

DIVERSITY, CHOCOLATE AND SAFE CRACKING.

JOHN LE DREW

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Hello and welcome to my session Diversity, Chocolate and Safe Cracking.

HELLO!



JOHN LE DREW

I have spent the last 2 decades working in the software industry and have spent most of the last 15 year in positions where I had direct or indirect influence on hiring decisions and/or the structure of teams.

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My name is John Le Drew and over most of the last 2 decades working in the software industry I have spent most of the last 15 years being involved in the hiring process, building new teams, growing existing teams and frequently, as a consultant, replacing myself.

A GOOD FIT?

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I have frequently (as I imagine many of you have) asked the question, "is this person a good 'fit' for my team?" As I became more aware of diversity and inclusion, I started to wonder exactly what that question really meant?

BIASED?

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But surely, I wasn't biased? Not me. It's those other people who are sexist, racist, homophobic. Not me, right?

FIRST THINGS FIRST

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I will leave that question hanging, and I promise to pick it up a little later. Before we dive into this topic, I want to explain a few definitions for some terms that I will use throughout this session.

MERITOCRACY

**ONE CAN HOLD POWER AND/OR INFLUENCE BASED ONLY ON
THEIR INDIVIDUAL MERIT.**

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The idea that one can hold power and/or influence based only on their individual merit. The majority of businesses would claim to be meritocratic, and in many ways, the goal is righteous, and the intent genuine, what what is getting in the way?

INCLUSION

THE STATE OF BEING INCLUDED.

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Inclusion at its simplest is 'the state of being included'. But, in reality, we know there is quite a bit more to say here. Inclusion is the practice of ensuring that people feel they belong, are engaged, and connected. It is a universal human right whose aim is to embrace all people, irrespective of race, gender, disability or other attribute which can be perceived as different. This means, ensuring that your organisation sees the value of difference, supports it and fosters it. But more on that a little later.

DIVERSITY

THE PRESENCE OF DIFFERENCE.

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Of all the definitions, this is actually the simplest. It simply means the presence of difference. It's the outcome of a true meritocracy supported by a culture of inclusion.

WHY DIVERSITY?

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So, before we dig into the 'how' lets look at the WHY? Why do we need diversity in our organisations? It's it just because we 'should' be doing it? To avoid being sued?

Or do we need diversity for other reasons? What about, beating our competition? What about innovation?

I think we know, living in the 21st century, that diversity is a moral imperative. This, in itself, doesn't need much more explanation. But I want to focus on it the business case, our organisations need diversity, not because of the risk of legal action, but because of the risk their increasingly diverse competitors pose to their market.

DIVERSITY MATTERS

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In 2015 McKinsey published a report titled Diversity Matters. Their research across hundreds of publicly listed companies across the UK, US, Canada and Latin America showed that organisations that were in the top quartile for ethnic, racial or gender diversity were more likely* to have financial returns above their national industry median. They also found the reverse was true, companies in the 4th quartile for diversity were more likely to have returns below their national industry median.

So, why does diversity in organisations improve their results? The McKinsey references 4 areas.

*35% racial/ethnic 15%

THE WAR FOR TALENT

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Diversity management is one important means of addressing talent shortages. Diversity programmes give companies an advantage in competing for the best talent—an advantage that is growing as workforces in many advanced economies become more ethnically diverse as a result of immigration and birth-rate demographics. For example, in the US, half of all infants under the age of 1 in 2010 were members of a racial or ethnic minority group. In the UK, the percentage of workers of European ancestry within the total workforce has fallen by almost 10 percentage points in the past decade. In both the US and the UK, women make up almost half the workforce.

A recent Gallup poll found that only 13 percent of employees were actively engaged at work, and that the management behaviour most likely to affect engagement was “demonstrates strong commitment to diversity”. Level of engagement are lowest for the cohort born after 1980, and multiple surveys have indicated that diversity is particularly important to Generation Y or the Millennials, as they are known.

Because they are underrepresented, the groups targeted by diversity efforts are often good sources of desirable talent. A recent study found that on average, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) recruits were more highly skilled and more likely to have advanced degrees.

CUSTOMER ORIENTATION

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Diversity groups represent the majority of the general population and an emphatic majority where purchasing decisions are concerned. In the UK, for example, 80 percent of purchasing decisions are made by women. By 2025, women are expected to own 60 percent of all personal wealth and control £400 million more per week in expenditures than men.⁹

In the United States, estimates of buying power indicate that LGBT individuals controlled \$790 billion in 2012, and African Americans are expected to control \$1.1 trillion by 2015.¹⁰ A top team that reflects these powerful demographic groups will have a better understanding of their market decision behaviour and how to impact.

Corporate leaders with a customer perspective are able to respond to market developments more quickly and creatively. Diversity helps companies react more effectively to market shifts and new customer needs. A senior executive at a global company in Asia stated an obvious if difficult truth when he said, “In our top-100 executive meetings we spend more than half of our time speaking about Asia. But if I look around the room I hardly see anybody with an Asian background”. Fortunately, CEOs from many different industries are increasingly adopting the view that “it is crucial for a company’s employees to reflect the people they serve”.

Many companies have put theory into practice in more closely reflecting their customer base. Coca-Cola, for example, has ensured that 38 percent of new US hires are people of colour and instituted mentoring programs to support the progression and retention of individuals from minority backgrounds. Walmart conducted benchmarking to understand the demographics of every country it operates in, and encouraged each country to create its own diversity and inclusion plan to reflect local needs.

GREATER EMPLOYEE SATISFACTION

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Diversity increases employee satisfaction and fosters positive attitudes and behaviours in the workplace. Workplace diversity increases job and life satisfaction for women and members of minority groups provided the workforce is diverse enough. For minority workers, for example, the boost in satisfaction kicks in when representation exceeds 15 percent of the workforce.

Where diversity recruitment is a token effort, psychological outcomes are poorer. It is hardly surprising that workers from ethnic minorities report higher job and life satisfaction in more diverse workplaces. The presence of sufficient numbers of minority-group members (or women in traditionally male-dominated environments) boosts individuals' confidence and self-esteem, while breaking down the prejudices that led to exclusion in the first place.

Similarly, research has shown that gay employees in a diverse workplace feel more secure and positive about their employers and jobs than those in a less diverse environment. A supportive culture among colleagues and supervisors is more important than the presence of a non-discrimination policy, necessary though such a foundations is.

BETTER DECISION MAKING AND INNOVATION

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Managers working on tough problems have often assembled diverse teams of thinkers to challenge one another and improve the quality of their answers. A diversity of informed views enables objections and alternatives to be explored more efficiently and solutions to emerge more readily and be adopted with greater confidence. Research by Scott Page indicates that the presence of women and minority members on a leadership team enhances problem solving in the same way, since they add perspectives from their different experiences. Ethnically and gender-diverse top teams offer companies more problem-solving tools, broader thinking, and better solutions.

This finding has resonated with leaders of top companies for inclusivity. For instance, Paul Block, CEO of US sweetener manufacturer Merisant, commented “People with different lifestyles and different backgrounds challenge each other more. Diversity creates dissent, and you need that. Without it, you’re not going to get any deep inquiry or breakthroughs”. Page’s research was based on professional rather than demographic diversity—having an engineer and a lawyer on an executive team, for example. He understood that benefits derived from one form of diversity would not necessarily be derived from others, but believed that professional and demographic diversity often went hand in hand.

The Center for Talent Innovation (CTI) found that when leadership lacks diversity or fails to foster a “speak-up” culture, fewer promising ideas make it to market. Ideas from women, ethnic minorities, LGBT individuals, and members of Generation Y are less likely to win the endorsement they need to go forward because 56 percent of leaders don’t value ideas they don’t personally see a need for.

This thinking can exert a stranglehold on an organization if its leaders are predominantly white, male, and heterosexual, for example, or come from similar educational and socioeconomic backgrounds. In short, the data strongly suggests that homogeneity stifles innovation. This finding is supported by a new study that found that if a market is dominated by any one ethnicity, it tends to make worse decisions.



We are going to play a game to demonstrate why diversity helps with creative problem solving.

Here we have a safe, it's full of yummy chocolates, and, it could be all yours. To begin with, I need four volunteers from the red team to come up here.

The rules are simple, you will orient yourself on the side of the padlock that matches your teams colour, and you can't move from that position. Then, you have 3 minutes to crack the safe. It's like just the crystal maze, only with less crystals and more hair.

--- 3 minute timer

Oh well, better luck next time!

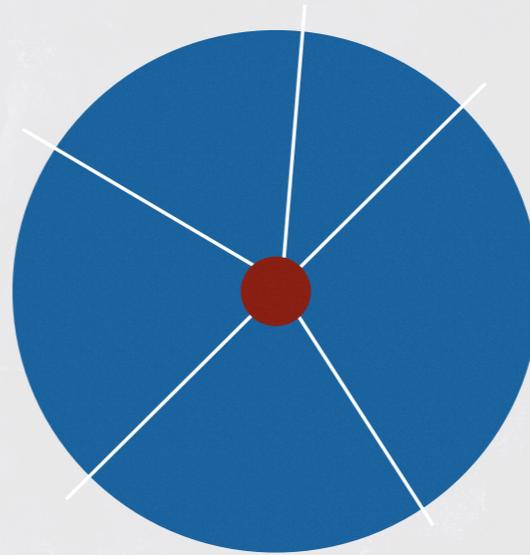
Now, I would like to give you the chance to improve your chances. Can I have one volunteer who is willing to stay up here, the remaining three people I would like you to swap with someone who is a different colour to you, we need to end up with 4 different colours.

--- So Now, let's try again. Now you can see the safe from all sides. Go!

--- 3 minutes

Well done! So, who wants some chocolate?

DEGREES OF DIFFERENCE



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The point here, is that to solve this problem, we had to approach the problem from all angles. Now, clearly this was a contrived example, but let's think about the problems most of our teams will be solving, they are complex software problems. If we narrow our view of the problem, we also blinker our approach. We need to approach problem from the broadest possible starting point to allow us to consider all the available options in order to come out with the most effective solution.

CONFLICT

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One of the most common challenges to diverse teams is that when you have many opinions and different perspectives, you have increased conflict. It's this very conflict that people highlight as a challenge to diversity, that is feeding the creativity itself. This is rich debate and discussion, that takes teams to the best solutions. What is often lacking in teams that see this debate and discussion as a blocker to progress, is truly effective facilitation from leadership.

INCLUSION

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So, we have spent a lot of time looking at the WHY, and I hope you are convinced that this is a good idea. So let's spend some time looking at how organisations can build a culture of inclusion that supports diversity.

THOUGHTWORKS

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As part of my research for this session, I spent a day at Thoughtworks' new Manchester office. With a focus on inclusion Thoughtworks have been able to increase levels of gender diversity. Specifically, the current international average for women in technical roles being about 17%, as of 2017 they have 38%, with a goal to get past 40% in 2018.

So, I asked them how they did it.

It's clearly an ongoing project for them, but here are some of the key things they have done to create an inclusive environment.

- Always looking to support flexible hours where they can.
- All the corridors are designed to fit two wheelchairs, and all surfaces are designed to be accessible to people who are wheel chair bound.
- Their main event space has a hearing loop.
- They have unisex toilets.
- Baby changing facilities on site.
- They have a quiet room for contemplation.

HUMANS

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Almost all the large management consultancies (McKinsey included) will use this opportunity to offer you a checklist for 'implementing' diversity. And I'm not qualified to comment on how successful those implementations are. But, I can't help but always feel a little cynical.

As I see it, there is a foundational principle that we can't lose sight of.

We employ human beings, and the humans we employ are different. Perhaps, not different enough (which is the specific focus here) but different and unique all the same.

From our first days in education, through to retirement, we are constantly reminded of how inconvenient it is to be different. Differently-abled (mentally or physically), differently-coloured, differently-gendered (especially if you chose to identify as something other than what you were at birth), it's truly inconvenient to 'handle' and 'manage' all this difference. As a teacher, or manager, frankly, it's a pain in the arse.

It's challenging to manage the differences, so we try to box all the differences into categories. Then we only have to deal with, the people of colour, the LGBTQ group, the women, etc. What are we really managing here? We are managing needs. Humans have needs. Some people have different needs than others. But, clearly, all LGBTQ people don't have the same needs. Nor do all women.

For me, the heart of this is that human beings have needs, and to create a truly inclusive environment, it's to be aware of and support the needs of all people. And we can do this without putting people into boxes to classify their needs, in fact, doing so (as can be seen by our terrible record on learning difficulties in schools) does nothing but damage the support we provide.

What's more, people frequently fall into many different buckets. Parents could be anyone, women and men, LGBTQ, etc. Younger people have different needs than older. This is a concept known as intersectionality that we don't have time to dig into directly but it's well worth looking up.

TO FINISH

DIVERSITY IS THE FUEL THAT POWERS OUR NEW CREATIVE ECONOMY, INCLUSION IS WHAT ENABLES IT.

ORGANISATIONS THAT ARE FOCUSED ON THE HUMAN BEINGS THEY EMPLOY AND SUPPORT THEIR NEEDS WILL BE THE ORGANISATIONS THAT CAN COMPETE, AND FRANKLY THE ORGANISATIONS THAT SURVIVE.

SURVIVAL IS OPTIONAL - W. EDWARDS DEMING

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THANKS!

QUESTIONS?

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