century or they will miss out on talent and market opportunities."

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‘We have truly focused on diversity & inclusion within the last five years’

The biopharmaceutical firm has won multiple awards for its inclusive workplace policies

DAVE PHILLIPS

Diversity and inclusivity in the workplace is currently a key issue for many organisations – from Government and State institutions to corporations and smaller businesses, there are moves to provide workplaces that are more accessible and egalitarian. But implementing a D&I policy isn't just down to making changes at the recruitment phase – a core strategy of many organisations which seek to promote diversity in the workplace is a model of business that seeks to be transformative at multiple levels.

Global biopharmaceutical firm Bristol-Myers Squibb (BMS) has been recognised internationally for its inclusive workplace policies, and was last year named

one of Fortune Magazine's World's Most Admired Companies. The accolade stands alongside multiple other awards including being recognised as a best place to work by leading LGBT organisations, disability networks, and advocate groups for working mothers.

BMS began operating in Ireland in 1964 and employ more than 650 people. It has received multiple Great Place to Work awards, including specific awards for its state-of-the-art manufacturing facility in Cruiseraith, Dublin 15. "If you look at how rapidly the world is changing in all its forms – technology, healthcare, society – organisations must move and adapt to ensure the talent pool and workforce is a true representation of this change," says Seán Kelly, engineering director, Cruiseraith Biologics. Kelly is also a global diversity and inclusion council member with BMS. "We have truly focused on D&I within the last five years," he says, pointing out that "our strategy is to attract, develop and retain a powerfully diverse workforce while nurturing a broadly inclusive culture that brings out the best in every person and advances our company mission to deliver innovative

medicines to patients".

Part of the transformative model adopted by BMS included establishing a forum for employees to engage and provide ideas and feedback on the structure of the business. "We do a lot of work internally with regards to D&I," says Kelly, "and we recognised in order to be fully inclusive these programmes also needed to represent how we engage as a business and within the community. We facilitate 'global cafes' where we elicit employee feedback on all D&I topics and take action based on the feedback".

This has led to multiple updates of policy at BMS's Cruiseraith site, according to Kelly, including a flexible work policy that facilitates flexible start times and gives employees the ability to work from home. "We have an open-plan office with collaboration areas," says Kelly. "We have focused on being able to support differently abled individuals on the site, and also set up mothers' rooms, genderless bathrooms, and a casual dress code to accommodate different nationalities."

Implementing and encouraging the changes has had a positive effect on

employees, suggests Kelly. "It has impacted our culture and engagement immensely. We want employees to bring their authentic selves to work and to use their perspectives to contribute in a unique and meaningful way to our mission at Bristol-Myers Squibb. Further on from this, and part of the diversity and inclusion engagement team, we have a number of people and business resource groups which are an important part of the wellbeing and engagement fabric at BMS."

Globally, BMS has people and business resource groups in 45 countries, which serve to support the career advancement and development needs of employees. "Over 17,000 employees worldwide are engaged in these groups, such as B-NOW: Bristol-Myers Squibb network of women and CLIMB: cultivating leadership and innovation for Millennials and beyond," says Kelly.

'An employer of choice'

"Our D&I engagement team have recently announced plans to engage in the reverse mentoring programme," says Kelly. The programme offers an alternative to the tra-

ditional mentoring model, allowing younger workers to share knowledge with older colleagues. "We want to be an employer of choice and in less than 10 years, millennials will represent 75 per cent of the global workforce. Presently 80 per cent of our workforce on the Cruiseraith site fits into this group so we are focused on talent development, connectivity, and innovation by promoting intergenerational relationship-building, and leveraging the energy and influence of this and the next-generation workforce," he says.

As well as having a positive impact on employees, implementing a robust and transformative D&I policy has a palpable interest on brand and business, suggests Kelly. "It is hugely influential on employer brand and value proposition – we can see this reputation impact when we visit career fairs, or speak to peers in the network. Our employees are our most valuable ambassadors and their word of mouth drives the reputation of our inclusive culture and work policies at BMS. Not only will diversity and inclusion strengthen your relationship with current employees as it impacts how the internal workforce thinks about

■ The Bristol-Myers Squibb team at the Dublin Pride parade: the company has been recognised as a best place to work by leading LGBT organisations.

an organisation, but also what external audiences perceive. "Ultimately, when we think of business performance, our focus is on how a world-class diverse workforce will help us innovate and generate new ideas or ways of working, to improve how we serve our patients," says Kelly, who suggests that a transformational model needs to be systemic in order to facilitate deep-rooted organisational and individual change. "Diversity and inclusion have become increasingly important to organisational success and can impact corporate reputation, internal culture, community development and competitive advantage," he says.

"These behaviours encourage us to eradicate unconscious bias and drive inclusivity as a habit, and I think this has really impacted us as a company in driving morale of our people – encouraging participation and thus business performance."



Building a brighter future for your company starts with building a diverse and inclusive workforce. This requires an investment of time and resources – gathering data on your workforce and giving it careful analysis to support decisions grounded in both economics and empathy. The success of your efforts depends on demonstrating just how gender parity contributes to the performance of your business – and tracking your company's progress.

Since 2014, **When Women Thrive** has been building brighter futures by providing organisations around the world with compelling insights and action plans for accelerating their diversity, inclusion and equity strategies. We invite you to take our next-generation global survey and benchmark your progress on gender equity.

Access the survey at www.whenwomenthrive.net/survey, and become part of this important research.



Creating a safe and welcoming environment

UCD's Gender Identity and Expression Policy, adopted in 2017, was the CIPD Diversity and Inclusion Award winner earlier this year. According to the award citation, the judges were impressed by "the thoughtful design and implementation, the co-creation and inclusive approach with students and staff and then the influencing of significant structural changes to buildings. This initiative redefined the boundaries of the HR role and demonstrated how HR built a strong voice that delivered impact and scale."

The Gender Identity and Expression policy was a radical initiative that led to a cultural transformation within the university. The policy was developed following university-wide consultation and has resulted in the creation of a supportive environment for gender identity and expression. "One of our objectives is to create an inclusive culture for the entire university community, which is made up of staff, students and visitors and anyone who comes onto the campus," says Rory Carey, UCD's director of culture and engagement. "What sets it apart is the nature of UCD itself. We could have just done a gender identity and expression policy for staff and left it at that. You see that in a lot of organisations. But we had to do it for students as well. UCD is a global university and we have students from all over the world. Wherever you come from, irrespective of your gender identity, you can express yourself the way you want to here in UCD."

The scale of the university also set it apart. "UCD is about the same size as Drogheda," Carey says. "When you count all our employees and students, there are more than 40,000 people

here. When we were rolling out the initiative, we needed to ensure every facet was represented on project groups." The initiative began at the very top, according to UCD equality, diversity and inclusion manager Marcellina Fogarty. "We need to engage and get the support of the senior management team, including the president," she says. "We kept them involved throughout the development of the policy. When it came to the approval stage, there were no surprises. We established a representative working group made up of staff, students, LGBT community representatives, student advisers and so on. We also engaged with Transgender Equality Network Ireland to ensure we were adopting best practice around gender identity and expression."

Far beyond mere signage
The physical expression of the policy went far beyond mere signage. "A lot of places just put up signs," says Carey. "But this poli-



■ Donal O'Donoghue, managing director, Sanderson Recruitment, sponsors of the CIPD Diversity and Inclusion award, with Marcellina Fogarty, strategic equality, diversity and inclusion manager at UCD and Rory Carey, director of culture and engagement, UCD, at the CIPD HR Awards last February. PHOTOGRAPH: PAUL SHERWOOD

cy is integrated into the university's broader diversity and respect policy. It's about respect in the workplace and the classroom. We spent quite a lot of time training staff before launch to ensure that everyone is familiar with the policy and how to deal with people in a respectful and sensitive manner."

While signage has changed, so too have facilities. "We have gone from a situation where transgender facilities were not always available, where people might have had to walk long distances to a toilet and it had become a human rights issue, to one where facilities are available in every building," Carey says. Another aspect is the student registration process. "They have to go through this to get their student card and so on," he explains. "We have stripped out bureaucracy to allow students change their name without needing official documentation to do so."

Students also receive all graduation documentation in the

name of their choosing rather than what appears on their birth certificate.

"Everyone, staff and students, can now self-declare their gender whether that's male, female or gender non-binary and so on," says Fogarty. "We have also changed the language we use and that has had a big impact on our culture. We ask what pronouns people prefer we use. We recognise that people have different gender identities and that's okay."

The real test is the impact on the university's transgender population, according to Carey. "It has to be transformative for them. They have to feel that they can use facilities on campus without fear or embarrassment or having the feeling of being a second-class citizen. The feedback from the transgender community has been very positive. They can see that the university is taking the issue seriously and that we are mainstreaming it into everyday life on campus."

Ten top trends in diversity and inclusion

From gender pay gap reporting to parental leave to mental health support, organisations are embracing the latest advancements in D&I

Sandra O'Connell

1 Transparency is here
Log on to the BBC news website (bbc.com/news/business-47212342) and you'll find a widget that allows you type in the name of UK companies such as Marks & Spencer to see its reported gender pay gap. M&S has a reported (by itself) pay gap of 4.2 per cent in favour of men, which means, the BBC explains, that for every £10 the average man earns, the average woman takes home £9.58. Such transparency will put pressure on all organisations to close the gap right? Well, yes, except the retailer's previously reported pay gap was 3.3 per cent.
In its favour, the company's pay gap is lower than the average of UK companies that had reported, which is 9.6 per cent.

2 More than box-ticking
Research from law firm Pinsent Masons into the effects of gender pay reporting legislation in the UK found that some employers are going beyond the regulatory requirements and disclosing additional information in relation to ethnicity, sexual orientation and disability pay gaps too. Other instances of proactive reporting are seeing some employers

give a breakdown of the gender make-up of their organisation, including at board level, and describing the actions they are taking to redress imbalances. In addition, hundreds of employers with fewer than 250 employees voluntarily disclose their GPG, despite not being legally obliged to do so.

3 Academics are weighing in
The launch of the DCU Centre of Excellence for Diversity and Inclusion provides all employers with access to the very latest in academic research, insights and tools on workplace diversity and inclusion. Getting it right is a combination of policy and best practice. Says director Sandra Healy: "It's about hearts and minds. You can have all the policy you like, but it has to be delivered in practice."

4 Mental health is moving centre stage
A significant shift has taken place in relation to employers and mental health. More are seeking out ways to support employees and proactively putting measures in place to enhance overall staff wellbeing. New research from Ibec shows the number of organisations offering stress management and mental wellbeing programmes has doubled in the last five years. Fostering a workplace that is supportive to mental health disclosures starts with



culture. "We can't expect someone to disclose about their mental health if it doesn't feel safe for them to do so. The organisation needs to signpost to its workforce that they can safely disclose and that support is available," says Kara McGann, head of social policy at Ibec.

5 What's getting measured is getting done
Ibec's KeepWell Mark provides organisations with a recognised accreditation in workplace wellbeing. Enrolling in the programmes provides Irish businesses with an assessment tool to help them conduct an extensive audit of all aspects of their corporate wellness practice.

Participation also includes the services of an expert assess-

or who will support the business in identifying – and making – the changes required to improve its performance in relation to wellbeing. The Irish Centre for Diversity, supported by Ibec and the DCU Centre of Excellence for Diversity and Inclusion, has introduced a Diversity and Inclusion mark for Irish businesses to support best practice too.

6 Technology is helping
Organisations are turning to technology tools to reduce the risk of gender and other biases. Apps such as Gender Decoder and Textio are being used to ensure language is gender-neutral, particularly for job adverts. "D&I technology has the potential to be a disruptor to the structural biases, intentional or not, that hide in our process and behaviours,"

says Mercer's Helen McCarthy. "They can help remove biases in relation to talent acquisition, development, engagement and retention."

7 Employers are preparing
Research from Mercer indicates almost three quarters of companies in Ireland agree with mandatory reporting, and two thirds believe it will make a difference. But businesses are also concerned about the potential risks to their reputation, particularly if their performance is poor relative to Ireland's estimated average of 13.9 per cent.

Mercer's research found more than two thirds of companies in Ireland are concerned about the potential reputational risks of gender pay gap reporting, with half worried

about the cost that addressing pay differentials might impose on their business.

8 Sectoral approaches are growing
The DCU-led Irish Centre for Diversity is launching its Year of Inclusion for the Aviation Industry. It makes sense, points out Sandra Healy, head of diversity and inclusion at the university, given that worldwide, only 7 per cent of pilots are women.

Research from Mason Hayes & Curran, a law firm, which publishes a Gender and Diversity in Aviation survey, found that while 71 per cent of respondents said women make up more than 30 per cent of total headcount, only 16 per cent said women make up more than 30 per cent of senior roles.

9 Childcare seen as a societal issue, not a women's issue

Shared parental leave is helping to ensure issues relating to childcare are not restricted to women. Organisations are increasingly seeing the value of having parents share parental leave, and are striving to ensure their policies support that.

Internationally, there are no prizes for guessing that the Nordic countries rank highest for parental leave, according to Unicef research. In Norway and Sweden, almost all fathers take some parental leave.

10 Salaries are being spoken about
In Europe, the pay gap between women and men, in their first job, is

€4,255, according to Catalyst. After five years, the pay gap widens to €36,304. While some attempt to explain this by saying women are not negotiating, research shows the opposite, says Sandra Ondraschek-Norris, the consultancy's vice-president of Global MARC (Men Advocating Real Change) Learning. Transparency around pay is essential to stop the culture of secrecy, says Catalyst, which calls on employers to ensure salaries, or salary bands, are published, along with explanations and discussions, to ensure clear and open lines of communications.

PHOTOGRAPH: ISTOCK



Keeping the inclusion message fresh

SANDRA O'CONNELL

To keep diversity and inclusion fresh, it helps to innovate new ways of delivering the message.

"Some of our member companies are engaging in ally projects, where training is given to one person to speak for others who might struggle to speak up in a difficult situation," says Kara McGann of Ibec.

"We're also seeing the introduction of a disability passport, whereby a person agrees the reasonable accommodation they need to be able to do their job to the fullest extent and so, in the case of promotion or getting a new boss, they don't have to tell their story all over again."

Employers are increasingly checking their job advertisements for bias too, putting the text through apps such as Gender Decoder for Job Ads, and Textio, to ensure language is gender-neutral.

"It's about only putting in the essential job skills required for the job, to make sure there is not something in your language that is putting people off. In particular, we know the research shows that women will only apply if they can do 100 per cent of the job spec, while men will have a go when they see they have 60 per cent

of the skills or experience required."

Organisations are being increasingly proactive on this front, reaching in to their staff cohort if they see women aren't coming through sufficiently and asking why they haven't applied for a role, suggesting that they do so.

"It's about encouraging women to say what their concerns are, and then addressing them. It's about innovating lots of little stuff, which all adds up to a more diverse and inclusive culture," says McGann.

Storytelling is a really effective way of engaging people with diversity and inclusion. Deloitte used this very effectively recently with two innovative photography projects.

"Taking a social advocacy research method, PhotoVoice, not used in the corporate world before, we facilitated people at Deloitte to share their stories using photography," says Valarie Daunt, Deloitte's partner in human capital management.

The first project focused on cultural diversity, with 11 people from nine different countries working in Deloitte Ireland taking photos symbolising the benefits and challenges of working and living in Ireland.

"We then created an art exhibition and a catalogue to showcase their captioned photos to

their leaders and colleagues. The visual impact of the photos alongside the personal stories created a step change in engagement across the firm, as people were able to connect with the individual and the stories in a totally different way to data from a focus group or survey," she says.

'Incredibly powerful'
The second PhotoVoice project was with 11 parents who took photos representing what it is like to juggle having a family with progressing a career at Deloitte.

"It's about encouraging women to say what their concerns are, and then addressing them"

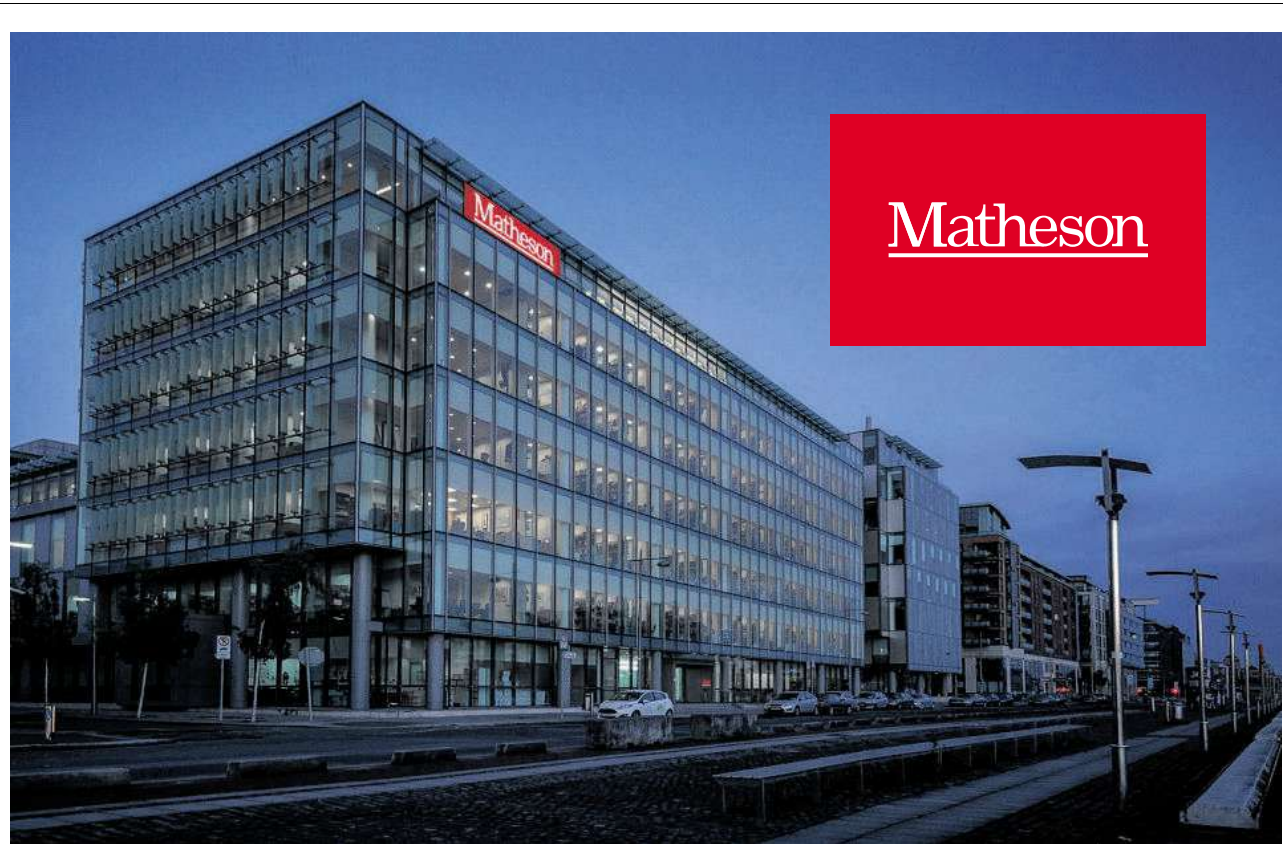
What is innovative about it is that it borrows from best practice in another sector. "Organisations where safety is a key concern, such as construction and energy, sometimes have a similar 'safety moment' to continually reinforce the importance of a key priority within the organisation," says Daunt. "Taking two minutes at the start of each meeting is another way of reminding people of the importance placed on inclusion and a good way of sharing stories, which people remember more easily."

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Championing mental health in the workplace

A stigma still exists around mental health in the workplace, something progressive companies are working hard to change

DANIELLE BARRON

Ireland has one of the highest rates of mental-health illness in Europe, with estimates that one in four of us will experience some mental-health problems during our lifetime.

Despite growing awareness, mental illness remains a taboo topic, particularly in the workplace. Efforts are ongoing to alleviate this stigma and prevent discrimination due to mental-health issues, but are they going far enough?

Dr Gavin Breslin is a senior lecturer in sport and exercise psychology at the School of Sport, Ulster University, who has carried out extensive research into mental health and wellbeing interventions. He says mental health is still “the poor relation” to physical health; this is evident from the relatively poor resourcing the area receives, an issue he says must be addressed by Government.

“Mental-health issues are not visible, and they are not given the same support as those with physical health problems,” Breslin says.

He says an employment culture persists where there is still significant stigma and discrimination attached to mental health and mental illness.

“People are afraid to come out and say anything about their mental health,” he says. “They are often afraid to be perceived as weak. When it comes to employment, they are afraid to come forward as they worry they will be seen as troublesome, and ‘rocking the boat’, when they should be getting on with their jobs.”

Breslin admits awareness has increased thanks to large public health campaigns but cautions, “we are still not there yet – there is more awareness but not enough intervention”. Companies wanting to prove they are supportive of employees experiencing mental-health issues need to show they have an “action plan”, he adds.

“Any employee review needs to take a holistic approach and not just use performance indicators – organisations need to start showing they are interested in the employee as a person.”

Worsening picture

Recent research in the UK shows a worsening picture in the workplace, with nearly two-thirds of people having experienced a mental-health issue due to work and one in three formally diagnosed with a mental-health condition. Aisling Kelly, senior healthcare consultant at Mercer Ireland, says issues such as financial uncertainty and workplace stress can cause negative mental-health symptoms like loss of sleep, lack of concentration and fatigue.

“Employers are increasingly aware of the impact these stresses can have on employees’ mental health,” she says.

While employees experiencing mental-health difficulties are protected from discrimination at work under the equality Acts, Kelly agrees with Breslin that stigma remains an issue in many organisations.

“Employers are increasingly aware of



“It would be great if we said stigma doesn’t exist but that’s simply not true

easier it will be for them to recognise symptoms of ill health and also to open up a conversation about potential supports,” says Mohan.

Stigma still persists

Despite a growing openness and understanding around mental health in society, stigma still persists in the workplace, says Kate Dodd, diversity and inclusion consultant at law firm Pinsent Masons.

“There is no doubt that this stigma remains and any workforce who is being honest with themselves has to tackle stigma. It would be great if we said stigma doesn’t exist but that’s simply not true,” she says.

Dodd says Pinsent Masons has been working to spread the message about the universal nature of mental-health problems – no one is immune.

“We try to make it very clear that everyone has mental health, the same way we all have physical health. A key message is that we are all on a spectrum, we all move between feeling extremely mentally healthy and other times when we are extremely stressed.”

Exemplifying this approach, when the firm developed its mental health strategy three years ago, the managing partner was appointed as the sponsor.

“Our very deliberate strategy was to have the most senior lawyer in our firm involved in this, to make it very clear to all of our people that we want to talk about this and we want to listen, and we want to tackle it as a business and it is absolutely no barrier to progression within our firm. Every message comes directly from him. We had to make people sure that it was okay to say they are struggling with their mental health, that it wouldn’t affect them getting on in the business,” Dodd says.

John Sisk & Son is another company that has been making a concerted effort to bring mental health to the fore in the workplace. “As a construction company, it’s a predominantly male environment,” says Sean Fitzpatrick, human resources director at the company. “We are trying to make it okay to talk about mental health.”

The company carries out a series of roadshows every year, and top of the agenda in 2018 was mental health.

“The CEO, myself and an external speaker were saying if you are feeling a little bit under pressure, it’s okay to put your hand up. This helps bring it out into the open,” Fitzpatrick says, adding that Sisk has also sponsored the Mental Health and Wellbeing Summit for the past three years.

Fitzpatrick explains that Sisk sought out experts in mental health in order to get their messaging right – for example, they worked with rugby pundit and mental-health advocate Brent Pope and Prof Jim Lucey of St Patrick’s Mental Health Services. “We have been engaging with experts in this space in order to develop an overall approach, as we want to engage the whole workforce on this,” he says.

“It’s natural for people to be reluctant to say they have a mental-health issue, but the message is that it’s okay not to feel okay and that it’s absolutely okay to ask for help.”

their responsibilities in this area and so many are putting supports in place for individuals and encouraging discussions to break down stigma,” she says.

This can range from having an employee assistance programme (typically an advice/counselling hotline) to holding specific wellbeing events targeting mental health. Many organisations that are actively trying to break down these barriers have developed mental-health champions within the business and regularly provide access to programmes such as cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) or mindfulness,

adds Kelly.

Shane Mohan is one of those mental-health champions. A consulting partner at Deloitte, he says one of the key things businesses can do is to open up the conversation around mental health in order to reduce the silence and stigma surrounding it.

“At Deloitte, we were one of the first signatories of the See Change green ribbon campaign and pledge to end the stigma around mental illness in workplaces. We have trained a number of mental-health champions with people from across the

business attending a two-day mental health first aid training to be able to act as a first point of contact for anyone struggling with their own mental health or seeking advice on how to support a colleague,” he explains.

Deloitte has a dedicated employee assistance programme available to its employees and the company also arranged for a monthly drop-in clinic with a psychologist onsite at its offices. The month of May is specifically dedicated to mental-health awareness, with a variety of speaker events and connectivity initiatives.

■ “People are afraid to come out and say anything about their mental health. They are often afraid to be perceived as weak.

PHOTOGRAPH: ISTOCK

“We also encourage regular check-ins between managers and their teams to ensure that people have a regular touchpoint with their managers so that any issues can be picked up more quickly. The better managers know their people individually, the

Diversity and inclusion can’t just be lip service

DANIELLE BARRON

Diversity and inclusion may be namechecked in the mission statements of most large organisations, but when it comes to its everyday execution, how do you embed it into company culture and not simply pay lip service to lofty goals?

Lorraine Roche, HR director at law firm Matheson, says she has seen huge change in terms of how firms approach D&I in the last couple of years. She believes there’s been a change in the bells-and-whistles approach, with companies bringing it back to brass tacks.

“Certainly, D&I is finally on top of everyone’s agenda but people do just pay lip service to it and try to do everything in a big, bold way. But you have to look after the basics and ensure it is embedded into the firm’s culture. That’s what we firmly believe here.”

Matheson launched a new commitment to D&I at the beginning of this year, and she says this was an opportunity to define what that meant to them as a firm.

“Obviously, the whole area of D&I is vast so we decided that to do it properly we should see what’s important to our employees and focus on that as a priority.” This led to the identification of six pillars of Matheson’s D&I commitment: generational, family, gender, LGBTQ+, multiculturalism and social mobility, and disability. Underpinning all of this is an ongoing commitment to mental health, adds Roche.

“D&I has to be everyone’s responsibility, so we invited people to become ambassadors for each pillar and they will be the spokesperson for their team when it comes to discussing D&I plans and initiatives,” she



explains. Matheson also recently hired in a dedicated D&I resource, which Roche says has been a fantastic addition.

Walking the walk
Global pharmaceutical company Bristol-Myers Squibb is another example of a company walking the walk when it comes to diversity and inclusion, with a number of initiatives designed to ensure D&I is an inherent part of company culture.

According to HR lead Louise Prendergast, it’s not simply about having an inclusive hiring policy – she says the organisation is committed to ensuring every employee in the organisation is mindful of D&I in their everyday work.

“As a leadership team, we track how diverse and inclusive we are across the site and departments – this is in terms of teams, open roles and hiring as well as employee retention and attrition.”

This ensures management is

always aware of areas of the business that might need some attention with regards to D&I, she adds.

BMS also has a number of people and business resource groups (PBRGs), which serve to support the business objectives, career advancement and development needs of employees. These include B-NOW (Bristol-Myers Squibb network of women), DAWN (differently-abled workplace network) and LGBT+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and allies). Employee volunteers – as well as senior management – align themselves closely with a particular group.

“At BMS Ireland, our PBRGs have volunteer members across our three locations of Shannon, Crusierath and Plaza, each of which have a huge influence in terms of site engagement and events,” says Prendergast.

In 2018, BMS launched the POSSIBILITY Lives campaign globally, according to Prender-

■ How do you embed it into company culture and not simply pay lip service to lofty goals?

gast, this behavioural and communications initiative aims to help shape a culture of inclusion using ground-breaking science, habit formation and specific actions directly tied to the BMS behaviours. “Employees are encouraged to adopt habits in order to create a more inclusive environment,” she explains.

To do D&I in a half-hearted way is to do all employees a disservice, both women agree.

“If it’s going to be embedded into the strategic goals of the business, it has to be part of the culture. This feeds into everything – for example, in meetings, we encourage diversity of ideas, diversity of thought, etc.,” says Roche.

“At BMS we encourage our people to look through the lens of inclusivity at all times,” adds Prendergast.



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Bristol-Myers Squibb



Deloitte's inclusive people leadership and agile working

KEVIN GLEESON

A quick look at Deloitte's Irish website and you will see it says "it's their people who make it succeed".

Torunn Dahl, head of employee relations, inclusion and wellbeing with the company says: "Deloitte's purpose is to make an impact that matters for our clients, people and society. Having a culture with real diversity of thought is the only way we will succeed in coming up with different solutions required by our clients."

She adds: "An inclusive culture is necessary to attract the best people to Deloitte and to ensure they are set up to succeed and contribute their insights."

With companies gaining greater insight into how creating an inclusive culture can drive momentum of diversity programming and therefore productivity, what are some of the ways in which Deloitte aims to do this?

"A few of the things we have focused on in recent years has been promoting a culture of inclusive people leadership and enhancing our approach to agile working to the benefit of everyone at Deloitte," says Dahl. "All of our senior leaders have attended inclusive leadership workshops, which are essentially facilitated conversations around the leadership behaviours we expect and the risks of allowing unconscious biases to influence our decisions. We also provide 360 degree feedback for our leaders and review each year whether the questions being asked are driving the right culture."

Chronic workplace stress is on the rise among Irish workers, resulting in burnout, recently recognised by the World Health Organisation as a legitimate medical condition. Is this something that would fall under the remit of an inclusive workplace environment?

'Time Out' policy

"From an agile working perspective, we launched a new 'Time Out' policy in the last year whereby anyone at De-

loitte with a year's service can apply for a month's unpaid leave to pursue a personal interest or just to unplug and take an extended break from work," says Dahl.

With many practical approaches in place within Deloitte, Dahl says the company also adopts creative strategies to support diversity and inclusion.

"We have also run two really innovative projects using photography to explore in more depth the challenges parents face juggling families and careers, as well as exploring the challenges people from other countries face working

"An inclusive culture is necessary to attract the best people to Deloitte"

and integrating into an Irish work environment. The visual impact of these PhotoVoice projects enabled us to change the dialogue around inclusion as it engaged people at an emotional level."

Most employees now understand that nurturing a diverse and inclusive environment for employees can see a sharp rise in productivity, but what does Dahl believe are some of the direct benefits of this type of environment for employees?

"The number one benefit is

that people can express and be themselves more fully at work, as the very nature of the diversity means there is no longer 'one type' of person, with people expending energy trying to conform to that mould," says Dahl.

"Another benefit is that it makes the workplace a more interesting and stimulating place to work. Working with people who have contrasting opinions or ideas challenges us to be better and look at solutions in different ways, from different angles. While sometimes this is challenging for people, we strongly believe that it stretches people and develops their critical thinking skills."

Does being part of a such diverse and inclusive company have direct impact on Dahl herself?

"Earlier this year, I participated in a research project at Deloitte, looking at the challenges experienced by parents juggling family responsibilities with career progression. While some of the stories shared as part of that project made for tough reading for our executive group, our CEO recognised the importance of communicating the full catalogue of stories in the report completely, not just internally but also with our clients, who are also grappling with similar challenges."

"I was very proud to work for Deloitte that day."



Torunn Dahl: 'Working with people who have contrasting opinions or ideas challenges us to be better'

Who has responsibility for D&I?

The best organisations have worked hard to embed a culture where people at all levels are clear on the expectations around values and behaviours and feel personally accountable for living them

DANIELLE BARRON

There's obviously a wider organisational responsibility to promote and achieve diversity and inclusion but who should be responsible for making it an everyday reality? Should it come from HR, C-suites or the employees themselves? And how can each employee play a role in ensuring their organisation is fostering a diverse and inclusive workforce?

The broad consensus is that driving an inherent adherence to D&I principles is the responsibility of everyone in an organisation. Colin Scott is vice-president for equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) and dean of social sciences at University College Dublin. He says at UCD they talk about EDI "being everyone's business".

"At UCD, we recognise that advancing equality, diversity and inclusion requires both leadership at university management team level, organisational support and also mainstreaming with our heads of unit, people managers and all employees," he explains. "I think it is important to build engagement from all employees, including managers, with the reasons of seeking to remove barriers to equality, celebrating diversity and promoting inclusion."

He sees EDI as a responsibility that someone must take seriously, whether it is engaging in training programmes or reporting something they feel contravenes these principles. "Responsibilities range between knowing about our policies and getting training on them, as appropriate, acting on inappropriate behaviours, to promoting behaviours going beyond our policies, to promote a positive culture that is inclusive in a deep sense that allows staff and students to be themselves and to contribute to the wellbeing and development of the university community," he says.

Management team

Scott was the first vice-president for equality, diversity and inclusion at the university and he works closely with colleagues in the university management team on leading strategy, policy and cultural change in respect of EDI. He says UCD has a golden opportunity to foster diversity and inclusion in its graduates before they enter the workforce. "As a university, we engage students with everything we are doing and recognise that the commitments and behaviours of our students and alumni are central to achieving a more equal, diverse and inclusive world," he says.

In a large organisation, a

top-down approach is necessary, says Will Cronin, head of culture, diversity and inclusion at AIB.

"The CEO, the executive team and board of directors are responsible for ensuring that the organisation should have a clear and actionable diversity and inclusion strategy, aligned to the organisation's purpose. That strategy is then executable right down throughout the organisation, with the tone from the top, through a

"Without inclusion, there will be no diversity of thought so inclusion should be a strategic priority for all senior leadership teams"

programme of meaningful actions and initiatives," he says.

Fundamentally, all employees across the organisation are responsible for ensuring a diverse and inclusive culture exists, says Cronin. This is made possible through the organisation's policies and codes and also through a programme of initiatives, he adds.

These types of initiatives include managing inclusivity

workshops and unconscious bias training, which the bank has run for more than 1,000 leaders across the organisation. "These create awareness, and also show the benefits in the areas of talent, succession and the development of our teams in a more inclusive way," says Cronin.

"Diversity and inclusion has to be led from the top and lived by all throughout the organisation."

These sentiments are echoed by John Mercer, chief executive of Mercer Ireland, who believes D&I is not the responsibility of one person or one group of people.

"Everyone in the organisation has a role. The C-suite sets the tone at the top by establishing D&I as a business priority and allocating resources and funding. HR is responsible for implementing policies and practices, and employees are responsible for open-mindedness towards diverse perspectives and fostering an inclusive culture," he says.

"While all three of these are important stakeholders, leaders at all levels are the key to creating a diverse workplace with an inclusive culture as they are often making the people decisions around hiring, development, advancement, engagement," he adds.

Torunn Dahl, head of employee relations, engagement, diversity and inclusion at Deloitte, believes the senior leadership team should have overall responsibility for D&I. She agrees with Cronin that a top-down approach will be the most successful.

"There is enough scientific evidence establishing the business case that diversity of thought leads to better results. Without inclusion, there will be no diversity of thought so inclusion should be a strategic priority for all senior leadership teams," she says.

Senior leaders

Dahl sees HR having a smaller role. And while employees have their own individual role to play, it is inevitable they will take their cues from senior leaders in an organisation when it comes to being inclusive and promoting diversity.

"HR might support in implementing the strategy but they cannot drive a culture of inclusion unless senior leaders are bought in and fully behind the importance of D&I as a priority," she says.

"Employees are responsible too, as everyone is responsible for their individual behaviours and ensuring they are not excluding people. Nonetheless, people do take their cues from an organisation's leaders, values and culture, hence the importance of the tone and accountability at the C-suite level."

On the ground, it is imperative that individuals and managers ensure they personally treat everyone they work with in an inclusive manner and challenge lack of inclusion anywhere they see it, she adds.

"Challenging processes or behaviours that could be more inclusive can take courage, but if it is framed positively people can do this without causing offence. For example, suggesting how a process might be improved by inviting some different viewpoints rather than focusing on the fact that only certain people were asked to give

Should responsibility for diversity and inclusion come from HR, C-suites or the employees themselves?

PHOTOGRAPH: ISTOCK

input." People can also offer to champion an initiative and get more involved in their company networks, she adds.

"The best organisations have worked hard to embed a culture where people at all levels are clear on the expectations around values and behaviours and feel personally accountable for living them," says Dahl.

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Tackling the 'default male' bias

'We simply cannot afford to have half of our best talent sitting on the bench' says the Minister for Finance

PASCHAL DONOHOE

As a people we have always had a strong entrepreneurial spirit, a strong sense of business acumen. We travelled the world building cities and breaking new ground on a whole host of business frontiers. Where there was opportunity the Irish were never far behind.

The task ahead of us is to ensure that Ireland's continued business focus provides a foundation for a more inclusive form of prosperity and builds further on our innovation.

To innovate you need to be open. Over recent months I have regularly discussed the need, and argued, for political and economic openness, in our role in the European Union. I want to restate the case for continued and increasing openness and transparency in our society, through our labour market. This must start at the top and, at these levels, unfortunately Ireland is progressing too slowly. Breaking into board membership or senior leadership teams should not be about your gender, what school you went to or your eligibility to join the "old boys' club". Everyone should earn their stripes and face the same challenges and, most importantly, be able to avail of opportunities equally.

Seeing the evolution in the landscape of senior business leaders in modern Ireland, I am left in no doubt as to the overwhelming benefits to us all when we embrace openness and allow fairer competitive forces to shape destinies. Increased diversity of thought and openness have been key to bringing us where we are. But we must maintain and accelerate progress. We have to make sure that the potential business leaders of tomorrow are not side-lined because of their gender. We must take the best indigenous talent and attract the best international talent.

'Default male bias'

The feminist campaigner and author Caroline Criado-Perez writes in her extraordinary recent book *Invisible Women* of the habit of the "default male" bias. All of us in business and political life must renew our efforts to guard against this.

I believe we are improving in this regard and to accelerate this progress the



“

Companies cannot continue to disregard the call for change, and to ignore the proven business benefits of balance on boards

– Paschal Donohoe

Government is sponsoring a business-led initiative to drive gender balance in corporate leadership. Balance for Better Business set targets in May of this year for the boards of companies listed on the Euronext Dublin markets. The Review Group, co-chaired by Brid Horan and Gary Kennedy, set a target of 33 per cent females on the boards of the top 20 listed companies and 25 per cent on the boards of the smaller listed companies by 2023. The Group also set a target of no all-male boards by the end of 2020, a call that has been highlighted by my colleague, Minister David Stanton.

Our purpose with this initiative is to actively encourage and support major Irish companies to achieve better gender balance in their leadership teams.

Companies cannot continue to disregard the call for change, and to ignore the proven business benefits of balance on boards. Alternative actions to drive change, such as quotas, have been successfully pursued by a number of other European countries.

Stubbornly resistant

While results due to be published by the Review Group next month will show significant progress on achieving the 33 per cent target, all-male boards are proving stubbornly resistant to change. To date, only one of the all-male boards identified in the May report has announced the appointment of a female director.

Balance for Better Business will continue to monitor progress among listed company boards and is extending its work in future reports to encompass leadership teams and to include leading private companies and multinational companies here in Ireland. This is important work.

To compete globally and to keep our society changing in the way we want it to, we need to bring our best players to the fore, whatever their gender.

We simply cannot afford to have half of our best talent sitting on the bench or unable to avail of the equal opportunity to succeed.

We cannot build the companies and economy of the future without more women on the leadership teams of our top firms. And socially we cannot tolerate a system that restricts the opportunities of our fellow citizens, our colleagues, our family and our friends like this.

I look forward to seeing business in Ireland actively embracing the opportunity to enhance performance, deepen customer understanding and improve overall governance by achieving gender balanced leadership and developing a genuinely inclusive workplace culture for all our talented workforce.

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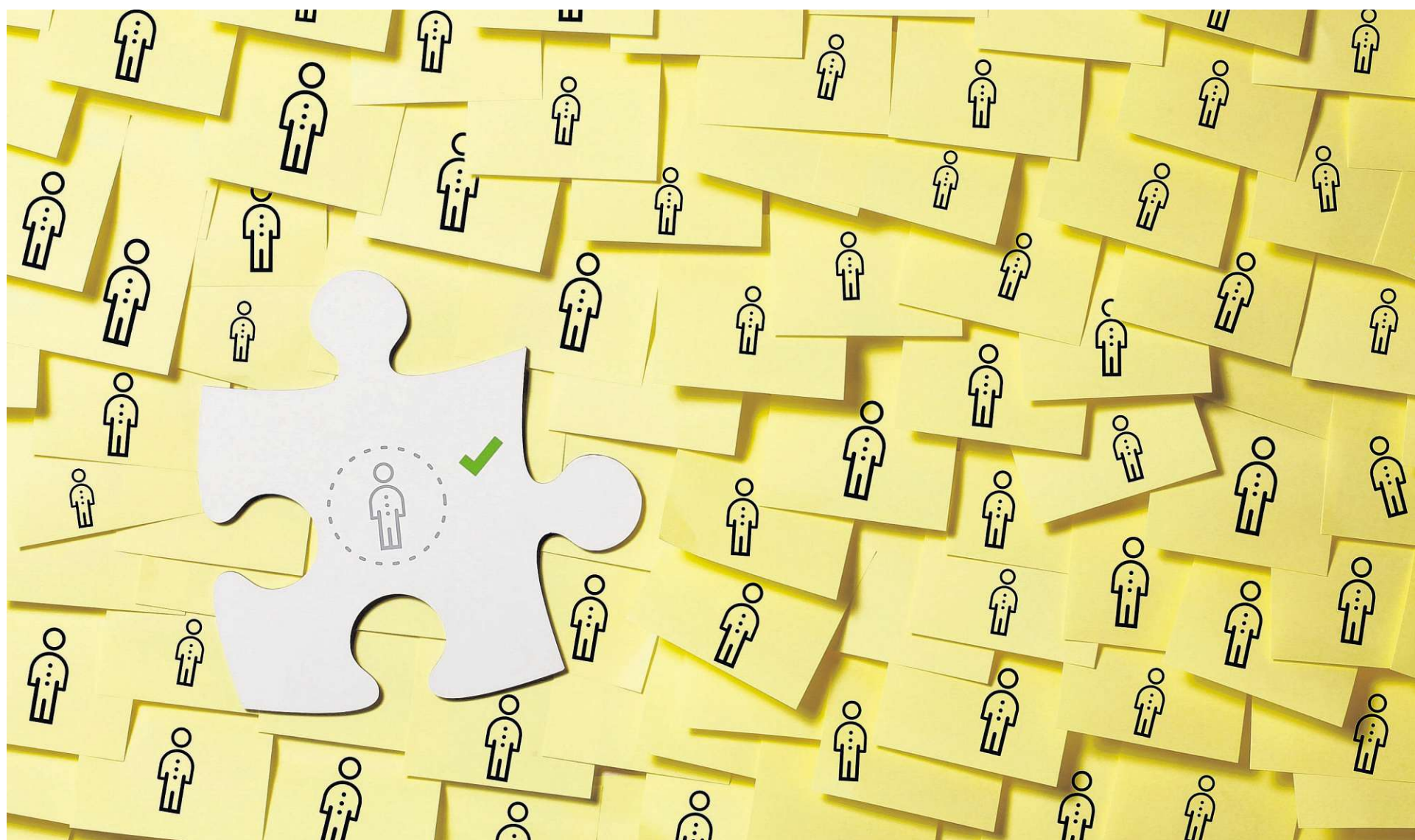
PWN MEMBER OF THE YEAR – Virginia Otel.

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The race to remove unconscious bias from the workplace

Companies are using diversity and inclusion technology to change toxic culture at work

DAVE PHILLIPS

In May last year Starbucks shut down more than 8,000 of its US outlets to deliver a workshop on discrimination and unconscious bias to more than 175,000 employees, following the wrongful arrest of two black men who had sat in a Starbucks shop in Philadelphia without ordering coffee.

The arrest, and Starbucks' subsequent response, highlighted the need for companies to be aware of the impact that biases have in the workplace, and the workshops took place within a larger trend of companies developing more robust policies concerning diversity and inclusion. Coupled with the growth of AI, many organisations are investigating and implementing new technologies to address the issue of bias.

"I'm almost 20 years here and over that time there has

been a lot of change," says David Lawson, director of IT at Matheson. Matheson was recently recognised at the Financial Times Innovative Lawyers Awards Europe 2019 for innovation in diversity and inclusion, and received the ranking of Ireland's most innovative law firm. Earlier this year, they became the first Irish law firm to be awarded the Investors in Diversity silver standard from the Irish Centre of Diversity.

Valued and respected

"We've moved from what I'd describe as a fairly traditional law firm 20 years ago to now a more diverse and mobile workforce," says Lawson. "That has really shaped things for us, to help fit a more diverse world. Our focus is on driving a diverse and inclusive workplace where all of our colleagues and their contributions and perspectives are valued and re-

spected."

Many of the emerging technologies designed to counter biases in the workplace are products aimed to be used by employers at the talent acquisition stage.

"There is a big focus on AI at the moment," says Lawson. "AI can use predictive analysis based on the data that is in somebody's CV rather than basing it on a face-to-face interaction with that person, that can allow employers to come up

Applied correctly, technology can enable scalable, consistent decision-making while also alerting users to previously hidden patterns of bias

with a more abstract assessment of that person's skills. New technologies allow potential employers to anonymise applications by removing elements such as the applicant's name, date of birth or gender."

Effectively blinding details that are potential areas of bias in recruitment may facilitate a fairer approach for applicants; however, the key role that technology can play in promoting diversity and inclusivity within organisations is through flexibility, suggests Lawson.

"It is not just relying on what that AI delivers, it's more about combining the data with the human assessment as well. Whilst we continue to invest and deploy technology leveraging and programmes that drive data anonymity, the technology also supports programmes such as our Agile Working programme which we launched earlier this year to enable greater flexibility and work-life blend. We recognise that not everybody works in the same way and to the same schedule, and that agile working arrangements are fundamental to achieving real workplace diversity."

It is not just in recruitment that diversity and inclusion (D&I) technology may be useful, suggests Helen McCarthy, senior consultant at Mercer Ireland. Earlier this year, Mercer and RedThread Research published a comprehensive overview of how technology can be applied to D&I. The report credits the #MeToo movement as a social flashpoint that has brought into light the effect that unhealthy cultures within companies and organisation can have.

D&I technology can assist employee experience polling, allowing workers to feed back their individual observations and perceptions within the company, with tools that allow anonymous reporting of experience, as well as to anonymously provide or respond to ideas. Services like these can safeguard against biases within an organisation.

"An example of this would be software that analyses communication between different groups and identifies disparities, such as a manager who consistently interacts with men more than women or consistently rates women lower than men," says McCarthy. "Technology can also help people connect with the right mentors and sponsors, surface innovative ideas, and objectively gauge skills through work sample tests," she says.

Growing field

D&I technology is a growing field, with software developers providing tools that can introduce a new level of metrics within an organisation, helping companies to reduce unconscious biases in decision-making and to promote diversity and inclusivity. However, there are risks involved as well, according to the Mercer report. These include implementing technology that may itself have a bias, based on the data sets on which the algorithm has been trained, or the biases of developers. The report also points to the danger of D&I software enabling an employee perception of "big-brother monitoring".

Mercer's report indicates that the next 18 months will see a period of continued growth for D&I technologies, as more leaders become aware of the need to address and imple-

ment effective D&I strategies within their organisations, and larger organisations allocate bigger budgets to the areas.

While a primary focus of current D&I technologies is the recruitment stage, they have potential throughout all levels of an organisation. "D&I technology can help remove bias from people decisions across the talent continuum including talent acquisition, development and advancement, engagement and retention, and analytics," says McCarthy. Mercer's report suggests that in the near future, as the market for technology based in the talent acquisition stage becomes crowded, developers will focus on

D&I technology can help remove bias from people decisions across the talent continuum including talent acquisition, development and advancement, engagement and retention, and analytics

software designed for other levels of the organisation.

"Applied correctly, technology can enable scalable, consistent decision-making while also alerting users to previously hidden patterns of bias," says McCarthy. "D&I technology has the potential to be a disruptor to the structural biases – whether intentional or not – that hide in our processes and behaviours."

Mercer reaping rewards for being inclusive

The global consultancy firm's progressive diversity and inclusion policies have improved performances

Global consultancy firm Mercer believes diversity and inclusion in the workplace are imperative for both the well-being of its employees and continued success of its business.

Joanna O'Riordan, partner, Women@Mercer leader explains: "Diversity and inclusion are embedded into our core values and we continually strive to make progress in key areas. We have a sustained focus at looking at key metrics related to diversity and inclusion and monitor those regularly. As a result, we have been able to develop some targeted goals to improve both. It's not a situation where Mercer – or any organisation for that matter – can say 'we've made it' and simply stop. It's an ongoing commitment that is at the heart of our overall business and people strategies."

talent/performance reviews, hiring, promotions and staffing of client teams."

Research has shown that team performance can increase by up to 50 per cent in diverse and inclusive working environments, what does she believe are some of the ways Mercer benefits from fostering this type of culture?

"We've actually done our own research in this area and found that our sales teams that have a higher level of gender diversity outperform those that don't. That's very likely because our clients reflect a broad range of diversity."

"We've found that our sales teams that have a higher level of gender diversity outperform those that don't"

Inclusive atmosphere

What measures is Mercer taking to achieve a diverse and inclusive atmosphere for its employees across all sectors?

"We approach diversity and inclusion broadly – gender, race and ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, generation, etc – to ensure that we're engaging the entire organisation," says O'Riordan.

"Mercer formally recognises and funds six business resource groups, each of which has chapters all over the world. The BRGs provide an engaging forum for employees to increase their awareness as well as provide those networking opportunities that are so critical to an inclusive workplace culture. We're also committed to visibly supporting our commitment to gender equality and are very proud that we have achieved EDGE certification in both the US and UK."

"We also develop our leaders and managers to fully leverage our people through an intentional approach to our talent management practices by addressing bias in

ty and it's essential that we're able to match that to truly understand and address their needs," says O'Riordan.

Research suggests that this is, in fact, being experienced by many large companies, with diverse sales teams reporting a significant impact on a company's bottom line. So when it comes to the particular needs of those teams and employees, how does O'Riordan feel highlighting diversity and inclusion within the company benefits them?

"An inclusive environment signals to employees that it's not just okay, but encouraged, to bring your whole self to work. When employees are able to be their authentic selves at work, it fuels career growth and performance. It also fuels that personal sense of belonging which boosts engagement and retention. As most employers well know, there is a real shortage of talent globally so ensuring that you're nurturing your current talent is critical and fostering inclusion is foundational to making that happen."

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Addressing workplace discrimination against people with disabilities

Smarter recruitment process and creating awareness of disability issues key to tackling problem

DAVE PHILLIPS

A key finding of an ESRI report last year on disability and discrimination was that the odds for experiencing discrimination at work, or while looking for work, were twice as high for people with disabilities, compared to those without.

With latest census figures showing more than 600,000 people with disabilities living in Ireland, the question of how to reduce discrimination for people with disabilities in the labour market remains pertinent for employers and the State.

The problem can be addressed in part by putting more focus on job criteria at recruitment phase, suggests Paul Gillen, employment partner at Pinsent Masons. "Clearly employers want to get the best person for the role. By excluding certain groups, the pool of choice for employers is significantly reduced and employers will be limited in the talent they recruit."

"At Pinsent Masons, we advise employers that they need to really think about the job role and the criteria for selecting applicants, as some criteria can have a more negative impact on certain groups," says Gillen.

Difficult

"For example some mental and physical conditions may make it difficult for an employee to work early mornings, so an employer should consider whether it is really important that a person works between 8am and 4pm. An employer should have regard to whether the criteria they have set could have such an impact on those with a disability, and where the criteria is essential to the job whether there can be any reasonable accommodations to facilitate applications from those with disabilities."

Partnering with work placement programmes for recruitment can also be beneficial, says Niamh McLoughlin, accessibility and inclusion leader within the Mercer Ireland Diversity and Inclusion Group.

"Programmes such as the Willing Able Mentoring (WAM) programme can help" says McLoughlin. "This is a work placement programme run by Ahead, the Association for Higher Education Access and Disability which promotes access to the labour market for graduates with disabilities and builds the capacity of employers to integrate disability into mainstream workplace. Under this programme, employers collaborate with WAM to offer mentored, paid work placements for graduates with disabilities."

"But the issue is not just in recruitment," she points out, "a broad range of HR policies designed to make a company more accessible and inclusive will help people with disabilities face less discrimination in the workplace."

Outside of the recruitment phase, the need for employers to educate management and employees, and restructure internal systems to reduce discrimination faced by people with disabilities is also par-



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Clearly employers want to get the best person for the role. By excluding certain groups, the pool of choice for employers is significantly reduced and employers will be limited in the talent they recruit."

amount.

"Being a more accessible and inclusive employer starts with creating awareness of disability issues in the workplace," says McLoughlin. "Such awareness also addresses the concerns and misconceptions that employers and employees may have about working with disabled people. Disability awareness training courses are run by many providers in Ireland, and are funded by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection."

Networking with other companies and organisations can also be useful, she suggests. "The Open Doors initiative offers an official forum for organisations to provide expertise and guidance to other companies who pledge to join the initiative and commit to adopting practices and policies to remove barriers to employment for marginalised groups, including people with disabilities."

While information is easily accessible for employers, there can still be a lag in im-

plementation of policies. "Most businesses are aware of their legal obligations," says Gillen, "but there can be a disconnect in applying this in practice. At Pinsent Masons we advise clients on having policies and procedures in place to deal with diversity and inclusion across all employment matters."

Legal compliance

"However, it is not just having policies and procedures on the shelf. Those operating them should have the training necessary to implement them and to challenge when changes need to be made to these," says Gillen.

"It is not all about legal compliance. Dealing with people matters requires managers to develop other skills, such as diversity and inclusion in practice, avoiding unconscious bias and how to proactively deal with matters as they arise. One key area is empowering all employees to own diversity and inclusion and to have the confidence

and the backing to call out behaviours which run contrary to diversity and inclusion in the workplace."

Internal systems to handle D&I issues within the company may also be lacking, and beneficial to focus on, according to Gillen. "Employees are now fully aware of the obligations on employers and are more likely now to seek to enforce their employment rights which is positive both for employees and for employers," he says. "The openness of this can only lead to more positive action in dealing with diversity and inclusion issues."

"What has to be in place is both the carrot and the stick," suggests Gillen. "Leaving this to employees or applicants having to enforce their rights set out in law is only effective to an extent. There should be more 'carrot' to provide effective training to employers, to assist them to put in place adequate policies and procedures. Business does not always run smoothly but where there are mistakes, proper mecha-

■ With latest census figures showing more than 600,000 people with disabilities living in Ireland, the question of how to reduce discrimination for people with disabilities in the labour market remains pertinent for employers and the State. PHOTOGRAPH: ISTOCK

nisms to correct the mistakes leads to a win-win for employee and employer."

While reducing experiences of discrimination in the labour market for people with disabilities requires the implementation of structures and D&I policy within the company, there also needs to be flexibility to work with each individual's needs, suggests McLoughlin. "Some great advice was given at the recent Irish Human Rights & Equality Commission convention on achieving equality at work," she says, "it's not about the employer guessing, it's often about asking the person what the best solution is."

AIB and employee resource groups

BARRY McCALL

AIB has developed a number of employee resource groups (ERGs) designed to foster inclusion and support staff, including Women Matters and Family Matters.

"AIB established a Women Matters group to support women to be at their best and to pave a path for women to advance into leadership positions. While women represent just over half of AIB's total workforce, they remain under-represented in the more senior managerial levels," says Mary Kennedy, who heads up the Women Matters ERG.

Fostering female inclusiveness is important for the organisation as a whole. "Keeping women at the table makes good business sense. Companies with greater gender diversity perform better, make better decisions and achieve superior customer outcomes," she says.

Key to the initiative's success is that it brings male colleagues on the equality journey too, and secures the support of the senior leadership team.

The Women Matters ERG launched a Mentor Her programme in 2018, matching some of its female employees with - male or female - colleagues from other parts of the organisation.

"The mentor is someone who can objectively advise and help their mentee as they navigate their career journey," says Kenned.

"The programme has multiple benefits, helping the mentees to better command their own career path, while also providing them with a network, both through their mentor's contacts and across the broader mentee group," she explains.



Networking is itself an important strategic objective for the group. "The ability to network is of key importance in establishing and progressing one's career. While women are typically regarded as being more social than men, according to a 2018 study by McKinsey, women tend to network considerably less than men," she points out.

AIB has sponsored the 30% Club - a campaign group which aims to increase the number of women on corporate boards - to introduce Network 30, a collaborative network of sharing and learning.

Strong role models

The forum allows women the opportunity to identify strong role models, find men-

tors and sponsors and to progress their career paths.

The ERG looks at why women are under-represented at senior AIB business levels, and sets out to identify the points at which women are "falling or stepping off the career ladder", Kennedy says.

It identified that a woman's maternity or adoptive leave experience can have a defining influence on her long-term career prospects and, indeed, her career aspirations.

"We identified the importance of inclusive leadership to ensure we support women through key life events and that, in turn, we enable them to remain seated at the table," says Kennedy.

On foot of that work, AIB partnered with external con-

■ Mary Kennedy and Annette O'Brien, of AIB Women Matters, pledging for inclusion

sultants to roll out group-wide training for its people leaders, to support them in managing inclusively.

"The key aim is to ensure that the maternity leave experience, and indeed any key life event journey, within AIB is a positive one for all our people."

"We also strongly recognise the support that AIB's working dads need in juggling work-life balance and achieving balance in our modern society today." Promoting flexible working arrangements is an important part of that.

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Gender pay gap reporting must lead to action

It's not enough to just measure gender pay, companies need to follow up with actions to address the issue, say industry experts

SANDRA O'CONNELL

The Gender Pay Gap Information Bill 2019, currently making its way through the Dáil, will require employers to publish information about the remuneration of staff by gender.

Where differences exist, it will require them to publish a statement setting out the reasons why and the measures taken, or proposed, to eliminate them.

When it was published in April this year, Minister for Justice and Equality Charlie Flanagan said the aim of the Bill was to provide transparency in relation to the gender pay gap, with firms able to report a low, or non-existent gender pay gap as an advantage when it comes to recruitment.

The provisions will apply initially to firms of 250 or more employees with the threshold reducing to 50 thereafter. It will apply to both the private and public sectors.

The detailed information that must be published under the regulations includes the mean (average) and median (middle value) gap in hourly pay between men and women. Employers will have to show the mean and median gap in the hourly pay of part-time male and female employees too.

It will include the percentage of men and of women who received a bonus as well as numbers relating to those who received benefits in kind.

The regulations may also require the publication of information on employees on temporary contracts, the percentage of employees in each of the four pay quartiles who are men and who are women and the publication of information by reference to job classifications.

The publication of a statement relating to each employer's gender pay performance will be required annually. If there is a gap, they will have to explain it and the measures being taken to reduce it.

Gender balance, diversity and inclusion are key to the competitiveness and growth of Irish business and to developing the workforce of the future, according to Kara McGann, head of social policy at Ibec.

Closing the gender pay gap (GPG) is an important part of it. "The most recent figures available put Ireland's GPG at 13.9 per cent, lower than the EU average of 16.7 per cent, and the 11th lowest of the 28, but these are 2014 figures and so likely to be out of date," she says.

Mandatory reporting will ensure such figures are kept cur-



■ There are very many societal factors contributing to the gender pay gap

“We're not getting access to 100 per cent of the talent pool available to us as a country”

rent. It will help clarify the issue in other ways too. "As a topic, gender pay gap can be confusing," says McGann, who says it is often confused with issues around equal pay, which is not quite the same.

It's not about hiring two people to do the same job and simply paying the man more. "The gender pay gap in a company represents the gap between the pay of all the men working in that company and that of all of the women. It doesn't indicate bias but if more women hold more lower-paid jobs in a company, you'll have a bigger pay gap."

It's part of the 'whole society strategy' that is required in relation to diversity and inclusion

and is a very welcome diagnostic tool for employers to use.

There are very many societal factors contributing to the gender pay gap which, McGann suggests, range from the high cost of childcare right back to the practice of girls' schools not facilitating mechanical drawing.

"These are the type of factors that force children to make the kind of career choices very early on that results in segregation later on," says McGann.

The high cost of childcare is another factor. "It often results in a partner having to step out of the workforce for a while, and more often than not, it's the woman. What these factors

show is that change requires a 'whole of society' approach. We have to stop seeing the GPG as a women's issue, and recognise it as an issue that affects all of society."

It makes sense, given that all of society suffers where a lack of inclusivity exists. "It means we're not getting access to 100 per cent of the talent pool available to us as a country. The idea that you only recruit on merit is fine, but if you are not recruiting from a pool of 100 per cent of the talent, then you are not really recruiting on merit at all."

Greater levels of diversity and inclusion are proven to benefit organisations in terms of financial performance, creativity and innovation.

Employers get that. "Gender equality is about more than equal pay for the privileged few. It is a hugely complex challenge. A diverse workplace is critical in today's rapidly-changing, globalised economy, enabling organisations to create products and services that reflect their customers' needs, fill talent gaps, and ensure sustainable growth," says David Anderson, president international at Mercer, and finalist for Manbassador of the Year award at the PWN Global Leadership Awards.

"At Mercer, we know that when women thrive, businesses thrive. We know that organisations with more women in

leadership report higher profitability and increased female participation throughout an organisation which positively impacts overall productivity. Gender diversity is good for macro-economic growth, increasing GDP and further bolstering social security systems."

Closing the GPG helps men too, of course. "It's not doing women or men any favours by not giving men access to a better work-life balance too, simply because of adherence to old-fashioned stereotypes," says McGann.

Societal shift

As such, the enactment of the Gender Pay Bill is part of that societal shift. "What gets measured gets talked about and actions result," says McGann. Having to publish figures will change the conversation, opening up questions about hidden barriers such as, perhaps, the premium put on people with financial experience in companies, versus those with people experience.

Challenging the status quo in this way has the potential to boost the numbers of women at board level, providing invaluable role models for other women, which matters. "Not being able to see role models stifles opportunities for others coming up through the ranks."

Equally, the advent of GPG statistics will help change the narrative around childcare as an issue for mothers, as opposed to being one for working parents. It should also help change attitudes towards people who are returning for work after an extended period of leave (such as for parental care), challenging those old stereotypes around ambition, she says.

"What the GPG bill will do is enable employers to say 'Right, if we find a gender pay gap at entry level, is there something about our culture that is not attracting women to us? And if we do not have enough women in middle management, which coincides with the prime child-bearing years, do we need to check our work-life practices, or our policies on flex working?'" says McGann, who adds: "It's going to take everyone to get on board with this."

Employers are supportive. "We're encouraging them to start pulling in their data now and putting an action plan in place. The GPG figure is just a figure, it's the actions that will make the change."



Closing the gender gap

SANDRA O'CONNELL

According to the HR professional body CIPD, the gender pay gap in Ireland – the differential between the average pay of males and females within an organisation – is estimated at an average of 14 per cent.

Its recent pay and employment practices survey found that only a quarter of companies in Ireland admitted to having a gender pay gap. It also found that only one in five companies had calculated the scale of the problem within their own organisation. This, the CIPD concludes, shows the need for legislation to address this perennial issue.

The good news is that its members support legislation for annual reporting of the gender pay gap, including bonuses and shares. The CIPD HR Practices in Ireland 2019 survey identified a number of action areas for both Government and employers. Almost half of respondents said the Government needs to address childcare subsidies and career choice at second-level.

Union body Ictu also welcomes the Bill as part of a necessary step in creating change. However, it pointed out that gender pay gap reporting will initially be limited to organisations with more than 250 employees – thereby omitting about two-thirds of the workforce.

While the Bill proposes to lower that threshold to 50 after

three years, Ictu would like to see this happening more quickly, and for consideration to be given to an even lower threshold, preferably 20 employees.

Its equality officer David Joyce has pointed out that, "As it currently stands, the Bill will capture just 1.4 per cent of firms and 57 per cent of all employees, based on the CSO's 2016 Business demography data. Lowering the threshold to 20 employees would capture 70 per cent of employees."

It noted too the absence of clear penalties for non-compliance in respect of companies that report inaccurate data, as well as those that fail to report. It is calling on the Government

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to enact the legislation without further delay, highlighting the fact that there is no commencement date as of yet and no indication as to how soon after companies will be required to report.

The 2018 World Economic Forum Gender Gap Report showed Ireland was the 9th most gender-equal country. Rankings took economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health and survival and political empowerment into account for scoring.

The European Commission reported in 2014 that Ireland had an average gender pay gap of 13.9 per cent, which compared relatively favourably with the EU average of 16.7 per cent. However, "female representation on publicly-listed companies in Ireland stands at just 13.2 per cent of board members compared with an EU average of 21.2 per cent," says Helen McCarthy, senior consultant with Mercer Ireland.

Reporting legislation

Other countries have already introduced gender pay reporting legislation. "What we've seen in the UK is that the laws forcing companies to report on and be transparent about gender pay has been a good move in the right direction, putting companies under pressure to act," says Sandra Ondraschek-Norris of Catalyst, a campaign group promoting women in leadership positions.

Catalyst's UK research indicates that when women go into their first job, they do so earning less than from day one. "It's a glass door as much as a glass ceiling."

Once in, they do all the right things, but don't advance at the same pace as men, "so different strategies are paying off for men. It's the same workplace, but a different reality," she says.

It is that lived experience that must be challenged, such as Catalyst's research showing

■ The European Commission reported in 2014 that Ireland had an average gender pay gap of 13.9 per cent, which compared relatively favourably with the EU average of 16.7 per cent.

that men are promoted based on potential, while women are promoted on the basis of proven performance. Equally, it found that while women get as much mentoring as men, their mentors are less senior. On top of that are layered old tropes about men taking charge and women taking care.

The biggest barrier of all is the 'double bind', where by the clearest model of leadership in most companies is a male environment, so male characteristics are more acceptable.

All of this "plays into the gender pay gap", which is why it is crucial men advocate for real change too, not just women. "Quite often, men are not aware of what their female colleagues are experiencing. The things women have to navigate, they don't even have to think about," says Ondraschek-Norris.

To succeed, eradicating the gender pay gap must be part of business strategy. "There's no point just reporting a number and not doing things to promote an inclusive culture. Companies need to take a serious look at not just women's representation and pay but the culture they are building."

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Giving employees a voice for change

Employee resource groups are becoming increasingly popular as a way for companies to address diversity and inclusion

BARRY McCALL

The concept of employee resource groups (ERGs) is a relatively new one in many Irish workplaces. They are usually self-organising groups of employees who share an interest or a background such as environmental activism, gender, or sexual orientation. Many organisations foster their growth and development as a means of promoting greater diversity and inclusion in the workplace.

"Employee resource groups can help to create a culture that fosters inclusion and open-mindedness while giving a voice to employees for change they want to see implemented in their organisation," says Mercer Ireland senior consultant Helen McCarthy. "These groups allow employees to interact with other employees outside of their immediate teams, develop new skills and gain access to leadership opportunities by interacting with executive sponsors. ERGs can be an effective way for companies to address diversity and inclusion if they are given adequate funding, management and accountability. ERGs can be part of larger strategy in an organisation to attract and retain diverse talent and build brand awareness by offering mentor relationships and development for workers."

One company which has embraced the concept for quite some time is Dell. "Our ERGs are communities within Dell where team members with common interests or backgrounds bring their collective voices together to drive business impact," says Marie Moynihan, senior vice-president, global talent acquisition. "Our ERGs are one way we demonstrate our company-wide commitment to creating an inclusive culture. We have 14 at the moment at a global level while in Ireland we have eight."

The Irish groups include GenNext, which facilitates the professional and personal growth of future leaders at Dell; Women in Action, which enables women to grow and thrive by creating new connections, sharing leadership expertise and building a culture that values diverse perspectives; Pride, which was established to improve the experience at Dell for LGBTQ staff members and allies; Planet, which focuses on the environment; True Ability, which strives to empower employees with a disability or those with special needs, their managers,

co-workers and those with an interest in disability issues through best practices.

"Their main purpose is to influence the business and have an impact," says Moynihan. "For example, True Ability got together to ask what the working environment in Dell is like and they looked at the area of neurodiversity. Some 80 to 90 per cent of neurodiverse people have a tough time getting jobs as standard interviews and recruitment processes do not assess for their talents and skills. As a result, we worked with organisations like Ahead to make it easier for them to get in the door here and we have hired 12 people during the last 18 months. I am certain that if not for the ERG pushing that agenda we would not be as far down that road."

Women in Action

Another example comes from the Women in Action group. "They designed Stem Aspire – the mentorship programme run in partnership with third-level institutes with team members mentoring women in their final year of their Stem degree," Moynihan says. "This year, we will have about 200 female students on the programme. They are each assigned a Dell mentor who they meet with every two weeks. It's to act as a bridge between college and the world of work."

Law firm Matheson has also established a number of ERGs with an overall group advocating for diversity and inclusion across the organisation. "If people are interested in issues they can focus on them and drive and lead initiatives and events and campaigns in relation to them," says Tara Doyle, partner and head of Asset Management and Investment Funds.

"We have a couple of other resource groups which are more issue-specific. Mums at Matheson is a group that drives female talent retention. Retaining female talent can be challenging for professional services firms generally as women try to balance competing career and family demands. The group introduced a coaching programme a number of years ago to help them through that journey."

A maternity and paternity buddies programme was also introduced. "We are trying to ensure that we support working fathers as well as working mothers and we are taking a gender-balanced approach to the issue."



The groups have been successful, says Doyle. "They have been very well received. People now know that it is fine to ask for family-friendly meeting times, for example. The groups have been really important for retention and work-life balance. People working for professional services firms traditionally left themselves outside the office. We want people to bring their whole and best selves to work. That's something the firm wants to support."

AIB has six ERGs, according to the bank's diversity and inclusion lead, Siobhan Sweeney. "There are groups for women and men, which are about to be joined together, and four others which fall under different 'I matter' headings dealing with family, Pride, ability and roots. So many people in AIB want to be involved in the groups, they are passionate and want to make a difference. A lot of people have really stepped up and they are all doing it off the side of their desks – it's not part of their day job."

Inclusive environment

Sweeney says ERGs help create a trusting, empowering and inclusive environment by providing employees with an avenue to voice their opinions, suggest change and contribute to cultural change. "They also

expand participants' opportunities in companies that provide a range of technology products and services. The programme is open to jobseekers and graduates of any background who have a passion for technology and love solving problems in a team environment. Over a period of 15 weeks, the KickSTART programme will help participants to develop confidence and skills to take up technical support roles as well as acquire new skills and qualifications in industry-leading technology. It is a route to gain internationally recognised certification, benefit from real life-work experience in a leading company and emerge ready for a career in the IT sector.

Dell Technologies partnered with Technology Ireland on the initiative and hosted the inaugural group hosted at its Cherrywood site last month.

Its focus is to enhance these core skills and professional abilities, as well as to provide detailed technology training to

provide employees with a means of availing of support and guidance on personal circumstances," she adds. "They assist in build-

ing awareness across the workplace on diversity and inclusion areas such as IVF, flexible working arrangements and parental

leave options. They also promote and embed diversity and inclusion across an organisation through social events, workshops and training."

ERGs ensure employees have an opportunity to be heard, valued and engaged, she adds. "This may seem like a basic principle, but ERGs really have the capacity to elevate the voices of employees who may often be overlooked," she points out. "By providing this platform to connect and advance initiatives, the organisation's leadership can have a better understanding of employees' needs and wants. ERGs can be a great avenue to solving some key challenges an organisation may face, such as recruitment practices and leadership development."

And they are certainly not talking shop, according to Marie Moynihan. "An ERG is not about a bunch of people sitting around having a chat," she says. "We carry out regular employee engagement surveys. These show that ERG members are more engaged. One of the problems with large companies is that people can get siloed into their own little boxes. You have to create mechanisms for them to engage at a wider level and ERGs accomplish that. They often lead to greater career opportunities as a result of engaging with a wider network."

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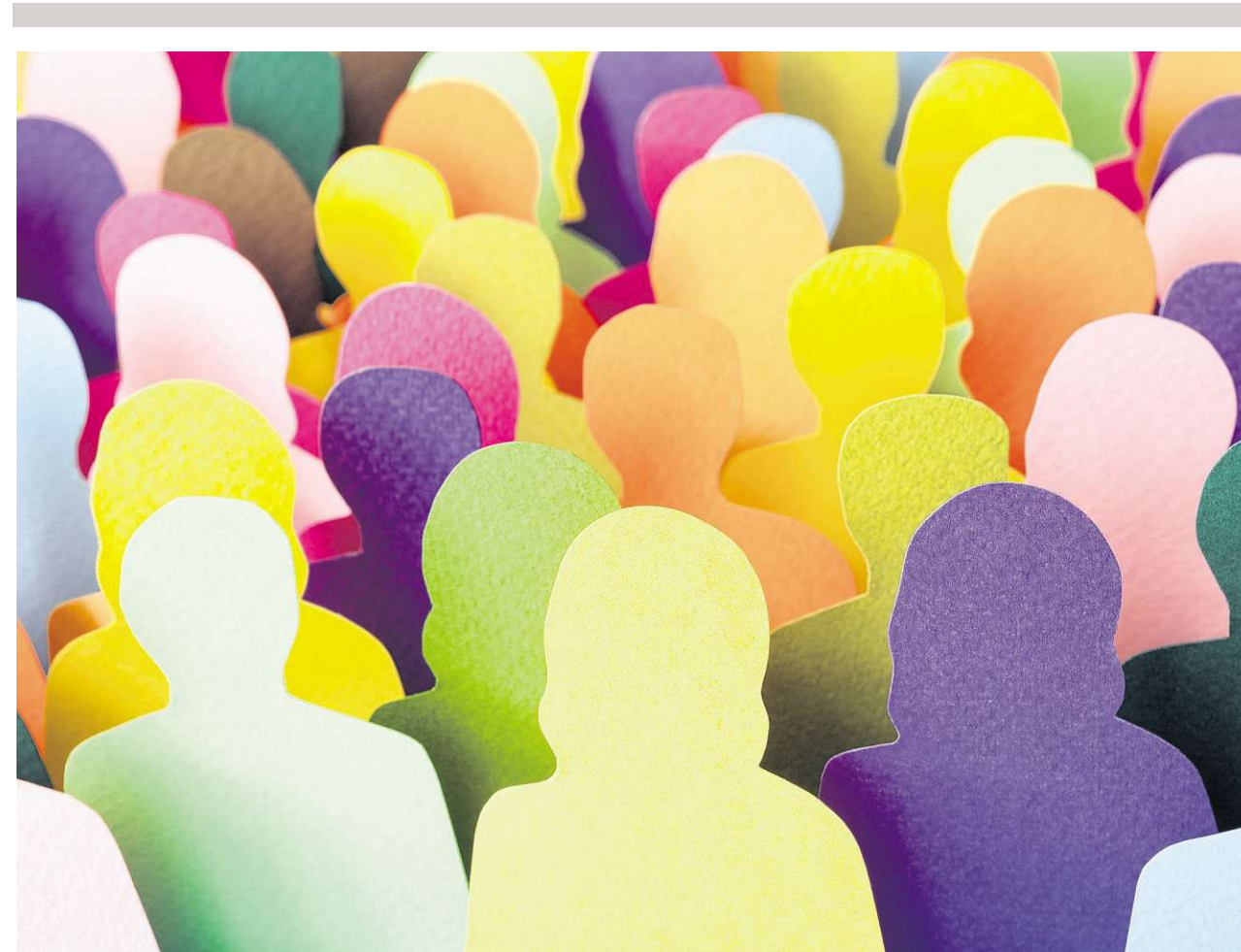
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Removing bias from the interview process

New research by recruitment agency Hays Ireland has found that 51 per cent of Irish professionals believe their career progression opportunities have been limited by an identifying factor such as race, gender, or mental health status.

Another finding was that almost half of Irish female professionals believe their chance of selection during the interview process had been affected by their gender.

Half of professionals look for a potential employer's diversity and inclusion policies, but 61 per cent struggle to find evidence of them.

Hays Ireland director Maureen Lynch says organisations that harness the new dynamic of diversity "are more innovative, better at decision-making, generate more revenue, and attract the best talent".

Almost eight in 10 Irish professionals believe their hiring managers would benefit from "unconscious bias" training. However, only a third of Irish professionals say their organisation currently provides this kind of training, according to the research.

Unlike explicit bias or prejudice, "unconscious bias" is a

subtle, learned stereotyping behaviour that forms subconsciously and can influence a person's attitude towards a group of people based on a characteristic, such as their race, age, gender, or sexual orientation.

The Hays Ireland Diversity & Inclusion Report 2019, which surveyed more than 770 employers and employees, shows that a significant proportion of professionals (44 per cent) believe their organisation's leaders have a bias to-

wards hiring people who look, think, or act like them. While the number is high, it is a marked improvement on 2018, when 55 per cent had the same opinion. More than half of all professionals (52 per cent) believe their chances of

selection during interview have been reduced because of their age.

Diversity and inclusion are important during the hiring process. Nearly all professionals (90 per cent) believe that actively working to build a workplace which encourages inclusion and respect for all will have a positive impact on employee retention.

Best talent

More than a third (37 per cent) of professionals believe greater workplace diversity and inclusion will positively impact the recruitment of the best talent; 29 per cent believe it will help an organisation keep the talent they already have; and 22 per cent say it will improve an organisation's reputation.

Speaking on the report findings, Lynch said: "A diverse workforce represents a diverse Ireland. We are a multicultural, multi-ethnic, equal-opportunities society that respects different opinions and outlooks. Organisations that harness this new dynamic are more innovative, better at decision-making, generate more revenue, and attract the best talent. "Hiring managers and or-

A diverse workforce represents a diverse Ireland.
PHOTOGRAPH: ISTOCK

organisation leadership can create a more inclusive workplace by ensuring that job adverts and other recruitment materials are more diverse. During the interview process, a diverse panel of interviewers should be set up to ensure that a greater range of opinions, perspectives, and life experiences are represented.

"Blind recruitment is also beneficial in this regard. By removing age, gender, ethnicity, and even names from application forms, hiring managers can focus solely on skills and ability."

"Ultimately, organisations have to truly value diversity and inclusion – they must be ingrained in their culture. That requires senior leadership to set out diversity and inclusion goals and policies, undertake unconscious bias training of their own, and be visible to staff as vocal advocates for more progressive recruitment and employment practices."

Fighting ageism in the workplace

Bias against older workers can be overlooked in the diversity and inclusion debate

BARRY McCALL

High Court judges don't have to retire until they are 70, hospital consultants can also continue until that age, while Catholic bishops can go on until they are 75 with permission from Rome. The US president is well into his eighth decade and his main challenger in the 2020 election is older still. Why then do organisations continue to try to push people out when they are 65 and younger when they still have much to contribute?

"There is a perception that older people are more costly and less productive," says Tony Devine, managing partner of the Grey Matters Network. "But the ESRI report on The Ageing Workforce in Ireland points to research which shows this perception to be a myth."

Founded in 2015, the Grey Matters Network is an organisation comprised of more than 400 retired individuals with experience in various areas who offer their expertise to client businesses. "I set it up with Declan Hughes and Mick Furlong. We each had more than 30 years' experience but still had lots to give. We had masses of experience and we thought there must be a value in that."

Paul Gillen, a partner with law firm Pinsent Masons, believes the issue will come into focus more in the coming years. "With increased age for receipt of State pension and, in

general, a more healthy ageing population, we can expect to see this as a more prevalent issue being raised, including seeing more employees and applicants claiming that their age has led to a disadvantage and potential discrimination," he says.

"Although age is a protected characteristic under legislation, it is still one of those areas that has not received a lot of attention," Gillen adds. "Whether it is 'forced' retirement at State pension age or whether it is couched in a certain cultural fit, people of a certain age do face uphill struggles. There is a policy and public campaign required."

Age-diverse policies

There are ways for employers to develop more age-diverse policies, he believes. "Employers should understand the impact of their approaches in work, including, for example, their brand, which could culturally be seen to be geared toward younger employees. Employers can do a lot to ensure that they are attracting older talent and making the most of the experience that this can bring. They can do this by having policies that are attractive to older employees, such as flexibility not only for childcare but for those who have caring responsibilities for older family members, not enforcing retirement and providing for retirement planning, but also to en-



■ Why do organisations continue to try to push people out when they are 65 and younger when they still have much to contribute?

“People of a certain age do face uphill struggles. There is a policy and public campaign required”

sure inclusion of older employees through buddy or mentoring by older employees with younger employees to bridge that gap."

Age is the next frontier for human resource strategies, yet employment models, practices and policies are not well aligned to this new reality, according to Helen McCarthy, senior consultant with Mercer Ireland. "Adopting age-diverse policies is crucial to capture the potential of experienced workers," she adds

And these policies are being embraced. "In Ireland, the trend towards greater accommodation of experienced workers is slowly accelerating," she continues. "Following changes in the law, it is now more difficult for employers to enforce retirement. When it comes to facilitating longer working, the main challenges employers are facing include such things as blocking progression of younger workers, health and fitness concerns, continuing to provide appropriate benefits and

inconsistent application of policy."

Organisations must evaluate policies already in place and assess gaps while determining their future needs, McCarthy advises. Organisations can optimise their experienced workforce through a number of actions including collecting and analysing age-profile data to explore demographic and skills pinch points; developing and implementing people and career strategies that embrace the experienced workforce;

and understanding what impact an organisation's retirement plan design has on the trajectory of retirement readiness and labour flow.

She also recommends that organisations initiate conversations with employees about how they might work differently. "They must also examine and tackle how ageism might manifest in an organisation – analysing pay, bonuses, performance, promotion and recruitment statistics through a lens focused on ageing," she adds.

"They should develop a life-long learning attitude that positions people to embrace jobs of the future. Productivity levels across different age and position cohorts in an organisation should be measured and effective, flexible working strategies should be implemented."

Tony Devine has a different view of the intergenerational workforce. "We've always had five generations in the workforce," he says. "That's why we have established the first Intergenerational Workplace Day, which will take place in DCU on November 20th. We want to celebrate the diversity that the five generations can bring to the workplace."

Intergenerational working

He points to the case of Chip Conley, the author of *Wisdom at Work*, as an example of effective intergenerational working. "He set up a boutique hotel chain *Joie de Vivre* that was very successful and wanted to get out in his 50s," Devine explains. "When he did, he was approached by the Airbnb founders, who wanted someone to help them grow the company. He was both a good and a bad fit. He knew lots about the hotel and accommodation sector but nothing about the digital or sharing economies."

What Conley realised was that he had been hired as a teacher and a mentor, but he was also a student and an intern. He had to be a beginner and a teacher. This emerged as the secret to succeeding as a mid- or later-life worker – the marriage of wisdom and experience with curiosity and a willingness to learn.

"Conley calls this concept the modern elder and he now runs seminars on it in interesting locations around the world," says Devine.

"It's not about them versus us, it's about the generations collaborating and working together. Research published by Forbes has shown that if you give a problem to an individual they will get it right part of the time; a team will get it right more often, maybe 60 per cent of the time; when you add in gender balance, this rises to 80 per cent; when you bring in age diversity, it climbs to 87 per cent; and with geographic diversity you get over the 90 per cent mark. There is no argument now that greater diversity leads to better decision-making."



Gender-balancing for better business

BARRY McCALL

Established in 2015, the 30% Club Ireland now comprises 250 of the country's largest employers, across the public, private and State sectors, representing more than 600,000 employees in Ireland who are committed to greater gender balance at board and executive levels.

"For organisations to implement a diversity strategy, gender is the best place to start," says country executive Gillian Harford. "You can see the numbers and track progress quite easily. If you are making progress in that area, then it's much easier in the others."

She believes progress is being made in relation to gender balance. "It is slow, slower than it should be," she says. "The UK is a bit further along than Ireland, but things are changing. Three or four years ago there was a much lower number of companies talking about it. It's almost impossible now to find a medium- to large-sized company which isn't talking about it."

"This is being driven by a number of factors, most notably the bottom line. McKinsey has done a lot of work in this space and their research shows improved performance for companies which have gender-balanced senior management teams. Regulators are actively promoting diversity as it leads to better governance and re-

duced risk. It delivers a better return on invested capital, higher value for shareholders, and a better environment for employees."

The journey starts with a broad focus across the organisation, identifying gaps and opportunities for change. "The conversation moves to inclusion, ensuring all employees feel welcome and valued," says Harford. "Diversity means you are here, but inclusion means you are heard, and so many organisations are focusing on ensuring everyone has a sense of belonging. This creates a modern workplace where everyone can bring the best of their whole self to work; where employee-led groups celebrate Pride, wellbeing, differing abili-

“The UK is a bit further along than Ireland, but things are changing”

ties, and integrate life and work in a more balanced way." But that's the easy part, according to Harford. It's what happens after general diversity and inclusion initiatives have been completed that counts. "It moves on to another 'i' – influence," she says. "This is the challenge of achieving balance, not just across the general employee base but in positions of

genuine influence – senior decision-making roles, strategic roles, revenue-generation roles – ensuring diversity in the positions of power that can change and drive a successful organisation."

Gender Balance Survey

The Gender Balance Survey issued by the CSO in May of this year highlighted that women occupy only 28 per cent of senior executive roles in Ireland compared with 72 per cent for men. But the reality could be even worse than that when it comes to the most powerful positions.

"We know from additional market research that this figure is heavily influenced by specialist functions such as HR, legal and marketing, and the ratio drops significantly when it comes to female representation across revenue-generating functions," says Harford. "There is no data available for diversity beyond gender. Achieving greater balance at the most senior decision-making levels in organisations is where the real economic value-add occurs – and that balance of influence is the critical next step in the diversity journey."

In these circumstances, how can real change come about? "Change, with pace, can't happen organically – it needs focused planning and action," she adds. "Many organisations

■ Many organisations are starting by setting internal targets for change

are starting by setting internal targets for change. Our Making the Change Count study of female representation in financial services identified that more than a third of respondent organisations are now setting targets for senior representation. More advanced organisations are setting further targets by function, to address the challenge of better senior representation in commercial as well as specialist decision-making roles."

But there are hopeful signs. "We are now seeing longer-term succession planning, with many organisations carrying out diversity gap analyses in the senior pipeline and putting in earlier interventions through 'building or buying' talent to ensure better readiness as roles are replaced in the future."

"Achieving balance at the most senior decision-making levels is also being driven by external forces, with initiatives such as the Government-backed review, Balance for Better Business, outlining targets for balance on boards of listed organisations and signalling targets for senior leadership as a potential next step."

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Education key to successful inclusion strategy

Companies are increasingly turning to specialists to ensure they are following best practice

PETER MCGUIRE

Diversity is no longer just a polite buzzword for most Irish companies. Good workplaces are changing: women are no longer willing to tolerate a lack of fair treatment or promotional opportunities, the faces in the office are not all white and companies are more keen than ever before to embrace and support their LGBTI+ staff.

"We've moved beyond 'tolerance', which denotes 'putting up with' difference," says Paula Lonergan, an organisational development consultant specialising in workplace wellbeing and resilience with Irish Times Training. "Organisations are shifting towards appreciating diversity at all levels."

It's not just about good optics, either: diverse workplaces produce diverse – and relevant – ideas. Getting it right, however, is important: if it's not thought through, there's a risk that companies will, inadvertently or not, patronise or insult their workforce. Increasingly, there is a need for specialists to ensure they are following best practice. But what is best practice and how do companies get it right?

"We are seeing more compa-

nies hiring D&I managers or co-ordinators, and they will usually have formal knowledge that they acquired through a designated course or learning programme," says Lonergan. "These courses are usually directed at people with high levels of experience."

Irish Times Training is one of the providers offering courses in D&I, with Open Minds, the Irish Centre for Diversity and EY being among some of the other providers. Many companies, especially larger businesses, run internal courses for staff.

In 2018, Dr Linda Yang joined the UCD College of Business, where she offers dedicated intercultural support for all faculty and staff members. She is also the programme leader for the intercultural development programme for all post-graduate students at Smurfit Graduate Business School. Her experience is instructive not just for higher education, but for all workplace environments.

"Ireland is the European hub for over 1,000 leading multinational companies," she says. "Immigration and demographic changes have made Ireland more diverse than ever before. The number of interna-



■ "We've moved beyond 'tolerance', which denotes 'putting up with' difference." PHOTOGRAPH: ISTOCK

“The first thing people have to approach is taking the unconscious bias and make it conscious

tional students in Irish higher education institutions has more than doubled since 2010, and it will keep increasing. We need to consider diversity and inclusion and also provide support for faculty and staff to de-

velop their cultural competence.”

A study carried out by Yang, with academic colleagues, showed that the aims of internationalisation – gaining global outlook, developing intercultural competence, working in multicultural teams and so on – are not being realised by simply increasing participation rates in study abroad programmes. And it's not just about being inclusive – everyone benefits from diverse and inclusive teams at work, and

D&I adds value to a business.

"The most recent Culture at Work global survey shows that intercultural skills and competencies are of key importance to employers," says Yang. "Domestic students, however, are not maximising the benefit of living, working and studying in an international environment and international students experience limited meaningful interactions with domestic students."

Companies tend to come for training either because issues

of discrimination have arisen or because they want to future-proof their organisation, says Lonergan. "I have also been approached by smaller organisations who might have encountered an issue with diversity and inclusion, or who wish to re-write their policies to embed it across their entire hierarchy and management structure."

Prejudice or preconceptions

What exactly do these courses include? None of us are without prejudice or preconceptions,

but being aware of them – and challenging ourselves on them – is vital.

"The first thing people have to approach is taking the unconscious bias and make it conscious," says Lonergan. "I ask them what our motivations are and why this is important to them. Is it about public image or is it about their deep-seated values. Cultural competency – such as knowing a little about India if you have a few employees from India – isn't enough anymore, and it can easily lead

to stereotyping. Appreciating and harnessing difference is more important."

For a busy manager, is D&I training really worth the effort? "The upshot is a creative environment where employees are safe to be themselves; it means a person is not afraid to open their mouth, and they can speak and know they will be listened to," Lonergan says. "CEOs and leaders know that this is the way forward and managers who listen have had higher levels of success."

Mercer When women thrive

In 2012, Mercer took a step back and decided to take an in-depth look at the status of women in the consultancy firm. It was the start of a five-year journey towards gender parity, improving the pipeline of talent and, ultimately, attaining EDGE (Economic Dividends for Gender Equality), the leading global assessment methodology and certification standard for gender equality. Education and training were vital parts of the process.

"We turned our own expertise inward and looked closely at the status of inclusion for women at our own firm," says Martine Ferland, president and chief executive at Mercer. "Using our client-facing workforce analytics, we examined our own data and found that, like many, we too were struggling with representation and pay. Once we identified our issues, leadership committed to a D&I strategy and, importantly, took accountability for ensuring change."

"Our strategy predominantly focused on continuous 'implicit and explicit bias' training for our managers in order to mitigate skewed pay and representation. We also helped managers recognize bias in real time and showed them how to strip bias from recruitment, talent development and performance management. While we still have work to do, we have shaped positive internal change and have become more empathetic partners with our D&I clients."

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