



Tackling Workplace Racism in Ireland



Introduction

2020 has been a year of immense change. In addition to everything that has been unfolding in relation to a global pandemic, we have also seen the Black Lives Matter movement reach new heights. This is in direct response to new lows which have been seen in the deaths of more and more unarmed black people in the United States.

Closer to home, unfortunately, racist attacks are likewise on the increase. There have been many reports of an increase in anti-Chinese sentiments in the wake of the Coronavirus pandemic, with school children facing racist taunts and businesses

experiencing a drop in custom. However, this is not new. Racism has been bubbling under the surface of our society for decades. Only now, we are more likely to hear about it – and there is a growing body of people who do not want to allow our society and communities to be held hostage to such discrimination.

Tackling racism in the workplace is an important part of this work. Employment is one of the most powerful ways of empowering vulnerable groups. It opens up increased opportunities for education, better health outcomes and, ultimately, increased integration into society.

It is true that we tend to judge ourselves on our intentions and others on the outcome of their actions. This is an important distinction when speaking of racism. Despite best intentions, many of us can slip into unconscious behaviours which may adversely affect under-represented minorities. This report acts as an introduction to building a workplace free of racism and avoiding those 'slips' from occurring.

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Racism in Ireland 2020

Racism Defined

INAR, the Irish Network Against Racism classifies racism as “any action, practice, policy, law, speech, or incident which has the effect (whether intentional or not) of undermining anyone's enjoyment of their human rights, based on their actual or perceived ethnic or national origin or background, where that background is that of a marginalised or historically subordinated group”.

The Latest Statistics

In 2019, there were 530 reports of racism according to the Racism in Ireland iReport figures. The smallest group of 111 cases were of illegal

discrimination, 112 were racist crimes, while the largest section was 174 counts of hate speech. Another 130 cases were classified as sub-crime hate incidents. Of the hate speech incidents, it was not just individuals at fault, 31 reports involved websites, 13 related to radio and television, while 12 reports mentioned newspapers.

Further, when we look at the illegal discrimination reports, 74 of these cases related to accessing goods and services, while 37 were workplace incidents. This confirms that racism is not taking place solely by unsavoury individuals. It is in the system and we need to address it. d plan to combat racism in Ireland.

While a range of minority groups experienced racism in 2019, according to the iReport figures, the group targeted the most, both for racist crime and discrimination were people of African descent. They account for 37% of reported racist crimes and 34% of discrimination reports. When we look at the perpetrators, 75% of racism was carried out by white Irish people and 83% of the perpetrators were adults.

Another report was conducted by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights in 2018, which involved responses from 25,500 people of different minority groups across the EU. In it, Ireland ranks poorly, second only to Finland, when it comes to the prevalence of

perceived racist violence. 51% of people of African descent in Ireland reported experiencing hate motivated harassment in the previous 5 years.

Policy Action

In June of this year, the Department of Justice & Equality set up an Anti-Racism Committee who will be tasked with developing a strategy to tackle racism in Ireland, Action Plan Against Racism for Ireland. Headed up by Caroline Fennell, Professor of Law at UCC and Commissioner with the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, the aim of this taskforce and strategy will be to review current evidence of racial discrimination in Ireland, international best practice in combatting same and develop an action-orientate





Focus on Workplace Racism

Racism in the workplace poses a significant barrier to vulnerable and minority groups. We know that across all sections of society, access to gainful employment acts as a lever to unlock success in a wide range of areas.

Facing sustained racist practices while at work can have a devastating impact on workers and their wider circle. The most notable effects of workplace racism on workers are on increased stress and anxiety, reduced confidence and an increased risk to their health. Inability to secure employment, as a result of one's ethnicity or nationality reduces an individual, and their family's standard of living.

However, the impact affects the employer also. Where racism is present in a work environment, it diminishes trust and increases

suspicion. Staff members become wary of standing out from the crowd which in turn has a negative effect on innovation and productivity.

Further, in today's environment where more and more consumers are socially conscious, a brand is likely to experience negative backlash where they are seen to support social injustice or even where an environment of apathy persists. Consumers expect more from companies, particularly now.

Three Principles to Fastrack Positive Change

It is what you do when you hold power that matters, what you choose to do with it. We all saw how police officer Derek Chauvin wielded the power bestowed on him by the state of Minnesota against George Floyd. That is not what we expect.



centuries, there is nothing to say that it should remain so.

Review your current organisational structure and look for the places in

We have high standards in our modern society for how those with more power than others ought to behave. We all have a choice, we can wield it like a weapon to maim or kill, or, we can choose to use it for good.

While we all carry the weight of personal responsibility to play our part in ending systemic racism in Ireland, larger organisations and employers also have a responsibility to play their part. Not only is this enshrined in law, but the weight of public support for the Black Lives Matter protests around the world shows that customers and employees now demand it of organisations.

1. Scrutinise the Status Quo

Work on Accepting that the Existing System is Racist

Systemic racism, othering, and exclusion exists at all levels of society. Unchallenged, this creates a two-tier system, where some have unhindered access to opportunities while others are repeatedly excluded. Although this is the way things have been for many

which it has aided inequality. Consider how a lack of consideration for differing groups may have inadvertently led to implicit bias in your organisational policies.

Look at the Existing Demographics

Organisations need to be intentional about the teams they are putting together and the actions they take to bring diversity and inclusion to their workplace.

If, as is likely to be the case, people of colour are under-represented, particularly at the leadership level, devise and implement a recruitment strategy to hire more staff from these groups. If you encounter difficulties sourcing suitably qualified staff from these groups, don't settle for a "we have done our best attitude". Raise your hand and say we need support. Consider partnering with community organisations that work with these communities, or academic institutions that can help diversify your pipeline through their graduate programs.

Do you prioritise one or a few education paths for prospective employees rather than a more general assessment of skills and experience?

2. **Become An Ally**

Embody Your Status as an Equal Opportunities Employer

Appoint a designated person to continually audit equal opportunities within your organisation. This is not just in the recruitment stage, but in the promotion, advancement and continual development of staff members throughout their career. Mentor and sponsor talents from ethnic minority groups to excel within your organisation. Look for the potential, nurture and champion it so that everyone has an equal opportunity of rising to the top of your organisation. This is the only way that diversity can become truly entrenched in your organisational structure.

Create safe spaces for staff to report racist experiences. When someone

aggrieved by overt or aversive racism describes their experiences, listeners have a natural tendency to be defensive or to try to identify parallels with their own experiences. Don't do it. Listen to others with an open mind, hear what they have to say without making it about you.

Most of us have not lived through mass genocide, so we cannot draw legitimate parallels between our lives and those of its survivors, nor pretend to understand how they feel about it. This is why slogans like "All Lives Matter" are offensive to black individuals who have endured racism for 450 years, and why comparisons of various events to the Holocaust are offensive to Jews.

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Speak Up About a Lack of Diversity

This is the difference between allies and bystanders, and it comes back to the personal responsibility piece. We, as individuals, must raise our voice when we see a backward shift. Calling it out can be enough to stop that slide from developing. Lean on the policies to support your case and ask for a change to be made.

Invite Minority Talent to the Table

Whether that be at lunch, roundtable discussions, focus groups, and ultimately, the boardroom table. It is only by sitting around a table, engaging in open and respectful dialogue that we make progress with any problem. This may mean giving up a non-diverse space for a qualified minority person to occupy. If you are serious about stemming racism

in your organisation and building a truly diverse community of people who work together in harmony, this is an excellent way to achieve it.

Take Responsibility for Your 'Implicit Bias', Help Others to Do So Too

Become aware of how implicit bias works and help others to understand it.

None of us are immune to the negative narratives and images we consume through the media, anecdotes and various other sources. How we internalise these biases leads to personal responsibility for their negative effects.

Awareness of how implicit bias operates requires organisational leaders to be even more vigilant and comes with a greater level of responsibility to interrupt biases when they see them, in themselves and others.

Understanding how implicit bias operates reveals the ways that we may be contributing to inequities without being aware of it. When we are aware of implicit

bias, it allows us to think more critically and creatively to create more inclusive work environments.

Encourage (Difficult) Conversations about Racism, Power and Privilege

Discussing topics such as racism, power and privilege can be uncomfortable. It asks a lot of us as individuals, but exploring these topics, bringing them out into the open, is an important step in creating an inclusive workplace.

Dr.Ebun Joseph, coordinator in UCD of the first Black Studies module in Ireland, asserts that “unless we centre race and name it in its entirety, it will continue to provide an unfair advantage for Whites while remaining unacknowledged yet powerful in destabilising any effort towards



levelling the playing field.”

True leadership is shown when the leader steps willingly into the space where they are uncomfortable, where the status quo is left behind in favour of improvement. A great leader can bring their team along with them too.

We defined racism earlier. Power is the ability to influence others behaviour, how events play out and how resources allocated. Privilege relates to access and to those who have the power to allocate access within an organisation.

Often, those with access to leadership development reflect privilege in their personal identity. Sometimes they choose to harbour that privilege for their own benefit. Being a leader is about how you choose to use that privilege in your role.

One of the ways leaders fail is by failing to acknowledge the privilege and power their role affords them. With power comes responsibility, the same is true of assuming a leadership role, in doing so, you are choosing to take responsibility for the development and care of someone else's experience.

Self-awareness is important as a leader. Consider what systematic privilege means for you and how you may have been benefiting from it. It is not something to be ashamed of or feel guilty for, but accepting that you have benefitted where others have not puts you in a stronger position to challenge the existing status-quo. Writer, Maya Angelou once said, "When you know better, do better." That's the key.

Create a safe space for yourself and

others to think about where they stand in this conversation on racism, power, and privilege. Address your privilege as a leader, accept it and commit to using it for good. Open conversation about this uncomfortable topic will, in time, diminish fears associated with it and can, in turn, lead to incredible group learnings and strategic shifts towards a more equitable organisational structure.

3. Adopt a Strategic Approach to Stamping out Racism

Commit to Anti-Racism Practices

Develop and communicate clear anti-racism policies and roll them out across the organisation so that everyone understands what is expected of them. Any breach of these policies should carry clearly defined sanctions which are easily implemented.





Explore and action ways to embed anti-racism practice throughout your organisation and its public persona. This needs to happen at a micro and macro level. Begin with everyday tasks, then look at your supply chain. Which brands do you support, do they align with your diversity and inclusion policy? What businesses do you invest in? How often do you audit your supply chains? Are your suppliers diverse?

What charities does your CSR policy support? Could the profile be expanded or tweaked to reflect your investment in minority groups? Examine the way you market your

business, what does it say? Who does it speak to? Are the faces featured in your advertising reflective of your anti-racism, pro-diversity policy?

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Invest Time and Resources in Training

Educate your leaders and employees across the board on topics like systemic racism, unconscious bias, inclusive leadership and allyship.

Organisations should also invest in resources and material on racism to increase awareness, shift mindsets and shape behaviour over time.

Accepting that we don't know everything is the first step to becoming a wiser, more understanding person and therefore organisation. It's ok not to have all the answers, but you need to be invested enough to engage in learning.

Track Your Progress

We have all heard the saying, “What gets measured gets done.” Regular tracking and reporting keep you focused, holds you accountable and gives you the information you need in order to make sure you achieve what you set out to do.

Too often, strategies are referred to at the start of a new programme but this wanes as the implementation develops. We can then lose sight of what it was we set out to achieve, important milestones get missed.

Review how the implementation is evolving on an ongoing basis and tweak your strategy as required. Organisations are encouraged to treat open discussions of racism the way they would discussions of job performance. Avoid blame or attribution and focus on behaviours. Define a challenging yet attainable measurable goal to which all parties must ascribe and for which failure to do so is equivalent to a resignation. Consistent measurement is key, as with all other feedback.

The goal should be a zero tolerance for racism, injustice and bias in the workplace.



About Adaku Ezeudo

Adaku Ezeudo is a diversity & Inclusion consultant, certified facilitator

- EverythingDISC Workplace, executive coach, and an inclusive leadership development professional who specializes in helping companies and organizations create and sustain inclusive workplaces and turn diversity into a strategic business advantage. She has worked

across functions in multinationals and public sector organisations before starting a transformational boutique consultancy, PhoenixRize Consulting.

Adaku has received numerous industry and community awards and recognitions for her work on diversity and inclusion, female empowerment, and community activation. Most recently, in 2020, she

received an award at the 2nd Irish Women's Awards in recognition for her work to make Ireland a great and more equal place to live and work. In the same year, she was also recognised by DiverseIn, a global diversity & inclusion embassy, as one of 2020's 145 Inspiring Women Leaders.

Adaku was also recognized as one of 2018's Dublin's Heroes and one of the most Exceptional and Inspiring people in Dublin by the Dublin City Council Culture Company. She currently serves on the advisory board of Common Purpose Ireland.

A servant leader, humanitarian, and passionate advocate, Adaku believes in meeting people where they are to address bias, racism, and injustice. Visit

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