

Why we need to practise what we preach

Adare Human Resource Management is leading the way in helping companies achieve greater gender balance within their organisations, writes **Siobhán Maguire**

In order to achieve any meaningful gender balance in the workplace, an all-encompassing approach must be taken. Awareness is just step one; practical policies and practices should be put in place to back up an organisation's intention to enact real change.

That's according to Adare Human Resource Management, who are currently helping Irish organisations change their narrative and approach to achieve gender balance.

Catherine Smith McKiernan, Head of Consulting in Adare Human Resource Management, said the debate on gender balance is quite rightly an ongoing focus for employers ahead of game-changing government legislation that will make gender pay gap reporting a mandatory requirement. However, she said there is a need to go beyond words and instead look to implement measurable, practical strategies to shift the scales in favour of a fairer and more

transparent gender balance landscape, including setting targets for change.

"Adare Human Resource Management has already started the conversation on how to achieve gender balance in the workplace," she said.

"But we go beyond this to show organisations how they can make practical, positive changes that involve both genders to deliver a better balance.

"It's about building on the knowledge that we have on gender balance and what this means in the Irish business landscape, and setting measurable targets that will help achieve sustainable parity."

Smith McKiernan said that in addition to the ethical argument for gender balance, there were far-reaching economic benefits to an equal opportunity workplace.

"We know getting the balance right across organisations drives a more success-



Catherine Smith McKiernan, Head of Consulting at Adare Human Resource Management

ful business environment for everybody. This includes growth in revenue and company success. It creates better workplaces, led by an engaged

workforce with opportunities for everyone."

Smith McKiernan uses Dublin City University (DCU) and Version 1, a technology company, as good examples of organisations which have made practical interventions to tackle the issue.

In 2015, DCU launched an initiative to promote principles of equality and embrace diversity, while Version 1 has substantially increased the number of females in senior management roles through targeted programmes to drive the change.

"DCU is an excellent example of a workplace setting targets and working towards those targets to achieve a better gender balance through their Women in Leadership Programme," she said.

"[Meanwhile,] Version 1 made a conscious decision to tackle an unconscious bias in the workplace, and that has resulted in more women in senior positions."

Smith McKiernan said that, for change to happen, the workplace must be a more welcoming environment for both men and women. Gender balance is not exclusively a women's issue, it involves everyone in the organisation from the top down, and success in changing the balance comes when it is embraced by all.

"There are so many practical initiatives that can be introduced, but these cannot just be targeted at women: there must be a universal approach," she said.

"Shared parental leave is one example. The offer of parental leave must be the same for everyone. It's about changing the dynamic towards a more equal and inclusive working environment."

Gender balance was the subject of a recent forum hosted by Adare Human Resource Management. Speakers included Jarlath Dooley, HR director at Version 1.

The forum highlighted the achievements of Adare Human Resource Management and Equality Strategies, its associate partner, collaborating on work with clients to develop practical programmes to address gender balance.

The gender pay gap is a global challenge. In November 2017, the World Economic Forum readjusted predictions that it would take 170 years for the pay gap to close, adding 47 years to the estimate. This means women may have to wait 217 years before workplace equality is achieved.

Figures compiled by the charity Dress for Success Dublin found that Irish women effectively work at least one unpaid month each year due to the gender pay gap. A gap of 14 per cent means women stop earning in mid-November compared to men.

Smith McKiernan said proactive interventions within organisations could push an agenda for change and help

achieve a better balance. She said the time for action was now and that meant putting into practice the many routes to better gender balance.

"There is no point in talking the talk if you're not walking the walk," she said. "We know the statistics and the length of time it will take to close the gender pay gap if we don't act immediately."

"This is where Adare Human Resource Management can help, because the gender pay gap is just a measurement sparking the debate – it doesn't invoke change. We, on the other hand, can sit down with organisations and show them how to make practical changes within the work environment to create more equal opportunities and drive success and growth."

For more information on how Adare Human Resource Management can help your organisation achieve gender balance, go to adarehrm.ie



Maria Hegarty, Managing Director of Equality Strategies

MAURA HICKEY

Nurturing a culture of gender balance in the workplace

BY SIOBHÁN MAGUIRE

Diversity, equality and inclusion are the latest buzzwords in organisations across the country. But what exactly do they mean and what are the implications of simply ignoring them?

Adare Human Resource Management is partnering with Equality Strategies to help tackle the challenge with gender balance within organisations, the associated risks and how to address these risks with practical policies and programmes.

According to Maria Hegarty, Managing Director of Equality Strategies one area that has grown in terms of demand for help is that of gender balance. With legislative changes such

as gender pay gap reporting on the horizon and a greater emphasis on the need for a more rounded approach to addressing gender balance, companies are seeking out solutions.

"Following best practice guidelines, we develop equality and diversity programmes using company surveys and focus groups with managers and staff to understand their needs, and specific actions to address those needs. This allows us to deliver a clear plan and communications strategy working alongside managers to ensure they can implement the action plan that is developed."

Hegarty believes that organisations must take account of the culture that already exists and making changes for the better that are inclusive to

all staff to generate a fair and balanced agenda.

"When we conduct reviews



For change to happen there has to be a company-wide ambition and engagement

in companies, we get to the bottom of the impact a gender imbalance is having on that environment," she said. "We ask what are the perceptions of roles in organisations? What kind of language is being used in job descriptions? What is the culture within the organisation?"

"Getting the answers to these questions enables us to look at the role gender plays in that organisation. We ask these organisations to encourage staff to stop and help them to examine and reflect on how they operate. Then we approach the idea of change that is meaningful to the staff and the delivery of their business objectives."

Hegarty said the gender balance debate was an important one and something all companies should be engaging with

regardless of the introduction of new legislation.

This sentiment was echoed by Catherine Smith McKiernan of Adare Human Resource Management. "A gender-balanced organisation with an inclusive organisational culture is a far more attractive place, attracting and retaining top talent, male and female, and driving better business results," she said.

"We are working with all sizes of organisations to focus on the gender balance agenda. For change to happen there has to be a company-wide ambition and engagement especially at senior leadership level, to recognise the need for change. We will actively support organisations all the way through the process and practicalities of achieving greater balance in the workplace."

How to close the gap

One Irish company is on a mission to achieve gender balance and its progress is inspirational, writes **Siobhán Maguire**

When Adare Human Resource Management held a forum that focused on the gender balance in the workplace in Ireland last month, it included a shining example of how this can be achieved through even the simplest of changes.

Jarlath Dooley of Version 1, Ireland's largest IT services and solutions provider, shared the story of his organisation's two-year journey to address gender imbalance in the workplace.

Speaking at the forum, Dooley said: "There was a catalyst two years ago that made us sit up and realise that we needed to achieve a better gender balance in the company. Our executive team was made up of white, middle-aged, sport-loving males. Our new Chief Executive at the time prompted us to challenge ourselves on the level of diversity within the organisation."

"Alongside that, many of us have daughters in secondary school who are looking at their career options and this alerted us to some of the biases that exist, particularly in the disciplines of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM)."

Examining its gender balance issues, Version 1 discovered that its senior management pool was predominately male with a ratio of 3:1 in favour of men. There were no females on the executive team.

"The first thing we did was to engage in unconscious bias training across the organisation," said Dooley. "This was a fascinating exercise because it shows the kind of learned stereotyping that exists if not addressed and how conditioned your thinking can become."

According to Catherine Smith McKiernan of Adare Human Resource Management, unconscious bias training is a great first step in the effort to achieve better balance. But it simply isn't enough to recognise that there are issues in how companies think, communicate and engage; it must



Jarlath Dooley, Director of HR and Integration, Version 1: "The IT industry is still very male-dominated"

then implement initiatives to change behaviours and culture.

For the Version 1 team, the training raised awareness and focused their thinking. The next layer the organisation examined was that of the interviewing process. There it found a leaning towards male-dominated interviewing panels.

"Predictably, males in technology interviewing for jobs in technology were going to hire more males in technology," said Dooley. "We started to mix interview panels upon this discovery and ensure there was a balanced panel in terms of gender."

"This is also more helpful for the female talent pool who are being interviewed. They are more inclined to want to work for a company that can show there are efforts under way to address gender balance issues. We are also cognisant that the IT industry is still very male-dominated and we must encourage more females into this sector."

The company also introduced 'blind' CVs. This means that applicants are not identified as male or female in the review process ahead of interviews, so each is assessed on ability rather

than gender. The combination of all these changes has paid off.

Two years on, there are now two women on the executive team, the senior management team has more female representation and last year, 50 per cent of those promoted to senior management were women, with a 50:50 pool of candidates for future promotions.

The company was also awarded the title of 'Best Workplace for Women' in the 2019 Great Places To Work awards.

Complimenting Version 1 on its achievements in a relatively short time-frame, Smith McKiernan said much could be learned from their experiences.

"I believe one of the key points made by Jarlath was this programme for change was led from the top level down, making conscious efforts to introduce interventions and setting targets. It's clear there was a motivation to make lasting changes in the company," she said. "At Adare Human Resource Management, we are looking to companies like Version 1 as best practice examples that demonstrate how change can be achieved relatively easily once the desire is there."



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Adare Human Resource Management is one of Ireland's leading experts in Employment Law, Industrial Relations and best practice Human Resource Management Services.

Gender Balance - it's more than diversity. It's a strategic business imperative.

Understanding the benefits of gender balance in your organisation is crucial to your future growth.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON HOW ADARE HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT COULD HELP YOU ON YOUR JOURNEY TOWARDS GENDER BALANCE, DIVERSITY & INCLUSION PLEASE CONTACT:

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