Michael Vermeersch:
Hi there. My name is Michael Vermeersch. I'm from Microsoft. At Microsoft I work in services as a digital inclusion lead and basically across all industry sectors and making sure that our technology and service [inaudible 00:00:15] in the most inclusive way possible. What brings me to TechSharePro is well, I think the key here is to learn and share and connect. We're on a journey; I'm sure there's areas where we do well, but we could do better. And this is where you really learn and share with others what your experiences are. And I think that that's why these conferences are really key and important. There you are. I can go a little bit further if you'd like that.

Michael Vermeersch:
Okay, so here's the thing. When I started with this, I would get comments like, oh, but Michael, you will never have a firefighter who's disabled. That will never work. So, we can only be inclusive up to an extent. So I went to [inaudible 00:01:12] X couple of years back, which is a conference on assisted living and disability inclusion. And there are [inaudible 00:01:22] with swivel chairs to pick up wheelchairs, lift the wheelchairs, and then hope you could have a farmer who is disabled and he can now farm his fields. He or she. And I would only have that point of evidence because I went there to the conference. And that's why I think these conferences are really key, to learn and see those advances that everybody's making in their own way.

Speaker 2:
Great. And Microsoft is one of our sponsors.

Michael Vermeersch:
Oh, yes.

Speaker 2:
And another key role of the conference is to amplify the inclusion message with businesses. Why is that, in particular, getting the message across to business and professional so important, do you think?

Michael Vermeersch:
So I think really the key in this is that disability inclusion, and with that, because we're getting more and more into digital transformation, that this digital inclusion for people with disabilities is really key for two reasons alone, if you think about it. It's one, you get access to more talent. There's an immense talent pool out there, disabled talent that brings loads of skills to the workforce, and also has those innovative views and those creative views of the world. And I think businesses will benefit from that. And I think they should do that.

Michael Vermeersch:
The second thing is, well, there's the Purple Pound, 250 billion pounds per annum, that businesses are not benefiting from in the UK. And then same thing, why would you say no to one in five customers? One in five customers are disabled. Why would you say no to that? And I think that's why, again, inclusive design, all this kind of stuff that we're do doing, our disability inclusion, is really key for businesses to get more talent and more market share, actually connect with 20% that they typically are ignoring. So that's the top line I would say.

Michael Vermeersch:
We ourselves see that we're changing our culture, we get better products, which are developed by people with disabilities, for people with disabilities, with people with disabilities. That in itself drives our future capital, which then reinforces that culture change. We're getting people, talent, that wants to work for us and at the same time we have customers who want to talk to us about this. These are things that never happened before. And I think that's why this is really key for us, but also for any other business because any other business can have this as well.

Speaker 2:
And just finally, I mean, Microsoft has got a long history of making accessibility a everyday part of what you produce. So we often talk at AbilityNet in My Computer My Way that those, like the accessibility features that are built into Windows for example, and it feels like the barriers are coming down between stuff that's for disabled people and just inclusive designs. It'd be good to get your take on that.

Michael Vermeersch:
So I think by providing a platform, operating system, a collaboration platform, which has built in accessibility features is making it mainstream. And in that sense, wherever you go, you will have at least that level of accessibility. And it gives them people that choice and that flexibility, whether they're at work or at home or on the roads, that they can consume things in a more accessible way and they can be more productive. Because it is also a story of productivity here. At the same time, if you then see that only 17% of people are born with a disability, 83% of people will gain a disability in their working life.

Michael Vermeersch:
And that's not a binary thing. That can be a progressive thing. The mere fact that those features are built in and there to help you just when you need it, want it, and that could be just temporary, but could also be you're getting a little bit older, you're sight is going a bit. The mere fact that those things are in there, it's just empowering and helps the productivity overall. And I think that that's what almost the story is, is that making that mainstream. And at the same time, that sends out also that message that it is actually easy to do inclusion.