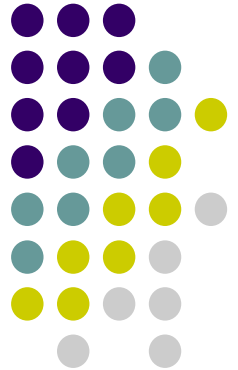




A Knewfutures Capsule
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The Achilles Heel of Digital Diversity and Inclusion

How Digital Reinforces Gender Biases and Marginalisation and why this is a Leadership Opportunity

To explore these issues further and identify the opportunities associated with the digital diversity blind spot contact

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Executive Summary

Digital can be a powerful force which creates new sources of value and opens up new opportunities. But digital has an Achilles heel, a profound weakness. This paper explores the Achilles Heel of Digital through the lens of diversity and inclusion, and identifies a profound weak spot of digital business. Like many vulnerabilities, this weak spot is also a tremendous leadership opportunity for visionary firms.

In 2015 the Irish constitution was amended to formally recognise the rights of LGBTQ+ people to marry. This was a landmark achievement which underscored a changed society in which the discrimination of Irish LGBTQ+ and non-binary people was no longer tolerated or considered in any way acceptable. It was the result of decades of difficult struggle for civil rights and equality.

Research has shown that digital systems can embody cultural bias and reinforce discrimination. This study asks whether or not Irish digital systems and services continue to reinforce gender discrimination in Ireland. In other words, do Irish companies and public agencies have a digital diversity and inclusion Achilles heel?

An online survey and a virtual focus group was used to carry out this research and gather evidence of non-binary and LGBTQ+ experiences. The findings suggest that digital data systems reinforce gender bias in spite of the fact that discrimination on the basis of gender identity and sexuality are unacceptable in Irish law.

Our findings provide evidence that digital systems and digital services offered by Irish companies and public sector agencies act as a vehicle for social violence towards marginalised communities in Ireland.

The unconscious bias and unfairness designed into digital systems and services systematically alienates certain important customer and citizen groups in Ireland. Given the winds of change in Europe and Ireland we assert that those organisations that do not engage in **digital diversity and inclusion** best practice likely to fall foul of emerging European and National diversity and inclusion regulation.

This has major implications for business and public sector organisations offering digital services to Irish and international customers and citizens. Are Irish digital enterprises socially sustainable?

The research invites the reader to review the following 4 questions:

1. **How do your non-binary and LGBTQ+ customers experience your customer facing digital services?**
2. **Are your data processing and analytics systems hard-wired with prejudicial assumptions about your customers, staff or other stakeholders?**
3. **Is your digital team diverse enough and do they appreciate the impact of digital bias?**
4. **Do your digital systems development practices embody diversity and inclusion in their DNA?**

The research also raises the following important strategic questions for business leaders:

1. **Have your senior team identified the leadership opportunity associated with digital bias in your competitors' systems?**
2. **Have you made digital diversity and inclusion a competitive issue for your sector?**