

European Diversity Day, 21 May 2021: Summary of key conclusions

Goals, commitment and TOP management who leads by example, this is the way to develop diversity and inclusion in the workplace and in the society

The current covid 19 pandemic has changed the view in companies and organizations or accelerated changes in working conditions for different groups of people at work, such as flexible forms of work, support for inter-generational cooperation, conditions for working parents with children, especially women, employees informally caring for their close ones or the promotion of women in managerial positions. The speakers of this year's online conference, European Diversity Day, which we organized in the second half of May 2021, agreed on that.

Speakers from multinational companies as well as the Czech and German state administrations agreed that it is not possible to develop and promote diversity and inclusion in workplaces and in the society without personal examples of top management of companies or organizations and without comprehensible commitments and goals.

The event was moderated by Jana Ciglerová, a journalist living mainly in the USA who is currently in the Czech Republic writing Deník N. In the past, among other things, she used to work as a reporter for Lidové noviny in the UK, as well as The Observer and Evening Standard. She also completed a fellowship for foreign reporters in Helsinki. She is interested in women-related topics, she started a discussion show Tah dámou on Czech Television, and also she managed the Elle magazine and was at the beginning of the creation of the Ona Dnes newspaper supplement. She pointed out the importance of the Diversity Charter and the fact that its membership base in the Czech Republic is wide and still growing. *"More than 90 signatory companies and organizations, domestic and international companies, have already joined the Diversity Charter in the Czech Republic, and it includes more than tens of thousands of employees,"* said Jana Ciglerová at the conference.

At the beginning of the conference, EU Commissioner for Equality Helen Dalli reminded in her video greeting that May is the European Diversity Month, *"There is still an inadequate representation of diversity in the workplace, especially in top management positions. This applies to both the public and private sectors, to universities, to banks, simply to all parts of our society,"* she warned, urging companies to organize as many diversity-related events as possible, because European countries need them.

Then, the Director of Business for Society Daniela Němcová also welcomed the speakers and summarized the impact of the current covid 19 pandemic, *"The impacts of the pandemic brought to the spotlight not only the quality of life of disadvantaged groups of employees, that was often debated only as a marginal and isolated issue, but also the meaningfulness of our actions, as well as the work life balance continuity and interconnection and the functioning of our entire society. The issue of employing mothers with young children extended its scope to the context of well functioning families as a whole, forms of work have been addressed from the perspective of efficiency of working time and work performance, employers began to take greater account of the difficulties of employees in private life, such as domestic violence or demands for people caring for their loved ones,"* summed up Daniela Němcová.

After the opening ceremony, the speakers continued discussions in several panels. First, managers of companies operating in the domestic market evaluated experiences, trends, challenges in the labor market and opportunities for international cooperation from the perspective of companies and public institutions hit by the pandemic. In the Czech-German panel, which was divided into two parts, ambassadors and managers of multinational companies shared experiences, trends, priorities and opportunities for intercultural cooperation in the field of diversity and inclusion in the Czech and German working environment.

A pandemic is an opportunity for change

Jennifer Bachus, Charge d'affaires of the US Embassy in the Czech Republic, spoke on support for disadvantaged groups and efforts in the US to protect disadvantaged groups - children, immigrants, women, mothers, and others. She told the women that they must not be afraid to say what they want, even if they think that they are not up to it. *"I just made up my mind and applied for the position. However, I was not exactly qualified. If you don't try, nothing will change and you will achieve nothing. I believe that it is necessary to try it, because it will be for the benefit of the whole society,"* she said.

Subsequently, the patrons of the event had their turn. Deputy Markéta Pekarová Adamová evaluated how the last 15 pandemic months had affected everyone's life. *"It held up a mirror to show how we are able to deliver on the things we have in our strategies, whether at the national level or in companies. To what extent are these plans actually implemented or whether it remains only on paper. I think it is an opportunity for us to really change something in the Czech Republic,"* said the deputy. Senator Šárka Jelínková highlighted the impact of the pandemic on families. *"The pandemic has mainly affected single mothers and fathers, who are often forced to give up work ambitions in order to meet their obligations to their children. The same goes for women who still do not enjoy equal pay conditions with men, especially in the Czech Republic. I think that the role of the state is important here, the state should create such an environment and conditions in its policies and programs that will motivate companies to apply diversity and inclusion,"* said the senator.

The pandemic accelerated diversity and inclusion activities that had previously failed to be addressed

Pavλίna Kalousová, Plzeňský Prazdroj's director of corporate relations and communications, was the first to speak in the Czech panel. According to her, the pandemic has accelerated what was not possible to do before. Covid 19 has thus actually become an opportunity for many companies. She said that motivating goal setting is important to support diversity and inclusion in companies. *"By 2023, we want to have a 40% representation of women in management. However, this number needs to be supplemented by other activities - strong communication, guidelines, but also tools such as support for the return of parents after maternity leave. Awareness raising is also needed because men are often unaware of the obstacles women face in the work environment,"* explained Pavλίna Kalousová.

For Ikea, there are two key themes in the area of diversity and inclusion - diversity and equal employment for both men and women and helping victims of domestic violence. *"It is important for us to have equal representation in top management, middle management, in the position of leaders of individual department stores, but of course also in other expert positions. And at the*

same time proportionally set salary conditions,” explained František Šašek, Country Communication Manager CZ/HUN/SK. “Our goal by 2023 is to achieve the so-called zero pay gap, when we really try to reduce the difference between the remuneration of our employees in similar positions to zero globally but also in our region. I am glad that this year, which was difficult, we were able to invest CZK 60 million in raising salaries in the Czech Republic. A large part was invested in closing the pay gap that still persisted,” added František Šašek. An extremely important and dominant topic for Ikea is also the area of assistance to victims of domestic violence, which, according to František Šašek, inexplicably and tragically increased by up to 40% during the pandemic. “For us as a company that deals with comfort and convenience at home, this is completely unacceptable. And it is completely unacceptable, even if we, as a society, deal with other topics. Public awareness is essential for us, but also direct assistance to the victims. For us, it has become a long-term commitment, at least until we see a change in this very sad and tragic area,” he said.

ČEZ manager Petra Junger pointed out that they see the impact of the pandemic as an opportunity in the area of diversity. In ČEZ, many processes accelerated and what had not happened before suddenly began to work. *“We have presented our vision 2030 that also includes diversity. We need to have measurable goals in the company so that we can tell each year whether we are succeeding or failing to achieve our goals. In our vision, besides energy and green goals, we also set diversity goals. We would like to achieve a 30% representation of women in management. I see it as a great progress and at the same time a great challenge, because the energy company is not a priori perceived as a women's field of expertise,”* she explained the company's goals.

Jonathan Rutherford, Vice President for Corporate Customers at Vodafone CZ, also listed a number of activities that underwent major changes during the pandemic. For example, encouraging women to be more active in the workplace, but also better work with flexibility. *“We have created many more part-time jobs. We tried to explain to the people in the team how to achieve more flexibility and a more cohesive environment, because some look after children in the morning, others in the afternoon, others need time off in the evening, some can only work until lunch, because then they have to go pick up children and so on. Our goal was for managers to understand this and try to approach these needs individually,”* explained Jonathan Rutherford. *“We also have noticed how big a problem domestic violence is. Let us support help in this area from the employer's point of view, but we also want to offer services that can help people in this regard. We offer the Bright sky application, where people may report such incidents or turn to the family or friends who can help them,”* he added.

According to HR director Klára Escobar, diversity is not just an empty word for Moneta Money Bank either. She stated that the pandemic has completely erased the borders between work and private life, and companies will continue facing this in the future as well and will have to learn to work with it. *“We had to keep the branches up and running and find the right tone for asking employees to be flexible. We have expanded work from home, we match the income of single parents that were at home on the nursing benefit, we support LGBT families, we have a targeted development program for women in leadership,”* said Klára Escobar during the conference. *“What I'm really proud of is the fact that by the beginning of June, we will have 30% women in management positions. This is a huge success, considering that a year ago it was zero,”* she added.

Despite these achievements, it was stated during the conference that, for example, we have not been doing very well in the Czech Republic for a long time in terms of gender inequalities. And this is confirmed by international indices. *“Recently, the Global Gender Gap was published, an index from the World Economic Forum, in which the Czech Republic ranked 78th out of a total of 156 countries. Within the EU, we rank roughly 23th out of 27 Member States,”* said Radan Šafařík, Director of the Equal Opportunities Department of the Office of the Government of the Czech Republic. At the same time, according to Šafařík, various surveys from countries such as the Netherlands and Sweden show that gender equality can have a positive impact in many areas of family life. *“In these countries, parents, and especially men, spend much more time with their children, so they have a much better relationship with them, especially during adolescence. Studies also show that the introduction of parental leave for men and shared childcare has a positive effect on the quality of the partnership,”* he added.

Martina Rašticová, Vice-Dean for Internationalization of the Brno University of Technology, sees two biggest challenges related to the labor market: the digitization, automation and robotics, and at the same time our aging society. *“Due to the so-called digital divide, there will be a new division of society - it will be divided not only in terms of diversity, but also in terms of the access of individual groups of people to modern technologies. And the most affected will be women and 50+ age group,”* explained Martina Rašticová. The aging of the population is also alarming. *“In 2017, about 17% of people were over the age of 65, and we assume that if this trend continues, around 2030, people aged 65+ will represent more than 30%. Extending working life is a big issue, so these people will stay in the job market for longer. And given the things that put them at a disadvantage, these are big social issues that need to be addressed,”* she said.

Without top management leading by example, things will be difficult to change

The German-Czech panel focused on the still low representation of women in top positions in companies. The speakers agreed that the road to the development of diversity and inclusion in the workplace and in society is paved with properly set goals, commitments and TOP management, which is leading by example.

According to HE Christopher Israng, Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany to the Czech Republic, Germany is lagging behind in the representation of women in leading positions in as well. However, the country is trying to change that. *“The German government joined the German Diversity Charter, which was established in 2006. The majority of government authorities and ministries joined the Charter. In 2015, we drafted a law that ensures equal status of women and men in managerial positions. It is currently being discussed in Parliament,”* said Christopher Israng.

Tomáš Kafka, Ambassador of the Czech Republic to the Federal Republic of Germany, who followed up on his colleague in Prague, emphasized that legislators should try to ensure conditions for as many members of society as possible so as to ensure equal opportunities for their development. *“Promoting diversity and inclusion in the society and work environment is the biggest guarantee that the goal of equal opportunities and equality will be achieved. Nevertheless, diversity and inclusion should not be applied mechanically,”* pointed out Tomáš Kafka. *“It is important to build on a positive image and what is called best practice. And that's exactly what I'd like to expect from conferences like this. Let us ensure that our society is more diverse, more inclusive and more just for all people,”* he added.

Subsequently, moderator Jana Ciglerová discussed gender diversity with two managers.

Armin Borries, Executive Vice President of Deutsche Börse Group and Pavel Malínek, Vice President, Business Unit Leader CS&EE; CGI.

According to Armin Borries, there are many talented women in Deutsche Börse Group and the company supports them in their careers. *“We have a program to support women in leadership positions, we have women's meetings where they can discuss various topics together, we try to make lunch meetings, now virtual, with our CEO. At the same time, I am glad that we have a woman in Germany, the HR Director, who is also a member of the Board of Directors,”* Armin Borries listed their women support actions. *“For me, however, diversity is not just women in leadership and other positions. We also pay attention to the LGBT community. We try to integrate them better. We must not forget the people with various disabilities that we are actively trying to recruit. But I must say that they are difficult to find on the Czech labor market,”* he added.

According to Armin Borries, having women in teams and leadership positions is a benefit in that they think differently than men, they have a different perspective on various issues, and that can be useful. But cultural views from people from different backgrounds are also important. It brings a healthy mix to the work environment.

Pavel Malínek pointed out that the IT industry is primarily a male area and there are few women in IT, so there are mainly men in management positions in CGI. *“The topic of diversity resonates very much in our company and we pay attention to it. In general, I feel that the Czech Republic has a problem with women in IT. I read that only 10% of employees in the IT industry are female. Women need to be drawn to the sector. And we offer opportunities to all people, regardless of their gender, age, religion or race. I don't distinguish among IT professionals - they look different and that's the only aspect. Having more women on the team is more fun, you laugh more, the environment is more diverse. Diversity gives you the opportunity to grow more, be more innovative, have better ideas, collaborate better,”* said Pavel Malínek.

Global Head Diversity in the Volkswagen Group, Elke Heitmülle, spoke about the most important aspect that helps on the path toward diversity and, conversely, what hinders the achievement of greater diversity. *“Bigger awareness is important as well as raising that awareness further. However, we have various obstacles on that road. And even when we already have a diverse environment, we need to work for inclusive leadership. What do we mean by that? Less hierarchy, more mental security, a constructive environment and a sensitive approach to involving different groups in the team,”* said Elke Heitmülle. *“Psychological safety means that you have an environment that engages everyone based on his or her knowledge and skills. That is the attitude we need. We have an educational program Diversity Wins and it is mandatory for all managers. We have 500 trainers around the world who talk about the added value of diversity and inclusion and the unconscious prejudice we should try to deal with.”* She added that the biggest challenge on the path to diversity is not the creation of new quotas, but that diversity should be taken as a fact and should not play a role in decision-making. Simply to make it automatic, natural.

Diversity is also crucial in Škoda Auto, as Thomas Schäfer, Chairman of the Board of Directors, noted: *“The topic of diversity has become increasingly important and significant in recent years. It has a measurable effect on team productivity and influences thinking and culture in companies. Diverse teams are more efficient and more able to understand each other. For us in the company, diversity is one of the key success factors in achieving corporate goals, and we consistently support it,”* he explained. He also added that if a company wants to make fundamental changes, the top management must lead by example. *“If you want to change the environment, you have to shake it. It has to start at the highest level. If top management takes it for granted, sets clear goals, it becomes a reality.”*

Wanting diversity is essential for achieving it, ideally it should be inscribed in the corporate and social DNA

In the third panel discussion, representatives of CGI Central & Eastern Europe, Deutsche Börse AG, Commerzbank and Škoda Auto met online.

Jan Volkmann, Vice President of Deutsche Börse AG, pointed out that when it comes to diversity, the first thing that comes to mind is gender diversity. However, at Deutsche Börse AG, they also deal with other aspects, such as internationalization. *"People from 100 countries around the world work for us. And that is the great diversity we want to take full advantage of. We try to help employees on this journey. One measure that is key to success is our resource group, which allows people to have a discussion with management. And it is a priority for the whole company. At the same time, however, I think that everyone can benefit the company and we must support it,"* said Jan Volkman.

According to Sabine Weinheimer-Hoepermans, Vice President of HR in the CGI Central&Eastern Europe, people in the field of diversity are already predefined by the way they were raised. *"It's about what we've been hearing since early childhood. And that is why diversity in everyday life must become a topic for the society as a whole. Only then will it be part of our DNA,"* she said during the conference.

Experience from Commerzbank, for example, shows that in a healthy work environment, it is a struggle for talent, regardless of whether it is women or men. *"In Prague, we employ more than 350 IT experts from more than 40 different countries. Prague is thus our most diverse working environment. We strive to attract talent from a variety of backgrounds over the long term,"* said Sven Gohlke, Regional Board Member for Central and Northern Europe of Commerzbank. *"We have a program to integrate people with inclusion issues. However, it is true that it is about a total change in the corporate culture. Everyone in the company must want it,"* he added.

Maren Gräf, HR manager, member of the Board of Directors in Škoda Auto a.s. believes that supporting the diversity of employees in the work environment is essential for the long-term competitiveness of companies. *"Diversity touches on aspects such as gender, ethnicity, social background, religion, ideological beliefs, sexual orientation or age. In this decisive way, it determines our own image and our personality. Companies that want to remain competitive in the medium term must be aware of this and actively promote employee diversity in order to reach their full potential. At Škoda Auto, we therefore aim to continue to be committed to supporting diversity in all areas and thus further strengthening society as a whole."*

The final part of the online conference presented a ceremonial signing of the Diversity charter by the following ten companies - **Commerzbank, Microsoft, Edenred, Raiffeisenbank, McDonald's Czech Republic, CGI, GasNet, Hyundai**. And we in the Business for Society welcome other companies and organizations that want to become part of an imaginary family of the Diversity Charter. We will be happy to be their partner on their way to improve diversity in their company.