



Promoting gender equality, advancing the economy

JUMP Corporate Hub

22th November 2016

Strategic planning & accountability: how to make your gender equality plan a success

Summary of the session

Introduction

This lunch and learn event brought together 21 participants from 17 companies reflecting a diversity of industry sectors, experience and perspectives. The focus of the session was strategic planning & accountability: how to make your gender equality plan a success.

1. Welcome

Petra de Bruxelles, Sr. Diversity & Employer Branding Officer at the European Investment Bank welcomed the participants. She presented the diversity strategy of the bank: the European Investment Bank is on its journey towards diversity, the first phase of their Diversity strategy is finished and they are in the process of developing a new one. The next step for them will be to drive change and build communication around it. As part of the new plan, they will implement objectives and managers will be held accountable for diversity. The senior management buy-in from the president and the board has been critical. Now it is the middle management who must be engaged to drive the plan and ensure its success.

2. Presentation

Eleanor Tabi Haller-Jorden, President & CEO of the Paradigm Forum, Strategic Advisor for EDGE Strategy, Visiting Scholar at the IMD Business School

Tabi provided an overview of the Paradigm Forum's focus on workplace innovation and social justice along with relevant research initiatives currently underway.

Critical discussion topics included the following:

- What are the critical success factors for a successful Diversity & Inclusion (D&I) strategy? How should impact be assessed, qualitatively and quantitatively? What hinders successful execution?
- What key social competencies are tied to impactful D&I business results?
- What's the significance of conscious vs. unconscious bias? What gaps and skills development are oftentimes lacking in unconscious bias training initiatives? What

performance metrics and interview protocols are appropriate to avoid biased assessments? What interventions can help alleviate the cultural reinforcement of bias? What successes are tied to reverse mentoring initiatives?

- How can storytelling be used as an engagement and communications strategy?

The key takeaways from Tabi's presentation were:

. **CEO support** is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the success of a gender equality plan. While critical, it does not always address challenges from **middle management**.

. Much more definitional rigour is required to ensure that we know what success looks like. It is important to **define and measure inclusion**. If short term impact may seem difficult to measure to some participants, they can look toward traditional business measures for inspiration: market impact, growth, productivity – these can all be translated in terms of human capital.

For example, one can measure “hit ratio” in hiring: this measures how many people you extend an offer to actually take it and how many reject it. If the hit ratio increases, you are getting more of the talent you are targeting.

. If targets are important, the **gender equality plan process is critical** to ensure it is sustainable. Diversity officers can provide a framework, but the process itself must be inclusive. **Men must be engaged** and critically invested in the overall success of the D&I strategy. Employees should be encouraged to actively participate. This will help bring new and creative ideas.

. Providing the business case for gender equality through research and fact-based insights is not always sufficient to ensure high-level engagement and strategic credibility. To be more compelling in your communication, **storytelling** is important. It can help provide that “light bulb effect” that engages people.

. Another issue is **raising difficult topics**. People need to have those difficult conversations about diversity and inclusion. Yet it can be dangerous to be authentic. To address challenging topics and concerns, different approaches can be used: e.g. be the first to raise issues, ask for feedback on how inclusive the meeting was at the end, set up rules in meetings to flag un-inclusive behaviours immediately and resolve them offline, etc.

. Bias can be tackled at different levels. Being aware of the different types of bias is important: **confirmation bias** (we believe that we are right and therefore we preselect information that confirms what we think, while filtering out information that we don't agree with), **just world bias** (belief that there is a meritocracy in place, what we see is the result of meritocratic decision making, what's “right”), **benevolent bias** (making assumptions based on what you think is good for the other person). To counter these biases, examples shared include reverse mentoring programmes and storytelling.

. What rewards and sanctions drive results and impact? Options discussed include internal competitions and rewards for creative ideas, compensation linked to D&I targets, collaborative behaviour as part of evaluation criteria, transparency on company D&I metrics, the external pressure of public scrutiny...

. One participant mentioned the importance of apprenticeships and cross-functional collaboration in enhancing both access and opportunity.

In conclusion, discipline and execution are of paramount importance to the overall success of D&I strategies.

3. Best Practices Sharing Session

Moderated by Isabella Lenarduzzi

Where to start:

The participating companies are at different stages of their journey towards gender equality. For those still at very early stages, what is their thinking? For one company, gender equality is important in the perception they give externally: “we need to reflect our market”. For another, it’s more about getting the best talent, and this includes women. For another, it’s felt as an internal need.

Tabi’s advice is to start with human capital data and the relevant pain-points. What do we look like as a company? What is the level of employee engagement? Are our policies and practices on talent working? Companies are often overly confident and/or do not perceive some of the pain-points within their culture. Additionally, companies need to understand how to translate data points into a compelling business strategy. Company branding is important to attract talent. People want to work in a place that embodies their values. The EDGE Certification is a key assessment methodology and standard to assess progress and performance around gender equality.

D&I engagement and communication strategies:

Images and videos are more impactful than quotes. Working with images can be used to express employee’s feelings about diversity. One organisation used the executives’ children to present the products they were selling. This video went viral, and contributed to making the company look more human and accessible.

Changing perspectives and reframing is another strategy. An interesting training was shared: ask men to imagine themselves in the position of a female middle manager in the company, to look at things from a different perspective. When they look at the company communication “through the eyes of a woman” it may trigger better understanding. Another suggestion is women coaching executives on gender equality, to help them experience the issue.

Engagement of middle managers is critical. CEO engagement for your gender equality plan is necessary but not sufficient; gender equality will ultimately be driven by the middle managers. The middle management have the capacity to disempower you and kill the project. Often, their perception may be that, by promoting more women, they will not get their promotions. So you need to highlight what is in it for them, too. Several reports are helpful on how to engage the middle managers: Tinna Nielsen & Lisa Kepinski’s Inclusion Nudges, Elisabeth Kelan’s report on Middle Managers (cf. Useful readings).

Finally, finding allies is necessary. If you can find one or two men that are willing to help make a difference, and if they carry your ideas, men talking to men will have a bigger impact. This is a good way to hook them.

Rewards and sanctions:

External pressure is important: people who resist diversity will not budge until they hear someone from the outside telling them how necessary it is. You have to make it painful for them not to be on board. They have to feel the peer pressure, the competition, in order for things change.

One participant mentions the difficulties of benchmarking its company externally. Tabi responds that there is not always an “ideal” benchmark; we need to learn from other sectors.

In some sectors like the public sector, taking risks, being bold, transparent and open are not at the top of their priorities. They need carrots and sticks to go towards diversity. What would Tabi advise for such an environment? In her experience, Tabi agrees that although many organisations aspire to be inclusive, their actions are not always in alignment with their discourse. In such organisations, creating subcultures can help, as well as storytelling.

Targets and processes:

More than targets, you need to think about the processes of designing and implementing a gender equality strategy. Targets are of course important. But if the process tied to realising those targets is not credible, targets will not be reached, nor will they be sustainable.

Is the risk with targets not disengagement if the targets are not achieved? Tabi counters: you need to be confident about the issue and not let the “business rationale” cannibalise the discussion. She recommends piloting the project in areas where the probability of success is the highest, finding ambassadors and allies. And not to run away from cynics: engage with them directly instead and refine your arguments.

Looking at JUMP’s four-step journey towards Gender Equality (*cf.* PPT), a participant mentions she thought her company was at stage 1 (understanding) but that they are also at stage 3 (trying to engaging middle management). Tabi confirms this is an iterative process: the four steps are illustrative, not a rigid process. This is a complex journey, where you are permanently starting again.

Corporate culture:

One participant remarks that when women reach leadership positions, success is not the same for them. They are judged more harshly, sometimes seen as parachuted into position. There is the risk of “the glass cliff” – there are so few women at the top that when one fails, it’s very visible and public.

In one organisation, when women reached the top, other women expected to see change in the company, to see it evolve towards more diversity. Yet there was no culture change: these women became even more competitive and less supportive of other women. It is indeed a misplaced expectation to hope that having a few women in leadership roles will lead to cultural change – cultural change needs to be driven by the whole organisation.

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An example that highlights the importance of perceived corporate culture is that companies now have to compete with the entrepreneurial sector for the up-and-coming talent. “Can your company’s value proposition compete with the perceived value proposition of the entrepreneurial sector?” Today, most young talent aspire to be entrepreneurs, not to work for large companies. Companies need to question themselves on this if they want to keep attracting the best talent.

Tabi finishes on a note of optimism. She has seen positive momentum in the last few years. There is a generational shift, there are pockets of evidence of change everywhere. People are coming to realise that you cannot have twelve 60 year-old white men sitting at the board table, that you need different perspectives and life experience. She encourages everyone to be bold, courageous and creative!

Isabella thanked Tabi for her inspiration and for pushing us to the limits of our thinking, and invites all to come hear her again at the next JUMP Forum in March 21st 2017.