

Web meeting
Wednesday, 5th September 2018
17:00 – 18:30 CET
Webinar with Microsoft
Notes

Participants

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Summary of the Webinar

Microsoft is a company that has been a catalyst for innovation in products for decades. Their innovative spirit is demonstrated by their efforts to include people with disabilities into their work culture. They show a determination to innovate not only in products, but in work dynamics and culture. They believe that disability can make people better employees as they are purposeful, resourceful and determined.

‘Disability is a matter of perception’, they say. It is not merely an individual condition but a ‘mismatch of human interaction’ because of social exclusion. It is this mismatch that leads to social and business problems, not the condition.

Between step backs and lessons, Microsoft has a long history from accessibility to inclusion. Now, their mission is to ‘*empower every person and every organization on the planet to achieve more*’. They targeted this goal via 4 focus areas: culture, accountability, inclusion and innovation.

1. Culture

From raising awareness to product accessibility, inclusive recruiting, interviewing, onboarding and retaining talent, Microsoft has taken various steps to establish a *culture of inclusion*. They train interviewers on disability awareness and on ways to adapt for people with disabilities to be able to show their talents, such as assistive technology, mentor systems and new employee orientation.

2. Accountability

Remaining transparent on their progress and sharing their strategies and roadmaps for their digital conquest is also paramount. They are *accountable to their partners as well as their clientele*. NGOs constantly educate and support the company, while clients have access to a Disability Answer Desk, a free help desk from all over the world for any problems that can occur when using Microsoft products.

3. Inclusion

Aside from the work culture, *inclusion in daily tasks and in the use of technological tools* is also important and necessary. Central to that idea is making the navigation in programmes such as PowerPoint or Word as accessible to people with disabilities as possible through features like Word Accessibility Checker, PowerPoint Designer or Text-to-Speech. With these, it is possible to increase accuracy, comprehension and creativity without the need for unnecessary mental or motor effort.

4. Innovation

An important event at Microsoft is the *Hackathon*: for three days, all employees are invited to form teams and solve problems and advance ideas for the better. Microsoft's Hackathon is different from other hackathons as all employees, not just coders, bring their unique skill sets to a project. This year, 200 hacks with the objective of empowering people with disabilities were conceptualized (learning tools, artificial intelligence technology).

For more information, a presentation is available.

Recommendations for EPR Members: Moving Forward

- 1. Inclusive leadership:** Leadership is an incredibly powerful force to establish inclusive work culture. Inclusive leadership takes account of diversity within markets, customers, ideas and talent. Inclusive leadership is rooted in respect, belonging and confidence. Inclusive leaders are also transparent, making sure to involve all stakeholders in their strategies while remaining accountable to both their partners *and* clients. Lastly, inclusive leadership welcomes new, innovative practices or ideas.
- 2. Inclusive culture:** An inclusive work culture sees people with disabilities as subject-matter experts and acknowledges that people with disabilities have added-value skills that are needed in the professional world. Inclusive workplace culture also means actively promoting product accessibility, conducting habitual awareness-raising and training, and practicing inclusive hiring practices.
- 3. Inclusive system:** Inclusion needs to happen at all academic and professional career stages – from education to onboarding, interviews, hiring as well as work tools and work environment. We must take a step back and understand that in order to have a genuinely inclusive workplace, inclusiveness must also take place in education, training, and other non-work areas of life.