

Gearing up the progress of Gender Diversity management in the MENA States

by Dianah Worman

Wow what an event

I thoroughly enjoyed taking part in the GD Circulator for delegates of business and professional associations from across the MENA Region organised by GIZ at the end of April in Cairo.

Designed to inform and stimulate discussion about *why* and *how* to progress the increased economic activity of women the workshop certainly succeeded in achieving this aim.

Meeting for the second time after the successful inaugural event hosted in Casablanca this gathering of enthusiastic business stakeholders shared information about the activities they had pursued to demonstrate the importance of GDM and raise awareness.

A room full of passionate *game changers* considered and contributed thoughts and ideas to help each contributor build on the progress that had been made in their own countries and to shape the development of a proposed GDM tool to support future progress.

The workshop group and plenary work generated excited conversations and valuable ideas for the proposed tool. These will be taken forward by GIZ/EconoWin.

The facilitated collaborative way of working took account of what had worked well and less well in the diverse environments of the countries represented.

While GDM is relatively new in the MENA Region in some of the countries– Tunisia for example - the evidence shows higher representation of women in senior positions than in many parts of Europe and a much smaller gender pay gap. However, such comparisons should not encourage a slackening of commitment to maintain and build momentum for further change. Top line generic indicators can mask important nuanced differences in the representation of women in the workplace and in education too. It is only by taking a deeper dive into data - whether this is numeric or qualitative - that more sophisticated insights can be gained. This deeper level of understanding is vitally important in order to design more effective practical remedies and interventions to make a real and sustainable difference.

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Some CIPD provisions that support GDM progress

In the UK, the female employment rate is 47%. The focus on GDM is high up the list of diversity issues gaining the attention of private sector business, as well as public sector employers. But other personal identity issues are also given attention.

The CIPD position on diversity and inclusion doesn’t exclusively focus on gender diversity, women at work and women’s issues.

The CIPD’s position on diversity and inclusion is based on extensive research evidence. It focuses on *valuing people as individuals* as employees’ customers and clients. It is recognised that everyone is different in many different ways but that people are also similar in many ways.

The challenges and opportunities this presents are taken into account in all aspects of attracting, developing and retaining talent. Additionally, diversity and inclusion informs the design of products and services and marketing activities. Recognising, valuing and managing *difference* can help organisations to be more efficient and effective and to develop a competitive edge.

Looking at *difference* through the gender lens - to use a skiing analogy -helps us to get off the nursery slopes on progressing diversity and inclusion. But it is important to remember that all women are not the same. Moving the dial on GDM needs to take account of this if we are to progress to the higher slopes, enjoy *cruising the blue runs* and cope will tackling the scary *black runs* only expert skiers are capable of navigating.

While getting to grips with GDM is vital it is important to keep the broader agenda of diversity and inclusion in sight. This is the bigger vision for the future which will help improve economic activity for everyone by improving opportunities for all people to reach their full potential.

From the CIPD’s perspective evidencing the business case for diversity was the major foundation for progress. Academic research, surveys and case studies are used to provide

the evidence to argue the need for change. Articles, conferences and network events and the use of diverse communication channels help to get the messages across to wide audiences. The development of relevant, accessible and current good practice guidance shapes and supports progress. Working to influence politicians and public policy makers is pivotal to ensure the infrastructure is designed to support progress. Working with the media to bang the drum about the messages the Institute wants to get across and

getting influential voices to make a noise about these helps to increase awareness and understanding and foster engagement. Last but not least tracking and evidencing how actions have made a *difference* using anecdotes, testimonies and stories to show how businesses and people benefit wins hearts and minds. Engaging people through both intellectual and emotional evidence wins commitment to take action. Facts stand up for themselves. No business wants to miss out on making profits by default and no business in today's tough world wants its corporate reputation to be tarnished by not being seen to be *doing the right thing*.

What would I recommend as a strategy to raise the bar on GDM?

Key things I would include are as follows but always be on the lookout for innovative ideas to inform new creative remedies.

1. Describe the business case and how to evidence one related to an organisations particular circumstances. Design and offer an interactive tool for doing this.
2. Offer and/or recommend mentoring opportunities and encourage the training of volunteers at different organisational levels to act as mentors. Give tips and suggestions about how to be a good mentor and receptive mentee. Consider reverse mentoring where senior employees act as mentors to juniors as both will learn from each other.
3. Promote the importance of advocacy which happens less frequently for women than men who are more likely to be known by senior employees because of the working contacts they develop.
4. Recommend ways of helping women to develop their confidence and network and learn from female role models.
5. Position the value of internships, project and work experience opportunities to build personal collateral.
6. Encourage the development of gender balanced pipelines starting with outreach work with schools and educational bodies. This is an essential long term activity.

It is important to recognise that no single intervention or remedy will get you there. The goal posts are constantly changing and just keeping up the pace of progress is hard work. No one has all the answers and what worked well yesterday may not continue to be as effective in the future unless reviewed and modified. This is why sharing,

networking and learning from each other is invaluable.

Never be afraid to try to make a difference. It is better to do something than nothing. If you don't get things right first time review the approach. A health warning on the progress of the GDM agenda is that women are not men and expecting them to behave as if they are, is nonsense. We need to focus on making workplaces fit for the future not the past and ensure both more men and more women can reach their full potential as the characteristics of labour markets become increasingly more diverse. We need to take account of the workforce of tomorrow and take into account the expectations of girls and boys and older workers in order to prepare them to participate. We need to take into account that work is changing, working life and the length of working life is changing and the demand for skills is changing. And that all these changes are getting faster and faster.

It is therefore common sense to share our own learning, learn from others and be confident to learn by doing. Ultimately, we just need to face up to the multitude of emerging challenges and opportunities and get on with addressing them because we can't afford not to. The delegates who attended the GD Circulator event in Cairo brought with them a keenness to learn by sharing what they had done and listening to each other. This appetite is a vital ingredient to foster future change. It provides opportunity to reflect on what progress can look like and spotlights how it can be expedited further.

Here is to the next event. I am sure it will be as successful as the one hosted in Egypt.



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