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| Diane Lightfoot | Welcome to Business Disability Forum’s new podcast series, ‘Disability Today.’ This series aims to provide thought provoking content for a wide global and UK audience, where experts discuss the issues that affect us now and will be part of our reality tomorrow. All too often, disabled people are overlooked and forgotten when considering what the future holds and the challenges the world faces today. In this series, leading experts will join me, Diane Lightfoot, to scan the horizon and highlight how disabled people and businesses are or will be affected. These debates will put disabled people front and centre in the challenges and solutions when creating a more inclusive world. You can listen to the series on all music streaming platforms such as Spotify and SoundCloud by searching for Business Disability Forum. We'll also be uploading all episodes to our website. Business Disability forum.org.uk. In our last episode, AI friend or Foe? We asked whether disabled people were at risk of being further excluded from jobs by the increasing use of AI, or if new technology always creates new opportunities. If you missed that episode do give it a listen. For today's episode we chat Disability Inclusion in Business and ask what truly counts as inclusion verses what’s just purple washing. To discuss this hot topic, I'm very pleased to be joined by two expert guests who I'm also proud to call friends, Peter Torres Fremlin, who previously worked on disability employment and is now the editor of Disability Debrief. And Birgit Neu, senior DEI advisor and former global head of DNI at HSBC. This is a hot topic and an interesting one. But before we delve in, many global businesses seem keen to share their disability smart credentials. But is this just purple washing to try to enhance their brand? So perhaps to start, we could start by explaining what we mean by washing as in green washing or in this case purple washing. And Peter, I'll come to you first. |
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| Peter Torres Fremlin | Thanks. Thanks, Diane, Thanks for having us. I'm glad we can discuss this. As it is something that, a lot of people think about? I think there's sort of two different elements, of washing. I think these sort of original look at something like greenwashing was, you pretending to do something like positive for the environment while you do like all the other barbarous things you're doing anyway. Right? So it's a kind of it's washing as in reputation, reputation washing. You kind of compensate for sort of other areas of business or other scrutiny that you might have or critiques by doing something like supposedly positive or the people or the people greet. So, it's kind of in some ways it was, a classic of some CSR, CSR initiatives. They have nothing to do with what the business is about, and they're just doing sort of one nice thing a year, right? To stereotype, I think in in purple washing we need to look at that like in the sense of, is disability being used as something just to sort of garnish the reputation, when other elements of the business aren't so positive. And I think we also need to look at washing in the sense of insubstantial right, that a commitment or promise has been made on, on this switch, inclusion or a boast of it has been made, but that's not backed up by reality on the ground. And I think that's important, particularly important in the case of disability. I think as, as disabled people, we know that our experiences aren't necessarily what people, have promised. They will be or describe them or describe them as and we will say, I have this mantra of nothing about us without us, which insists that sort the people affected, describe the situation. You don't have a corporation or a government describing it for us. So I think it's critical to look at in the sense of business because business does make sort of quite a big splash sometimes saying it will be on disability. And I'm really glad that together we can kind of like think through all these necessary commitments that are positive or are they kind of commitments instead of doing the actual work. |
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| Diane Lightfoot | And of course, we're talking about purple washing with with purple being the color that is associated with disability. But people can say they're doing stuff and not really act across the whole diversity, equity and inclusion space. Alas. So, Birgit, what have we learned from other DEI strands that can help us here? |
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| Birgit Neu | Yeah. Thanks, Diane I think, you know, it's a really great point that Peter made about the kind of different elements to the to what washing looks like. And we've certainly seen that across other aspects of diversity as well, getting, sort of accused of the same thing, you know, rainbow washing or whatever colour is associated across the different strands. What I would say also is that there's a component part of, maybe some people not understanding what the defence of doing good in these different areas should be, you know, is it, are you supposed to be just throwing out, you know, how many awards if you won in this space? And that's the ultimate, you know, sort of accolade or the way that you demonstrate that you actually care about something. So I think a lot of times it goes wrong because we're maybe using the, the ineffective evidence, to showcase, what it is that we're doing or, again, that it's just a kind of marketing ploy. and certainly, again, if we talk about the sort of rainbow washing, you know, we've seen that a lot. And obviously just having also gone through, LGBT pride month that, you know, a lot of companies might, you know, your change, your logo, whether you make it purple or this month, you make it rainbow or, you know, whatever it is, according to which aspect of diversity. So a lot of it just feels like marketing or, or, you know, advertising fluff. And so, you know, I think one of the key things there is, particularly from a marketing perspective of when organizations are going down that route, that, you know, you want to make sure that you are representing, you know, disabled individuals authentically and what you're doing in your marketing and advertising all the time. You know that you're showcasing the diverse stories and experiences within that community and avoiding stereotypes. And, you know, and doing that consistently. But, you know, I think there's there's more to it. Again, across every aspect of diversity here. It's, you know, you need to be able to demonstrate that you've got the kind of all year round basics in place and working effectively, whether that's, you know, your policies and practices, your training, your employee resource groups, community engagement. But you do actually need to have a more robust narrative around some of the other things that you're doing, you know, of, of kind of reinforcing that idea of, you know, is there a leadership commitment and what is it? Is there evidence of consistent support and advocacy from the organization? Are you demonstrating that you are listening and learning about what's working or what's not, and adjusting your, actions accordingly? And is there transparency around the reporting and accountability for what you said you were going to do? You know, and I think that organizations can do a better job of avoiding that kind of washing accusation or feeling like it's, you know, we're just putting up a purple logo or, you know, it's that time of year we're doing this thing, and then it all goes away again by being much more consistent about that story and having much more robust evidence that feels like people understand where you're headed, what you're doing, how you're adjusting and learning, and, and most importantly, how you're actually driving progress. |
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| Diane Lightfoot | I think that point you make around the narrative, is so important, and I suspect it's one that we'll come back to. and thank you also for mentioning authentic representation. It gives me a nice opportunity to plug our changing the image of disability, projects, an image bank, which has some really brilliant, pictures of disabled people in a, you know, range of a range of settings doing a range of things as, as everybody does. So, please do take a look at that if you haven't. I think to that that point about consistency is, is really important, but it's also really hard. So, you know, one of the things that we often talk about because we work with very, very big businesses is that any, any size of business, actually, the experience will vary dramatically depending on who you work with and particularly your your line manager. And, you mentioned awards, and I can remember being on a panel a couple of years ago where somebody referred to, people winning awards as being, I don't know if I use the term purple washing, but that was the inclined information and, was saying, yes, but I know that at that organization, somebody had a terrible experience. And I said, well, is that purple washing or is that just that that individual unfortunately has a rubbish line manager and that that isn't the norm. So it's, you know, there's all sorts of narratives around this. And so to be slightly controversial, we may be talking about purple washing, but I've recently heard the term purple hushing, to describe businesses who are doing good stuff but are so afraid of talking about it for fear they will be shot down, particularly in obviously the world of social media. that somebody will say, well, all very well, but it wasn't like that for me. And so then they don't share the good stuff and it's easy to dismiss that. But that that matters, doesn't it? Because when we carried out some research, with, disabled consumers about buying choices, the things that everybody said they wanted very consistently was accessible products and services. Yes. And information on those accessible products and services that they could find easily and get the information they need. They also wanted customer facing staff who were confident to support them. But it really doesn't sound like rocket science, but it seems as though that is easier said than done. So how do we get to that? Do businesses need to wait until they are, quote ‘perfect’ before sharing what they are doing? Peter, do you want to come in on that? |
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| Peter Torres Fremlin | Yeah, no thank you. I think this is, also key question to sort of understand the theory of change on inclusion because it can get into a bit of a, sort of, a loop where you don't want to share until it's perfect, but you can't grow until you have shared. And I think, as Birgit said, sort of transparency on these issues is how we how we need to convince people. I think it's I think it's complicated. I think we should also sort of say the disability is still a subject that stigmatized. And so that's also a reason that people don't necessarily want to they don't necessarily want to talk about. We also have to recognize that it's a kind of say, lack of thought, public discourse on identity topics and that there is like there is a kind of a, a cost to taking a public position on things. There's also a cost to not taking a public position on things. And I think, one of the ways and, and, Diane, I've learned this as much from sort of BDF colleagues as anyone else. One of the ways that you change, like the place of disability in the, in the workplace, is by having more visibility, is like by, senior leaders sharing, sharing their stories. So, yeah, it's a point taken. It's something, complicated, too complicated to navigate. but sort of ultimately, sharing where they are on, disability can have a benefit for the, the business in making their own staff and other sort of customers, more positive about it making people want to apply. And it also has a social benefit that we see in these different jobs, disabled people are doing things that disability isn't the opposite of a workplace or the ability to work, but is, at the at the heart of, many different industries today. |
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| Diane Lightfoot | Thank you. Yes, absolutely. And, Birgit, do you want to do you want to add to that? |
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| Birgit Neu | Yes, absolutely. I think, you know, if we think about waiting until we're perfect, you know, I have I have never worked with a team where I have said, you know, wait, typically, I think perfect can be the enemy of good often times. And and trying to do the work, there's too much to do. And also not enough resource to wait until everything's perfect. And oftentimes, again, getting something out that's 80% can be more than sufficient already. Make a really huge difference. I would have to say in the DEI space, I don't think I see a lot of waiting for perfect. which I think is a good thing because I think, you know, typically, the people that are doing this kind of work have learned that you go where there is, enthusiasm, momentum, bandwidth, and also often times willingness to experiment. I mean, one of the things that I personally love about working in this space is that a lot of times you do get to experiment or innovate or, you know, try different ways to find solutions for people. And that does involve, you know, maybe building sort of smaller wins over time. So you that you get the evidence, about what works and the engagement with people and, and that gives you the license to do more. but the I guess my caution around that would be where sometimes there is the need for waiting is that often times what we do in this space is a multi-disciplinary team effort to get things over the line. And sometimes, I think it's very important also to to listen to specialists, around why we do need to wait for things to happen. and I think that's probably in my DEI career probably spent a lot more time having those conversations with stakeholders who were desperate, you know, to run at full speed and get these changes done overnight. and often times, some of the reasons, why, you know, I was, advocating to wait would be things that they wouldn't necessarily see, you know, weren't visible to the naked eye. Things like, you know, I was making sure around things like data privacy considerations were taken into account or systems changes that needed to happen or, you know, waiting to sequence with other kinds of communications around things that were going on, or even things like, looking at if we were making a change, that maybe we would, we could make that change and it would be better for a broader set of stakeholders. And actually, we wanted to get more people to the table in order to be able to have a bigger impact. so, I think, you know, sometimes it's important to recognize that things may not happen so quickly because the teams that are working on these things might be trying to, you know, minimize the risks. because sometimes if you do move too fast and then it goes wrong, that can set you back even further than if you've done nothing at all. Or again, maximizing the opportunities. But I think, you know, to Peter's point, it's complicated. It's not always the same answer all the time. So I think that fine balance of knowing when. Right, you know, 80%. Let's get something started. We have the ability to, you know, grow that and drive that change. Or actually we need to do this carefully and thoughtfully because of who and what is involved, to make sure that we land this appropriately. |
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| Diane Lightfoot | I always like the expression, don't let the perfect be the enemy of the good, and kind of building on that, really. I remember way back when we did our first global report, there was a quote which was focus on progress, not perfection, which I really like because it is okay. It's it might be good, it's not perfect, but we still need to keep improving. We still need to get better. We still need to move forward. Rather than saying, oh, we've ticked that box. It's good enough. Does it matter if businesses are trying to make themselves look better, if they are actually effecting some positive change. Slightly controversial? |
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| Peter Torres Fremlin | Yeah, I think maybe different advocates would have different views on this. But I'm of the view like I mean it's that a win’s a win, right. Like, I think that, businesses, one of the benefits for businesses of working on disability inclusion is some of the branding is some of the branding effect it. It will make their own staff, it will make their clients, make society more generally a bit more positive about them. But obviously that's a kind of the big if, right? On affecting some change. And then like how much change and what kind of change? And I think maybe that's, that's sort of also what will what we explore in this conversation, who then gets to like who is evaluating like whether that change has been done and certainly we can't be satisfied with just the sort of, just the business telling us that they've made amazing change without a sort of independent look. And regulation of that. |
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| Diane Lightfoot | Regulation I expect we will come back to that word. But, Birgit, what's your take on this? |
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| Birgit Neu | Yeah, I think it's, it's unrealistic in my view. one woman's opinion, to think the companies, you know, shouldn't be communicating about, again, what they're doing and trying to make themselves look better. When we think about what the business case for DEI is more broadly, all of the topics in that business case do require communication and talking about what it is that you're doing. Right? So if we think about the business case, it's around, again, as Peter already mentioned, that kind of reputation and brand piece. But, you know, talent and attraction is a huge consideration. And probably, you know, for many years, the talent attraction, aspect of the business case was really one of the primary ones that organizations were focused on the work that they were doing in this space. But, you know, it's also around things like, you know, better risk management, more innovation. Again, the collaboration potential from, being an inclusive organization and that, you know, making people feel sort of psychologically safe to speak up and bring their ideas to the organization. And of course, those stakeholder outcomes that organizations are trying to achieve. And so, you know, from a topic perspective, those are things, you know, you're going to want to say what it is that you're doing to try and let people know that, you know, this is an organization that we want you to come and work at because we're doing X, Y, z. So, so I think companies are definitely going to be talking about it. They are incentivized to try and tell a better story. But to Peter's point, it's that we need more transparency around even the things that are not necessarily great, because also you need to manage expectations from a talent attraction perspective. You know, if you're saying this place is fantastic to work at, if you have a disability and then you walk in the door on day one and you have a terrible experience and you turn around and leave again, you know that is going to backfire. So I think it is that balance of saying these, the incentive is to tell a good story, but it does need to be managed because you can have, the opposite effect. I think if you tell that story in the wrong way. So I think back to narrative, the care that organizations need to take around that narrative is very important. |
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| Diane Lightfoot | And I think having a positive conversation and a positive narrative, great. But it has to be an honest narrative. And it's interesting actually, that whenever we have our own sort of member and partner networks and task forces, it isn't people coming and going, look how brilliant we are. It's it's usually people saying, we're struggling with this. Is anybody else? Or we know we need to get better at this, but this is what we've done so far. So actually kind of publicly sharing what you were trying to do more, but acknowledging what they're still to do. It feels better than just saying, hey, we're marvelous. And then the reality gap is just too big. with a positive hat on. And sadly, I don't have an actual hat. It's interesting, though, that being seen to be good at disability is a positive. Arguably, that's a good thing in itself. Birgit, what do you think? |
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| Birgit Neu | I think it is. and the reason why I think, you know, disabilities is interesting and across the, the spectrum of, you know, the full spectrum of diversity strands as well, because it is more complicated, it is more resource intensive. because it has, I would say, sort of all the elements of things that need doing for other aspects of diversity, but it also has the additional lens of things like, you know, workplace adjustments, you know, digital accessibility. It has kind of other add-ons, which are also, you know, I would say more complex, involve different parts of the organization than DEI usually does to get it right. And so, I think the ability to demonstrate that you can manage those kinds of things, it's a really good sign if you're working on disability and making progress on that, because there are additional complexities for disability that aren't quite the same for other aspects of diversity. So I always look at that to at the organizations that are good, at disability and can, you know, defend those points around what they're doing. as, you know, potentially maybe being kind of better organized. and you know, you need very clear support at the top of the house to be able to do what needs doing around disability. So that, to me is always I take that as a good sign. I, I don't necessarily have the detailed research to back all of that up, but I think, you know, from experience, that is definitely something that we see that it's a harder aspect of diversity to get right. |
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| Diane Lightfoot | I think. I think you're right. It's more complicated. if I'm going to put my positive spin on again without my actual hat. I think one thing that is not necessarily easier, but it's tangible about disability in a way that maybe other areas of DEI aren’t, are like in the space of adjustments. So, I can remember speaking at GAAD, a Global accessibility awareness Day a few years ago pre-pandemic. And I sort of said that and I said, you know, I don't know of any assistive technology that stops people being sexist, racist, homophobic or transphobic, but actually technology can remove all the barriers in some cases for disabled, for disabled person, I should say that, Hector at Microsoft was there at the back of the room and he put his hand up and said, we're working on it. But anyway, joking aside, I think the positive is that you can actually do something that transforms people's experiences, sometimes overnight, sometimes not, because it's a huge system change. But if we if we're going to be in the sort of the broader DEI space for a moment, I don't think we can avoid the anti-woke piece, which I hope will go away. And but it does play very well, doesn't it, on social media in the major generally. But on the other hand, we're seeing more organizations are increasing their DEI commitments across the piece. So what do you think about that? Is it just the DEI needs to be done differently? |
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| Birgit Neu | I think those are those are some very big questions and a very, very dynamic, context at the moment. And yes, I think, you and I were looking at some US data that indicated that there was a greater share of organizations that were increasing their DEI commitments over the next two years, rather than cutting, and organizations, you know, they have made commitments. They are aligning to ESG frameworks. They have commitments in the public domain. There are things they have to report on. So there is a lot of activity that I would fully, expect to be ongoing that does need the resourcing. But it is undeniable that some of this rhetoric is impacting the DEI strategies globally. maybe more so on the US side, but we are certainly seeing that here in the UK as well. I think, you know, organizations that maybe were never, terribly serious about DEI in the first place or aren't particularly confident about their own purpose or position around this, are using some of that anti-woke workload as an excuse to step back? But I think, sadly to say, Diane, I think the kind of noise that we are experiencing, it's going to keep going. It's going to keep changing weekly, possibly daily. Now, I think every time we wake up and see what's happened in the news, you know, that's continuing to shift the dynamic and, you know, absolutely that social media construct, it does absolutely favor the extreme views, right? Anybody who wants attention right now is going to put out the big scary headlines, about, you know, Anti-Woke and DEI is dead. And I fully expect that to continue. And, you know, even in places like LinkedIn, it's not just on, Twitter or some of those other social channels. but I think, you know, we need to be clear that while that while the anti-woke noise is having an impact, I think there is a lot more to some of the DEI retrenching that is going on. It's not just that that's having an impact. I think there's a fundamental question that every organization answers differently about what the DEI work actually is, and there are inconsistent views across different organizations about which work belongs to DEI teams, or where that should be getting integrated as standard in other teams remits. And, you know, organizations are also really facing ongoing cost pressures. Right? So a lot of organizations are looking across everything that they do and where and how they do it. And the really challenging the value of what's being done. And in some cases, when they get to DEI, I don't think that they're necessarily seeing the outcomes or the impact from, you know, what's been going into it so far, all the time. So DEI teams are, you know, they're absolutely facing more scrutiny around budgets, team size. And again, that impact and evidence around, are you doing things that are really, you know, driving the right value and leading to, the kind of outcomes that we expect to see. So, I think it's a super important time right now, also in the evolution of DEI to be asking the questions of ourselves, of, you know, how are we making sure that, you know, where we are focusing our effort and attention? Are those the right places? Are those, you know, is that where we're going to get the real big value add in terms of driving change for people and making sure that we're continuing to pivot, to get to the things that really make a difference to what our organizations and our employees and all of our other stakeholders are really trying to achieve. |
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| Diane Lightfoot | Peter, I can see you want to come in. Do share.  |
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| Peter Torres Fremlin | Yeah, I think sort of, like Birgit’s mapped out the kind of the macro scene which is also a very big picture. But I just wanted to add that these dynamics also exist within organizations. Right. So say someone, explaining to their boss that a disability means they need an adaptation, could be seen as less credible if someone is not disposed to these sort of identity based, identity based requests. Right? In the same way, people that have received accommodations and progressed in work might be seen with scepticism by their colleagues. Is just there because they're in that, minority category, which is sort of both unfair. But just to just add, these are also within the organizations. And we always need to be sort of like, like innovating and pushing in the way that we can, like, describe why we are working on inclusion in the way we're working on it. |
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| Diane Lightfoot | A big challenge. I'm not surprising. It's a big topic. but that does lead me on quite nicely, which is that businesses aren't, of course, nameless, faceless corporations. They are made up of people, and people can make things happen. So isn't it better to encourage people within businesses who might be taking tentative steps towards creating a better world for disabled people. Perhaps Peter, I'll come to you first. |
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| Peter Torres Fremlin | Yeah. This is, one that I really feel because I've been part of, of projects or teams in organizations that are tiny and under-resourced, or just one person trying to shift the whole ship on accessibility. And you can't do it without encouragement from your friends and peers in other places. Right? You're just going to be you're going to in your own office. You're just going to be met all day with reasons you can't do it. People that don't agree with you and push back. So you absolutely need that community appears to learn from, to keep, to keep motivated and to get and to get excited about. But I think we need to differentiate there like, are we like recognizing the business or the recognizing and supporting the individual? And I think some of the, some things have kind of got a little bit, a little bit mixed, mixed up in that. And so often the sort of public nature of awards sort of conflates those. But, I mean, I totally agree with the question that, the, the individuals making the change, sort of need, need, need support and encouragement and we're on the same. We're on the same side and trying to shift very big, mechanisms. |
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| Diane Lightfoot | Okay. Birgit, you want to come in? |
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| Birgit Neu | Yeah. I think, you know, I, I spend a huge amount of time and sort of putting effort in upfront trying to get to know people around the organizations that I'm working on, working with to understand why they might care about this topic. because again, it you are only going to really be able to drive change if you have that kind of coalition and, and people helping you along the way. So finding those advocate for these topics, and, you know, people who have incentive to want to support, you know, different bits and pieces of what you're doing in this work is really, really key. but what I would say is there, you know, there are many things that you can do, again, by working through different advocates, people at the frontlines on the ground and getting them to, again, just make small changes in the day to day work that they do. You know, I've had an enormous amount of success that way by, you know, somebody in a particular team going, oh, you know what? I'm going to start to think about this within the context of my output. And then suddenly, you know, that starts to change. And if you get lots of those moving along at the same time, that can really drive things forward. But we have to be conscious that there are some things and some significant change that do need top down organizational support. and again, where we talk about things like, you know, resource requirements or sort of technology change where they're going to typically have to go through, you know, sort of boards and executive committees and those kinds of things for sign off. You know, some things do need, the kind of structural governance piece where you do need to understand how the nameless, faceless corporation organization works to drive change as opposed to just having people at the front lines all making, you know, sort of small changes in their individual areas. So I think it's kind of recognizing both the people and the system and having to kind of understand how to manoeuvre both, because you can do different things in different directions. |
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| Diane Lightfoot | I think it's back to that, progress over perfection bit as well as in it. So, so making sure we are moving forward and sometimes at BDF, we refer to ourselves as sort of lovingly nudging our members. So like you've got you've got that, and that's great. How about now doing this which would be even better. So that it isn't just oh good, we've got this. Well, we can stop now. And, I think your point as well about recognizing individuals, great. But at some point, that then has to translate into organizational and systemic change. And that does need the whole organization. It does need resources. It does need leadership. And of course, if you want to really demonstrate that and demonstrate you're making progress, our friend measurement starts to come in, and proof points and then Birgit, I know this is something that you're living at the moment because you're helping us develop our disability smart global tool, and yet you're still smiling. It's amazing. And from what you're saying, we where should we be setting the bar in terms of ease of engagement versus rigor, in terms of standards? |
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| Birgit Neu | Yeah. And I think that comes back to what I was just saying, is that the bar is going to be in different places for different things. and I think that's what we need to understand sort of topic by topic as we look at what needs changing. you know, there are some things where we can just tell people, please, just get on with it. and, you know, if you can make a change in your area, that's fine. But where we do need structure and governance around things, you know, one of my favourite topics at the moment is around AI. And you know what that's going to mean for the entire DEI space and certainly for disability. And, you know, that is absolutely an area where, you know, the sort of governance and the rigor around standards because of the complexities of data and particularly the state that disability data is in at the moment. You know, that is an area where I'd be, you know, right up at the at the very end of the, the rigor scale because of how this is going to work and what the potential risk around that is, whereas if I think around something like ease of engagement and maybe around more sort of learning topics, you know, there we can make it easier for people to just get on and do things as they will, because you know, that content is out there. And again, the risks around doing that are are very low and the potential, for opportunity and, and positive outcomes is higher. So I think there's there's not one answer to that. I think it's really sort of going through topic by topic and understanding, you know, again, which bits of this need, the rigor and which bits of this can we say, you know, carry on. |
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| Diane Lightfoot | And, your point about AI is, is very well made. And actually, the first episode in our podcast series, is, is focusing on AI, so, do check that one out. But I suspect it's a subject we'll be coming back to quite frequently, as things change. And so, when we do have standards, what about when businesses don't meet them? So I talked about, where BDF sort of lovingly nudge people. We sit very much, I guess, in the coach space, encouraging and coaching. But do we need a referee to or at least a line judge? Do there need to be sanctions when businesses don't get it right? Peter, what do you think? |
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| Peter Torres Fremlin | Yeah, I think that this question of role is really central to the washing, to the washing discussion, because this role has sort of been confused too much. Right. And I think it's partly been confused because we don't have like we don't have good enough referees or indeed rulebooks. Right. So like organizations working on disability often, like you might take a sort of more confrontational advocacy approach of like, like you're doing everything wrong. Why are you so bad? Be better. Right. But then there's many organizations like sort of among which BDF is, one which take that more look, we’re going in the right direction here. Here's the next step. And that's really essential to have partners like that in any growth. But it can be confused with like sort of certifying that people are making progress. So in, in this country then as you know, this disability confident scheme from, from government and many, many employers have committed to this. But when you look at research that whether, well, do they then have more disabled people working for them, are they then more likely to mention adaptations in a job advertisement or give a guaranteed interview just to basic sort of elements of the scheme? You find that they're not doing very well on that. So they're the kind of like, was it a scheme to encourage or was it a scheme to certify it's kind of also being used as certification, just gets very, confused. And I think that's very illustrative. And, do like, I mean then for you it's clear that you're, you're acting in the coach role. I don't know if, your partners might also see you as, as a referee that's kind of telling them whether they're doing it well or not. Obviously, some of this is we need just a stronger again, the regulatory environment. We need sort of stronger requirements on basic accessibility, more ways to tackle discrimination when it comes up. Different places have tried, sanctions and whatnot. like, it's quite complicated, like some places just quite like, direct about it. Like, if you're not hiring, 5% of the workforce is disabled. We're going to sort of put a sanction on. And many businesses then like, well, fine, we'll pay the sanction or evade this or just sort of like find some like way to kind of fake compliance to this issue or like we'll hire the person, but we're not really making them work and whatnot. So it's very like, it's kind of complicated as to what those sanctions should be. And then sanctions in the context that you don't have other supports creates, those negative dynamics as well. I think my main like as well as sort of putting it in that like, bigger picture, like my main ask would just be for us to be more clear, when we're playing coach and when we're playing referee. Right. So I see, kind of colleagues doing both. And then I'm like, well, which are you in? And then they’re like we’re playing coach here. And I’m like, was that clear on what you were saying. And it's not always, it's not always clear and it's our job to show that, given that we're spending more time with, with this process of change than, than other stakeholders who might not be so like, logged on to looking at that difference. |
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| Birgit Neu | Diane, can I jump in as well? I think, you know, one of the things which has been really helpful, again, from what we've seen, for some of the other aspects of diversity is, you know, the increasing transparency is helping, with some of that, I guess carrot and stick or slash refereeing as well as you know, there is more data in the public domain now which is leading to more pressure around, you know, what are companies really doing? Around some of these topics. And so, I think hopefully, you know, that's a, that's an additional layer of referee, just by having more transparency. And I think, you know, we'll see again, if, if some of the regulators, you know, depending on what happens here in the UK with something like the FCA and the policy that we're waiting for from them around what they're going to be requesting around more data and, and reporting, you know, will that start to play more of that role. But I think we're still a long, long ways away from having, you know, that kind of, a real referee out there to drive sanctions consistently across business, in the UK. |
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| Diane Lightfoot | And, Peter referenced the quota thing and actually before the DDA, it's 30 years of the DDA next year, there was a quota system and businesses paid the fines, so maybe the sanctions, the sanctions don't work. And I think you're absolutely right about being really clear, what role you're playing. And I suppose I was just reflecting as you were both talking. And I suppose sometimes we are referee, but we're privately referees. So, so we will have conversations. People will say, really, you shouldn't be doing that. But it's not a public thing. So that's slightly different. And again, being optimistic, perhaps some of this will play out in terms of brand and reputation. So actually where organizations are realizing they need to be good at disability and visibly so, when they get it wrong, perhaps the consumer in the brand side will provide those kind of natural sanctions that might be big, hopelessly overoptimistic. So, here's a killer one. Is it better for disabled people to try to persuade and create change from the inside after they've been hired, then to lobby from the outside? Or is that selling out? Peter. |
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| Peter Torres Fremlin | Excellent. Thanks Diane. There's like, obviously, kind of too much to say about this. Like, if w, change needs both, right? Change needs critics from the outside and people from the inside. It needs disabled people and non-disabled people. I'm not sort of. yeah. Whether it's selling out or whatnot is a personal moral compass. Did you sell out, and like, did you get enough money for selling out? Right. Like it's, I think something we need to need to keep in mind and often the experts on accessibility are underpaid compared to, like, equal skill roles and importance across, the organization. What I kind of would want to see like more of is people from the outside, that are sort of providing this important critique to, to business is to think through a little bit like what's needed because we, we would want businesses to invest on this distributing period. We would want them to make commitments on disability inclusion. We would want them to sign up to, BDF or whatever of their favourite member organization, that they are. And so you would want, these things and sometimes those, are critiqued without sort of seeing. Well, actually that's, how business does stuff and that's how business, makes, changes. Obviously, of course, for many, the same people would just suggest outside of these, a long way away from accessing these privileges of nice jobs and, and sort of all to aware that the current, sort of capitalist system is, punishing us or serving us, not serving us as well. And so obviously that's a very that's a very real position. I'm not going to sort of tell anyone in that position that they should sort of they have to accept sort of, these structures, yeah. |
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| Diane Lightfoot | Selling out. But how much did you sell it for? Goodness me. thank you. Thank you for that. And you're right to remind us as well, that not everyone has the luxury of actually being in, a nice job where they could do that. Influencing from the inside. So I suspect the answer is that you probably need both. so often people are scared of getting it wrong around disability inclusion. So end up doing or certainly saying nothing. And we don't want that to be the outcome of this podcast, that it's too difficult and too scary and you get accused of purple washing if you do anything. So actually what we want to do is to inspire meaningful action. So I'll come to each of you and ask for your final thoughts. For anyone listening. Birgit, do you want to go? |
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| Birgit Neu | That that's a big responsibility. Diane. I think there's a really important thing around this. This idea about being scared of getting it wrong. because also, you know, it's impossible to know absolutely everything there is to know about every disability, you know, let alone multiply times the rest of the diversity spectrum. And everybody's kind of intersectional, that the way that they identify as well. And what's really, really important here is that people demonstrate their intent. you know, even I've been working in the space for a very long time. I don't know everything. And I will go into people and be very clear about what I don't know and that I am trying to achieve a positive outcome. I'm trying to learn. I might get things wrong. I'm looking for help to get it right. And I think, you know, that's a really important frame. to explain, that this is a learning process. and to ask for help, and I think, you know, the majority of the time that that is met with, I think, I guess a positive experience on the other side of saying, you know, look, my what I want to do here is to, to do the right thing and help me make sure that I can do that the best that I can, because it's impossible to understand. Everybody's unique circumstances and experiences like that. and I think, you know, that's certainly the guidance we see. There have been more and more people asking for help around that, given the complexity of the diversity landscape. And then you add in things like the geopolitical situation on top of that and, you know, there are a lot of people that just think, you know, it would be easier to just say nothing, keep my head down, carry on, rather than wade into some of these things where either I don't know the answer or actually, you know, there is no answer. And these are very, you know, complex such, situations that people are facing. But I think it's all about demonstrating that intent and, you know, the will to try and do the right thing by people to at least have a conversation. And, you know, it always starts with that in terms of trying to drive an outcome. So I would encourage people to, you know, not shut down. And again, make sure that you're if you're having those difficult conversations, you can think about the kind of situations that you have, the men, you know, do you want to have them in a room full of 100 people, or do you want to have them 1 to 1? You know, there are different decisions around how you can manage things like that. if you're slightly less sure about how to have these conversations. But the most critical thing is to continue to be talking about this, because if we all shut down, nothing's going to change. |
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| Diane Lightfoot | Totally, and we're all learning all the time. I learn stuff all the time, and I don't believe there's such a thing as perfection either, because people have different preferences, all sorts of things. Peter, what are your thoughts? |
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| Peter Torres Fremlin | Yeah, really. I really agree with you both about the the journey and the learning journey. Like the best time to started something is ten years ago, but the second best time is today, right? So we go we go on that. I don't think that our conversation sort of should be taken, taken negatively. Like we're exploring sort of different forms, of say, reputational risk. They also exist if you don't if you don't do anything. And I think our sort of conversation is, is an example of like, people trying to think it through how you get from, from a commitment to, to substantial change, like what is what is the difference? What is the difference between them? How do they relate? And that speaks to the kind of, the asset of resources and experiences that there are to support people in, in taking that inclusion forward and making sure that we carry on learning together. |
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| Diane Lightfoot | Well, I think it's been a great conversation, and it's one that we could probably have continued for at least twice as long. but we probably need to draw it to a close there. So, my huge thanks to my two guests today, Peter Torres Kremlin and Birgit Neu for sharing your deep wisdom and insights and experience. I hope you've enjoyed listening to our conversation, and please do look out for the rest of our podcast series. Hope to see you on the next one. |