Why Inclusion is good for business (a CEO perspective) and Caroline Casey Transcript

Robin Christopherson

Welcome to another episode of The AbilityNet Podcast. Disability. Technology. Inclusion. I'm your host Robin Christopherson, Head of Digital Inclusion at AbilityNet. A pioneering UK charity with a mission to make a digital world accessible to all. Join me on this series to revisit key themes from TechShare Pro 2022. A place where accessibility professionals and allies gather once a year to share and learn together, you can download a transcript of this episode from www.abilitynet.org.uk/podcast. So sit back, grab your favourite beverage and let's get started.

Robin Christopherson

We are back. It's another AbilityNet podcast. Thanks for tuning in guys. Marks here, again,

Mark Walker

Hi Robin

Robin Christopherson

Mark Walker, Head of Marketing at AbilityNet here and is generally the brain behind TechShare Pro. And we've been listening to Tech Share Pro sessions for the last several weeks now. Really brilliant content, we would encourage people to go to our website or techsharepro.com to check out this content really, really good stuff. Now this one is talking to the C suite. These are the big guys, the big decision makers Tell me all about these sessions because there are a few.

Mark Walker

Yes, well, this is this was our kickoff session. And it has been for the last couple of years. And I really think what we're going to hear from is the chief executive of HSBC, the UK chief executive, the chief executive of Channel 4, the leading accessibility leader in HSBC, Mali and also Caroline Casey from the valuable 500. Now, what this sort of collection of pieces brings out really is how we're shifting the story in terms of accessibility as part of disability inclusion, which is as part of the diversity and inclusion story overall, that is coming from the top down now. And we think back six years to when we started TechShare Pro and even longer that you and I have been working at AbilityNet. Now we really are being asked by the C suite to do this stuff. Now. It's big, it's being built into business plans. And what you'll hear from these segments is, you know, not only why this is important, but also how that's being implemented and the resources that are being put in place to make it happen. And just one mention, when you get to Caroline's piece around Valuable 500, you'll hear me saying that we've worked together and she's been appearing in TechShare Pro for several years. I think there's a real momentum now that we didn't have before. And that's why I love having her in just to hear just how quickly those changes are happening at that level, how seriously these organisations are taking it. She was at Davos a few weeks ago, Caroline since TechShare Pro she she popped up at Davos with more news about Valuable 500 More news about how they're pushing forward. And they're talking there about making the data real and really sort of holding to account these these claims that the C suite is making. We want we know we're going to be the most inclusive, we want to do this stuff. We're really getting into the into the detail now and say right, how are you going to deliver that. And I think these three sessions really illustrate how seriously they're taking it, but also the role of accessibility and inclusion professionals in getting involved in that story.

Robin Christopherson

Brilliant, I can't wait. Let's get cracking.

Mark Walker

Morning. Hello, welcome, everybody. This is Tech Share Pro 2022. I'm Mark Walker from AbilityNet. And I'm really pleased to welcome you to our first session. And at the start of three days of conference and community building and connecting up and learning and sharing. So I'm really pleased that you've joined us, we had over 1500 people sign up. So we know there's a huge interest in this topic. And we're back again, to do some more of the good stuff that we've done over the last six years. It's the sixth year that we've done TechShare Pro, so I'm hugely proud of everything that we've done. And I hope you have a good three days and learn a huge amount from from what we're doing. I've got two guests with me here, who we're going to have a very brief introduction, and then we're gonna crack on with the keynote. So Christopher Patnoe from Google, Mali Fernando from HSBC. Christopher, lead sponsor this year, thank you so much for all your support. But it's such a strange time for accessibility. I think we were talking about this, just the changes going on around us and particularly in the big tech companies. Yeah. So the next three days is I think about community building. And I think that's probably a theme isn't it to try and connect and join up and support one another.

Christopher Patnoe

For me, it's one of the things that's most important about the work that we do. We are better together than apart. You, we have companies like Google Apple, Microsoft, coming together with for something like the accessibility speech project, which we'll talk about tomorrow. Or just simply trying to push the standards forward trying to make things easier to do and make it better for everyone. And we do this together. Because no one company, no one organisation, no one charity can do this by themselves. Because the world is a big and complicated place. And by working together, we have the chance to do it. Coming together here at TechShare Pro, we get to learn together, we get to learn the same story as the nouns, the verbs, we get inspired by people, we we get to learn what not to do, from the stories of other people. So, it's a really important way to really dial in how we want to behave, how we want to teach, and how we want to grow.

Mark Walker

Brilliant, fantastic. Thank you. Mali, fantastic, having HSBC on board as well, we obviously work together really closely, AbilityNet and HSBC. But as Christopher says, it's a complicated world and your world in banking and finance and all the services you're doing millions of customers. It's a hugely complicated business to be in, but accessibility for you is right at the heart of the work that you're doing. So can you tell me a little bit about where that is? We're going to hear from your CEO soon, he's gonna He's gonna be big enough for the work you're doing. But from you, from your your point of view these three days, how does that sort of fit into the jigsaw stuff that you're learning and working on?

Mali Fernando

Of course, so look, I mean, it's an absolute pleasure to meet folks like Chris, you know, we benefit from some of the work they do upstream in terms of being able to supply services to our customers, we've got 40 million customers around the world. Financial inclusion is imperative. I think, you know, organisations particularly bank sometimes have to realise the privilege, we have the ability to either provide great independence, or take away independence from an individual and that's really important. Financial independence lends so much to to everybody else. As an organisation, we're gonna be bold and simple vision, we want to be the world's most digitally accessible bank. And to be really explicit, we want to be the Bank of choice for disabling neurodiverse customers, and we want to be the employer of choice for disabled, and your diverse staff. And, and earlier this year, we wanted to see how we were doing so we came to yourself to say, look, how are we doing across the world? And I think we asked the question in our top 13, personal Banking Markets tell us independently How are we doing and look, I'm really proud to say in 11 of those top 13 markets we're the most accessible website. But it isn't about being the best. I think what's more important is particularly in Asia, Latin America and the Middle East, we are possibly the only digitally accessible bank. So that means actually, if you have certain types of disabilities, and you want to bank online, you don't really have the same sort of choice that you do in places like the UK, in in the US. So, we have a real obligation not just to do the right thing by our own customers or our people. I love the spirit of community. And you know, some of the things we'll talk about over the next few days is how it is we are giving our stuff away. And we want to really open source, our skills, expertise, we are by no means perfect. But we really want to open up what we have and give to the world. We're not asking for anything in return.

Mark Walker

Fantastic. Thank you. And so, what we've got first thank you so much, both of you. Well, we've got first is an amazing start. Mali, you helped make this happen. So fantastic. We've got Ian Stuart, who's the CEO, UK CEO for HSBC bank and Alex Mahon, who's the CEO of Channel Four, talking about why they and their businesses invest in inclusion. I think it really sets the scene. Exactly this stuff you're talking about Mali. Why Why would you do this? What Why is this important? It creates the starting conversation for us in our work do as a community. So, roll VT.

Adi Latif

Hello, I'm Adi Latif, and welcome to this opening session at TechShare Pro 2022. I'm very excited. I've got two amazing guests with me today. And we're going to be talking about digital inclusion, diversity, accessibility, all those lovely, lovely buzz words. So, first of all we've got Ian Stuart here, from HSBC, UK, he is the CEO of HSBC UK. So it's absolute pleasure to have you here in and we've got Alex Mahon, I believe I'm pronouncing that correctly. I've checked on YouTube a number of times. I hope that's okay. And Alex is the CEO of Channel Four. Welcome both to the session today. Thank you so much for coming.

Alex Mahon

Thanks very much, Adi.

Ian Stuart

Thank you.

Adi Latif

So today's discussion, we're just gonna have a little discussion, and I've got a couple of topics we're going to be discussing, I've got a few prompts, just to kick off as business leaders, what value do you place on digital inclusion, disability accessibility? And the need to make your services accessible? So if it's okay, Alex, are you happy to kick off with that?

Alex Mahon

Yeah, I am. Well, first of all, as you know, part of the mission and the purpose of Channel Four is about making real and positive change. And it's about representation in society for people who are not always heard, you know, particularly the underrepresented and people who are treated in equitably. And clearly there's a massive fit with disabled people in the UK there, because we're not in a position as a society, where there's equal understanding representation, yet, although we hope to do that. So for us, that's about, of course, how we communicate with the public, and access services and all of that, but it's also about changing hearts and minds in terms of how we represent in programming, because we have the ability to make an impact on audiences and people across the UK. And of course, it's also about our own workforce and what we do for colleagues there.

Adi Latif

I think that this is great, you understand it's for your your customers, but also for your colleagues. And I think a lot of the times that that can be forgotten is oversight and insight. In How about yourself? HSBC? What, what, what's your drive for accessibility? What's What, what's your thoughts on that?

Ian Stuart

Yeah, Adi, thank you very much. Well, first of all, we've got a very simple purpose in HSBC. If you've gone to any of our websites, you'll see the world's opening up a world of opportunity. That's the purpose, we want to open up the opportunity for all our customers got 15 million customers in the UK today. But in no point in that purpose, does it say that it's not available to people with a disability. So we want to open up the opportunities for everyone. And it's quite interesting, because when I got involved in the ability network in in the bank here, I was really prompted by the fact that I've got four children, three of whom have got a disability. And I didn't want them to miss out on different products, different services. So from a customer perspective, the whole challenge for us is to make sure our customers can get access as easily as anyone else to these products. But then once you start to really scratch awareness, so Do you realise that most people pick up the visibility during the working lives, so between 18 and 65, and we have to adapt to make sure that people can, as they pick up disabilities move to products that suit them? So it's a really interesting challenge. And then it goes all the way around to how do we look after people in the workplace with disability? And it's there's some obvious stuff like how you ever made of chairs, who people sit at desks, to people like me who without my glasses, I can't see anything? So are we giving people the right apparatus to enlarge the print all these simple things? That a few years ago, you maybe wouldn't have thought about? So it's exciting times, but it's hugely challenging. I think Alex just touched on it. We've, you know, we've really got ourselves into this mindset now of Hold on. How will people access this if they've got a disability? So it's challenging? I think we've made a lot of progress over the last few years and technology has played a key part in that.

Adi Latif

Thank you, thank you, but that mindset is that is that at Channel Four, Alex, is that something that keeps you up at night at times as well? You know, how are we going to make it accessible? Obviously, there's quite a focus on digital. We're becoming on digital first world. And so to make your digital accessible, is that something that is, you know, on your mind at Channel Four, is that something that you do spend time in research into looking at?

Alex Mahon

Yeah, I think it's always about the question for us is always about how can you do better? And how can you do more? And how can you try? Because I'm really lucky, it's like part of our job, how can you try to set the standard or put the bar higher. So let me give a like couple of examples for that, of course, we like, are about 100% of subtitles on our shows, that's, that's what we should be doing. We've got a lot of audio described programming, also what we should be doing. And then of course, we also have programmes which are signed, particularly important for those who can't access elsewhere. But then what's the what's the next step? But you know, how many of the shows how do you balance that? What do you add to those services? I think that to some degree, is like relatively simple, because you can set a target for things that you can set a target for a bit easier as when you're running something. The

hardest stuff is, is how do you make sure that colleagues are treated well in the business? So how do you make sure that people are really taking into account access requirements, or our staff are really aware of how to be inclusive? That's the much harder work day to day in organisations? I think, are people really making reasonable adjustments? Do they know what reasonable adjustments they should be making? Have they understood things from the perspective of others, you know, have they understood how hard it is to get someone to come to work with you as a signer, and what that might involve and what the struggle might be like for someone to get that? The stuff that is incredible that galvanises people though, is where we do things like work on the Paralympics, because we have the power through that, to change people's minds. So you know, since we've started doing the Paralympics, 84% of Paralympics viewers in the UK, said that the coverage has helped improve their understanding of disabled people. So that's immense, we have a massive privilege. And I know HSBC do, too, when they do advertising campaigns and other things, we have the privilege and the opportunity to change huge amounts of people's minds and connecting that back to our own staff. And what we do on air is important. And you know, we've been able to do things they're not just throw that show the athletes, but we've moved to 100% of the presenters on the last Paralympics, being people with a disability. And we're moving to the cruise behind the camera like 30% or more people with a disability. So that starts to change things throughout the system. It takes time. But those sorts of things are the things that starts to change minds throughout the UK.

Adi Latif

Yeah, I think that's an It's incredible because a lot of the times and the disabled community people are used to non-disabled people talking on their behalf and delivering them services and to actually have disabled people involved, you know, behind the scenes and to be able to deliver such amazing I mean, the Paralympics, were just an incredible feat on TV, which is absolutely amazing. So to have several people as part of that case, you know, I knew I'll never be a Paralympian but if I could, you know, work behind the scenes on something then there's you know, there's there's, there's hope there's a provide the opportunities is incredible. is I mean, you know, Alex has mentioned some some of the great work that that's happened at Channel Four is the things that you're proud of HSBC, and you know, is there any sort of value you've seen from the accessibility and disability related work that's that's taking place?

Ian Stuart

Let me get Sainsbury's. A shout out here. When when I think back to where we were as a company, or an industry isn't an industry in 2012. I think we were poor. But we really learned a lot from what Sainsbury's did for the panel. picks back 10 years ago. I mean, it sounds like feels like yesterday, but it's 10 years ago. And that gave us a job and thought, well, if they can do it, why can we do it? And I think this is great. And that's why we share so much information. So the things that we've been doing, and we do a lot of the things that I would say are now sort of like that, that just get your table stakes, you know, making sure you've got the right support for people with disabilities, all that and the products, the Braille on the cards a little bit. So have that credit card, so people know which credit card that is, these are all table stakes, then you get into more complex area, which is how do you hire people into your organisation who have disabilities. And we've really struggled with that, you know, because we've got a very standard process, you go online, you fill in the forms, if you have disabled, that can be really difficult. So, I'll give you an example. For a lot of people, when you you've got to do identification, upload your driving licence for people with a disability don't have the driver's licence, so at that point that come out of the system. So, we've had to really look at some of the ways we recruit people. And if you had my team in here today who really do all the great work behind this, they will highlight a few things that we've managed to do in the last I would say, six to 12 months to make that process easier. And just putting out and I don't mean to offend anyone when I say this, but in banking, everyone doesn't have to have a degree from Oxford or Cambridge, okay, we've got a lot of roles, where you need to be empathetic to customers, understand customer's needs, take them to the next stage, really important roles for us. So, people with disabilities can easily do that. And in the last two to three months, we've just hired six people with pretty severe disabilities in wheelchairs as part of our meet and greet team. I can see the customers faces when they come in, and something a wheelchair approached them say, Can I help you? Yeah, it's really quite an experience to watch it live. People ask them, Can I help you and they're in a wheelchair, it's worked really well for us. And I hope now that we've got process up and running, and we've, we've we've had to work hard to refine that. But now we've got it, I'm really hoping we can roll out much, much more across the UK and give many more disabled people an opportunity to have a purpose in life. Because if you live with disability, I think it's one of the things that upset you the most is that you're working with people and looking at people who cannot have a normal existence, because they can't get that breakthrough in that first stage on the working ladder. And it's it needs to be addressed. So so so part of making it easier for people to come into the organisation is that we work with professional partnerships in scope, and scope are professionals in this space. And we made the whole process of community HSBC easier, by simplifying questions and making sure that people with the right support can can come in again, give score absolute credit for helping us there, we also had to make sure that the recruitment process was short, because a lot of these processes are quite long, you know yourself, when you're trying to apply for a job, you can be there for quite a long time. So, we're trying to make it short and to the point. And then from there, marry up the skills that people have got with the opportunities that we've got. And so far, we've had some really good success with that. But I'm not at the stage of celebrating it yet. Because I still think we've got a long way to go. But I think in the next year, maybe two years, we'll have many more disabled people right across our network. And I really look forward to seeing the results. And as I say, I would say it's going to be more of a two-year programme.

Adi Latif

Lovely. And that's really important. It's really good to see that is quite a challenging process, as quite a lot of organisations find recruiting people with disabilities, but you seem to have got the right advice and you're making ground in this area. Alex, I mean, you mentioned earlier that, you know, you've got a lot of people within Channel Four, when, for example, when you're working on the Paralympics disabled people working for you, how was it for you to recruit disabled people? And what was the kind of approach that you took?

Alex Mahon

I think in terms of recruiting them into the industry, we worked with specialist agencies. So, I work with a whole programme that we run called for skills, which is about bringing young people into the television and media industries. There have been traditionally fairly exclusive industries in terms of people's backgrounds for all kinds of reasons. In fact, the only industry that's been more exclusive in terms of background class, etc has been medicine and law, which is shocking when you consider mediation be that complicated, really just working out what people want to watch on telly. All kinds of people should be able to come into it. But that's how it's been. So, for skills is a programme that is like getting to 15,000 young people a year. And we are very much over indexing to people for whom the industries have seemed inaccessible. So people with a disability, working class people from the nations and regions, different ethnicities, that's our focus, as you might expect, but we work with a load of specialist agencies who help us bring in the brightest and the best, and ensure that we're creating the best possible conditions for them to be a success in the industry. And often they work with us, and then they go on. So we have a creative diversity team that reaches out and does that. I think that sort of differences that we make, and even touched on it there about the difference it makes if someone's working in a branch, and they're in a wheelchair, because it's not just the difference it makes to them as it is the difference it makes to everyone they deal with who suddenly adjust their preconceptions. It's not that they're necessarily prejudiced. They've just got preconceptions. So those are the differences. And we've just introduced this thing called the disability code of portrayal, which is a first in the industry, which is about focusing on changing the representation of people with a disability on air. So, moving from perhaps what we've seen before presenters on the Paralympics presenters in the last leg, to thinking about how we strengthen on screen representation, costing disabled actors and disabled roles, but also portraying well rounded characters. So, moving from perhaps the character being about the disability, which we would, you know, call the obvious to much more normalisation of presenting the disabled on because the truth is, it's like 22%, one in five in the UK, or people with a disability. But when we look at roles on air, if you look at advertisements, and we did a big study, only 4% of TV advertisements in the UK feature a person with a disability, and only 1% have disabled people in a lead role. So, you've got to like run the data, set the targets, work harder, we have to work harder as organisations to recruit. But then the impact in terms of how you change perception, and how we make society a fairer place is quite spectacular, when that pays off,

Adi Latif

It's amazing. We work with a lot of companies where we try and help them with the ability to net we try and help them with their accessibility strategy. And a lot of the times it's passionate people in an organisation that might not be very high up in their organisation, but they want to make it accessible and inclusive. The face of barriers a lot of the time to get themselves heard to get buy in from from the top. I mean, is there is there any sort of advice you would give if someone wanted to get the attention of the people at the top to get the budget to get the resources behind it? What's the best way of doing that?

Ian Stuart

Well, I'll tell you how it works in our organisation, usually, usually, and I say nine times out of 10, somebody has an idea. And if the if they've been blocked somewhere, it pretty quickly gets up to my desk. And I will try and release the energy to make it happen. And we're working on something right now. Which mean, I think it's a terrific idea. So, we've got various health plans in your organisation, but for not a lot of money, we can give people screening at a much younger age. And it's kind of that admits because some of these come with a really good debate and argument on this. It's no more a case of why wouldn't you do it. It does cost money, but it's so good. And it'll be so good for our colleagues to have access to this. It's just a sensible idea. And most of the ones that come they're really good sound logical ideas. Now, don't get me wrong. You will get some where you've just got to make a really tough call and go, we just can't do that. We it's not in our gift. It's too complex. But most of the time people will come up with the solutions and you can make it work. The big one is always Can we can we afford to do it If somebody wants to completely rebuild a campus, that gets quite expensive, if you want to completely rebuild your IT infrastructure is quite expensive. So, you've got to sort of park those ones and make sure you're focusing on what we can sort out here now, with, you know, goodwill and good judgement. And honestly, I, I'm always blown away by just how good ideas are that come up to my desk?

Alex Mahon

Because I would say, to my mindset, because I'm in this business, try and tell a story. Because, say, well, people are valuable. And generally, some of the problem is ignorance that leaders don't realise that, or they haven't come across it, or they don't know someone, or they don't have a relative or they haven't realised. So, try and tell a story about a particular person, or someone that you know, was someone that could make a difference, because often, that's what kind of melts the ice and bring someone into it as a leader. That's what the difference can make. That's what we try and do with stuff on IRI, you know, Rosie Jones, we've gotten those issues, once you've listened to her, you realise she can be really funny. And people wouldn't realise that before. didn't believe that someone with cerebral palsy could be like that. It's the individual things where you meet one person, and then perhaps you realise that you haven't been given people the chance, so tell a story so that people realise how valuable individuals are.

Adi Latif

Wonderful, thank you so much, both for coming on and having this conversation. It's been really, really invaluable for me. I probably should be asking lots of other things, which I haven't so but hopefully it will keep the conversation going. And, and yeah, thank you so much for coming along. Thank you.

Mark Walker

That's fantastic, isn't it? What a brilliant way to kick off the conference, those two very passionate leaders. Just talking us through how it all fits for them and their big, you know, the big organisations that they're leading, and where it fits into the jigsaw. So a customer of mine back six years to the beginning of TechShare Pro and a lot of work that we were doing at that point was trying to make the case for accessibility and inclusion. I think we've moved on from there now I think the world around us has changed for lots of obvious reasons. But hearing those leaders and hearing them talk about the similarities and differences among organisations and what accessibility means to them, I think that's a kicking off point for us. So I'm pleased to say Mali is still with me. And I've also got Adi Latif from AbilityNet, who you will have seen talking there to the leaders. So, Mali we've just seen, yeah, the CEO telling us that the work you're doing is important. Out on the forum, we've got everybody working in a similar business to us in the accessibility industry. So how do you translate that by in in this sort of nuts and bolts sense into activity? What does it look like when you're doing the work that you're doing? And I think the other bit we were just talking about winning the hearts and minds? That's a key part of it, isn't it? Can you tell us a bit about where that fits into those plans?

Mali Fernando

I'll answer your second question first, if that's all right? The hearts and minds arguably is as important as the technology. Right? You know, I remember when we first started doing these things, and trying to make the bank accessible. The questions I used to get were quite interesting. You know, what is digital accessibility? Can somebody who's blind really use a smartphone Mali? Why do we have to do this? Can't We? Can't we get to it at some point in the future. And then I met this handsome gentleman on my left, Adi Latif. And the two of us, you know, started kind of quite literally with the with some of the other colleagues like Robin Christopherson, changing the culture, as I always say, if you win hearts and minds, the ones and zeros will follow. And that's really important. And Adi and I do a simple black. You know, we talk about the what the why and what the bank is doing, which, which I'll speak to in just a moment, but actually bringing disabled customers and users into your organisation and demonstrating the power of good accessibility. But also, what a barrier, that accessibility can present, whether it's banking, whether it's airlines, whether it's something as simple as doing your grocery shopping, is really powerful. I don't know Adi if you want to add to that before I kind of get into sort of practitioners view.

Adi Latif

Yeah, I think a lot of the times, people when it comes to accessibility can get a little bit confused, you know, quite technical thing. But the little, I guess, demonstration I do, and some of the sessions I've had with you at the bank is just simply just showing someone, hey, I'm blind. I just don't work. But if I touch my phone screen, it talks and look, I can use this app it works really well. Oh, but look, this app doesn't work. So, I'm still blind. I'm still using this talking phone. But this app doesn't work. So, this is a digital barrier I'm facing which is making me disabled. So, I think that's the point we make. It's not I'm not disabled, because I'm blind. I'm disabled because my needs as a blind person are not being met here. And so, I think I think that's what we demonstrate in our sessions quite well

Mali Fernando

Indeed, and Mark in terms of specifics. You know, we've got sort of five or six very simple pillars to extract. The first is user research. You have to have disabled and neurodiverse users. They're part and parcel of your process all the way from our brand to how it is we build products and services, training and awareness. You know, I think Adi you and I did 50 or 60 events last year to about 15,000 people. Wasn't bad was it, we should sell tickets. But also providing the right technical skills, right? This isn't the kind of thing that's been taught in universities, you know, we have, you know, 1000s of developers across the world, and they're coming in without these skills. So actually, we trained about 2000 people a year. And an offer I'd like to make to, to the audience watching us here is, actually look, we are by no means perfect, we do not have all the answers here at HSBC, what we've been in our own journey, and very much like, you know, some of the other speakers and the concept of community, we reckoned, we're in a position of privilege, because we are able to invest in this space in a way that some other organisations do not or cannot. So actually, if you would like to learn, if you would like the training, the knowledge, I would like to offer that to your position, we do not ask for anything in return, we don't want your commercial account, we don't want any publicity, I don't even want a LinkedIn post. If you want to tell us actually how this has benefited somebody, whether it's a customer or one of your employees, just so that actually we're able to partake in the pleasure of making a real difference, we'd love to hear about that. The third is look change the DNA of the organisation. You know, we're making our comms accessible, we're changing our procurement process. And that's particularly important because ultimately, while these might be fintechs, or third-party products and services, these are ultimately our customers and our people. But we also recognise that when we take a really strong stance, with a supplier, we benefit other organisations who buy the same platform or service. And then look, we do a lot we're making our own internal systems accessible, this is really important we, we employ a quarter of a million people across the world 7% of our UK workforce is identified as being disabled, we want to make sure that every respect to their disability or ability gets a fair opportunity at HSBC, not just to come in and do a job but to thrive. And lastly, this is part of our policy, right? It doesn't come down to an individual in terms of, you know, do you agree with the concept of digital accessibility doesn't matter, that conversation is beyond us. This is just simply how we do business, we will be accessible, otherwise, we are not going to learn something. And really what I'd love to do is, you know, continue to work with some of the fantastic people at this conference, but also offer what we have to the world because actually, as Chris mentioned earlier on the segment, this is really about a community, it's a partnership. It isn't about one organisation trying to do you know, solve all the world's problems. Yeah,

Mark Walker

Cool, fantastic.

Mark Walker

So Caroline, it's brilliant to see you. This is another virtual event, sadly, we met when you came to London for TechShare Pro 2019, which is just one of the highlights of what we've done with TechShare Pro really all those amazing people in a room. We have got some amazing people in the room with us here, the virtual room that that we're going to be joining. But it's three years on, and what's happening in The Valuable 500 you're a year beyond the big announcements last year. Where are things at for you, for you guys, now, you must be turning a corner into a new sort of phase of your work.

Caroline Casey

Yeah, first of all its great to be back, though, three years ago, feels like seven years ago, in some ways. So, you know, as, as I was saying that we are sort of 15 months out from achieving the 500 and building that unique, global collective, which I believe is the second biggest collective in the world after UN Global Compact, and really to have the accountability of the CEOs. And that makes it fabulous. But where are we? Well, now we have to go deep, right? So, what do you do with this collective? Building it was a campaign to end CEO silence and get build in C suite accountability. And now we have this extraordinary, powerful collective, which is like 22 million employees in 64 sectors in 41 countries and all the big names. What Yeah, and so where are we? So how do we use this community to deliver impact? So, we're having the really hard conversations with ourselves, you know, what we thought we could do? And you we've done a year as nearly action research with our companies and with our iconic companies. And it's that kind of place. Yeah, but is that good enough? Is that really going to drive the system change? So, we're at the point of saying what's really working towards the heart pieces, and not just doing things for the sake of doing things do what I mean? So, it's a it's a it's a, its tough conversations were knee deep and strategy. But what I think we've really come to own is what is the only thing that we can do to drive systemic change or not? Maybe to catalyse systemic change, and I think what we can do is work on synchronise collective action of our 500 against two or three big barriers. And you know, if I did this two years ago, that's too little, that's too little. Well actually stop, focus and go deep. And I think that's where the as to where we are now and really trying to find those areas where a company at any level, whether it's beginning, scaling, or leading can be part of that 500 Synchronised collective action?

Mark Walker

Well, and I mean, how far do you feel we've really come we're; you know, we were both invested in this day in day out. Through the pandemic, as far as we can tell, at the moment, there was a big sort of explosion of empathy that we all talked about this time last year. Is there a lasting effect of that is stuff drifting backwards? Do you think, in the broadly in your barometer?

Caroline Casey

Oh, well, I think. Look, don't don't we all agree, there was some there was empathy, for sure. But then there was also a dialling back on, you know, when we've got to realise in the UK alone, six out of 10 people who died from COVID had disabilities, we heard about the non-resuscitation clause, you know, people with disabilities couldn't get the access to things that they needed for their life. So, in some ways that there was a business where we saw business accommodate, I'm doing air quotes here, for everyone. And we looked at everybody's needs, and we could move to remote working, we started to understand what captioning is, and it is a crime against humanity to go online without caption. So those are some good things. But in other things, we saw, still the lack of valuing the disability community, as a hugely powerful community, and a valuable part of the community. So, where I kind of think we are is, I think we are all challenging ourselves, aren't we? It's it. Look, we don't want to have poster child or men and women for in front of a camera, we no longer are willing just to tolerate, oh, we might consider doing an accessible conference, there is a lack of tolerance. Now I think, which is brilliant, and is really pushing and forcing change. I see disability certainly more in strategic conversations, and I was saying to you the word disability and strategic. Like, when did that actually happen, and people didn't know the rise to heaven, that's actually happening. We are seeing CEOs really put money behind it. We are actually seeing companies put Global Disability leads with budgets. That's the good stuff. Can I give you the bad stuff in our valuable 500 companies, only six of our companies have Chief Accessibility officers. We know that only 8% of our companies, alt text on Twitter. So, I mean, there's it's like this all the time. But what I do think is happening, we are now in the rooms, some of the rooms, right, we might not be taking up all the space, but we're pushing. And I think the young that young generation as well, don't underestimate it. With social media and language and a sense of pride and honour, there's that dimension is very much changed as well.

Mark Walker

We also say about the tech community and the stuff that we're familiar with in TechShare Pro. I think there is this accessibility connecting is maybe softer for some people than it is in other more competitive areas where we may not see people joining up as easily across commercial boundaries. And, you know, TechShare Pro has benefited from a sense of community within the accessibility world. As much as AbilityNet has directly in terms of the work we do on our own. And, and I think that's part of that saying, you know, there's the good news stuff part of the picture, isn't it, we're beginning to see more of those things come to fruition. Reading yesterday about Google, Apple, Microsoft, I think working on voice technologies for people with different accents, and so on. So, I'm in an in TechShare Pro, we're obviously looking ahead to how we connect up and work together. That's that's the point of the whole conference is to bring people together. So, I guess in terms of your next steps, how are you going to create that sense of community? Are there steps that we're going to be able to do to support that? How can we work to enable The Valuable 500 mission? Are there particular things you can see lining up for us to get behind?

Caroline Casey

Well, so once again, I often think about this idea of convening behind or putting energy behind one or two, three things and as I said, that's you will hear what calling our companies to do and the communities. I think, to your point I think accessibility and digital accessibility has we have used that as in a really strong entry point into the broader work across the value chain. It's because it's a place what is because of digital acceleration and uptake. We're all experiencing that and that's sort of design in hopefully from the beginning, so you're probably in the strongest position. You, you, the community that you are, the way that you work together are not a brilliant, and an exciting example of collaboration. But it's what we need to see outside your work as well. And when I think about that brilliant news, I can't wait till you're here at L'Oreal and Google will be announcing an incredible piece of inclusive digital beauty which will be coming out and you see that kind of collaboration. I'm really excited to hear that happen. But I also want to just give a cautionary note. We did a piece of work with tortoise, there's two statistics that terrify me in this a third of our footsie 100 companies still do not have accessible websites. You know, I'm not compliance is a dirty word as far as I'm concerned. But that is just insane. Right? It really is ridiculous. And the other one is the issue on self ID. We have to get underneath this because can you believe in our footsie 100 companies, again, there is nobody from a senior leadership position above who's identifying of having a disability. Now, that is problem. So, I think there's a piece, we've got to focus on what we're seeing as a good place to learn off, which is a lot of the work that you do. But we have to look at why are we not having cultures where this we're disability is being covered and hidden, but you have the choice to where you want to, and what is hidden is not dealt with. And that's incredibly important. I think we have to keep our eye on that always. Yeah.

Mark Walker

I mean, it's been great catching up with, you know, so much stuff goes on in our separate worlds that crosses over in loads of different ways. But just catching up, even now, just reminding ourselves, hey, there's loads of work to be done. This conference for us is obviously something that comes up once a year for us to pull a lot of things together, you're doing that all the time through through The Valuable 500. Anything we can do where the community belongs in your world, you know, let's make sure we keep building those bridges and making sure that we're, we're sort of headed in the same direction. But it's been wonderful catching up with you. And I think you've given us a rallying cry for the next three days' worth of work, you know, it's a long way to go.

Caroline Casey

We do but I just want to say for everybody in the TechShare community and anybody outside it, I think we need to take an example of what you do and how you collaborate, because that scarcity model at the expense of somebody else is very, very heightened at the moment. So, the more that we can prove that collaboration does work and is beneficial to all. I think that's where we're at as a world in a society right now. So, I just want to say it's brilliant to see the work you all are doing. And yeah, let's look at the next year ahead and see what trouble we can cause.

Mark Walker

Brilliant, lovely to see you. Take care.

Robin Christopherson

Brilliant. That was so good. Disclosure, full disclosure, I'm a massive fan of Caroline. Yeah, she's so brilliant.

Mark Walker

I mean, and, you know, when I think back of. Do you remember, she turned up at TechShare Pro in 2019, when we were in Google, and I remember talking to her beforehand, she's actually really slightly scared of technology. I think she's not so much now. But she said, Look, I'm coming to a tech conference. Well, what am I going to talk about? I think she realises now that it's actually a disability event that clearly that's the core purpose behind the event. But the distance that she's travelled with The Valuable 500, having all of those senior leaders buying in and now clearly sort of pivoting to some extent and saying, right, we're gonna hold you guys to account you need to deliver on these promises. I mean, it's fantastic being alongside that and seeing that change that she's bringing, we're part of The Valuable 500 network where there's a directory, and we're in part of that where we're part of the community that they're building globally to bring expertise together to share knowledge with other others in the community, other suppliers and other organisations within this space. And you know, so much of that emanates from Caroline and her approach and the values that she brings to it, and the personality that they you know, that we all know, and love is brilliant chatting to her. She's so inspirational.

Robin Christopherson

And it's definitely about technology, because it all has to start, or at least it relies on sea level buy in, you know, you need the support at the top for the stuff to happen on the ground for it to be sufficiently prioritised for the right products and services to be inclusive. And for digital accessibility to be prioritised and, you know, reflected in, in people's lives in the products that we use every single day. So totally, and I'm sure she got that very quickly. And she was a massive hit then, and she was this year, as well.

Mark Walker

And let's not forget that that segment started with the chief executive of Channel Four and the chief executive of HSBC saying this is really important. We're really invested in this. We understand this. We're interested in it. It's part of the work that we're doing every day. So, you know, I think that segment is fantastic. If anybody's wondering whether not anybody's taking this seriously, you know, outside our choir the way that we say, you know, we're preaching to the choir in the accessibility community, those guys are telling us that this is important. And we need to be listening to that and responding to it and holding them to account and doing the stuff that needs to be done, I think is an opening sequence for TechShare Pro in 2022. That, you know, I just remember giving myself a little hug at the end of the list and really, really pushing on here. And you know, we're part of this conversation that's really making the world sort of sit up and listen to the stuff we're talking about. So yeah, that's fantastic. I couldn't be prouder of that particular mix of stuff we've just heard.

Robin Christopherson

Amazing. Fantastic. We're done. Thanks, Mark. And we might be speaking together on next weeks or next times podcast or it might be other voices, who knows, but we will see you guys then.

Mark Walker

It's to catch up. I'll see you soon.

Robin Christopherson

Thanks. Thanks for listening to this episode of The AbilityNet Podcast. If you'd like more information about how you can make your websites and mobile apps more accessible, easier to use by all and compliant with current legislation, you can speak with AbilityNet's accessibility experts, just head over to www.abilitynet.org.uk/accessibility-services Thanks again for tuning in and more hot discussions around accessibility will be coming soon.