The Complexity of Diversity and Inclusion in Europe: A report from the DBP Global Member Conference in Paris

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On May 21, 2014, diversity and inclusion professionals from France, Italy, Russia, Finland, Canada, the US, Australia, the UK, Austria, the Netherlands and Germany, gathered at the Maison de Polytechniciens in Paris for the first European Diversity Best Practices Global Member Conference. Both the formal and informal conversations throughout the day highlighted the unique opportunities and challenges faced by diversity and inclusion (D&I) practitioners in Europe as their efforts gain momentum.

Dr. Rohini Anand, Global D&I Director at Sodexo, began the day by providing some context for D&I in Europe. With four generations working side-by-side, new legislation in many countries for LGBT people, and women and ethnic minorities being underutilized in the workplace, D&I work has become more complex. Companies continue striving to recruit and retain the very best diverse talent in order to compete in the marketplace. At the same time, Sodexo, like most companies operating in Europe, face the challenge of laws prohibiting them from collecting data on people's race, ethnicity, sexual orientation or ability/disability. Grounded in the legacy of World War II and the use of the Star of David to identify people by their ethnicity, these laws and the implications for D&I work in Europe were a recurring theme throughout the day.

With the stage set, Stephen Frost, Head of Diversity and Inclusion at KPMG UK, guided the audience through his model of inclusion, based on his recent book The Inclusion Imperative.

The three levels of diversity and inclusion he outlines are:

- Diversity 101 - Compliance based, legally driven
- Diversity 2.0 - Marketing and public relations-lead approaches. This can play a significant role in diversity and inclusion efforts but only goes so far. In order to drive change culturally, an organization will need to do more.
- Diversity 3.0 - Systemic culture shift. This model of inclusion does not begin and end with initiatives and budgets, but has life in all levels of the organization and in the human resources strategy from end to end.

Frost spoke about the tendency of many to see diversity as a zero sum game, either/or, her or me, us or them. To illustrate his point, Frost used an example from an exercise he does with MBA students. He asks his students to pair up and for 30
seconds they are asked to arm wrestle. Each person earns a point every time the back of their opponent’s hand touches the table. Eighty to ninety percent of the class scored one or two points with opponents struggling against each other to avoid losing. The remaining 10-20 percent of the class scored 30-40 points each in bouts that were more a give and take between the two competitors. His argument is that, “we advance our own self interest if we let other people win, too.”

Getting from the zero sum game to a culture of inclusion, Frost argues, will take a shift in the role of D&I practitioners from administrators of programs and initiatives to consultants. He stressed that D&I teams need to treat others in the organization as clients and build capacity for leadership in others to do the work. “How we will choose to include or exclude difference is the key determinant of Europe’s future and will affect our own careers and how we take D&I efforts forward.”

The topic of race and ethnicity in Europe, addressed by an impressive panel of executives from the UK, Italy, France and Austria, highlighted the struggles many European companies face in tackling this area of diversity at their organizations. For instance, race is a word not commonly used in Europe, causing some healthy tension in the room. Beatrice Achaleke, CEO, Diversity Leadership; Manager, European Diversity and Inclusion Congress, addressed this by saying, “No matter what wording we use, this is an issue we need to address because it is where most of the difficulties lie. If we just go across it and change the definition without actually understanding what the impact is on people, then we are not truly doing inclusion.”

Given the limitations on collecting ethnicity and national origin data in Europe, the issue of metrics and how to measure diversity and progress were also addressed by the panel. There was a concern raised from the audience that some companies may be using the lack of data as an excuse for not making progress in the area of cultural diversity at their organizations. Panelist Jamie Cooke, Vice President HR and Operations for Discovery Networks Central & Eastern Europe, Middle East & Africa said, “Measurement can sometimes drive short term thinking. When you focus on numbers it can over-simplify the issues as opposed to creating a space where more complex conversations can happen.”

Tunde Ogungbesan, Senior Diversity & Inclusion Consultant at Shell in the UK, offered an opposing view of the use of metrics. “At Shell, what gets measured gets done. Sometimes, data is the necessary evil to start the debate.” Beatrice Achaleke cautioned, “Although I agree with this, we also need to be very careful not to rely on this. We should ask the questions, ‘who are we measuring and for whom?’ We need to be inviting people to the table and finding out what they need. What kind of environment do you need to be active members? What resources do you need? These conversations should be implemented into an organization’s culture. This is when inclusion starts taking place.”

After a lunch break during which the conversation about race and ethnicity continued, participants broke into four small groups for Think Tank discussions on
the topics of gender, LGBT, people with disabilities and generations. Each group participated in knowledge sharing and creation regarding these areas and reported back to the group some of the key takeaways from their discussions.

A common theme in the gender group report out was how to engage men in the conversation and encourage senior level men to role model an inclusive environment including support for paternity leave and tying compensation to D&I goals. It was also suggested to consider a change of branding, if you will, from *flexible work to productivity* arrangements. The idea here was that flex time has become synonymous with moms as opposed to being inclusive of all employees. This re-branding could appeal to a wider audience and convince senior leaders of its merits across the organization. Lastly, the group suggested that there is often a lack of professional coaching for women early in their careers. An example was shared of a woman who may have the same number of years on the job as a man but lacks a global experience, for instance, and is no longer able to take on that kind of assignment due to family obligations and gets passed over for a promotion because of this.

Although millennials are an important part of the conversation about generational diversity, the generations group also discussed ways to bring all generations to the table for the benefit of all employees. Efforts such as mutual mentorship, shadowing programs and flexible work arrangements were all shared as common best practices.

The LGBT group similarly pointed to the importance of engaging allies in efforts to build an LGBT-inclusive workplace. Many companies have LGBT and Allies employee resource groups in order to not only make these networks more inclusive but also to allow for people to join without having to come out if they are not ready to do so. With growing concern over anti-LGBT legislation in many countries around the world, an audience member asked how companies support their employees who travel to many of these places. An employee from Cargill shared that their Global Security Group has developed travel safety guides for all countries to which their employees travel. These guides not only address traveling as an LGBT person but also, for example, as a woman in certain countries and as an American in others.

Lastly, the group that discussed people with disabilities discussed the problem of measurement and metrics. All countries have different regulations or laws concerning people with disabilities including many that do not allow companies to count at all. The group shared a paradox of measurement: “If you are not counted, you do not count. However, not everything that can be counted counts.” Echoing the panel’s discussion about race and measurement, the group stressed that although the numbers are interesting, it is the quality of programs that is more important. Shell shared their *Be Yourself* initiative in which they released a video highlighting employees at Shell, including senior leaders, who had various disabilities. This sparked great discussions and led to heightened awareness of these issues.
To close out the day, Satu Chauvin, Director Diversity Initiatives at Sodexo and Brian Baker, General Manager at Diversity Best Practices, shared their thoughts on what they heard throughout the program and asked the audience to share their insights as well. An attendee shared a powerful paradox she was faced with going back to her company after the day’s programs. “In the morning we were charged with moving toward a more systemic way of thinking about diversity and inclusion at our companies and yet we spent much of the afternoon sharing initiatives and programs.” Beatrice Achaleke responded this way:

“This paradox should make us grow. We should not look at it as either/or but rather as well as.”