# Transcript for How to build a culture of empathy webinar – May 2022

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| MARK: Hello everyone, I'm Mark Walker from AbilityNet, hopefully that is |
| where you thought you would be, to learn about culture and empathy in an organisation. |
| We will be starting in a few moments. |
| Usually we allow two or three minutes for everyone to join. |
| We have over 150 people expected to be here. |
| If you have, if you are familiar with Zoom and you are familiar with the use of captions, we do have live captions, |
| so you can switch on captions. |
| We will be showing you some other housekeeping information in a minute. |
| We have closed captions in place if you need to use them. |
| I will give it one more minute and we will get rolling. |
| You can see some of the information there which is the housekeeping you can use the URL which is in the chat |
| for you to click on and find. |
| You can have them on a browser screen or built into the screen. |
| Or the slides we are using are available for you to if that is easier for you to do. |
| If you go to the website on the slide share page you can see them there. |
| We will have a recording of this webinar and slides and the transcript available after the event. |
| That is on the website on the screen now. |
| Try not to use the chat. |
| We have chat and you haven't. |
| Because with the screen reader people have everything in the chat announced so we don't use chat in our webinars. |
| But we have Q&A, so if you can see a button on the control panel for you to use. |
| We will answer them or we will use them later in the session and take questions at that point. |
| Let's get going with this. |
| There will also be some polls and some chances for you to ask questions as we are going along. |
| And fill in a webinar form afterwards. |
| It's worth saying that with this type of topic you might ask questions we don't necessarily get to answer. |
| We always wrap that up into an FAQ afterwards and answer as many of the questions as you have. |
| Please use the Q&A as much as you want as you are going along. |
| We may or may not be able to answer all those questions. |
| So, a little bit about AbilityNet, in case it is the first time you have encountered us. |
| We are a UK charity that believes the digital world should be accessible to all. |
| We work with people of any age, living with any disability or impairment, helping them to use |
| technology to achieve their goals at home, at work and in education. |
| We have been doing that for over 20 years. |
| We have a number of different services relating to digital accessibility. |
| Testing, strategy, design, reviews and so on for people who are building websites and apps. |
| We work with employers to help them develop their strategies for supporting disabled people, |
| particularly in terms of the technology they use within the workplace. |
| We're also, we have a Network of 300 volunteer who is can go into people's homes and support them directly. |
| We help several thousand disabled and older people during every year to get to grips with their technology. |
| To help them get the most out of the tech they have. |
| What we're going to look at today is about empathy. |
| So I've got two great guests here. |
| We published an article about this a bit over a month ago. |
| About what theme has do with diversity and inclusion and accessibility. |
| So today is moving on from that. |
| If you haven't seen the article there is a lot in there about why empathy forms part of the conversation around |
| accessibility and disability, inclusion and diversity. |
| There is five people we interviewed in that article, Ted is one of them. |
| We will be introducing him in a moment. |
| What we wanted to do there is really review, look at what is empathy all about? |
| What role does empathy play in enabling us to deliver accessibility and inclusion in the workplace. |
| What we are doing today is a bit more of catch up on how we do that. |
| This isn't about the background to all of that stuff. |
| You can go and read that article. |
| This is looking at some of the top tips that we have for actual practical things that you might be able to do in |
| the workplace or within your team. |
| So somebody has asked for the link. |
| It's AbilityNet. |
| org. |
| UK/empathy, that is the link to that story if you haven't seen that yet. |
| It is up there yet if you want to look at it. |
| So we have two great speakers today. |
| I'm going to introduce to them and we are going to crack on and start the conversation. |
| So Maria, hi, how are you? |
| MARIA: Hi, thank you for having me. |
| MARK: Checking we can hear you. |
| What's your role what organisation do you work for? |
| MARIA: OK so my name is Maria and, as you know, I am the senior equality |
| diversity and inclusion manager at |
| HS2. |
| Everything I do as part of my role has to do with equality, inclusion and empathy. |
| I was very pleased when I was invited to join you. |
| My background is really in EDI and disability inclusion. |
| Back in the day when I was working as a consultant, I used to be a social entrepreneur, and I was a national |
| winner of the disabled interpreter award in 2010. |
| I was Vice Chair of the community disability engagement group for 2012. |
| I also founded a co-operative of disabled women, Sisters of Frida. |
| And in 2019 I was very proud to have been listed in the power 100, as one of the most influential disabled |
| people in the UK. |
| The reason for this is because I am severely deaf. |
| I communicate with captioning, lipreading. |
| Amplified telephones, people's facial expressions, and basically all of these ingredients enable me to have |
| good communication. |
| This is what makes me passionate about inclusion and empathy. |
| MARK: Cool, thank you. |
| Very briefly Ted I will ask you to introduce yourself and then we are going to dig in a bit further into |
| your work and Maria and find out more about what you are doing. |
| TED: Sure, my name is Ted Drake the global Accessibility Leader at Intuit, |
| I have been doing accessibility for 20 years. |
| I got into it as website manager for the Museum of Art in San Diego, I realised the websites we are creating |
| had to be accessible. |
| Because everybody who goes to a museum should be able to enjoy the artwork. |
| That led me to exploring accessibility, the standard space web development that started to become |
| popular around that time. |
| I joined Yahoo! |
| I was an engineer and co-founded their accessibility lab. |
| I moved to Intuit and I have been there for ten years. |
| It is coder reviews, design reviews, working with legal, equality, diversity and inclusion, every day is |
| something different. |
| The whole goal is making it easier for customers to run a business, do their taxes and manage their money. |
| MARK: Thank you. |
| I will run a poll, just because we are interested in getting the people on the call to tell us who is here. |
| That can obviously then guide some of the thinking we have about questions and answers that we are going to give |
| when we meet Ted and Maria. |
| Could I ask you, the questions should be available to you, could I ask you to fill those in now. |
| Everybody who is on the control. |
| We are interested in the range of roles that you have. |
| Some of you will be Accessibility Specialists. |
| Some of you are HR professionals, diversity and inclusion. |
| and others. |
| If there are other roles that have drawn you here, we are interested in that and mention that in the Q&A. |
| Something that you think would be relevant for us to know about your professional interests. |
| We have another question below that, which is why you are here. |
| I am an empathic leader, I want to be one, what is your interest there. |
| Also about the nature of the organisation you work for. |
| Is it not-for-profit? |
| Is it university? |
| What size business is it? |
| And then in the Q&A if you have got a chance to put anything there you think will be relevant, it helps us think |
| about what topics will be relevant to us. |
| I've got 75 of 111 people polled so far have answered. |
| I will give you a moment to fill that in and we can have a quick look together at who is here and think |
| about that changes what we are going to do. |
| OK we have an archaeologist in the Q&A! |
| A programme curricular developer in university design, please do chuck any details you think are interesting. |
| Just to see who else is in the room? |
| I have ended the poll and I will share the results. |
| We can all see who is here. |
| The most people, 28% of people say some of my day-to-day work includes accessibility. |
| So AbilityNet's audience is often people who are working in digital accessibility or accessibility of some |
| kind. |
| 18% of people say they are a diversity and inclusion professional, that is maybe more of the crossover |
| with Maria's work. |
| A reasonable number of people it's your main role, and then there are others. |
| Obviously different types of organisations as well, an NHS nurse has just popped up in the Q&A. |
| You aspire to be empathic leaders and you want to know In more about empathic leadership from a |
| non-leadership position. |
| That jumps out of the second poll. |
| 49% of people saying they aspire to be an empathic leader and 42% of people saying they want to know more |
| about that from a non-leadership point of view. |
| not-for-profit rolled together with a university is the biggest number of organisations here. |
| So not-for-profit, including university well over 50%. |
| 17% of people from small or medium sized businesses but larger number from large businesses. |
| A sense of the scale there. |
| A university is obviously a large organisation in terms of employees as well. |
| Great, thanks for filling that in. |
| Right, so, I'm going to just turn your video off a moment Ted and I'm going to have a chat with Maria. |
| So, Maria, you talked about your role being very broad and to do with diversity and inclusion, equality, |
| also your background clearly relating to your interest in disability, not just your personal relationship with |
| disability, but all the influence you have had in terms of inclusion. |
| Where do you put empathy in terms of the value it brings in terms of inclusion? |
| What does it bring to life for you the idea of empathy in your work? |
| MARIA: That's great question. |
| I think empathy is obviously a value for me. |
| It is like a personal value. |
| It is an essential part of respect. |
| I think that it's a great value to have in practise. |
| I think that empathy is about asking about questions. |
| Like your brilliant article the difference between sympathy and empathy. |
| Equality, diversity and inclusion really is all about moving from sympathy to and actually going into |
| empathy. |
| Going back to asking the question, what works for you? |
| How do you want to be included? |
| And really hearing that. |
| In the olden days we used to be asked what's wrong with you if you have a disability. |
| I feel so sorry for you, you poor thing, et cetera. |
| That is the classic empathy that is demeaning and making disabled people victims. |
| Making them out as victims or passive objects of charity. |
| And actually having empathy is about having respect and having a question what was for you making people feel |
| heard. |
| And to me as a deaf person, it's so important because, you know, I really want to hear people because I'm deaf. |
| So I transformed, my disability into something that is almost like an interior trait. |
| It's the willingness to really hear people, and therefore, maybe I don't just listen with my hearing aids, but |
| I listen with my heart. |
| I listen with everything that I have got in my tools, all my tools in order to include people. |
| If that makes sense? |
| MARK: Absolutely. |
| That's great. |
| And it's very inspiring that idea of thinking, of listening with your heart as well. |
| The idea that this is a human thing, it's a personal thing. |
| And I think the idea that empathy is very human, isn't it? |
| And the respect that comes with listening to people and trying to understand their needs is a very human |
| thing, I think. |
| It's very powerful. |
| I think people respond to that. |
| So, in your role, I guess it's fair to say that you are trying to build empathy across the organisation. |
| I know you have an incredibly diverse organisation, and also it's in the construction industry, so there may be |
| people who don't know what HS2 is, I notice we have people from all over the world here. |
| So briefly tell me about HS2, challenge in the sense of professional challenge and some of the things you |
| are doing to generate empathy within the workforce. |
| MARIA: HS2 stands for High Speed 2. |
| So we are literally a megaproject. |
| Building the biggest infrastructure project in Europe. |
| It's going to be the longest underground and overground railway, so that we can run our fastest trains on |
| it. |
| It involves many, many people. |
| HS2 will have about 2,000 staff, of which I'm responsible for in terms of equality, diversity and inclusion for |
| the workforce specifically. |
| But essentially HS2 manages all of our suppliers, that are delivering HS2 and we are part of the construction |
| and engineering industry. |
| So we manage and we deliver the actual infrastructure from a construction perspective and from an |
| engineering perspective. |
| So everything from building the stations, cleaning out the waste. |
| Making sure people along the route are helped and supported. |
| Because they are affected by the works. |
| Of course also we will build all of the new stations. |
| We will lay down the tracks, we will build the new trains, everything with our inclusive design principles. |
| So it's a big, big job that will, you know, will go on for the next 15 years or so. |
| It's a big project. |
| It's an absolute privilege to be able to work at HS2, because what we do in inclusion for our workforce can create |
| a ripple affect with all our Supply Chain that employs around about 30,000 people a month at the peak of |
| construction. |
| At the moment we employ round about 22,000 a month. |
| That involves everybody, from the brick layers to the people who, you know, driving the tunnel boring |
| machines, building the tunnel underground, it is an incredible project. |
| MARK: Cool, as you say it is an unusual environment to work in because |
| of the breadth of it. |
| So you must have some fairly simple things you are trying to do. |
| You know this is what we talked about previously. |
| So for you the challenge must be that complexity as well. |
| But I like the three things you are going to talk to us about feel like there is structure and framework for |
| that approach in terms of building empathy. |
| Can you tell me a bit about how you go about that? |
| What are the three core parts of your work right now in terms of building empathy? |
| MARIA: You are right. |
| When I joined at HS2 first, I was a little bit worried, I thought oh my gosh, I have never worked in |
| engineering and construction. |
| I work with train operating companies before, but the railway was already built! |
| So this is completely different as an industry really. |
| I was thinking what kind of environment will that be, construction? |
| Engineering? |
| How inclusive are they? |
| I was a little bit worried about the massive change ahead? |
| But actually when I joined in it was incredible, because I realised that actually one of the things that we say |
| in the team is it might be complex but you will never be bored. |
| And that's for sure. |
| So I love that, I love that aspect of being so involved in equality, diversity and inclusion that not one |
| single day is the same, different things to get involved in. |
| That is the challenge but also the real privilege, it's a real privilege as well. |
| So one of the things that really got me hooked was that when I joined we started working on the company values. |
| That was really key because there were values voted by all of the workforce and they are integrity, |
| safety, leadership and respect. |
| So that is giving you a really good background to work against. |
| I guess what I'm trying to say is everything you do, if you join a new organisation and you find out what the |
| values are, all of the work that you are doing, if you refer to the relevant values in order to make your |
| way and pave your way in, that kind of giving you the support. |
| Everybody likes the values, they have been voted in! |
| So that's a little sort of psychological thing that you can use to say, EDI is part of the respect |
| values, and this is why we do this. |
| So that is definitely something that is very useful. |
| So one of the things that we do around equality diversity and inclusion is to equip people with the |
| right conversation skills. |
| That helps you solve so many problems because a toolkit you can look at how do I have a constructive conversation |
| around performance management. |
| If I'm a manager and I have someone who is not performing as well, it is quite hard, it is a difficult |
| conversation to have had. |
| How do I do so inclusively and respectfully. |
| For example you have a disabled team member and they require some adjustments. |
| Some people might think that there is too much attention being paid on that person. |
| They might feel resentful or some of the flexibility or so on. |
| Understanding the language to have, projecting it against the values, this is about respect, this is about |
| integrity and so on. |
| It helps our managers drive this conversation in a very thoughtful way. |
| I will woo definitely say provide train to go all your managers in having constructive conversations. |
| So that's definitely something that we do. |
| Then the other thing that we have done, and this is really ground-breaking for engineering and |
| construction is we have developed great flexible working policy. |
| Which actually is really ground-breaking for our industry, and actually my colleague, Stephanie is |
| the brains behind it. |
| And she was invited by ACAS, the employment tribunal to talk about how she put together this policy. |
| So the importance of this is that if we do something at HS2, you can be sure that our suppliers will also look |
| up to it. |
| That's where we have a real opportunity to influence and build our legacy. |
| So the flexible working policy is a fantastic piece of work because it's really based on the respect value. |
| The integrity value. |
| And basically it stands on the principles of the three Ps, personal choice, professional development and |
| programme needs. |
| So you can negotiate a little bit of how the flexible working can work for you. |
| For example, if you are a brick layer, you have to relate your request for flexible working in relation to |
| your role. |
| So perhaps you might not be able to work from home because you have to be there on the ground laying down the |
| bricks. |
| However, you can absolutely have a conversation about when it is strictly necessary. |
| Do you need time to take leave and negotiate around childcare, negotiate around any other things, caring |
| responsibilities for example. |
| So you have a little bit of flexibility. |
| Your mental well-being is secured with that, because you have the comfort of knowing your manager is |
| on-board, and you can really integrate your work life and your personal life in a way that is always is requesting |
| flexibility but is constructive and open to negotiation. |
| The flexible working policy we have needs to be based on the role. |
| Not everyone can work from home, some prefer to work in the office. |
| The flexibility and the spirit behind it, built on the respect values, I think that's what's really amazing. |
| And really ground-breaking in the industry. |
| Then I will mention one last example which I'm very proud of, actually. |
| Because as disabled person myself, I really appreciate it when people make adjustments for me. |
| For example just joining in this conversation, AbilityNet have made sure that I could access the |
| conversation, that I could see the captioning and so I feel fully included. |
| So I know how important it is to have adjustments being made promptly. |
| So one of the things that we are doing at HS2 is we have a very good system that captures the adjustment of |
| our employees, we work in collaboration with our occupational health staff, also our DCS, between us we can try to |
| make sure that all the people have what they need as soon as possible, as soon as they start working with us. |
| So I think that gives people a sense of trust and a sense of welcome and feeling included. |
| It is about empathy, because it is about listening. |
| Rather than making everybody feel like treating everyone the same, we are empathetic enough to listen and |
| make adjustments for individuals rather than one size fits all. |
| Those are pretty good examples of how we can be empathetic employers. |
| I'm really proud of it. |
| MARK: Thank you Maria. |
| They are really good examples, very practical, they change people's day-to-day experience as well. |
| That's important so people in the organisation feel valued and connected and supported. |
| We will come back to some questions. |
| If you have any questions for Maria please start putting in the Q&A. |
| I will jump over to Ted. |
| I have to find Ted somewhere to bring him back in. |
| I will ask you to start your video Ted. |
| I have to find a button. |
| There you go. |
| I will catch up with you in a second Maria. |
| Ted, we talked about this, it strikes me Maria has this very broad view around diversity and inclusion, |
| organisation-wide. |
| Your role is more from AbilityNet's point of view focused on accessibility of digital interfaces |
| and apps and websites and so on. |
| Tell me a bit about where empathy plays a part in your work, and also this longer view that you have, and we |
| were saying five years ago nobody used the word "empathy" particularly as a day-to-day characteristic, I suspect |
| it's always been there in the work around accessibility, it's an essential ingredient part of making |
| accessibility work. |
| So where does it fit into your picture of your role over that time. |
| TED: We had an interesting conversation earlier. |
| One of the things we talked about was, for a lot of people that are accessibility leaders' professionals |
| we could do this all day long. |
| Empathy is just what we do. |
| Because it's so core to making products successful and inclusive. |
| But I was also saying it wasn't that way all the time for me. |
| I started in accessibility about 20 years ago. |
| My background is in fine art. |
| I was the website manager for an art museum. |
| When I became the website manager for the art museum, they told me it has to be accessible. |
| 20 years ago let's think about 2021, that is about when it was. |
| This was a time when the web was really in bad shape. |
| Everybody was just trying to make explosively colourful and distracting websites. |
| So all of a sudden we are told we have to make it accessible. |
| And all that we were told is use alt text, that was about it! |
| So accessibility at that time was like let's figure out how we can make it accessible, it was about |
| engineering. |
| It was about what are these new WCAG requirements and things like that. |
| I early got into a shift of standard space web development. |
| Which means building stuff right the first time. |
| That started making things a bit more clear. |
| Now we are trying to figure out what is successful, but we also have this whole new method of creating websites. |
| We know what we need to do. |
| We know what CSS and happen. |
| HTML is and put them together in the correct way. |
| It was still analytical, still very much about bits and pieces. |
| I joined yahoo about 17 years ago. |
| And at Yahoo, that is when I first met people using screen readers. |
| I met people using Zoomify, and Assistive Technology for people who were deaf. |
| That is when accessibility went from being bits and pieces and code to actually working with people and |
| seeing the impact you have. |
| So I would say empathetic for me started when I actually, it's like it went from theory to reality. |
| So one of the things we do at Intuit, I have been there for ten years, I start with empathy. |
| To me it's like I don't think about it. |
| But there are so many microelements to it. |
| First thing is to understand the customer, in order to understand the customer we do a lot of customer |
| interviews, we do a lot of videos, we do a lot of volunteering. |
| To become one of our Level 2 accessibility champions one of the requirements is to do a "follow me |
| home" with your team and volunteer. |
| To create closed caption videos, audio description, things like that. |
| I want people to no longer think about accessibility as something you do for, you know, a community, but to |
| understand accessibility is how this person is going to create an invoice. |
| Or accessibility is how this person is going to be able to communicate with their accountant, or file their |
| taxes. |
| And once you actually start to put a face to who your customer is, it really starts to come together. |
| Mark there is a question that has popped up. |
| Because you have been involved in the leadership role for some time, in terms of building accessibility into |
| the things, are you hearing people ask you about empathy and see it coming together in terms of the way the |
| organisation thinks about all its customers. |
| Not just about the design and code, but we have seen this change, and one of the things we haven't mentioned yet |
| is the pandemic, which everyone says has brought a level of understanding and knowledge. |
| How has that influenced how easy it is to start a conversation around accessibility. |
| TED I would say that this is where the accessibility team, having mature accessibility programme has made a |
| leadership group, a hub of empathy around the company. |
| This is especially true with diversity equity and inclusion with the George Floyd murder. |
| We already had a lot of ideas about empathy and customer, but it was the accessibility team that had already |
| worked with every Employee Resource Group and Product Team, and we were on first name basis with all the |
| leadership and such. |
| We were able to provide assistance to everybody to make those connections. |
| Intersectionality is the next stage for accessibility. |
| If you are not thinking intersectionality at this point you really need to. |
| That's really where we are extending empathy. |
| It's no longer I'm making this screen work for someone that's blind using a screen reader. |
| I'm making this invoice work for someone that's blind but also I may have, maybe have got a masters degree |
| but still working a part-time job, and they are trying to run a business on the side. |
| These are the things that we are starting to look at. |
| Empathy, when it came to Covid is because we had already established some ideas with videos and customers |
| interviews, that mental health and neurodiversity is something that affects everyone around us, it was not |
| like these isolated topics. |
| We had a really strong response when it came to moving from an in-person to virtual. |
| Really quickly implemented several programmes for mental health. |
| Not just Zoom fatigue, but also the impact it had on people from the Covid and also from being in a house with |
| your family non-stop. |
| People needed help and we realised very quickly there were mental health concerns. |
| Not only did that help our colleagues that had mental health problems like depression, but also those that |
| normally wouldn't say they have a mental health concern, but at the same time were exhausted and were |
| starting to have anxiety. |
| That was one way by having a mature accessibility plan with empathy, it made it a lot easier for the company |
| to start supporting whatever needs to come up at any point. |
| Mark are there particular parts of the organisation that you are connected to that you weren't so much. |
| I'm wondering around HR and some of the stuff you have described there, the more rounded picture of how the |
| organisation works, maybe you are able to connect into that because of the accessibility work you have been |
| doing, it then lends influence to the work you are doing, I guess? |
| TED: Our accessibility team is primarily product focused. |
| We are focused 75-85% of our work is on the products. |
| However, I would say over the last two or three years, we have been working closer and closer with the |
| accommodations team. |
| It used to be more like here's "ask JAN" jobs accommodations Network. |
| Great place to ask about the accommodations at work, we would say go to ask JAN, and look up your |
| condition, what kind of accommodations you need, and then go over to our workplace accommodation people and say |
| this is what I need. |
| But what we have done is we have become much more of a team over the years. |
| We just implemented a centralised budget which makes it much easier for small teams to afford American sign |
| language interpreting. |
| It removes that barrier of I'm a team of four people, I don't have the resources to pay for X, now that |
| budget is coming out of a central budget. |
| That really helps hiring and diversity. |
| So, yeah, accommodations is one where we have really started working together. |
| I MARK: I will bring Maria back in. |
| Just getting my mouse to work. |
| Can I ask you Maria to put your video together. |
| I will jump over the video, unless you want to show it. |
| I have the video here. |
| TED: Let me describe it for people. |
| There is a video that we show to everybody. |
| It's a video I believe from the Department of Labour in the United States. |
| It's not a great title, Disability Sensitivity Training Video is the title on YouTube. |
| It's about four minutes long and it's excellent. |
| We show this to every new employee. |
| We show it at every workshop and boot camp. |
| Anywhere we can. |
| Anybody who wants to become a champion we show this video. |
| In four minutes you can learn more about disability etiquette than in a two-hour workshop. |
| MARK: I think it's an example of sensitising people, that's not the |
| wrong word necessarily, but that empathy is first encountering people knowing what to say, understanding |
| different perspectives. |
| I wondered whether there was anything like this you use Maria? |
| Some of the capture-all, the first contact with disability that people may have had where they are a bit |
| unsure what to say and a bit unsure what language to use? |
| Do you have things in place where people have resource that is they can use or links like this that Ted has |
| suggested from YouTube? |
| MARIA: No, we don't have anything on YouTube right now to share right now. |
| We have an HS2 channel where we talk about many initiatives. |
| Especially around the Supply Chain and what we are trying to do and what they do to make sure that the work is |
| inclusive, to all the people affected, to the workers on site and so on. |
| But what I will say is generally, in the workforce, internally, we do refer to workplace adjustment. |
| That way we avoid the language issue. |
| Also because, as you well know, disabled people are quite reluctant to share their disability status, for |
| obvious reasons. |
| Because for so many people disability is still a stigma. |
| And they don't know, they might be fine with it, but they don't know how an employer understand, they don't |
| know how a line manager will understand their disability so they are reluctant to share. |
| So if we actually refer to workplace accommodations or adjustments I think that is a very good way of making the |
| term more inclusive and a bit more flexible. |
| Many people will say, for example, oh, I'm not disabled, I just happen to have diabetes. |
| Or I'm not disabled, I just happen to have dyslexia, and actually they do require workplace adjustments. |
| So in order to make sure that people feel respected, using that term gives you the flexibility to make the |
| adjustments that are needed, yes. |
| MARK: And there's a question here about language. |
| I guess is could you ask Maria how she prefers to be asked about adjustment and accommodations. |
| I don't know if you have seen that request there. |
| Your own personal view of that, separate as also your role, how you then encourage managers, those |
| difficult conversations that you are giving them training in, part of that I'm sure is about being able to listen |
| to how people prefer to communicate? |
| MARIA: Absolutely. |
| And I think going back to what Ted was saying earlier, about the pandemic being a great leveler. |
| I think this definitely helps us to realise how many people need adjustments, just to give you an |
| example, in terms of our own employee database system that we use to manage adjustment, we have recorded a massive |
| jump over the pandemic. |
| This goes to show that it is not about how we define people. |
| Because it might be the wrong definition, it is important that we implement adjustment regardless. |
| In order to hear people, to be empathetic to people and actually say what do you need, rather than making |
| an assumption. |
| So our data for example shows that when it comes to disability, disabled people in the work place, it is only |
| about 3-4% depending on how many people we have, however, when you look at the adjustment, the workplace adjustments |
| we on average, pre-pandemic we used to make adjustments for about 18% of our people, now, as of October of the |
| pandemic and even now we will see in the UK that we are managing it differently, and we could say we are |
| coming out of it, I don't think we are coming out of it yet, but there is a different way of managing it. |
| We are now recording to see 34-35% of adjustments for the workforce. |
| That could be anything from providing additional coaching, additional counselling, or how to manage your |
| time. |
| All sorts of medium-to-substantial adjustments that we implement for people. |
| That speaks to the empathy of the employer, because they are not just labelling it as "disability", but they |
| are just saying you are a person with multiple intersectional sides to yourself. |
| And so we have to pay attention to intersectionality. |
| There might be more than one need, multiple needs than addressing. |
| You could be a black person, you could be a disabled person, you could be a parent, you could have carers' |
| responsibilities. |
| So all of this comes into play when the workplace and the people's lives intersect. |
| That is really important that we are fully empathetic and fully open to asking the questions without any |
| prejudice, without any assumptions. |
| MARK: Yeah. |
| So stepping on from that then. |
| Ted there's a question here, I guess this is looking at the 20 years' experience that you have. |
| Everybody wants that silver bullet. |
| It's describing here an organisation where it's not very mature, people aren't necessarily hearing this sort |
| of accessibility evangelist, that lone voice that we have all been at certain times. |
| So leaving aside a global pandemic, what's the other thing that you think has made the difference in that time. |
| What can people do to maybe make a step change in terms of how this is understood, is empathy a good way into |
| this conversation, I guess. |
| Is it now a live space you can take this conversation to. |
| TED: One of the things we learned at Yahoo, is video makes a huge |
| difference for people. |
| It is one thing to say you need to make this a heading, or you need to fix this table or add alt-text to an |
| image, it is a completely different things when they receive a video, or it's attached to a bug report saying |
| this is the experience of somebody who has low vision, or someone using a screen reader, or someone that can't |
| use a mouse. |
| When you show a video, that's going to start kicking off your empathy. |
| Because now all of a sudden the people are looking at that ticket and can understand what's the bad |
| experience. |
| So that's a good way of starting. |
| The other thing that I found is we have an accessibility champion programme. |
| You can learn a lot about a champion programme. |
| If you are on LinkedIn, you can look for the accessibility champions Network, it is a global Network of companies. |
| That really transformed everything at our company. |
| We have now had over 12 people complete the champion badge. |
| That includes watching that video, watching other things, setting up the computers for testing, running the |
| first test. |
| The conversation around the company has changed. |
| Now I go into meetings and I don't have to describe accessibility. |
| People are coming to us and saying here's the tool that we just built, or here's the testing that we just set |
| up, can you review it. |
| So I think setting up an accessibility champion programme can really help. |
| It just changes the way people from all levels of the company actually understand what accessibility means. |
| MARK: And I guess you have also got the Employee Resource Groups and all |
| those equivalent that is are in parallel. |
| There is often a lot of crossover in how those two are evolving, the champions and the ERG groups. |
| Maria do you see the ERG, I mean HS2 is not an old organisation, it is still relatively young, is that |
| growing and moving out? |
| In your own professional experience you are moving on, but in HS2 how do you grow that type of community? |
| MARIA: We are very, very proud of our staff Networks, that's what we all the |
| ERGs. |
| We have eight. |
| And you know, the key thing, they are an essential part of embedding the values, going back to the values, that |
| is always the reference. |
| Then in the business of the values we make sure that we know how to make them come alive. |
| So that's the ERG/staff Network role. |
| Because they really make everything on paper or digital really come alive. |
| Because we are using people. |
| And they are people who are passionate. |
| Then, you know, as far as I mean for me accessibility is absolutely essential. |
| It is sometimes misunderstood, like Ted was talking about earlier. |
| One of the things that we need to come alive, we need to make it come alive is to first of all come up with |
| a policy, that was championed and sponsored by an Executive Director at HS2. |
| That was the first step. |
| We made sure it was fully consulted with as many departments as possible. |
| So that each could bring in what the policy, how the policies will be served by their own respective |
| directorates or teams or departments we made it aspirational. |
| We accounted for the fact that accessibility is always evolving and changing. |
| So it needs to be a flexible policy that is adaptive. |
| It then grows with the organisation. |
| The other thing that we did, we built in a structure around it, a strategy around t so that we linked it up, not |
| just to our people, but to our Supply Chain and how it empowers everybody. |
| We made sure it was, we have our really effective signposting, in our own intranet we have a whole section |
| dedicated to accessibility, while we are signposting to our ERGs, staff Networks. |
| You know, all of the stakeholders, all the people that can help, people in IT, together our disability |
| Networks and so on. |
| And the equality diversity and inclusion team. |
| HR and so on. |
| We have a working group that meets quarterly to talk about what are the problems that we need to solve, how |
| can we help each other, so that we really make more of a discussion rather than wagging the finger in |
| people's faces and making them feel awful about the mistakes they made. |
| It is all about collaboration. |
| And then we also put together an accessibility pledge. |
| Many of us use this pledge represented by a badge, a digital badge that we put in our staff |
| signature. |
| So that's a nice introduction to accessibility. |
| We also often use the pledge at the start of a meeting when we have our values moment, we have our values |
| moment in every meeting that we have, so this is how we embed our culture around our values. |
| So when we talk about respect, for example, it is very useful to bring up the accessibility pledge that tells |
| you how to conduct a meeting. |
| Little things that you can think about to make sure that people are alerted in advance that they have |
| their needs met, and so, not one silver bullet, the silver bullet doesn't exist and we have to forget about it. |
| We just really have to think about empathy. |
| You know keep talking to people, keep talking to your stakeholders. |
| And that's the only way. |
| There is no silver bullet, forget about, that it would be too boring anyway! |
| MARK: So I have one last question for both of you. |
| There is a few minutes left. |
| I jumped over the video because it is easier to share it afterwards, there has been a question after it. |
| We will share that, it is great, and it is a good example of the sensitising, listening, and it's |
| humorous and great bits to T I will go to a different part of the question, you mentioned this Maria. |
| The top level buy-in, which whenever we do strategy work with organisations, you can't ignore that |
| makes the change happen quicker. |
| So somebody from the top says this is really important. |
| It happens quicker, the resources flow more easily, people sit up a listen to the issues that you are |
| trying to advocate for. |
| Starting with you Ted, how do you approach that question with leaders. |
| If I was in an organisation and I'm thinking right I have to approach somebody. |
| I've got to find that mythical leader who will open all the doors for me. |
| One of the things that occurs to me we talk about lived and personal experience, do you feel genuinely the |
| people most sensitive to that will have personal experience of disability or inclusion or diversity issue s that |
| your experience and you gravitate towards that, you find out somebody has a child with particular needs, or |
| is it that simple? |
| It sounds a bit mercenary almost. |
| But you need that person, but who are they? |
| Are they really there? |
| Can people become empathetic or are they already empathetic? |
| You have to already find someone with the traits? |
| MARIA: That is a great question. |
| And it is a big dilemma for people. |
| It does involve a journey. |
| So it really helps when the organisation has established values. |
| Because remember that you can always appeal to that when you are approaching a conversation. |
| So when the executive team, when the senior Leadership Team, you know, they have their own values and objectives |
| for the year. |
| So you can go and say I know you have a values-led objective for the year, how would you feel about completing |
| your objective by doing X, Y, Z. |
| That could be one way of approaching it, because it is a win-win situation. |
| To be honest I think, like I said before about the silver bullet, it doesn't exist. |
| So the key thing is for people like us, people who have a little bit of influence and can really help people |
| understand accessibility, equality and inclusion, we have to have an attitude that was collaborative and empathetic. |
| Most people they want to help, they want to be inclusive and often they don't know how. |
| Or they are scared, they are scared of making mistakes. |
| They are scared of saying something inappropriate. |
| They are terrified of "cancel culture", everything has to be politically correct and so on. |
| I think that is what stops most people from actually doing the right thing. |
| I think this is important for us, every single one of us as leaders in our own right to address the |
| conversation empathetical and say, someone makes mistakes and they say something about my deafness, it might |
| be slightly inappropriate I take that opportunity to draw in and say I appreciate that you might not know |
| about this, this is how it can help. |
| I also appreciate the fact that you are trying to help me. |
| This is how you can help me better. |
| This is how you can help your reports better. |
| This is how you can help your teams better. |
| So that opens up the channel of communication, because they now realise that you are not going there |
| telling them off. |
| MARK: Yeah. |
| MARIA: So they feel bad about their mistake, but really helping nurture |
| that conversation, that empathy. |
| It's not about don't do this because you feel sorry for me, don't do this because you feel you have to, do it |
| because it's about our values, it's about empathy and together we can go on a journey. |
| It needs to be dialogue, it needs to be reciprocal. |
| So I think when you approach equality, diversity and inclusion that way it's not that hard to actually |
| reach out to senior leaders and say, really sell them the positive for inclusion. |
| I find them quite good actually. |
| MARK: Ted, I can see the sun has come up! |
| TED: The sun has come up. |
| MARK: So really looking at that in your experience, Maria is describing a |
| more of an organisational framework and in your experience of leaders who have you had around you, the door openers, |
| the influential ones, how does that look now. |
| Is there more understanding at senior management about this than there was 20 years ago perhaps? |
| Have we seen a shift in people's attitude and understanding in this area do you think? |
| TED: One of the things that helps, I have always thought I want the senior |
| leadership to trust me. |
| So I have been very open with our senior leadership, when I see them, that was one of the benefits of being |
| in-person, when I would see them in the cafes I would go up to them. |
| To let them know I will do everything in my power to keep them from being surprised. |
| By good or bad news. |
| I'm going to celebrate wins with them, and let them know, you know, what people around the company are |
| doing. |
| So when they get a message from me they could typically trust that it's going to be something that they need |
| to look at. |
| Low signal-to-noise ratio, essentially! |
| What that means is because they know me, they know the accessibility team, when we reach out to them they are |
| much more likely to respond. |
| And I think that's key. |
| I think you should not be afraid of leadership, you should share with them, just don't share the minute |
| , it is always what you say should be in the first paragraph, they may not read the second paragraph, but keep it |
| open dialogue. |
| That is very important for us, as people move from one part of the company to the other, to become like |
| the CEO. |
| I worked with a CEO ten years ago when he was leading one of the business products. |
| So he was always a big supporter of accessibility. |
| I knew that when he became CEO I could go to him for anything. |
| So I would say yes, keep the communication channels over, don't be afraid of leadership. |
| Be their ally. |
| Don't come to them when the fires are out, you know, screaming fire, fire, fire! |
| But hey, here's a new customer and look what this person just did! |
| Mark brilliant, thank you. |
| We are drawing it to a lose. |
| There are a few other questions in here. |
| I just want to pick up one more which is about language. |
| I think we have talked a little bit about how we communicate around this. |
| How do you in your organisations, do you have guidelines, policies, training videos, so that people learn |
| this interaction. |
| Maria you were saying, people ask you questions and you respond certain ways. |
| Do you have training that people go on? |
| It seems like a very important part of the glue that people can understand the rules and don't feel scared. |
| Ted let me ask you first and then Maria to finish. |
| Do you actually have those guidelines? |
| How what does that look like in practise inside your organisation? |
| TED: Part of our workshops is to talk about people-first language. |
| But know that many communities are identity first. |
| It is not bad to start with people first. |
| If someone corrects you then go with the correction. |
| For instance in the deaf world a lot of times it's identity first. |
| Same thing in autism. |
| That is something we cover, people-first versus identity-first. |
| It helps clear up confusion. |
| MARK: I'm assuming the other trick is not for that to be singled out, but |
| all induction, all in coming processes, all employees when they join, not just because they are in a particular role |
| and not just because they are not in the accessibility team for example. |
| So I'm guessing that's more of a blanket policy that all employees would have that sort of knowledge and |
| insight? |
| TED: I don't know if I could say that we have a policy for all employees to |
| understand identity language. |
| But we also do have training on ableism and we have a very strong inclusive language policy. |
| MARK: Maria, in your role, whereas Ted's in the accessibility corner, if |
| you like, the breadth of what you are doing, does that one-size-fits-all training does that feature in your |
| work, is it relevant and helpful? |
| MARIA: When you join HS2 you are on-boarded and is there are key |
| elements of training that sets the tone and language. |
| We tend to follow the UK module of disability, which is the social model of disability and so we will tend to |
| say disabled persons rather than a person with disabilities. |
| However, it is fully important to understand that we are an international project. |
| Like I said, people mean well. |
| I have worked in America for five years, for example, so I know that when they say people-first, |
| person-first, they absolutely are doing the right thing as well. |
| Because you know they actually put in the person first and the fact that they have a disability second. |
| Both sides are equally great. |
| I think that maybe we should steer away from this strict way of looking at language and adapt it. |
| Especially when you have an international workforce, we have engineers and directors from all over |
| the world. |
| And the culture, you know, will see a disabled person or a person with a disability differently. |
| So I think we need the flexibility to allow for people's culture to also be reflected in. |
| So, however, we do have training on the basics of the language. |
| Person-first or after is a subtlety, it is something subtle. |
| However there are terms that absolutely must be avoided. |
| So we do have a look at that and we do have training for that. |
| That's covered. |
| It's just about common sense. |
| MARK: We have had an hour and we have covered so much ground, it's been |
| fantastic, thank you so much both of you for your time. |
| Ted, for joining us at some unholy hour, you can now get up and enjoy the sunrise! |
| And the rest of your day! |
| Thank you so much. |
| Maria it has been a pleasure meeting you and talking to you about all the stuff we have done in the preparation |
| as well. |
| There's such a breadth to what you are doing, that you bring that simplicity to it, but it's so much to |
| it. |
| Thank you both of you for that. |
| I've got to refer on to the article, the video that Ted shared I think is great, so anybody watching or |
| listening to this later, please do take a look at the article, do take a look at the video and a load of other |
| resources that will connect in on the webinar page. |
| Anything that we haven't covered today. |
| It is worth mentioning we have training in AbilityNet around recruitment, inclusive workplace, and |
| a load of accessibility skills training. |
| There is lots of training available. |
| It is really about seeing the subtleties that you said. |
| It won't be one size fits all, it will be enabling people to learn and grow their skills and knowledge. |
| That is a core thing for us. |
| But it has been fascinating, thank you so much both of you. |
| Thank you everybody who has joined us. |
| I know this is lunchtime, so we have kept you away from your lunch if you are in the UK. |
| Thanks for dropping in and joining us and I hope we will catch up with you all again soon. |
| Thanks everyone. |
| See you soon, cheers Ted. |